

Perceived Effectiveness of Alternative Strategies to Corporal Punishment in Ghanaian Basic Schools

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ABSTRACT: *This study was a qualitative research study utilizing the phenomenological research design, which was carried out to ascertain the lived experiences of teachers on the effectiveness of alternative strategies to corporal punishment in Ghanaian Basic schools. With the in-depth interview of fifteen teachers and focus group discussion with fifteen headteachers in Mampong Municipality, three main benefits were identified from the use of these strategies namely: improved pupil-teacher relationships, improved behavior, and improved school climate. This implies that the teachers perceive the alternative strategies as effective to some extent. It was recommended that to encourage the use of these strategies in Ghanaian basic schools, there should be continuous education of stakeholders on the use and the benefits of the use of these alternative strategies.*

KEYWORDS: *Alternative strategies, Corporal punishment, Basic schools, Positive discipline, Restorative discipline.*

INTRODUCTION

Acts of indiscipline abound in schools in Ghana (Gyan et al., 2015; Salifu & Agbenyega, 2016). These acts include absenteeism, truancy, vandalism and bullying. Measures have constantly been put in place in Ghanaian schools to address these indiscipline acts to help in the attainment of the goals of education. As a way of addressing these indiscipline acts, before 2010, the use of corporal punishment was sanctioned in Ghanaian schools by Ghana Education Service (GES), the body mandated to fashion out policies and programmes to regulate first- and second-cycle institutions in Ghana (Ghana Education Service, as cited in Selasi, 2019). Corporal punishment is any kind of

discipline in which physical force is used with the goal of causing discomfort or pain, regardless of how minor the level of discomfort or pain is (United Nation's report cited by Gershoff, 2017). Similarly, Gershoff, Purtell and Holas (2015) described corporal punishment as the use of physical force to inflict suffering on a perpetrator with the goal of correcting or preventing the perpetrator from repeating an unpleasant behavior.

In 2010, the policy on the use of corporal punishment was revised by GES. Teachers were warned to be cautious of its use since it could result in parents suing teachers for illegal punishment (Ghana Education Service, as cited in Selasi, 2019). However, its use was abolished entirely in a policy statement by GES in 2017 (Selasi, 2019). This ban was further enforced in a statement by GES in 2019 (Ghana Education Service, 2019a).

The ban on corporal punishment in Ghanaian schools was occasioned by several negative consequences experienced and reported in the literature on corporal punishment. Corporal punishment has been linked to violence and aggression on the part of people who experience it. This was confirmed by a study by Akhtar and Awan (2018). A study by Elgar et al. (2018) also confirmed the relationship between corporal punishment and youth violence. The study concluded that the prohibition of corporal punishment leads to a significant reduction in youth violence and vice versa. Adding on to the afore mentioned effects, Heekes et al. (2022) in a review of 53 studies carried out in the United States of America, Africa, Caribbean, Eastern Mediterranean and Western Pacific areas on corporal punishment spanning the period of 1980-July 2017, posited that most of the studies reviewed confirmed that corporal punishment is associated with problems related to physical, mental, health, behavioral and academic development of people who experience it. Furthermore, Hussain & Muhammad (2017), in a study in Pakistan, found that corporal punishment leads to aggressive behavior as well as the development of a sense of nervousness in students, and negatively impacts academic progress and development of psychological trauma in students. These negative effects identified agree with most studies on the effects of corporal punishment.

Following from these negative consequences of corporal punishment, in the policy abolishing the use of corporal punishment in Ghanaian schools, teachers were urged to use positive discipline strategies of behavior modification as an alternative to corporal punishment (Ghana Education Service, 2019) which are seen as more humane in their use. Positive discipline strategies are aimed at restoring the offender rather than punishing him/her for exhibiting a wrong behavior. They, therefore, utilize practices that bring together the offender, victim, and the entire community or significant players in the child's development, to resolve the problem at stake. The aim of positive discipline strategies is mostly to appease the victim and to restore the offender by providing him/her (the offender) with skills lacking in the environment that resulted in the offence

committed. The switch to the use of positive discipline strategies in place of corporal punishment, led to the development of positive behavior tool kits by GES in collaboration with the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and other stakeholders of education (Ghana Education Service, 2016) to serve as a guide to teachers in the course of ensuring discipline on the part of their pupils. The steps in the use of the positive discipline strategies are depicted in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Steps in using positive discipline strategies

