

## Perception of Teachers towards the Use of Punishment in Sancta Maria Primary School Onitsha, Anambra State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

A survey design was employed to find out the perception of teachers towards the use of punishment in Sancta Maria primary school Onitsha, Anambra State, Nigeria. Fifty-eight teachers were studied. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Mean and z-test were used for data analysis. It was found that the teachers perceived scolding and verbal assault to the pupil, making a pupil stay back after school dismissal, pupil's fetching of water, pupil washing of school's toilet, sending the pupil out of the class, and seizing or denying the pupil of his or her belongings as unacceptable forms of punishment. Giving the pupil knock on the head, slapping or beating the pupil with hands, kicking and pushing the pupil with legs, and pulling the pupil's ear or hair are unacceptable to the teachers. The teachers perceived the pupil's cutting of grasses, the pupil kneeling down or standing for a long time, the pupil scrubbing the floor of the class, flogging the pupil with stick or cane and the pupil sweeping the whole class as acceptable punishment measures. Teachers' gender, age and years of teaching experience make no significant difference in their perception towards the use of punishment.

**Keywords:** Perception, punishment, teachers, primary school, gender, age, years of teaching experience.

### 1. Introduction

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. Kilimci (2009) noted that schools are meant to be one of the safest places where students fulfill their educational practices. There has been high prevalence of indiscipline among learners in all level of Nigerian educational system including primary schools. The teachers and administrators in Nigerian primary schools have employed different strategies to curb indiscipline among pupils. Such strategy is the use of punishment. Punishment refers to the application of a negative stimulus to reduce or eliminate a behaviour (American Academy of Pediatrics 1998). They further classified punishment for children into verbal reprimands and corporal punishment. Corporal punishment is the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child pain, but not injury, for the purpose of correction or control of the child's behaviour (Straus 2001). Punishment especially corporal punishment has received attention at the international community as a violation of a child's right. Most common students' behaviour problems include coming to school late, not doing assigned work, disrespecting teachers, skipping classes, stealing, and vandalizing school property (Manguvo *et al.* 2011). Kilimci (2009) maintained that corporal punishment is adopted worldwide in many schools. Krajewski *et al.* (1998) reported that not completing assignment, cheating, attacks on teachers, stealing through force, carrying weapons, and sexual activity were the discipline problems among secondary school students. Some of the school teachers and administrators use punishment as a way restoring discipline among the pupils and students. Corporal punishment includes a wide variety of methods such as hitting, slapping, spanking, punching, kicking pinching, shaking, shoving, choking, use of various objects (i.e. wooden paddles, belts, sticks, pins, or others), painful body postures (such as placing in closed spaces), use of electric shock, use of excessive exercise drills, or prevention of urine or stool elimination (Gershoff & Bitensky 2007; McClure & May 2008). The type of punishment depends largely on the socio-cultural environment surrounding the child. In a school setting, punishment can range from slapping, beating or kicking, kneeling down or standing for a long time, scolding and verbal assault, cutting grasses, fetching water, knock on the head, pulling of ears, sweeping and tidying of the school environment, sending a pupil out of the class, seizure and denial of a pupil's belongings, among others. Use of corporal punishment, according to Tan & Yuanshan (1999) has been banned in some countries such as United States, Canada, Australia and lately in Hong Kong, and also in South African schools (Cicognani 2004). In Zambia, corporal punishment in schools is unlawful. Meanwhile corporal punishment is still lawful in Nigerian homes and schools in the

