Alternatives to Instilling Discipline in Primary Schools during the Post-Corporal Punishment Era in Uganda

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to look at instilling discipline in learners after corporal punishment was abolished in schools in Uganda. We approached the study by identifying the alternatives to corporal punishment and the attitudes of educational stakeholders (learners, teachers and parents) towards disciplinary management alternatives. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews and observation using two neighbouring schools in Masaka Municipality. A qualitative research approach was used in the study. Findings reveal that there are several alternatives to corporal punishment and that educational stakeholders hold different views about these alternatives to corporal punishment. The study recommends that alternatives such as manual labour, professional support such as counseling and guidance and small class sizes should be employed as alternatives to corporal punishment.

Index terms— corporal punishment, discipline, school management.

1 Introduction

ehavioural problems in schools are generally an area of concern in maintenance of quality education. **??**ohen and Cohen (2007:1) express that the 'growing incidence' of disruptive behaviour is posing a challenge to everybody and needs to be tackled by every means at our disposal, before it endangers the aims of education. It is for this reason that a study, however limited, on the perennial problem of discipline is of great importance and valuable cornerstone of learning. According to **??**onn (2002:26), discipline refers to an understanding of what is right and wrong or self-discipline. In the classroom or in a learning situation, the intended outcomes of teachers and learners may not be achieved if there is a lack of discipline. Even learners themselves in coming to the classroom with learning goals to achieve, expect their classmates to be well disciplined or display behaviour that will not interrupt their own learning or that of their classmates. They should adhere to **??**smal's view (2001) that discipline is a kind of 'moral compulsion' that one should submit to. Learners therefore need to subject themselves to discipline without which it would be difficult to engage themselves in any 'valued activity'.

However, the question is how discipline could be maintained in school especially at this time when learners who used to be disciplined by corporal punishment can now no longer be physically punished (Fontana, 1985).It becomes not easy to abandon the old ways of keeping discipline in schools through corporal punishment since it has remained an effectual disciplinary method. Some of the alternative strategies to corporal punishment need specialised training for any effective implementation (Department of **??**ducation, 2001:14). For example the use of restorative justice means (e.g. counselling and guidance) need trained teachers to do the job. The professionals or psychologists to whom schools and teachers are referred are usually not available to most schools, especially in rural areas of Uganda. The behaviour problems encountered by teachers in schools pose problems to all those directly affected, as well as other stakeholders in the field of education. What seems to confront teachers mostly is the legal position of what was once believed to be the effective remedy to bad behaviour. Corporal punishment is no longer legal and cannot be administered as a corrective tool. Therefore, the topic of discipline without the use of corporal punishment in school is important, and needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency because

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of fast deteriorating situations with respect to behaviour. While teachers are assigned and burdened with the task of fostering a culture of teaching and of learning, the situation, conditions and environment to achieve these honorable goals, are fast crumbling, making it a frustrating and demoralizing state of affairs for educators. The purpose of this study is to explore two research questions:1) how is the discipline of learners at two primary schools in Masaka municipality effectively instilled using alternatives to corporal punishment? 2) What are the positive and negative perceptions of stakeholders with respect to the implementation of these approaches?

2 II.

Literature Review a) Possible approaches for the effective instilling of school discipline Disruptive pupils in the classroom have long been a problem (Eggleton, 2001). Thus, the suggestion of a behaviour modification approach takes its starting point from the recognition that the behaviour which is Abstract-The purpose of this study is to look at instilling discipline in learners after corporal punishment was abolished in schools in Uganda. We approached the study by identifying the alternatives to corporal punishment and the attitudes of educational stakeholders (learners, teachers and parents) towards disciplinary management alternatives. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews and observation using two neighbouring schools in Masaka Municipality. A qualitative research approach was used in the study. Findings reveal that there are several alternatives to corporal punishment and that educational stakeholders hold different views about these alternatives to corporal punishment. The study recommends that alternatives such as manual labour, professional support such as counseling and guidance and small class sizes should be employed as alternatives to corporal punishment. acceptable tends to be rewarded while those types of behaviour that receive no reward tend to be eliminated. This is why Dadisman, Manahan and Quade (1990) say that reward and punishment are techniques of control. **??**owley (2001) argues that if problem behaviour occurs because of particular antecedents and consequences, it can be made to occur less by changing those conditions. They also suggest that disruptive behaviour can be reduced through good pastoral care planning together with more discussion and less shouting. More so, **??**ontana (1985: 122) writes about the cognitive approach to the problem of disruptive behaviour. The cognitive approach deals with the question of motivation, interest and life goals. If levels of motivation and interest are high, then learning takes place more readily. Although individuals may vary, in most cases where children are allowed or given chance to manage themselves by, for example, choosing own leaders to monitor noise levels and task completion, they will behave better.