Nature of misbehavior	How to deal with the misbehavior
Step 1- No exhibition of misbehavior	Put in place preventive measures like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly spelling out rules and regulations of conduct • Appreciating pupils for good behavior • Counselling pupils to show good behavior • Creation of mutual respect for teachers and pupils
Step 2 – Trivial/first time offences	Use of non-punishable measures like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reminders • Cautions • Investigation of reasons and causes of misbehavior • Drawing offender’s attention to benefits of good behavior
Step 3 – Frequent/very serious offences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draw offender’s attention to the gravity and repetitive nature of the offence • Use counselling, behavior contracts, token economy and constant follow ups.
Step 4 – Lingering, risky and disruptive behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School-community conferencing • Constant pupil monitoring • Intensive counselling of pupil

Source: Ghana Education Service (2016) Adapted

Indiscipline, however, still exists in Ghanaian basic schools. In a report on Ghanaweb (2018), some teachers confirmed increased cases of indiscipline in Ghanaian schools. This was further buttressed by a report by Sottie (2016) that the Director of Education in the Eastern Region of Ghana described the spate of indiscipline in Ghanaian schools as very disturbing and called for appropriate measures to curb it.

But the question is: Are the alternative strategies now in place in Ghanaian schools altogether ineffective in dealing with indiscipline in Ghanaian schools? As with a coin, there are two sides to everything that is, the good and the bad and therefore the good would have to be harnessed for the

success of the policy and the bad addressed. This study, therefore, sought to find out the perceived effectiveness of alternative strategies to corporal punishment used in Ghanaian basic schools from the experiences of teachers who use the strategies in managing indiscipline in schools. This was done to document for attention of stakeholders of the policy and to whip up their interest in the use of this new direction of disciplining in Ghanaian schools.

The study was directed by one main research question, that is: what are the perceived effectiveness of the use of alternative strategies to corporal punishment in Ghanaian basic schools?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In a study on the implementation of the alternative strategy of positive discipline in school, the benefits of it were underscored (Predescu & Darjan, 2017). Positive discipline involves teachers and caregivers establishing care and supportive relationships with students which leads to assistance and support for the students rather than fear as in the case of punishment (Wang & Kuo, 2019). This makes students self-dependent and self-regulatory rather than being controlled by the teacher (Wang & Kuo, 2019). Positive discipline has shown a number of benefits. First, it facilitates learning and boosts the development of the child. Second, it makes the child independent and self-supportive, leading to a feeling of self-acceptance on the child's part. Third, it helps in controlling disruptive behavior (Beerli, 2020).

Furthermore, Watchel cited in Payne and Welch (2015) reports that restorative discipline, for instance, enables the school to find its own individualized solutions to school misbehavior. Beitzel and Castle (2013) on the other hand, reveal that restorative discipline (1) is successful in dealing with a variety of crime rates not excluding violent offenses, (2) has a high likelihood of acceptance as good by both parties, (3) accounts for a reduction in the level of indiscipline and (4) decreases the feeling of anger, retaliation and the propensity to seek retributive justice. Morrison and Vaandering (2012), on the other hand, opined that restorative discipline builds the student's sense of maturity by aiding in problem-solving, reconciliation, and compensation. They further reiterate that this method builds understanding and motivation in others while allowing moods of anger, anxiety, and humiliation to be articulated and settled by all parties. Other evaluative studies have pointed to the other positive outcomes of the restorative discipline strategy. For instance, Stowe (2016) saw that restorative discipline improves relationships and promotes empathic understanding for each other. Furthermore, it encourages teachers and pupils to work together and creates the sense in pupils to take control of their behavior.

