

## **CONTEXT AND CONTESTATIONS ON THE USE OF CORPORAL PUNISHMENT IN ZIMBABWE'S PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The study focused on the contexts and contestations of corporal punishment in Zimbabwean schools. It was guided by the extinction principles of Skinner. A qualitative research method was adopted. It was achieved through an interpretive paradigm. A sample of five teachers and five parents was purposively selected. Open ended questionnaires were administered to teachers whilst the one to one interviews were adopted to the parents. Findings revealed that corporal punishment is administered to correct unwanted or unbecoming behaviour. However, some participants also indicated that extinction principle does not totally eliminate bad behaviour. If wrongly applied it can bring bad results and can harm the pupils especially applying corporal punishment when one is angry. The researchers concluded there is need to adhere to the circulars that prohibit the use of corporal. This will ensure that both parents and the teachers are not found wanting by the law.*

**Keywords:** corporal punishment, schools, parents and the teachers

### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

The concern on the issue of inflicting corporal punishment is a controversial one. Children should be protected against abuse and violence whilst they are also expected to abide by the expectations of the norms and values of their societies. Kenyan law permits limited school corporal punishment, but only in certain highly restricted circumstances. Regulations state that corporal punishment may only be inflicted in cases of continued or grave neglect of work, lying, bullying, gross insubordination, indecency, truancy or the like and that it may only be imposed by or in the presence of the school's head teacher or principal <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/kenya/Kenya999-02.htm> retrieved 18 April 2016. Jonas (2012) noted that Botswana still retains the use of corporal punishment in schools regardless of the fact that this form of punishment in schools is primitive, offensive to human rights notions and modern thinking, inhibitive to academic excellence and must be legislatively abolished. This clearly outlines that most regional schools perpetuates the use of corporal punishment in schools. In Zimbabwe, Nemukuyu reported in The Herald 15 October 2015 that Justice Malaba is quoted to have allowed the parents and teachers to continue beating up children as disciplinary measure because the landmark High court judgement on corporal punishment only dealt with constitutionality of canning juveniles as judicial judgement. He further pointed out that there was no judgement outlawing spanking of children at home and in schools. It is against this background that the researcher was prompted to carry out a study on parents and the teachers' perceptions on the proposal to re-introduce corporal punishment in schools. OGBE (2015) carried out a study in Nigeria on the parents and teachers opinions

on the need for continuity or to discontinue the use of corporal punishment among primary school pupils.

### **Corporal Punishment**

Jones (2012) noted that corporal punishment in schools occurs when the teacher or the 'adult-in-charge' purposely inflicts pain upon a child in order to stop that child's unacceptable behaviour and/or inappropriate language. This serves to transform the delinquent students' behaviour. Shaikhmag, Assan and Madiala (2015) also indicated that corporal punishment is physical punishment inflicted on a person often a child by an adult in authority. However, Jones (2012) is of the view that corporal punishment is inherently inhuman and brutish as it involves the unleashing of violence against children. Napodia (2007) stated that corporal punishment usually falls within the scope of the teacher's authority, while suspension and expulsion are usually with the discretionary powers of the school board

Chemhuru (2010), who asserts that punishment is not necessarily used as an end in itself, but it is used as a means to achieve some good end, that is good behaviour which is compatible with the process of education. The purpose for which it is used is to enable the smooth and successful education process through creating a disturbance free and a conducive environment that benefits learners. Sonesson (2005:9) indicated that research shows that corporal punishment is an effective way to ensure change of behaviour and discipline among children. Shukla (2013) highlighted that it is the deliberate infliction of pain to change a person's behaviour or to punish him or her. This enhances the use of physical force towards a child for the purpose of controlling the child's behaviour and is often used as punishment. This is a deliberate act that causes pain or physical discomfort.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is influenced by Skinner's operant conditioning. According to this theory the likelihood of a child's behaviour reoccurring could be increased by following with a variety of rewards or reinforcers (Keenan, Subhadra and Crowley 2016:32). Skinner also believed that the decrease of a behaviour can be a result of punishment (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 2010). Banda, Chivore, Zindi, Muchenje, Hapanyengwi, Nenohwe and Chikoto (2014:88) noted that the probability of a behaviour occurring is changed (increased, decreased) as a result of punishment that follows behaviour. Basically, under operant conditioning there is positive and negative reinforcement (Mangal, 2002). Positive punishment involves reducing a behaviour by delivering an unpleasant stimulus (Banda, Chivore, Zindi, Muchenje, Hapanyengwi, Nenohwe and Chikoto 2014: 91). This entails punishment by application here one can make use of corporal punishment. Snowman and Biehler (2000) are of the view that negative punishment engages decreasing a behaviour by eliminating a pleasant stimulus. For instance, taking away privileges for a bad behaviour exhibited by the child. Equally, both positive and negative punishment decreases behaviour.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative research methodology was adopted in this study. A research methodology is the overall approach to studying a topic and includes issues to think about such as the constraints, dilemmas and ethical choices in a research (Dawson, 2007). Focus of this study is on context and contestations of using corporal punishment by both the teachers and the parents. Qualitative methods are often regarded as providing rich data about real life people and situations being more able to make sense of behaviour and understand behaviour within its wider context (De Vaus, 2002:5). This is because it enabled them to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue under study (Creswell, 2004: 234).