Again, the effective inculcation of discipline in schools or classroom is dependent on certain rules. Rules for behaviour are needed to set limits on what can or cannot be done. According to **??**haplain (2003:140-141), the goal pursued with rules for the classroom and the whole school is a safe environment and good working relationship. Rules should be clear, achievable and be subject to the school policy and government regulations. Rules can be for prevention and also, after the act of misbehaving, prescribe the consequences of the offence in relation to its seriousness. **??**haplain (2003: 150) says that the rules in schools are mostly rules that relate to 'teacher -pupil and pupil -pupil relationships'. The code of conduct of a school can maintain or improve an existing positive learning situation. It can reduce the task of using tough disciplinary actions or measures against misbehaving learners. Therefore, the School Governing Body of each school should draw up a code of conduct for its school (Department of Education 2001:20). The aim of the code conduct should be to maintain the 'disciplined and purposeful school environment that exists at school' (p: 21). The code of conduct should set standards of moral behaviour, promote self-discipline and constructive learning and be based in mutual respect and tolerance. A successfully implemented or enforced code of conduct can contribute to good school discipline.

According to Mercure (1995:1-2), a list of alternatives to discourage misbehaviour used in United States of America schools includes the use of parents. A principal can invite parents to school to 'literally baby-sit' children who are unruly. During their stay at the school their children can recite or repeat the schools' attitude pledge or whatever is about the schools' basic rules with an aim of building collective involvement of external publics into school management affairs. Bianco (2002) says that the emphasis should be on the responsibilities of parents towards their children's attendance and behaviour in school. More still, schools need to set up pastoral support programmes especially for learners already identified as difficult to manage. Parents and schools need to draw up and agree on strategies that contain clear expectations from learners towards attaining acceptable behaviour. This home-school approach can achieve good outcomes, and parents should always be informed about their children's behaviour patterns.

Alexander and Carla (1995:2) believe that small classes have a positive effect on student behaviour. In addition to small classes, the authors also recommend that schools that are smaller and whose curriculum is easy to adjust may contain programmes aimed at prevention of ill-discipline and such programmes may be those that can promote social and cognitive skills in learners. Burgess (1988) is of the opinion that parents and teachers should reinforce behaviours that are compatible with any desirable behaviour in children through being exemplary. This is because children normally expect from adults a type of behaviour that is characterized by good manners and a helping hand to others. Docking (1996) agrees that a teacher should at all times be exemplary in being responsible and committed to people around him or her because children, in general, worship their heroes and imitate those whom they appreciate and admire.

3 III.

4 Research Method a) Design

We decided to do a qualitative study. According to Muijs (2004), the aim of qualitative research is '... understanding experience as nearly as possible as its participants feel it or live it' and also aims at '... discovery that leads to new insights'. We used a qualitative research approach mainly to understand what learners, teachers and parents experience in the process of maintaining discipline when corporal punishment is no longer used in schools. While we wanted to understand how the participants relate with the problem through their own perspective, we also wanted to gain understanding within my theoretical and conceptual framework and try to arrive at findings that will help solve the problem in the practical context of the school. The study we conducted was a naturalistic inquiry during and teachers and parents related their experiences in dealing with discipline after corporal punishment was abolished in Ugandan schools.