Several studies have unearthed the effectiveness of other alternative strategies. In a longitudinal study of 1,122 schools in the Florida area, Childs et al. (2016) found that implementing School-Wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (SWPBIS) reduced office discipline referrals,

in-school suspensions, and out-of-school suspensions significantly. Similarly, Gage et al. (2020) studied the effect of SWPBIS and school disciplinary exclusions. The study, which was a conceptual replication of already conducted studies on SWPBIS, looked at 98 schools strictly implementing SWPBIS and 98 schools not implementing it in the California area. The results indicated that the schools strictly implementing it had reduced suspensions on the part of students. Freeman et al. (2016) investigated the association between the application of SWPBIS and school attendance, behavior, and academic performance in high schools and discovered that rigorous adherence to SWPBIS tenets has a favorable impact on school attendance and behavior outcomes. Medina (2017) found that the usage of Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) had a beneficial influence on teachers' self-efficacy, which improved their classroom behavior as well as that of their pupils, in a study that looked at self-efficacy of teachers at schools employing PBIS. Stanton-Chapman et al. (2016) also did a study on the effectiveness of PBIS and found that it was effective in classroom quality improvement. It was also found to significantly improve children's social skills and significantly decrease children's problematic behavior. Lee and Gage (2020), in a meta-analysis of 29 studies on SWPBIS in Europe and the United States to ascertain the outcomes of its use, found that its use significantly reduced school disciplinary issues and led to an increase in academic performance in a range from small to medium.

On the side of alternative strategies of guidance and counseling, several studies point to the effectiveness of its use in schools. Studies like Agi and Jackson (2020), Kanus (2018) and Yusoff and Abdullah (2021) have pointed to the effectiveness of guidance and counseling in significantly reducing school indiscipline and improving pupils' academic performance. Alternative strategies like positive reinforcement, token economy, behavior contract, and premack principle among others have been seen as effective in studies reported by Essuman, Nwaogu, and Nwachuku (1990), Herrod et al. (2022), Lopez et al. (2017), Rahmadhony (2019) and Shakespeare, Peterkin, and Bourne (2018).

The above review points to a positive outlook of the use of some alternative strategies to corporal punishment. It was therefore important to find out in Ghana, how the alternative strategies used in Ghanaian basic schools are effective by way of sustaining the use of these strategies by teachers.

METHODOLOGY

The constructivism-interpretivism paradigms, the qualitative research method, and the phenomenological design, respectively, were used in this study's research paradigm, research approach, and research design. The constructivism-interpretivism paradigms are predicated on the idea that knowledge must be built from the perspective of the experiencer because it is not objective in its form (Guba, 1990; Iofrida et al., 2018). The researchers chose these paradigms because they sought to create information using the perspectives of the study's participants. To

enable the researchers to investigate and characterize the perceptions of the study participants on the phenomenon under inquiry, a qualitative technique was chosen. To obtain the lived experiences of the participants on the effectiveness of the use of alternative strategies to corporal punishment, Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological design was adopted in the data collection and analysis.

Gill (2020) asserts that Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method follows the line of descriptive phenomenology by Husserl. It originated from psychology and its method of enquiry is scientific. The aim of Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method is to reach out to the core essence of a particular phenomenon. In terms of the participants selected to arrive at the core essence of a phenomenon, a minimum of three is suggested for use in this phenomenological method. Key concepts involved in this phenomenological method are bracketing (epoche), eidetic reduction, imaginative variation and meaning units. Giorgi, Giorgi, and Morley (2017) have presented steps undertaken to arrive at the essence of a phenomenon in the Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method. These steps are collecting the lived experiences of the key experiencers of the phenomenon under consideration, reading through the transcripts of the lived experiences and drawing meaning units from them after bracketing your experiences, and lastly, using the meaning units to form categories, themes and sub-themes after assuming a scientific phenomenological reduction position. These were the steps utilized in arriving at the themes and sub-themes of this study.

Fifteen basic school teachers who had experience in the use of the alternative strategies to corporal punishment, by having undergone professional teacher education which in part, includes topics on behavior modification strategies of pupils, were purposefully selected for the study after the necessary ethical clearance was obtained. These teachers were engaged in an in-depth interview on their experiences of the effectiveness of the use of alternative strategies to corporal punishment. Furthermore, fifteen headteachers with experience in the use of the alternative strategies by virtue of their training and use of the strategies, were engaged in focus group discussion to ascertain their experiences on the effectiveness of the use of the strategies. There were three focus groups of five members each. The focus group discussion data were used to triangulate the data from the interviews in the course of analyzing the data. The interview as well as the focus group discussion guides were developed by the researchers and content validated by the Ethical Review Committee of College of Education, University of South Africa.

