

How Research and Theories of Learning Inform Government on the Issues Related to the Use of Corporal Punishment in Schools

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Abstract

The United Nations already declared corporal punishment as against human rights by its article no. 28, 3 (2) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Tanzania among many countries rectified the convention though corporal punishment still exists. The paper is aimed to inform the government and the general population using learning theories and research findings on the need to ban corporal punishment in schools. The significant of this paper is that, it tries to inform the government and other education stakeholders on the alternative or better ways to manage students' behaviour in primary and secondary schools in Tanzania and to have policies that consider the rights of the students as per the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child article No. 28, 3 (2). The paper is also expected to contribute to fill the knowledge gap on the educational stakeholders' perception towards the use of corporal punishment as the strategy of managing children's behaviour in the schools. In addition, the community at large through reading this paper would be informed on the negative impacts of using corporal punishment as a means of rectifying undesired behaviour from their children hence discouraging them from using such kind of punishment to their children while they are in their home environment. The paper also outlines the reasons, on why corporal punishment has continued being provided, impacts of corporal punishment on those inflicted, the need to ban it, alternatives that researches have suggested to corporal punishment, and its challenges.

Keywords:-Punishment, corporal punishment, learning theory, research

Introduction

This paper investigates issues related to corporal punishment when administered to the child or students in schools. It uses the general ideas of learning theories and different research findings conducted by different researchers on the necessity of banning the use of corporal punishment in our schools. Corporal punishment has not the only suggested to be banned by psychologists and researchers, but also has been recorded as against universal human rights on which Tanzania and many other African countries signed and therefore, agreed with it (The UN Convention on human rights of the Child, Article No. 28, 3(2)).

Tanzania is reported to having the high prevalence of corporal punishment where by more than 85% of students on one way or another have ever been punished in schools (Kuleana, 1997). According to Kuleana (1997) corporal punishment has reported to have negative impacts, some being physical injuries, psychological problems and sometimes may cause deaths to students.

Since corporal punishment has huge impacts on children, all over the world there are struggles to completely ban it. Tanzania has also to ban it because the impacts are there also to be evident. Different scholars have tried to conceptualize learning, and most of them have defined it in a similar way. Dinsmoor (1998) fore example defines learning as a relatively change of person's behaviour or knowledge due to experience.

Cowne (2003) defined learning as establishment of a connection or association between stimulus and response where prior to learning such association did not exist. Polito (2005) in his book *Psychology and Education* defines learning as the process that brings together cognitive, emotional, and environmental influences and experiences for acquiring and enhancing changes in one's knowledge, skills, values and world views. According to him, learning as a process focuses on what happens when learning takes place and the explanations on what constitutes the learning theories.

A learning theory is an attempt to describe how people and animals learn, thereby helping us to understand the inherently complex of learning process. It is categorized into three philosophical frame works which are the behaviourism, cognitivism, and constructivism. Behaviourism is objectively focused on the observable aspects of learning; cognitive theories go beyond behaviour to explain brain-focused learning, and constructivism views learning as process in which the learner actively construct or builds new ideas or concepts (Piloto, 2005; www.rdi.co.uk/Distance.learning). A learning theory also is defined as a model of psychology that explains human responses through the concept of learning. Pleasure or reinforcement is more important in learning than pain (punishment in this case) as pleasure increases the probability of the reinforced behaviour (learning) to reoccur than pain (Thorndike, 1935)

Punishment is defined as an intentional application of physical pain as a method of changing the behaviour. It includes a wide variety of methods such as hitting, slapping, punching, kicking, pinching, shaking, chocking, use of variety of objects (wooden paddles, belts, sticks, pins or others), painful body postures, use of electric shock, use of excessive exercise drill, or preventing of urine or stool elimination (Dinsmoor, 1998).

According to Gelles and Straus (1979), corporal punishment is an act carried out with the intention or perceived intention of causing another person to experience physical pain or injury. Graziano (1992) define it as a punitive act that inflicts pain that includes hitting, slapping, spanking or forcing a child to maintain an uncomfortable position. Generally, corporal punishment can be defined as any deliberate act against a child that inflicts pain or physical discomfort to punish or contain him or her, it includes but not limited to spanking, slapping, pinching, paddling or hitting a child with a hand or an object, denying or restricting a child's use of toilet, denying meals, drinks, heat and shelter, pushing a child with force and forcing the child to do exercise.