5 b) Area and study population

This study focused on two schools in Masaka Municipality. From each school, 15 learners and 5 teachers were chosen. From the community, 10 parents who directly linked to either of the schools were also the 10 parents. Even group interviews were conducted with 6 learners and 5 teachers from each school, while individual interviews were conducted with 10 parents. The authors also used observation as a method to gather information because it has been found to be a useful way of looking at many education research questions, and can give direct access to social interactions ??Muijs 2004:52). We particularly observed how the teachers, including the principal, were coping to maintain discipline without using corporal punishment. We were also able to observe the behaviour of learners towards the application of alternatives to corporal punishment in these schools. As participant observers, we participated actively in the life activities and in the interests of a group of persons in the schools. Parents for the study were selected from the neighbourhood of the two schools and were purposely chosen because of their specific involvement in the disciplinary matters of both schools.

6 c) Data collection instruments

The main data collecting instrument was the questionnaire. The questionnaire is a survey of different opinions from (usually) large numbers of people who provide anonymous replies. The questionnaire we used was separated into three sections according to the two research questions. The first question required learners to list possible alternatives to corporal punishment. We included the question because it forces the respondents to think of answers without having a list of "acceptable" options from which to choose (Bell, 2001). The second question was focusing on the positives and negative perceptions of stakeholders with respect to the implementation of these approaches. We conducted interviews in order to address the second question. The interview schedule had small groups of 5 and with all parents. We used the tape-recorder for the interviews and later transcribed the responses. Tape recording the interviews ensures completeness of the verbal interaction and provides material for reliability checks.

7 d) Sampling

The choice of participants for the study was purposive which involves hand-picking respondents for a study for the specific qualities they bring to the study ??Cohen & Manion, 1995). The learners were a head boy and head girl from each school, twelve class leaders and seven prefects. Ten educators i.e. five from each school, two principals and two deputy principals were also hand-picked. The group of ten parents approached was a combination of retired educators who were either parents of learners at one of the two schools involved, or current members of governing bodies of the two schools. These participants were all chosen because of their involvement and experience in dealing with disciplinary problems in their schools, and because of their awareness of the current legal position concerning caning of children in schools. Data was presented using descriptive statistics (tables and frequencies) as well as themes developed from the interview data.

IV.

8 Findings a) Alternatives to corporal punishment

In order to respond to the question of "how the discipline of learners at two primary schools in Masaka municipality could be effectively instilled using alternatives to corporal punishment", the 30 learners were asked to list alternatives to corporal punishment used and results indicated in table 1.1. We found that the thirty learners involved in the study provided five alternatives to corporal punishment commonly used in their schools and these are manual labour, suspension, detention of misbehaving learners, counseling and guidance as well as isolation. From the 30 responses from learners, the majority (43.3%) suggested manual labour. Because corporal punishment that seemed to inflict some form of pain in order to reduce misbehaviour was abolished, educators tend to highly substitute it for manual labour which also inflicts some bit of pain. In the participating schools, manual labour varied and ranged from cleaning the classroom, gardening in the teachers' quarters, digging ant-hills, to preparing new school playing grounds. The suggestions ranged from light to heavy manual labour from a few minutes to many hours of hard work. The final decision should depend on the severity of the offence.

Counselling and guidance (20%) was also frequently given because today schools are resorting towards more restorative justice methods other than the oldfashioned traditional methods like corporal punishment. The least used alternatives were isolation (10%) as well as suspension (10%). Isolating a learner is in itself not effectual because it tends to produce docile learners. Even suspension would not be the best solution because schools are entities supposed to mould learners however difficult they are other than suspending them to display the school's failure to handle indiscipline cases.

The majority of learners were in favour of manual work as an alternative to corporal punishment "Children enjoy being in groups and hate isolation. It is a common practice by teachers to group all the punished learners doing manual work for easy supervision". Out of ten teachers given the question "how is the discipline of learners at two primary schools in Masaka municipality effectively instilled using alternatives to corporal punishment?", (7) of them suggested that behaviour management programmes (40%) were the best alternatives to instilling discipline without corporal punishment, and this was followed by small class sizes (20%). The application and enforcement of codes of conduct (10%), detention and isolation (10%), use of professional support i.e. psychologists and counsellors (10%), as well as verbal and non-verbal interventions (10%) were ranked the same while parental involvement in school affairs and empathy (00%) received no response (See table 1.2). More explanations were given on why some alternatives were considered to be more effective than others while some were not even rated as alternatives to corporal punishment. The interviewed teachers agreed that it was generally easy to reinforce good behaviour through management training programmes given to teachers, prefects and class monitors. One teacher recalls: "In our schools, teachers are given professional training courses in order to enable them to cope with unwanted behaviour. Counselling and guidance courses are given".