The data from the two research techniques used namely the interview and the focus group discussion were thematically analyzed to arrive at the themes and the sub-themes of this study. In the analysis of the interview data, the interview participants were represented with the alphanumeric codes P1-P15 while the three focus groups were represented with alphanumeric codes FGD1-FGD3. This was done to ensure anonymity of their responses. Strategies, such as

member checking, triangulation and audit trail were used after obtaining the data, to ensure trustworthiness of the findings.

Demographics of the participants

Tables 2 and 3 present the demographic information of the participants of the study.

Table 2: Demographic data of the interview participants

Participant Code	Sex	Age Range	Years of Teaching Experience	Highest Educational Qualification	Current Rank
P1	Male	41-50 years	20	M. Ed.	Assistant Director I
P2	Female	31-40 years	12	B.Ed.	Assistant Director II
P3	Female	31-40 years	15	B. Ed.	Assistant Director II
P4	Female	31-40 years	12	M. Ed.	Assistant Director I
P5	Male	31-40 years	13	B. Ed.	Assistant Director II
P6	Female	31-40 years	10	B. Sc. (Dip. Ed)	Assistant Director II
P7	Male	41-50 years	14	B. Ed.	Assistant Director II
P8	Male	20-30 years	5	Diploma	Senior Superintendent II
P9	Male	31-40 years	10	Diploma	Senior Superintendent II
P10	Male	31-40 years	10	B. Ed.	Principal Superintendent
P11	Female	20-30 years	7	B. Ed.	Principal Superintendent
P12	Female	31-40 years	11	B. Ed.	Principal Superintendent
P13	Male	41-50 years	18	B. Ed.	Assistant Director II
P14	Male	31-40 years	9	B. Ed.	Principal Superintendent
P15	Male	41-50 years	21	B. Ed.	Assistant Director II

From Table 2 above, it can be seen that nine (9) male and six female teachers were interviewed. They had years of teaching experience ranging from the least of five (5) years to the highest of twenty-one (21) years. Just two (2) of the participants had their highest academic qualification as

Diploma. Most of them had Bachelor's degrees, with two (2) of them having Master's degrees. In terms of their ranks in the teaching profession, just two (2) of them were at a near lower rank of the profession, that is, Senior Superintendent II. Majority of them were at the middle and higher ranks, namely, Principal Superintendent and Assistant Director, respectively. This means that the participants had considerable experience in teaching and hence, they tapped from their rich experiences to share their perceptions of the challenges of the use of alternative strategies to corporal punishment.

Table 3: Demographic data of the Focus Group participants

Group Code	Sex	Age Range (Years)	Years of Teaching Experience	Highest Educational Qualification	Current Rank
FGD1	Male	41-50	26	MPhil.	Deputy Director
	Female	41-50	21	M. Ed.	Assistant Director II
	Male	41-50	27	B. Ed.	Assistant Director II
	Female	51-60	28	B. Ed.	Assistant Director I
	Male	41-50	21	M. Ed.	Assistant Director II
	Male	41-50	21	M. A.	Assistant Director II
FGD2	Male	31-40	14	B. Ed.	Assistant Director II
	Female	31-40	12	B. Ed.	Assistant Director II
	Female	41-50	20	B. Ed.	Assistant Director II
	Male	31-40	14	B. Ed.	Assistant Director II
	Male	51-60	28	MPhil.	Assistant Director I
FGD3	Female	41-50	23	B. Ed.	Assistant Director II
	Male	51-60	24	B. Ed.	Assistant Director II
	Male	51-60	26	B. Ed.	Assistant Director II
	Male	41-50	23	B. Ed.	Assistant Director II

In relation to the focus group discussions, there were five (5) females and ten (10) males who formed the three (3) focus groups. Twelve (12) of them were at the rank of Assistant Director II, two (2) were at Assistant Director I rank, while one (1) was at the Deputy Director rank. Their range in terms of years of teaching experience was twelve (12) to twenty-eight (28) years.