penal system both as a sentence for crime and as a disciplinary measure in penal institutions (Newell 2007). Use of punishment especially corporal punishment has been argued as a means of correcting children. Some researchers (Straus 2003; Hyman 1990) are against the use of corporal punishment as it is a maltreatment and psychological abuse of the child. They further condemned it pointing out its harmful effect such as somatic complaints, increase anxiety, changes in personality and depression. Gershoff (2002) stated that corporal punishment increases aggression, and lowers the level of moral internalization and mental health. Robinson *et al.* (2005) noted that running away, fear of teacher, feelings of helplessness, humiliation, aggression, and destruction at home and at school, abuse and criminal activities are the side effects of corporal punishment. Corporal punishment to Nigerian children results to ocular injuries (Oluwakemi & Kayode 2007). Other researchers like Baumrind (1996), and Larzelere (1996) supported the use of corporal punishment emphasizing that it is a valid means of discipline. The academic success, health and fitness of a punished pupil may be affected as he or she may lose interest and withdraw from the teacher and school activities including sports due to the psycho-social effects associated with punishment. Studies (Socolar & Stein 1995; Flynn 1998; Day *et al.* 1998) revealed that parents tend to view corporal punishment as most appropriate for children of preschool age and least appropriate for infants and for children age 5 years and older. Corporal punishment in schools is an ineffective, dangerous and unacceptable method of discipline (United States 2010). An individual's perception on the use punishment can be influenced by some socio-demographic factors like gender, religion, age, among others and teachers cannot be exempted. In Nigerian schools especially primary schools, punishments are mostly administered to pupils by the teachers. This is why it is necessary to find out teachers' perception towards the use of punishment as a means of correcting pupils' unwelcome behaviours in Nigerian primary schools. Sancta Maria Primary school in Onitsha, Anambra State was explored for the study.

## 2. Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female teachers towards the use of punishment.
2. There is no significant difference in the perception of teachers towards the use of punishment in relation to age.
3. Years of teaching experience make no significant difference in the teachers' perception towards the use of punishment.

## 3. Methods

A descriptive survey design was adopted for this study as it tries to describe events and behaviours as they occur in their natural setting at a particular point in time. The population comprises of all the 58 teachers in Sancta Maria primary school Onitsha, Anambra State. Considering the small size of the population, all the 58 teachers were studied as sample for the study. The instrument for data collection was a 4-point modified Likert-type response options of "Very Acceptable" (VA) (4points), "Acceptable" (A) (3points), "Unacceptable" (UA) (2points), and "Very Unacceptable" (VUA) (1point). The instrument comprises of sections A and B. Section A elicited personal information of the teachers in relation to gender, age, and years of teaching experience. The section B was structured on questions addressing punishment. The instrument had a reliability coefficient of 0.79 which was calculated using Pearson Product Moment correlation.

Fifty-eight copies of questionnaire were distributed to the teachers but only 52 copies were returned giving a return rate of 89.66 per cent. Descriptive statistics of mean was used to answer the research questions while inferential statistics of z-test was employed to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. A criterion mean of 2.50 was used as a bench mark for taking decision. Any item mean or grandmean that is equal to or greater than 2.50 was considered as "acceptable" while any item mean or grandmean that is less than 2.50 was considered to be "unacceptable".

## 4. Analysis Results

**Table 1:** Perception of Teachers Towards the Use of Punishment.

S/n	Forms of Punishment	VA	A	UA	VUA	TWS	$\bar{x}$	Decision (D)
1	Scolding and verbal assault to the pupil	8	15	30	30	83	1.60	*

2	Making the pupil to stay back after school dismissal.	4	6	20	39	69	1.32	*
3	The pupil cutting of grasses.	60	60	20	7	147	2.82	√
4	The pupil fetching of water.	28	15	50	15	108	2.07	*
5	The pupil scrubbing the floor of the class.	100	60	10	2	172	3.31	√
6	The pupil sweeping the whole class.	84	72	12	1	169	3.25	√
7	The pupil washing the school toilets.	40	15	45	22	122	2.35	*
8	Sending the pupil out of the class.	8	15	60	15	98	1.88	*
9	Seizing or denying the pupil of his or her belongings.	20	21	50	15	106	2.04	*
10	The pupil kneeling down or standing for a long time.	120	30	20	2	172	3.31	√
11	Flogging the pupil with stick or cane.	80	60	20	2	162	3.12	√
12	Giving the pupil knock on the head.	8	9	64	15	96	1.85	*
13	Slapping or beating the pupil with hands.	8	12	72	10	102	1.96	*
14	Kicking and pushing the pupil with legs.	4	12	30	32	78	1.50	*
15	Pulling the pupil's ear or hair.	8	9	54	20	91	1.75	*
	Grandmean						2.28	*