But also important to note is that with the coming of the Universal Primary Education programme (UPE), pupil enrolments increased from time to time. Teachers feel it is difficult to handle large classes not only in terms of instruction but also in monitoring the discipline of each learner. As a matter of fact, school administrators find it effective to make small class sizes for easy disciplinary control. This is noted by a principal in one of the schools: "Huge classes cannot be managed and monitored effectively. What is common practice is to put in place small class sizes for easy control of behaviour".

The 10 parents involved in the study were (after explanation) each able to participate in the grading of the alternatives to corporal punishment according to what they consider to be their most effective alternatives when instilling discipline in schools. After grading the alternatives, we interviewed each parent asking them to expand on their responses i.e. giving reasons on how they had arrived at their choices. All the ten parents who individually answered the questionnaire on alternatives to corporal punishment chose the enforcement of the code of conduct and strict application of school rules as the best approaches to instill discipline in schools. Later during the interviews, they supported the response by suggesting the calling of parents to school when learners were failing to observe school rules. The researchers were able to realise why all the 10 parents had chosen parental involvement as their best strategy to lessen misbehaving of learners at school. Professional support i.e. the use of psychologists and counsellors and good behaviour management programmes were rated second and third respectively by all the ten parents who had participated in the study.

9   b) Stakeholder perceptions of the alternatives to corporal punishment

Teachers were using corporal punishment without restrictions to instill discipline in schools. When corporal punishment, as a corrective measure, was made unlawful in schools, teachers had to look for alternatives or other strategies for effective inculcation of discipline. The study we conducted on instilling discipline without use of corporal punishment in schools was extended to look at the stakeholder perceptions of the alternatives to instilling discipline in schools. In this study, learners were able to reveal the positives and negatives of alternatives to corporal punishment at school. Eighteen of the learners felt that some alternatives to corporal punishment were bad measures for achieving positive discipline. The responses of the learners are summarised below:

1. Learners said it was not good to do manual work which they claimed had health hazards or the possibility of being hurt while working with, for example, garden tools. 2. They also mentioned embarrassment in front of other learners when doing dirty manual work on school grounds. 3. They were also concerned about being left behind during lessons when suspended from classes for misbehaving.

rape, molestation or being mugged was also mentioned. For them it was negative because of detention during breaks. Learner in school B interviewed said:

'You even miss out on learner gossip, you are left out on the latest news if detained during the lunch hour or going home alone'. They also claimed that all these types of disciplinary measures took a longer time than corporal punishment.

Twelve learners were of the opinion that there were positives to some of the alternative approaches to corporal punishment at school. A group of teachers had this to say: "Some alternatives were good and even educational if taken seriously. For example, if detention after school was hated by learners, then it was good as a deterrent to misbehaving in school. If learners hated these alternatives to corporation punishment, then it was a positive thing for the school in instilling discipline".

A school principal similarly added: "That is why parent involvement as an alternative to corporal punishment

in inculcating discipline at schools can also be claimed a good measure since most learners do not like their parents to being called to school. Most learners do not feel comfortable with all the school stories known to parents".

During the oral presentation of their responses, two learners voiced concerns about some alternatives. They singled out a few that can have an educational negative effect on learners, e.g. suspension.

"Suspended learners always come back after a few days and are then behind in their school work. This might lead to academic failure".

The ten teachers involved in the study also answered the question on positives and negatives to corporal punishment. On answering the question, teachers related their own experience on alternatives they had implemented to instill discipline in their schools. Eight of the ten teachers involved in the study felt that most of the alternatives to corporal punishment were good measures to maintain discipline in school. In their answers to the open-ended question and during interviews, teachers were able to explain why they were mostly positive about the majority of the alternatives to corporal punishment. One teacher indicated: "Since all alternatives to corporal punishment were compatible with the laws of the country, they (teachers) were no longer liable for prosecution or being sued in courts of law for wrongly or excessively punishing learners".

The alternatives to corporal punishment were acceptable by law which renders them as positive interventions to discipline. "Alternatives like the code of conduct make learner control easier", teachers said.