FINDINGS

The thematic analysis of the responses from the participants in both the interview and the focus group discussions unearthed three main themes in respect of the effectiveness of the use of the alternative strategies. These three themes were improved pupil-teacher relationships, improved pupils' behavior, and improved school climate. The themes and the subsequent sub-themes discovered from the analysis of the data are presented next in line.

Improved pupil-teacher relationships

It was realized that one way the alternative strategies are working is that they have improved the relationships between teachers and students. Under this theme, two sub-themes, namely, up-close with teachers and sharing concerns with the teacher, were realized.

Up-close with teachers

One way alternative strategies are working is that they have brought students closer to their teachers. One negative effect of corporal punishment is that it brings fear for teachers on the part of the student who receives that form of punishment. Elliason (2020), in a study in Ghana, found a number of negative psychosocial consequences of corporal punishment. They included marring the relationship between teachers and students, development of the antagonistic relationship between teachers and students, violence on the part of students, and problems with mental health. On the other hand, the alternative strategies were indicated by the participants as removing students' fear of the teacher. It makes teachers more approachable to students. Students, therefore, see teachers as friends and hence, it brings them close to each other. The narratives below show the expressions given by the participants to the effect that alternative strategies bring them closer to their students:

P1 singled out the alternative strategy of counseling and said that it makes students develop trust in their teachers and easily approach their teachers:

P1: The alternative strategies, for instance, counseling make the student develop trust in you as a teacher. They also make students come close unlike corporal punishment times when the students see the teacher and they run away. But these days they have the confidence, and boldness to come to the teacher without fear.

P7 agreed with P1 and compared the difference between corporal punishment and the alternative strategies:

P7: With corporal punishment, the children see you as their enemy but with the alternative strategies, they are like friends because they are not inflicting pains.

P11 further supported the experience of P7 on the use of the alternative strategies and further added that the rapport built makes students approach teachers with their problems:

P11: You have a good relationship with them, and they are free to tell you anything.

P15, FGD2, and FGD3 supported the earlier assertions:

P15: When you use them, the child will think that he is part of you and the child will not be afraid to come to you if there is any problem.

FGD2: It has helped a lot because we have been able to socialize with the children. If you are able to socialize with the children, you will know more about their problems.

FGD2: These strategies release children from fear so it gives them the opportunity to come closer.

FGD2: Now the fear, the fear among the students is no more. Unlike in those days, immediately you set your eyes on the teacher, "Today I am dead". This teacher today.....Now, these things are no more because the children see the teachers and the Headteacher as their parents too, because when you call them, you advise, you give them directions and so that fear is no longer there, so they freely come to class, unlike those days.

FGD3: And also, with these alternatives, the children see you as a friend and then the atmosphere is convenient.

The overall rundown of the forgoing description so far is that alternative strategies improve the relationships between teachers and students, as asserted by Stowe (2016) in relation to restorative discipline. Effective pupil-teacher relationships are very important for academic success so the achievement of this through the use of alternative strategies is worthwhile. This effectiveness with the use of alternative strategies also agrees with the motive of GES in introducing the positive discipline strategy. According to the positive discipline strategy document, one motive for the introduction of this strategy is to improve rapport between students and teachers to make for effective teaching and learning in the school setup (Ghana Education Service, 2016).

Share concerns with teachers

Another way alternative strategies to corporal punishment are working is that they have allowed for pupils to easily share their concerns with their teachers. This transcends the good relationships built between the teacher and pupils as a result of the use of alternative strategies. For effective teaching and learning, pupils should be able to channel their concerns to teachers for redress and seek all the necessary support from teachers. The use of alternative strategies allows for this avenue to be created for sharing these concerns and seeking necessary support. The quotations below show examples of how the participants' experiences with the use of the alternative strategies have created avenues for pupils to share their concerns with teachers:

P1 and P8 indicated how their use of counseling has created a trusting relationship between them and their pupils for their pupils to seek help from them:

P1: Sometimes when they even have problems, they will still come to you because you have been counseling them.

P8: If they are having some issues concerning their lives, they will just come to you because they know that this teacher if you go to him, if it is money or some sort of motivation, he will give to you because of the way he has been rewarding us. I have seen a lot of students coming to me for pieces of advice and I know that if you use corporal punishment, they won't come. If you counsel them to stop their bad behaviors, they will still come to you and say, "sir this is my problem". So, I know this one is really working.