Reasons for Corporal Punishment

Psychologists like Skinner (1953) claims that, punishment are used mainly to suppress or weaken behaviour or to curb the undesirable behaviour. Researchers like Dinsmoor (1998) believe that, the general reasons for the use of the corporal punishment in schools or at home have been ascertained to, disciplining children who misbehave. A northern Irish adult responding to why children must be physically punished, asserted that, they need to lean from corporal punishment to respect elders, learn right from wrong, and obey rules and work hard (Cowne, 2003).

A study by Partika (2007) on Nyakahoja School (Tanzania) shows that teachers employ corporal punishment to encourage and motivate pupils to work harder and to discipline them. In his research on whether corporal punishment is a positive disciplinary method, Patterson (1982) noted that adults (parents and teachers) who were physically punished as children are more supportive than those who were not. The reason above is also evident in a research by Cowne (2003) who quotes a response to the interviewee that ".....I do with my children the same as my parents did with me..... They punished me and nothing bad happened". This means that, corporal punishment is applied because those who punish were also punished by there parents or teachers.

Cowne (2003) also shows that corporal punishment is a means to safety. It is explained by his respondents that it is a means of stopping children from burning themselves or running into traffic. It is also due to teachers' frustration and stress than the students' misbehaviour. Their stress and frustrations are due to overcrowded classrooms, poverty and to some, the tightened time table, their poor training, underpayment, undervalued, poor teaching and learning resources and poor sanitary conditions. So they ascertain to government not to ban corporal punishment until it removes their stress (Graziano, 1992; Cowne, 2003 & Council of Europe, 2007).

Lack or shortage of knowledge has also been attributed to being a cause persistence of corporal punishment. Teachers are said to have inadequate knowledge on the proper classroom order or management, effective management of discipline, children's rights of healthy child development, of how children learn and other factors that may attribute learners to fail to catch up (Patterson, 1982).

According to Kuleana (1997) in Tanzania, teachers prefer corporal punishment because of the claim that it is the easiest and most visible form of instruments to administer the large and unmanageable classes. It is said to call attention of pupils in classes. Kuleana (1997) also show that they are unfamiliar or not capable of dealing with the alternative techniques of controlling pupils behaviours.

Learning Theories and Punishment

Holden (2002) explains that for more than 70 years psychologists have been investigating the effectiveness of punishment and its consequences. Although very few psychologists like Domjan (2002) have believed that corporal punishment can be effective agent of behavioural change, most of the popular psychologists like Thorndike (1935), and Skinner (1953) claimed that punishment was (is) ineffective for producing significant and lasting behavioural change.

Thorndike in his theory asserted pleasure is more potent for stamping in desirable responses than pain (punishment in this case) was for stamping out undesirable or wrong responses, where as rewards strengthen behaviour, punishment simply leads the learner to do something else. Holden (2002) claimed that, most of the learning theories assert that punishment or corporal punishment assumes that there will be suppression of bad behaviour, but does not show the alternative positive behaviour. When the effects of punishment are viewed in a school situation, one finds out that some times a learner only substitutes the less desirable behaviour for the

punished one. For example, a learner punished of noise making in the classroom may substitute the behaviour by aggressing the punisher.

Most of the learning theories assert that punishment or corporal punishment does not suppress the behaviour as completely as does extinction, and in both cases a recovery occurs when the procedure is discontinued. This is to say, punishment has a little role to do away with the undesirable behaviour in schools and at home as recommended by other psychologists like Thorndike and Skinner (Dinsmoor, 1998).

Although the purpose of punishment has been to decrease the undesirable behaviour, most of the learning theories show that punishment does not decrease the unwanted behaviour and indeed sometimes increase the unwanted behaviour over time. This means that, when a teacher or parents spank to discipline children, the indiscipline may increase overt (Dawes, 2004; Polito, 2005). Learning theories also have long recognized that punishment is accompanied by unintended side effects as Dinsmoor (1998) observed that there are many experiments carefully done which show some of the devastating consequences of the utilization of punishment to control behaviour in the classroom and such side effects are frightening indeed and should not be ignored.