Key: \* Indicates unacceptable while √ indicates acceptable

Table 1 reveals that the teachers perceived scolding and verbal assault to the pupil ( $\bar{x} = 1.60$ ), making a pupil stay back after school dismissal ( $\bar{x} = 1.32$ ), pupil's fetching of water ( $\bar{x} = 2.07$ ), and pupil washing of school's toilet ( $\bar{x} = 2.35$ ) as unacceptable. It is equally evident in the table that teachers perceived sending the pupil out of the class ( $\bar{x} = 1.88$ ), and seizing or denying the pupil of his or her belongings ( $\bar{x} = 2.04$ ) as unacceptable punishment practices. It was found that giving the pupil knock on the head ( $\bar{x} = 1.85$ ), slapping or beating the pupil with hands ( $\bar{x} = 1.96$ ), kicking and pushing the pupil with legs ( $\bar{x} = 1.50$ ), and pulling the pupil's ear or hair ( $\bar{x} = 1.75$ ) are unacceptable to the teachers. However, the teachers perceived the pupil's cutting of grasses ( $\bar{x} = 2.82$ ), the pupil kneeling down or standing for a long time ( $\bar{x} = 3.31$ ), the pupil scrubbing the floor of the class ( $\bar{x} = 3.31$ ), flogging the pupil with stick or cane ( $\bar{x} = 3.12$ ) and the pupil sweeping the whole class ( $\bar{x} = 3.25$ ) as acceptable. With the grandmean of 2.28, it shows that the use of punishment as a means of correcting behaviours was unacceptable by the teachers.

**Table 2:** Influence of Teachers' Gender, Age and Years of Teaching Experience on their Perception Towards the Use of Punishment

S/n	Forms of Punishment	Gender				Age				Years of teaching experience			
		Male n=21 $\bar{x}$	D	Female n=31 $\bar{x}$	D	< 30 years n=18 $\bar{x}$	D	$\geq$ 30 years n=34 $\bar{x}$	D	< 5 years n=32 $\bar{x}$	D	$\geq$ 5 years n=20 $\bar{x}$	D
1	Scolding and verbal assault to the pupil	1.62	*	1.51	*	1.42	*	1.38	*	1.57	*	1.60	*
2	Making the pupil to stay back after school dismissal.	1.27	*	1.38	*	1.29	*	1.31	*	1.22	*	1.28	*
3	The pupil cutting of grasses.	2.66	√	2.72	√	2.81	√	2.76	√	2.75	√	2.91	√
4	The pupil fetching of water.	2.11	*	2.01	*	1.98	*	2.12	*	2.10	*	1.89	*
5	The pupil scrubbing the floor of the class.	2.96	√	3.21	√	2.84	√	3.41	√	3.47	√	3.26	√
6	The pupil sweeping the whole class.	3.33	√	3.24	√	3.27	√	3.12	√	3.10	√	3.20	√
7	The pupil washing the school toilets.	2.26	*	2.42	*	2.31	*	2.33	*	2.40	*	2.27	*
8	Sending the pupil out of the class.	2.11	*	2.01	*	1.96	*	1.87	*	2.03	*	1.76	*
9	Seizing or denying the pupil of his or her belongings.	2.06	*	1.98	*	2.11	*	2.02	*	1.96	*	2.16	*
10	The pupil kneeling down or standing for a long time.	3.10	√	3.09	√	2.97	√	3.61	√	3.16	√	2.97	√
11	Flogging the pupil with stick or cane.	3.16	√	3.01	√	3.17	√	2.98	√	3.04	√	2.99	√
12	Giving the pupil knock on the head.	1.92	*	1.73	*	2.01	*	1.56	*	1.61	*	1.76	*
13	Slapping or beating the	1.94	*	2.04	*	1.76	*	2.06	*	1.92	*	1.97	*