P10 and FGD2 agreed with the above assertion by adding on that:

P10: They will come out freely and bring out their problems.

FGD2: Then also, it gives them the opportunity to share their ideas or feelings about certain things not fearing that they would be censored for giving the wrong answer.

These perceptions expressed by the participants agree with the tenets of the positive discipline strategy which stipulates that positive discipline builds good rapport between teachers and pupils, allowing for easy access to the teacher. Furthermore, it is in line with the advantage of positive discipline for promoting togetherness and collaboration between teachers and pupils (Stowe, 2016).

Improved pupils' behavior

Another way the participants see the alternative strategies as working is in the area of the behavior of the pupils. Some participants indicated that per their experience, they have led to improved behavior of their pupils. This can be seen in three areas that formed the sub-themes of this theme, namely, disciplined behaviors, teaching of moral behaviors and learning of academic skills.

Disciplined behaviors

Contrary to the popular assertion that the elimination of cane has led to the deterioration of discipline in schools (Bulmuo, 2017; Dwamena, 2021; Twum, 2021; Yeboah, 2020), some of the participants indicated that it has rather improved discipline of the pupils in some areas. The following verbatim quotes from the participants indicate areas where they believe the alternative strategies have brought about disciplinary behaviors on the part of the pupils and how the behaviors came about:

P4 indicated that depending on the nature of the pupil, these alternative strategies do work:

P4: For some kinds of students we have in our classroom, fine, these strategies work. So, the kind of children that we have make us know the effectiveness of the strategies.

P3 and P6 also indicated that the strategies that they use, withdrawal of privileges and changing of seats, respectively, are very effective in bringing about a disciplined pupil:

P3: Some do work, some especially withdrawing a privilege from someone.

P6: I have realized that the strategy I have been using, the changing of seating arrangement is working properly because it puts the students on their toes so that they don't disturb in class.

P9 added on that the brief detention during break works to bring about a disciplined student:

P9: And for not going out for break, it reduces misbehavior in class because, you will end up not repeating that mistake you did.

FGD2 added on that corporal punishment leads to a number of negative consequences but the withdrawal of privileges leads to discipline behavior on the pupils' part:

FGD2: This caning was bringing a lot of negative things. It was bringing vandalism, aggression, and damage to the child's body. All these are eradicated now with the alternative strategies. Just disallowing them to engage in some privilege, improves their behavior.

The view of the participants, therefore, disagrees with the findings from Bulmuo (2017), Dwamena (2021), Twum (2021), and Yeboah (2020) that the abolition of corporal punishment, more especially, the use of cane, has led to the upsurge of indiscipline in Ghanaian schools. The overall implication of the forgoing discussion is that alternative strategies are not altogether bad. Some lead to disciplinary behaviors on the part of the pupils.

Teaching of moral behaviors

A different way behavior improvement arises through the use of alternative strategies is when through the use of the strategies, moral values like cleanliness and neatness are learned by the pupil. Alternative strategies like sweeping, picking of broom sticks and cleaning lead to learning of moral requirements of life like cleanliness. This the participants saw as one of the ways in which the alternative strategies are working as indicated by these narratives from them:

P7: With corporal punishment, sometimes somebody even gets injured but when you look at this one like telling one to sweep or clean, it teaches moral behavior.

FGD3: It is working perfectly. They don't split the brooms anymore and when there are dustbins, they don't litter the floor. They do well to manage the environment for the environment to be clean because when you are seen, you will pick more than you threw about.

Moral values are essential for life. The school is supposed to inculcate moral values in the learners. The use of these strategies, therefore, indirectly helps the learners to achieve this aim of education.

Learning of academic skills

The success of education, partly, depends on the learners' ability to write fast and clearly. The development and improvement of these skills were also identified as one way alternative strategies to corporal punishment are working and, hence, effective. Alternative strategies, more especially, the writing of lines, are reported by the participants as leading to the development of academic skills required for school success. The participants' perceptions as to how the use of alternative strategies improves academic skills are indicated by these quotes:

P13: I see it as positive because while writing, you better your handwriting.