The Ways Research and Learning Theories can Inform the Government Policy on Issues Related to the Use of Corporal Punishment in Schools

Apart from researches and theories of learning to show that the use of corporal punishment in learning has not shown success, the punishment has now days become popular recognised as being against human rights. According to UNICEF (2002) the Article No. 28, 3 (2) of the UN Convention on Rights of the Child states that school discipline methods should be “consistent with the child’s human dignity and in conformity with the present convention”. The committee on the Rights of the Child, which monitors implementation for the convention, has consistently interpreted the article as requiring prohibition of corporal punishments in schools.

Although the convention on the human rights show that corporal punishment is against human rights and so showing the need to ban it, many schools in different countries (developed and developing countries) are still using corporal punishment as a means of changing the undesirable behaviour in schools. Therefore, it is high time that varieties of researches and some theories of learning can be used to inform the government to strictly ban the administering of corporal punishment in schools and even at home.

Dinsmoor (1998) in his studies on different countries show that, in Egyptian survey of children aged between 10 and 20 years, more than third of them were severely beaten with various implements and quarter of the group suffered physical injuries including broken bones, loss of consciousness and permanent disability. The study also shows that majority of the children believed their punishment was not deserved and third felt it was cruel. Therefore, the government of Tanzania should strictly have an immediate policy to ban corporal punishment as Partika (2007) asserts that corporal punishment is part of the culture and tradition of Tanzania. This means the problem is as big as to be considered part of our culture and living.

Other research by volunteer in Nyakahoja primary school in Mwanza-Tanzania reported that corporal punishment goes on in every school in Tanzania and other African countries to make the learners respect teachers, and the volunteer said she found it difficult to accept or understand how can one respect someone more through the instrument of corporal punishment and she also wondered if any research had been done over the years to see if the method worked (Partika, 2007). Therefore, the government has to ban the use of corporal punishment in school because researches do not show that learners can respect one through corporal punishment but through open and effective communication (Dinsmoor, 1998).

The government should amend the corporal punishment Regulations of 1979 section 60 (c) which allows the use of corporal punishment under special conditions and circumstances, this act as another cause of the existing of corporal punishment. Researches shows that whether it is provided under special conditions or not it constructs an environment of education that can described as unproductive, nullifying and punitive (Dinsmoor, 1998).

Research conducted by Gelles and Straus (1979) on the issues of corporal punishment in schools, concluded that, the long-term use of corporal punishment in schools tends to increase the probability of deviant and antisocial behaviours such as aggression, adolescent delinquency and violent acts inside and outside the school. Though the research was done outside Tanzania, experiences show that the research findings can be applicable to Tanzania and many other African countries. Therefore, the government needs to reform her policy on the corporal punishment to reduce or eliminate violent acts and deviants in the country.

Studies outside Tanzania indicates that, the use of corporal punishment in schools has been associated with a variety of psychological and behavioural disorders in children and adults, including anxiety, depression, withdrawal, low self-esteem, impulsiveness, delinquent and substance abuse (Dawes, 2004). This inform the government that the alternative way of dealing with the problems of drug or substance abuse in our country is to do away with corporal punishment in schools that cause the students to abuse drugs or substances when they are in schools and after the completion of their schools.

Research conducted by Dawes (2004) in Pakistan indicates that, children who are subjected to corporal punishment are more likely to utilize violence in their family and society in future. Many students in Pakistan fear attending school and many of those who seek admission, later leave the school due to physical punishment. Also it is discovered that, later on they consent to enter the criminal world (that is, they become extremists, terrorists, and offenders). If the teachers in schools (who are obviously a catalyst for change) are stopped from using corporal punishment, it will bring a healthy change, contributing to a healthy society free from crime and terrorism. This tells us and the government at large that, if we want to develop a healthy and free society from crime and terrorism, we must develop policies that prohibit teachers to employ corporal punishment in schools because corporal punishment has more negative impacts than the positive impacts in the society.