	pupil with hands.												
14	Kicking and pushing the pupil with legs.	1.61	*	1.36	*	1.42	*	1.31	*	1.65	*	1.75	*
15	Pulling the pupil's ear or hair.	1.81	*	1.62	*	1.56	*	1.61	*	1.79	*	1.80	*
	Grandmean	2.26	*	2.22	*	2.19	*	2.23	*	2.25	*	2.24	*

Key: \* Indicates unacceptable while √ indicates acceptable

It is evident in table 2 that teachers perceived scolding and verbal assault to the pupil (male  $\bar{x} = 1.62$ , female  $\bar{x} = 1.51$ ; < 30 years  $\bar{x} = 1.42$ ,  $\geq 30$  years  $\bar{x} = 1.38$ ; < 5 years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 1.57$ ,  $\geq 5$  years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 1.60$ ) and making the pupil to stay back after school dismissal (male  $\bar{x} = 1.27$ , female  $\bar{x} = 1.38$ ; < 30 years  $\bar{x} = 1.29$ ,  $\geq 30$  years  $\bar{x} = 1.31$ ; < 5 years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 1.22$ ,  $\geq 5$  years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 1.28$ ) as unacceptable forms of punishment. The table shows that teachers perceived pupil's fetching of water (male  $\bar{x} = 2.11$ , female  $\bar{x} = 2.01$ ; < 30 years  $\bar{x} = 1.98$ ,  $\geq 30$  years  $\bar{x} = 2.12$ ; < 5 years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 2.10$ ,  $\geq 5$  years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 1.89$ ), and pupil's washing the school toilet (male  $\bar{x} = 2.26$ , female  $\bar{x} = 2.42$ ; < 30 years  $\bar{x} = 2.31$ ,  $\geq 30$  years  $\bar{x} = 2.33$ ; < 5 years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 2.40$ ,  $\geq 5$  years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 2.27$ ) as unacceptable punishment measures. Data in the table reveal that teachers perceived sending the pupil out of the class (male  $\bar{x} = 2.11$ , female  $\bar{x} = 2.01$ ; < 30 years  $\bar{x} = 1.96$ ,  $\geq 30$  years  $\bar{x} = 1.87$ ; < 5 years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 2.03$ ,  $\geq 5$  years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 1.76$ ), and seizure or denying the pupil of his or her belongings (male  $\bar{x} = 2.06$ , female  $\bar{x} = 1.98$ ; < 30 years  $\bar{x} = 2.11$ ,  $\geq 30$  years  $\bar{x} = 2.02$ ; < 5 years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 1.96$ ,  $\geq 5$  years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 2.16$ ) as unacceptable. It could be seen that teachers perceived giving the pupil knock on the head (male  $\bar{x} = 1.92$ , female  $\bar{x} = 1.73$ ; < 30 years  $\bar{x} = 2.01$ ,  $\geq 30$  years  $\bar{x} = 1.56$ ; < 5 years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 1.61$ ,  $\geq 5$  years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 1.76$ ), and slapping or beating the pupil with hands (male  $\bar{x} = 1.94$ , female  $\bar{x} = 2.04$ ; < 30 years  $\bar{x} = 1.76$ ,  $\geq 30$  years  $\bar{x} = 2.06$ ; < 5 years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 1.92$ ,  $\geq 5$  years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 1.97$ ) as unacceptable. Kicking and pushing the pupil with legs (male  $\bar{x} = 1.61$ , female  $\bar{x} = 1.36$ ; < 30 years  $\bar{x} = 1.42$ ,  $\geq 30$  years  $\bar{x} = 1.31$ ; < 5 years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 1.65$ ,  $\geq 5$  years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 1.75$ ), and pulling the pupil's ear or hair (male  $\bar{x} = 1.81$ , female  $\bar{x} = 1.62$ ; < 30 years  $\bar{x} = 1.56$ ,  $\geq 30$  years  $\bar{x} = 1.61$ ; < 5