With the code of conduct, teachers know what behaviour to expect and what disciplinary measures to take. On the issue of professional support, e.g. the use of psychologists, teachers said that they favoured such measures because they felt that professional support could be of great assistance in cases where they had problems with mentally and physically disabled misbehaving learners.

After teachers had voiced their opinions about alternatives to corporal punishment, they concluded that if the alternatives could be implemented, they could in future work better with all educational stake holders since they are accepted by all.

On the other hand, those participants that had negative perceptions about the alternatives to corporal punishment gave some reasons to support their claim:

1. They felt that these measures were time wasters.

They claimed that to use a cane to discipline learners takes a very short time. Valuable teaching time will be wasted if the alternatives were to be applied, they said. During the interviews, one teacher said: ' In a forty minute teaching period, you can beat all the wrongdoers in five minutes and you'll have the best of their attention during the other thirty five (minutes)'. The interviewee was supported by a colleague: 'Our children behave better and learn only when they have something to fear'.

2. They also claimed that since corporal punishment was outlawed in schools, discipline has deteriorated and learners were not doing their work. Teaching has been made more boring and frustrating, they claimed.

10   V. Discussion and Recommendations

Research findings reveal that learners were highly in favour of manual labour whereas teachers were in favour of behavioural management programmes as alternatives to corporal punishment. The learners seem to be positive about manual labour as punishment because it is usually done in groups and therefore they may do it without taking it seriously as a punishment ??Rodgers, 2003). On the other hand, teachers were in favour of behavioural management programmes because these provide them with modern approaches to child education and training (Mercure, 1995). Probably this is why professional supports such as counseling and guidance (20%) are highly favoured alternatives to corporal punishment since teachers have the requisite training to handle behavioural issues among learners. Finally, adopting professional supports like counseling and guidance requires relatively small class sizes (20%) for each teacher to closely monitor the behaviour of learners. Alexander & Carla (1995) do not only believe that small classes influence student behaviour positively, but also that smaller schools stand a good chance with programmes that aim at the prevention of ill-discipline. They further argue that programmes that promote social and cognitive skills are easily applied in small classes and small schools. The findings of the study clearly indicate that learners who participated in the study are not very clear about most alternatives that could be applied to correct misbehaving if corporal punishment was to be spared. This finding reveals their limited use in school and at home. However, there most alternatives were positively perceived by most participants because they substituted corporal punishment which traditionally inflicted pain and torture on the learners (Bull & Solity, 1996).

This study has revealed important opinions on each of the two questions investigated. In the light of that, this study recommended that:-1. Parents should be encouraged to work with teachers to improve discipline at schools with the aim of strengthening better relationships between schools and communities. 2. Teachers should acquaint themselves and learn to know learner home -backgrounds in order to understand learners they are dealing with. 3. Co-operation or teamwork in the execution of school rules and codes of conduct should be promoted at each school. 4. Teachers, including schools management teams, should be developed and empowered through workshops with specialised knowledge or managerial skills. The skills could include discipline without corporal punishment, class management and organization and effective teaching. 5. The Ministry of Education should find ways to limit class size, since bigger classes are difficult to control. 6. Properly supervised manual labour as an alternative to corporal punishment should be highly considered with motivated teachers to play

284 a responsible role. 7. Professional support i.e. psychologists or educational counsellors should be increased to support schools. [1]

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1 : Alternatives to corporal punishment as
indicated by learners

Alternatives	Freq.	%
Manual labour	13	43.3%
Suspension	3	10.0%
Detention of misbehaving learners	5	16.7%
Counseling and guidance	6	20.0%
Isolation	3	10.0%
Total	30	100.0%

Source: Field data

Figure 1: Table 1 .

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2 : Alternatives to corporal punishment as
indicated by teachers

Alternatives	Freq.	%
Behaviour management programmes	4	40%
Small class sizes	2	20%
Application and enforcement of codes of conduct	1	10%
Parental involvement in school affairs	0	00%
Detention and isolation	1	10%
Use of professional support (Psychologists and counsellors)	1	10%
Verbal and Non-verbal interventions	1	10%
Empathy	0	00%
Total	10	100%

Source: Field data

Figure 2: Table 1 .

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[1]. On being detained after school, transport problems or walking alone home were mentioned. The fear of

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