A study by Kuleana (1997) in Mara Region schools (Tanzania) revealed high prevalence rate of corporal punishment where, 85% of all pupils disliked and condemned corporal punishment. The study further shows that the more often punishment used by teachers in schools are, frog jumps, push ups, kneeling down, standing in bright sun shine, lying on sands and lifting stones. As far as Tanzania has signed the Convention for the Rights of a Child, No. 28, 3 (2), it should ban corporal punishment to stop its related consequences.

Wade (2002) contends that, behavioural learning theories shows punishment conveys little or no information about what the victim should do but it tells only what not to be done. For instance the research by Partika (2007) showed that, students ranked lower positions in examinations were punished regardless of the effort made on studying. Therefore, punishment was likely to tell not to be in lower positions but not what to do as an alternative to their hard work. The government then has no option but to have a policy to ban all such acts against students.

According to Kuleana (1997) corporal punishment in schools can cause physical injuries and or death of students. Sometimes problems like gastrointestinal, orthopaedic, and neurological problems can occur to the children who have been punished by the teacher. To avoid those problems to pupils, the government needs to introduce rules prohibiting teachers to use corporal punishment in schools.

Also a study by Dawes (2004) found that, children who are more punished show more behavioural problems that consequently evoke more punishments. The action-reaction tendency increases the probability for these children to show conduct disorders. The study tells the African government and Tanzanian government in particular that, corporal punishment in schools does not work as expected, instead it produces more problems than expected, and therefore, the government should put rules that ban the application of corporal punishment as a means of suppressing unwanted behaviours in schools.

A research by Holden (2002) suggested that, we should ban the use of corporal punishment in schools because the use of it promotes a very precarious message that, punishment is acceptable phenomenon in our society. It sanctions the notion that it is meritorious to be violent towards our children. It encourages children to resort to punishment because they see their authority figures or parents using it. Therefore, it sends to children a dangerous message that, when children become adults will have to punish their children. The result is that the society is harming its children that, punishment is acceptable, especially against the weak, the defenceless-a message which will negatively effect the generations yet unborn. Punishment is not acceptable and we must not support it by sanctioning its use by such authority figures as school officials.

Holden (2002) argued that, extensive research conducted by various researcher shows that, corporal punishment does not achieve the desired end-a culture of learning and discipline in the classroom. Instead, violence begets violence. Children exposed to violence in their homes and schools tend to use violence to solve problems, both as children and adults. He further explains that, corporal punishment does not build a culture of human rights, tolerance and respect, does not stop bad behaviour of difficult children. Instead these children are punished over and over again for the same offences. This inform us and the government that, there is a need to set down measures or rules that will ban completely the use of corporal punishment in schools so that to enable the pupils to develop a culture of human rights, tolerance and respect.

Dawes (2004) claims that, corporal punishment does not make children feel responsible for their own actions. Also it undermines a caring relationship between the learner and the educator, which is critical for the development of all learners, particularly those with behavioural difficulties. It undermines the self-esteem and confidence of children who have learning or behavioural problems and or difficult home circumstances and contributes to negative feelings about schools. This means that, corporal punishment needs to be banned in schools not only in Tanzania, but all over the world.

A study conducted by Research & Analysis Work Group (2008) in various parts in the country (Tanzania) discovered that, corporal punishment is highly used by almost all teachers in all schools in Tanzania. In Mtwara for example, pupils mentioned that, they are being beaten or punished when they are at schools and at their home. At home, children are being denied food, and being chased away from home to go to sleep in the bush. In schools, teachers use sticks and other punishment like hard and complex exercises, slapping over the ears, push-ups, kneeling and kneeling with arms up, to punish the children. In the schools, teachers were seen walking around with sticks in their hands. This makes children to develop fear and negative attitudes against the school and hence affecting the learning process. Because of these impacts, the government should abolish the use of corporal punishment not only in schools, but also at home so that to create conducive environment for learning to take place.