P14: I think that would lead to the correction of grammar and then the use of verbs.

P15: If I ask you to write lines, it improves your ability to write good essay and right expressions.

FGD3: With the writing of lines, when you dictate notes to them during teaching, they are able to write fast, they are able to spell most of the words. It also improves handwriting. Line writing, therefore, though tedious, leads to the acquisition of academic skills as compared with corporal punishment that largely inculcates fear in the students (Gershoff, 2010).

Improved school climate

Though there is no consensus on what school climate is (Wang & Degol, 2016; Thapa et al., 2013), Wang and Degol (2016) note that many academics define school climate as the common attitudes, values, and beliefs that influence how students and adults interact and establish the rules and conventions for the school. Grazia and Molinari (2021), on the other hand, see it as individual perceptions of the institutional, relational, and moral dimensions of school life. It can be summed up that school climate is the totality of experiences witnessed by visitors and various stakeholders of the school, which influence the nature of the performance of the school.

A good school climate is associated with a number of positive educational outcomes, including, respect and trust for school players, high overall performance of staff and students, dedication and focus of staff and students, and a sense of safety in school (Rudasill et al., 2018). It is also linked to high Grade Point Average (GPA) (O'Malley et al., 2015), high teacher retention (Ingersoll cited in Malinen & Savolainen, 2016), lower pupils' aggression, high academic performance, high learner motivation, and reduced suspension rate (Thapa et al., 2013). The participants indicated from their experiences with the alternative strategies that their use of the alternative strategies has brought about a good school climate, especially, in the area of school safety in bringing about a tension-free school environment.

Tension-free school environment

One way that the use of alternative strategies to corporal punishment has resulted in a good school climate has been in the area of the school environment. The use of alternative strategies to corporal punishment was reported to have brought about a tension-free school environment, that is, an environment welcoming to pupils. This also includes an environment free from rancor between teachers and pupils, and teachers and parents. The fear entertained by pupils receiving cane in school for an indiscipline act has been eliminated, making the school environment safe for pupils. This is attested to by these quotes from the participants:

P2 sees that today, schools are safe for pupils, with tension-free relationships also between teachers and parents, as compared with the corporal punishment era:

P2: The school environment is now tension-free because at first when you were coming to school, you know this time my teacher will cane me. All those things now, the child knows that he won't be canded. The atmosphere in the school is very calm and teachers are free to carry out their duties without problem with parents.

P2 further expressed that the alternative strategies have ended the friction between teachers and parents:

P2: Again, we teachers right now, we don't have problems with parents because we are doing the work with the parents. Some parents used to come to the school and fight with teachers because the teachers have beaten their children, but this is no more.

P15 collaborated the experiences of P2 by stating that:

P15: What I have seen is that such strategies when you use them, they promote safe and conducive learning environment.

The forgoing expressed experiences by the participants is in line with the findings of Sandwick et al. (2019). Sandwick et al. (2019) noted that an implementation of alternative strategies that aim at restoring the pupil fosters and promotes pupils' sense of safety and belongingness at school.

DISCUSSIONS

In this study, the participants indicated a number of areas the alternative strategies are working. This shows that despite some perceived challenges with the use of alternative strategies to corporal punishment, there are some positive sides of the strategies that teachers have realized with their use. The effectiveness of the use of the alternative strategies found in this study was improved pupil-teacher relationships, improved pupils' behavior, and improved school climate. These are all essential for the achievement of school attainments of pupils and teachers. The above-enumerated effective areas of the alternative strategies are discussed next in turn.

The study found that effective pupil-teacher relationships are attained from the use of alternative strategies. These are in the areas of bringing pupils and teachers closer to each other and secondly, making it easier for pupils to easily direct their concerns and worries to their teachers for redress. Studies on pupil-teacher relationships have stressed its importance in pupils' academic life (Dale, 2017; Hagenauer, Hascher & Volet, 2015; Lindfors et al., 2018; Longobardi et al., 2016; Longobardi et al., 2021). The use of alternative strategies to bring about effective pupil-teacher relationships is, therefore, in consonance with the expectations of various stakeholders of education.

