



The challenges of alternative effective measures to corporal punishment to enhance Teacher-Learner Relationship, in the O.R.Tambo Inland Education District

Nikho Fayindlala¹  & Theodore Nkadimeng Mahosi² 

¹ Department of Continuing Professional Teacher Development, iYuniversity Walter Sisulu, Mthatha, South Africa.

² Department of Humanities and Creative Arts Education, iYuniversity Walter Sisulu, Mthatha, South Africa.

ABSTRACT

This paper explores “the challenges of alternative effective measures to corporal punishment to enhance teacher-learner relationship, in the O.R. Tambo Inland Education District”. The authors focused on how the abolition of corporal punishment has affected classroom discipline, teacher morale, and overall learning dynamics. They interrogated the reasons for the abolition and the implications within the teaching-learning environment. Using a qualitative research methodology, the paper employed a case study design and a descriptive approach to capture the experiences of teachers, learners, parents, and community members regarding classroom management and discipline since corporal punishment was abolished in South African schools. The authors collected data from 14 participants in three selected senior secondary schools through semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires. The findings reveal that while the abolition of corporal punishment was intended to align educational policies with democratic values and global human rights principles, this has presented significant disciplinary challenges, such as increased learner misconduct and aggression, which have adversely affected teacher morale, learner discipline, and class management, parental disengagement, and home discipline. The paper found that the absence of effective alternative disciplinary strategies has left teachers struggling to maintain discipline in the classroom and the broader school environment. The participants strongly advocate for interventions from the Department of Education, targeted professional development programmes and training in evidence-based but non-violent disciplinary approaches. This paper recommends policy adjustments and comprehensive teacher support initiatives to improve classroom discipline and the teacher-learner relationship for a more conducive teacher-learner environment.

Keywords: Corporal Punishment, Alternative Measures, Teacher-Learner Relationship, Comprehensive Teacher Support

INTRODUCTION

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996 and the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 (SASA) guarantee that every South African has the right to be treated with respect, regardless of age and gender. Both documents also explicitly state that no one shall subject a learner to

CORRESPONDENCE – Nikho Fayindlala Email: 216186293@mywsu.ac.za

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corporal punishment in any form. Consequently, following the enactment of this legislation, the South African government effectively banned corporal punishment in schools. However, despite its well-meaning objectives, the abolition of corporal punishment has created substantial challenges for teachers, parents, and school communities, particularly in relation to maintaining classroom discipline and nurturing positive teacher-learner dynamics.

Following these changes, many schools in South Africa find it difficult, if not impossible, to uphold significant learner discipline now that corporal punishment has been outlawed.¹ As the situation stands, many schools in South Africa have become dangerous places where learners carry knives and other dangerous weapons, thereby becoming a safety and security risk to both teachers and other learners.² Increased reports of learner misconduct, defiance, and violence towards teachers have raised concerns about the effectiveness of current disciplinary measures, as many teachers feel ill-prepared to manage disruptive behaviour without resorting to punitive actions.

Furthermore, teachers find it difficult to enforce discipline, which has affected classroom discipline and motivation.³ In addition, South Africa's Department of Basic Education (DBE) has not been able to enforce alternative and effective disciplinary measures to enforce discipline in schools, despite the publication of a paper titled "Alternatives to Corporal Punishment in 2000".⁴ Having said this, it is important to accept that there is a primary need to establish effective alternative strategies to instil discipline in every classroom and throughout the school environment for effective teaching and learning. It is also important to note that although corporal punishment has been abolished in terms of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996, any teaching and learning situation is also dependent on a healthy and manageable teacher-learner relationship.⁵

In the context of democratic South Africa in 1994, the end of apartheid and the establishment of a human rights culture formed the basis for the abolition of corporal punishment in all schools around South Africa. This was in accordance with Chapter Two, Section 10 of the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996, which stipulates that everyone has the right to be free from any violence, be it from public or private sources; to be free from torture in any form; and not to be subjected to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. Importantly, the same document declares that while in a school environment, teachers are expected to take on the role of a substitute parent and guardian of the learners, and that the latter are entitled to various rewards or discipline. However, the downside of the situation has been that since corporal punishment was abolished in terms of legislation, no alternative disciplinary mechanisms have been implemented. Having said that, the lack of alternative disciplinary measures in post-apartheid South African schools has led to a breakdown in learner behaviour, particularly with regard to the teacher-learner relationship.⁶ This paper explores "The Challenges of Alternative Effective Measures to Corporal Punishment to Enhance Teacher-Learner Relationship, in the O.R. Tambo Inland Education District." Investigating the motivations behind the abolition of corporal punishment, the challenges that have arisen as a result, and potential strategies for developing effective disciplinary methods, the research aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of how to foster positive and respectful educational environments. Such insights are essential not only to enhance interactions between teachers and learners but also to contribute constructively to the ongoing dialogue regarding educational policy and practice in South Africa.

Flowing from the above discussion, South Africa's Bill of Rights, which is enshrined in the new Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996, declared corporal punishment, either at home or

¹ Olufunmilayo Tenidade Obadire and Dzivhonele Albert Sinthumule, "Learner Discipline in the Post-Corporal Punishment Era: What an Experience!," *South African Journal of Education* 41, no. 2 (2021): 1–8.