Alternatives to Corporal Punishment

Researches have not only suggested that corporal punishment should be banned, but also suggested some alternatives to corporal punishment. Some of those alternatives can be discussed as follows:-

According to Kuleana (1997) schools should have daily reports that are a system that give the learners opportunity to reflect on their bad behavioural patterns and to give them on a daily basis to improve and receive reinforcement for that improvement. The teacher should explain to the learners that he or she is going onto a daily report system and explain why. The form used is shown to them and the procedure of having it filled in by every teacher is demonstrated. At the end of the school day, the teacher and the learner look at the report together and discuss the entries. The report is then taken home and signed by the parents. The child starts the process again the next day and this will be stopped only when the learner showed a desired behaviour.

Kuleana (1997) also suggest the schools and government in general to effectively develop a milieu of effective communication, in which the teacher displays an attitude of respect for the students. School officials are suggested to exhibit cordiality to students and an attitude that they generally enjoy working with children. For instance the environment such as the futile, contentious and the win-lose contests should be avoided. Partika (2007) in her research suggest the government to insist schools t have peer support programs which utilize techniques such as drama to encourage acceptable behaviour.

Behaviour modification techniques for classroom control are suggested to be effectively be utilized by school officials. Such techniques the government and schools have to insist may include a variety of non violent disciplinary techniques such as soft verbal reproofs or social isolation in addition to the persistent use of rewards as love, praise and attention by the teacher for the appropriate behaviour (Santrock, 2004).

Dinsmoor (1998) suggests the government to provide support and training to teachers on effective classroom management or control without resorting to violent techniques like corporal punishment. Such training should include instructions on the deleterious short and long-term consequences of corporal punishment. Further, he suggested the government to have ample supply of counsellors, especially for younger children while policies deemphasize the necessity for corporal punishment.

Challenges for Banning of Corporal Punishment

Researches like that conducted by Partika (2007) and Petterson (1982) show a number of challenges that hinder the prohibition of corporal punishment in schools and society at large. Such among the challenges are include the following:-

One of the big challenges toward prohibition of corporal punishment in schools is lack of knowledge. Some members in the society including teachers believe that, corporal punishment is necessary and effective in managing school discipline. This is due to the lack of knowledge of positive discipline methods of children's rights, of healthy child development and of how children learn, of the inefficacy of corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure and its negative effects on children and their ability to learn, and of the differences between punishment and discipline. Teachers may also fail to appreciate pressures facing children, which may impact on

their ability to learn and on their behaviour. All these can be addressed by awareness raising and initial and in-service professional training (Partika, 2007).

Teacher stress is one of the challenges that hinder the abolition of corporal punishment in schools. Teachers may be poorly trained, underpaid, and undervalued, classes may be large, and schools may be poorly resourced with inadequate lighting, heating, and ventilation and poor sanitary conditions. All these may lead to poor classroom management, lack of adequate lessons preparations, use of inappropriate teaching and learning methods, negative attitude towards students, and poor time-keeping and attendance. Such circumstances can make teachers resistant to apparent criticism of their ability to manage a classroom to initiatives which feel like yet another demand to deal with (Pettersson, 1982; Polito, 2005; Partika, 2007).

According to Dawes (2004) one of the challenges to the banning of corporal punishment in schools is its legality. To him, so long as the law authorises corporal punishment in schools, it will be seen as a legitimate way to deal with school discipline. Policy, advice, and guidance promoting positive disciplinary techniques are likely to have much effect when they are undermined by the laws which allow corporal punishment in schools.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Corporal punishment as intended physical pain or harm to curb the misbehaviour has been blamed not only by different researchers and psychologists but also by human rights activists, because it has been recognised as against human rights. Corporal punishment has been continued to be administered because it is seen as a culture (Partika, 2007), as revenge because those who punish were also punished in their childhood, and as means of disciplining because of its easiest administration.

However corporal punishment has been seen as having negative impacts such as telling what the misbehaved should not do and not what should they do, causing serious harms, injuries and some deaths and more often the punished are likely to repeat the same misbehaviours their were punished for.

Therefore, it is suggested by the researchers, psychologists and other stakeholders that corporal punishment should strictly be banned by the government officials or policies, teachers and the community at large in order to stop the negative impacts of it. The government should avoid overcrowded classes and train teachers as well as the parents on the impacts of corporal punishment.

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