A sample of five teachers and five parents was purposively sampled . Purposive sampling is where the researcher already knows something about the specific people or events and deliberately selects particular one because they are seen as instances that are likely to produce the most valuable data ( Denscombe 2010:34). In this case the researchers saw it worthwhile to solicit data from the parents and the teachers regarding the use of corporal punishment. In depth face to face interviews were carried out with the parents. By in depth qualitative interviewing, we mean face – to –face encounters between the researcher and the informants directed towards understanding informant’s perspectives on their lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their own words. (Taylor . Bogdan DeVault (2016:102). The researchers solicited data from the parents to note the merits and demerits o using corporal punishment. In conducting this study questionnaires were also used. Some questionnaires were administered to the teachers. One way to discover what a person is thinking is through self-report which lies in the creation of questionnaires ( Davis , 2003 : 8). The participants are supposed to outline whether parents allow them to administer corporal punishment to their children.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The findings revealed that the participants had varied sentiments over the use of corporal punishment. Three teachers out of the five selected were pro the use of corporal punishment. The other two indicated that they were against the use of corporal punishment. It seems that those who were pro against the use were using the corporal even before the court ruling. Circular minute P36 ( 8 October, 1999) also indicated that corporal punishment should only be administered by the school head. This is it is permitted to use corporal punishment though it is allowed to lesser extent. One of the participants indicated that the extinction principle assist in behaviour modification. However, the other participant also indicated that extinction principle does not totally eliminate bad behaviour. Rima and Pokharel ( 2003) argued that physical punishment does not appear to be superior at shaping behaviours than more positive forms of discipline. It was also noted that use of corporal punishment was not a solution to changing pupils’ behaviour. There was a view that once the pupils are aware of the extinction principles they will conform to the rules.

In response to the question that sought to find out the reasons for using corporal punishment one participant outlined that this is done to eliminate unwanted behaviour. In concurrence the other participant indicated that it is done to deter bad and unwanted behaviour. The other suggestion was that corporal punishment should be used to enforce discipline. This is also done in order to let the pupils know that you have authority over them. One respondent was of the view that corporal punishment should be used to instil fear to the pupils. Punishment is also used to let the pupils know that you have authority over them. This will also assist in moulding the behaviour of pupils. The other participant added that pupils can conform to acceptable behaviour, norms and values. The other sentiment was that this will ensure that pupils conform to acceptable behaviour. However, corporal punishment can destroy the relationship between a child and the child’s care giver ( Gender Research and Advocacy ).

Responding to the benefits of using corporal punishment, one participant indicated that there is no benefit since this brings fear hence learning should be done in a friendly though firm environment. The use of corporal punishment promotes obedience, honesty and hardworking among the pupils. One participant indicated that corporal punishment extinct bad behaviour. One suggested that y use of corporal punishment the pupils will be aware of the do’s and dont’s. Corporal punishment is very effective because pupils will be alert. However, one was of the view that once pupils are hurt it affects them psychologically. As a result this braches teir fundamental right to respect for human dignity and physical integrity ( Global

Report, 2011). There was a submission that it creates bad relationship between the one using corporal punishment and the one affected. Four teachers indicated that parents agreed that their children to be punished. One teacher was against the use of corporal punishment.

Findings revealed that four parents were vying for the proposal to use corporal punishment. It seems these parents also use this form of punishment because there are four responses that indicated that they use corporal punishment at home. One parent was mumbling that due to the complacency of not using corporal punishment it has become a challenge to control the behaviour of the children. Punishment makes the children to be more deviant once they get used to it. As a result, the use of corporal punishment to provide discipline might bring more harm than benefit (Songul, 2009). They will at some point try to be mischievous just to provoke an individual who often uses corporal punishment.

In response to the question that sought to find out reasons why parents use corporal punishment at home they indicated that they are doing so to enable them to socialise with other children at home. They suggested that corporal punishment guide pupils on the expected norms and values. Corporal punishment is administered to correct unwanted or unbecoming behaviour. There is no need to spare the rod and spoil the child (Bitamazire, 2003 ). It is also administered to let other children in the family know that bad deeds are preceded by punishment. It also instil conformity to the family and societal expectations. If punishment is administered children will stick and adhere to what they are expected to do to avoid punishment. Due to fear children can also end up changing their behaviour for the better. One parent also indicated that corporal punishment reinforces discipline.

Suggestions were that if corporal punishment is not administered properly a child can develop a negative attitude towards the person who beats him or her up thereby hindering learning. One participant indicated that if wrongly applied it can bring bad results and can harm the pupils especially applying corporal punishment when one is angry. There was also an indication that continuous punishment can lead to stubbornness. A child can be fearful and end up losing concentration. The other parent noted that children may pretend to be good in the presence of the teachers or parents and behaves nastily behind their backs. It can also be used as preclusion for would-be offenders who may be tempted to commit an akin offence in future (Jones, 2012). Corporal punishment can lead to confusion as the child will be thinking about being beaten once he or she comes closer to the corporal punishment administer. It can also lead to mistrust. It can also lead to resistance on the part of the children.

## **CONCLUSION**

The researchers concluded there is need to adhere to the circulars that prohibit the use of corporal. This will ensure that both parents and the teachers are not found wanting by the law. There is need for both stakeholders to work hand in glove to ensure that discipline is maintained home and way.

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