years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 1.79$ ,  $\geq 5$  years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 1.80$ ) were perceived to be unacceptable by the teachers. However, the teachers perceived the pupil cutting of grasses (male  $\bar{x} = 2.66$ , female  $\bar{x} = 2.72$ ;  $< 30$  years  $\bar{x} = 2.81$ ,  $\geq 30$  years  $\bar{x} = 2.76$ ;  $< 5$  years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 2.75$ ,  $\geq 5$  years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 2.91$ ), and the pupil scrubbing the floor of the class (male  $\bar{x} = 2.96$ , female  $\bar{x} = 3.21$ ;  $< 30$  years  $\bar{x} = 2.84$ ,  $\geq 30$  years  $\bar{x} = 3.41$ ;  $< 5$  years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 3.47$ ,  $\geq 5$  years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 3.26$ ) as acceptable forms of punishment. The pupil sweeping the whole class (male  $\bar{x} = 3.33$ , female  $\bar{x} = 3.24$ ;  $< 30$  years  $\bar{x} = 3.27$ ,  $\geq 30$  years  $\bar{x} = 3.12$ ;  $< 5$  years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 3.10$ ,  $\geq 5$  years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 3.20$ ), and pupil kneeling down or standing for a long time (male  $\bar{x} = 3.10$ , female  $\bar{x} = 3.09$ ;  $< 30$  years  $\bar{x} = 2.97$ ,  $\geq 30$  years  $\bar{x} = 3.61$ ;  $< 5$  years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 3.16$ ,  $\geq 5$  years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 2.97$ ) were perceived as acceptable. Flogging the pupil with stick or cane (male  $\bar{x} = 3.16$ , female  $\bar{x} = 3.01$ ;  $< 30$  years  $\bar{x} = 3.17$ ,  $\geq 30$  years  $\bar{x} = 2.98$ ;  $< 5$  years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 3.04$ ,  $\geq 5$  years of teaching experience  $\bar{x} = 2.99$ ) was perceived by the teachers as an acceptable form of punishment. With the grandmeans as could be seen in the table show that male teachers ( $\bar{x} = 2.26$ ), female teachers ( $\bar{x} = 2.22$ ), teachers less than 30 years ( $\bar{x} = 2.19$ ), teachers who are 30 years and above ( $\bar{x} = 2.23$ ), teachers with less than 5 years of teaching experience ( $\bar{x} = 2.25$ ), and those with 5 years and above as their years of teaching experience ( $\bar{x} = 2.24$ ) perceived punishment as an unacceptable.

### Hypotheses 1

There is no significant difference in the perception of male and female teachers towards the use of punishment.

**Table 3:** Z-test of no Significant Difference in the Perception of Male and Female Teachers Towards the Use of Punishment.

Gender	n	calculated z	critical z	df	alpha level	decision
Male	21	1.35	1.96	50	0.05	Ho accepted
Female	31					

df means degree of freedom

Table 3 shows that the z-calculated value of 1.35 is less than z-critical value at degree of freedom of 50 and 0.05 alpha level, thereby leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis as stated. Hence, there is no significant difference in the perception of male and female teachers towards the use of punishment.

### Hypotheses 2

There is no significant difference in the perception of teachers towards the use of punishment in relation to age.

**Table 4:** Z-test of no Significant Difference in the Teachers' Perception Towards the Use of Punishment in relation to Age.