One area most facilitated by the improved relationship between a teacher and a pupil is the ease of the pupil to ask teachers questions for clarification of lessons or reading done. Several studies have stressed on the importance of pupils' questions (Clark, 2015; Howe, 2019; Sedova, Sedlacek & Svaricek, 2016). The improvement of pupil-teacher relationships for the attainment of these returns to education is, therefore, in order as in the long run, the expectations of school life attained by the pupils and the various stakeholders. The finding that the use of alternative strategies improves pupil-teacher relationships runs counter to the outcome of the use of corporal punishment. Studies

(Akhtar & Awan, 2018; Elliason, 2020; Gershoff, 2010; Gershoff, Sattler & Holden, 2019; Hussain & Muhammad, 2017) indicate that corporal punishment brings antagonistic, aggressive behavior on the part of pupils towards teachers, marring the relationships among them. This, therefore, suggests that the use of alternative strategies works best in terms of pupil-teacher relationships, as that improves it and corporal punishment worsens it. Next, their effectiveness in improving pupils' behavior is discussed.

The findings that the use of the alternative strategies to corporal punishment brings discipline behavior, teaches moral behavior and the learning of academic skills on the part of pupils are worthy of note since these are expectations of education. They agree with the findings of other studies on alternative strategies (Beerli, 2020, Lee & Gage, 2020). However, these findings do not agree with the perceptions of teachers in other studies, particularly, studies on teachers' attitude towards the ban on corporal punishment. These studies, some of which are Dwamena (2021), Twum (2021) and Yeboah (2020), see the state of indiscipline in schools to have worsened with the abolition of corporal punishment and the subsequent introduction of the use of alternative strategies. However, it may be said that perceptions do differ among people and hence, teachers who support the use of corporal punishment might have that perception of support for corporal punishment. Those who do not support the use of corporal punishment, on the other hand, see corporal punishment as largely harmful in the long run though it might seem to have curtailed misbehavior in the short run. They support the use of the alternative strategies which though they perceive as time-wasting and have a lot of challenges with their use but yield a number of positive effects. The next discussion looks at improved school climate as a result of the use of alternative strategies.

Studies on school climates agree that a good school climate is necessary for the attainment of returns to education (Daily et al., 2019; Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020; Kutsyuruba, Klinger & Hussain, 2015; O'Malley et al., 2015; Voight & Nation, 2016; Wang & Degol, 2016). Studies on the use of corporal punishment have indicated that a negative school climate results from its use (Addison, 2015; Awoniyi, 2021; Elliason, 2020). Studies on the use of alternative strategies, however, indicate that a good school climate results from their use (Augusta et al., 2019; Gage et al., 2020; Oxley & Holden, 2021). The findings of this study, therefore, agree with other study findings that the use of alternative strategies improves school climate (Sandwick et al. 2019). Improved school climate, therefore, increases pupils' school attendance and creates cordial relationships among school stakeholders (Darling-Hammond & DePaoli, 2020; Kutsyuruba, Klinger & Hussain, 2015; O'Malley et al., 2015; Voight & Nation, 2016).

CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded from this study that the use of alternative strategies to corporal punishment is not altogether bad. There are a number of effective outcomes namely improved pupil-teacher relationships, improved pupils' behavior and improved school climate experienced by users of these strategies. Being new strategies in the arena of teaching and learning in Ghana, there surely might be some teaming challenges that will hamper their use. These challenges, however, should not be made to cloud the effectiveness of these alternative strategies. The effectiveness identified with the alternative strategies, therefore, should be used as a basis to encourage their use while the challenges with their use should be addressed to ensure the best use of these alternative strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended for educational stakeholders in Ghana, based on the findings of this study that:

- i. Teachers should be encouraged to use alternative strategies to corporal punishment since the returns from their use by way of improved pupil-teacher relationships, improved pupils' behavior and improved school climate are key to the success of an educational endeavor.
- ii. To ensure their continuous use by stakeholders, continuous professional education and training on their use should be carried out among the stakeholders of education in the country.
- iii. The benefits derived from their use should be constantly made known to stakeholders of education in the country.
- iv. The challenges that hamper the use of these alternative strategies should be identified and addressed to forestall the situation where teachers may go back to the use of corporal punishment and hence not helping to attain the benefits of the use of the alternative strategies.

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