Age	n	calculated z	critical z	df	alpha level	decision
< 30 years	18	1.17	1.96	50	0.05	Ho accepted
≥ 30 years	34					

df means degree of freedom

In table 4, it could be seen that the z-calculated value of 1.17 is less than z-critical value of 1.96 at degree of freedom of 50 and 0.05 alpha level, thereby leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis as stated. Hence, age makes no significant difference in the teachers' perception towards the use of punishment.

### Hypotheses 3

Years of teaching experience make no significant difference in the teachers' perception towards the use of punishment.

**Table 5:** Z-test of no Significant Difference in the Perception of Teachers Towards the Use of Punishment in Relation to Years of Teaching Experience.

Years of teaching experience	n	calculated z	critical z	df	alpha level	decision
< 5 years	32	1.09	1.96	50	0.05	Ho accepted
≥ 5 years	20					

df means degree of freedom

Table 5 reveals that the z-calculated value of 1.09 is less than z-critical value of 1.96 at degree of freedom of 50 and 0.05 alpha level. The null hypothesis which states that years of teaching experience makes no significant difference in the teachers' perception towards the use of punishment was accepted.

## 5. Discussion of Findings

The finding that the teachers perceived punishment as unacceptable method of discipline was surprising. This is because most teachers still punish their students and pupils for any misbehaviour. The finding is in agreement with United States (2010) report that corporal punishment in schools is an ineffective, dangerous and unacceptable method of discipline. Also in conformity with earlier findings (Socolar & Stein 1995; Flynn 1998; Day et al. 1998) that parents tend to view corporal punishment as most appropriate for children of preschool age and least appropriate for infants and for children age 5 years and older. The agreement could be due to the negative physical, mental, emotional and social health effects of punishment on the punished pupil and as it constitutes an infringement on the child's rights. The finding disagrees with Baumrind (1996), and Larzelere (1996) who supported the use of corporal punishment emphasizing that it is a valid means of discipline. The finding that teachers' gender makes no significant difference in their perception of the use of punishment is equally surprising. This is because of the belief that Nigerian fathers punish their children or wards more than the mothers and as such the male teachers who are most likely to be fathers were expected to perceive punishment as appropriate and acceptable than the female teachers. Again the finding that teachers' age and years of teaching experience make no significant difference in their perception of the use of punishment is surprising as the young teachers due to their strength are most likely to punish students or pupils than old teachers and were expected to perceive the use of punishment differently. Those with less than 5 years of teaching experience are expected to have perceived the use of punishment differently as they may not been exposed or stayed much with the students or pupils as to learn how to manage their behaviour problems.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that Sancta Maria primary school teachers perceived punishment to be unacceptable to them as a means of correcting a pupil. Teachers irrespective of gender, age and years of teaching experience perceived punishment as unacceptable means of correcting the pupil's behaviours. Hence, teachers' gender, age and years of teaching experience make no significant difference in their perception towards the use of punishment. It was recommended that:

1. Some of the punishment measures such flogging the pupil with stick, and the pupil kneeling down or standing for a long time perceived to be acceptable by the teachers should be avoided. The non-violent classroom management and behaviour control methods should be employed on the pupils.
2. Counseling the pupil on the possible effects and dangers of their misbehaviours should be used to control the behaviour problems. Child and adolescent counseling experts should be involved in the character molding process of a pupil in the school.
3. Inviting the pupil's parent or guardian to school can serve as behaviour controlling and correcting strategy as no pupil would want the parent to be invited because of his or her misbehaviour.
4. There should be a critical examination of the causes of a pupil's behaviour problems and address it rather than punishment which may never eliminate the root cause of the misbehaviour.
5. Moral education in schools should be strengthened as it contributes to character building of a pupil.
6. There should be positive, cordial, conducive environment and human relations among education stakeholders (school administrators, teachers, parents, significant others) and the pupils.
7. Pupils should be allowed to form moral conduct clubs and associations in the school under the adequate supervision and guidance of teachers with integrity.

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