² Michael Nhambura, "Handling of Violent Behaviour of Learners in Secondary Schools: A Case Study of Vryburg Cluster in North-West Province" (North-West University, South Africa, 2020).

³ Elizabeth Piliyesi, "The Impact of Indiscipline on Students' Performance in Public Secondary Schools Balaka District, Malawi," *Journal of Popular Education in Africa* 4, no. 1 (2020): 4–28.

⁴ Elizabeth Alberta Bosman, "Relationship-Centred Strategies for Improving Discipline in Rural Secondary Schools: A PALAR Approach," *Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, North-West University, South Africa, 2022*.

⁵ Phindile Happiness Mabaso, "Experiences of Teachers in Managing Learner Discipline: A Case Study of Two High Performing Schools in a Township" (School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2019).

⁶ Hlengiwe Goodness Khanyile and Kofi Nkonkanya Mpuangnan, "Dilemma of School Management Teams in Balancing Discipline and Multiple Deprivations among Learners through Integrated Management Approach," *Research in Educational Policy and Management* 5, no. 2 (December 24, 2023): 312–27, <https://doi.org/10.46303/repam.2023.33>.

at school, a violation of the rights of children and learners, respectively.⁷ Subsequently, the legislation led to the abolition of corporal punishment in South African schools based on the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 (SASA, 1996). According to the study conducted by Makhasane and Majong, teachers are considered guardians of the learners in a school environment.⁸ Therefore, an increase in violent incidents against them, particularly from learners, raises concerns about the primary question of safety and security in schools. Moreover, the violence against teachers has had a disturbing effect on the profession, to the point of discouraging talented and dedicated teachers from remaining in the noble profession, thus having long-term consequences for the entire education system of the country. Additionally, it is essential to identify and develop constructive disciplinary strategies that can effectively address the challenges faced by teachers. Such efforts must aim to cultivate a learning environment that promotes positive engagement, mutual respect, and academic excellence, ultimately fulfilling the aspirations of a democratic educational framework. The paper raised the following questions:

- What were the primary motivations for the abolition of corporal punishment in South African schools after 1996?
- What strategies can be implemented to foster effective and supportive teacher-learner relationships as an alternative to corporal punishment?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Abolishing corporal punishment in schools in South Africa has presented challenges for some teachers in maintaining classroom order, as they continue to encounter disruptive behaviour, with increasing demands for the adoption and implementation of more effective alternative disciplinary strategies. The general perception is that these changes have complicated classroom management and authority maintenance, thereby creating an environment that is not conducive to teaching and learning.⁹ Such has been the experience in countries like South Africa, where such a method of punishment was abolished in 1996 according to the South African Schools Act 84, and similarly in various other parts of the world in recent decades. For example, the United Kingdom (UK) prohibited physical discipline in state schools in 1987 and expanded this prohibition to include all private schools by 1999, which led to comparable issues. In the United States, there has been a marked reduction in the use of corporal punishment since the 1970s, with a majority of states enacting bans.¹⁰ These developments have sparked ongoing discussions and necessitated adaptations in methods of discipline, as learners frequently mistreat teachers verbally and physically while such conduct goes unpunished.¹¹

A study Ekanem and Edet conducted in Nigeria found an unexpected mass failure rate due to bad habits of learners, which had been brought about by what appears to be either absence or inadequate disciplinary measures, especially at the secondary school level.¹² Furthermore, these authors mention that as a result of mischief and bad habits, learners in Nigeria's secondary schools have shown a lack of the discipline necessary to ensure outstanding academic success. Additionally, they maintain that if teachers were in a position to administer corporal punishment more frequently, learners would improve their performance in their subjects more regularly, and that they would be more likely to think twice before acting indiscriminately.

⁷ Jan Grobbelaar and Chris Jones, "The Contentious Issue of Corporal Punishment in South Africa," in *Childhood Vulnerabilities in South Africa: Some Ethical Perspectives* (African Sun Media, 2020), 65–96, <https://doi.org/10.18820/9781928480952/03>.

⁸ Sekitla Daniel Makhasane and Nomase Sarah Majong, "Exploring the School Management Team's Perspectives about the Challenges of Addressing Learner-on-Teacher Violence in Secondary Schools: Implications for Invitational Leadership," *Journal of Culture and Values in Education* 6, no. 2 (2023): 172–91.

⁹ Oluwatosin Egunlusi, "Teachers' Authority: Strategies for Instilling Discipline in a Post-Corporal Punishment Era," 2020.

¹⁰ Helen Cahill and Katherine Romei, *A Report Informing Approaches to the Prevention of School-Related Gender-Based Violence in Eastern and Southern Africa* (Harare, Zimbabwe: Paper commissioned by UNESCO Regional Office for Southern Africa, 2020).

¹¹ Mabaso, Phindile Happiness. "Experiences Of Teachers In Managing Learner Discipline: A Case Study Of Two High Performing Schools In A Township." PhD Thesis, School Of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2019.

¹² Ekenyong E Ekanem and Aniefiok O Edet, "Effects of Corporal Punishment on Disciplinary Control of Secondary School Students in Calabar Metropolis of Nigeria," *Global Journal of Educational Research* 12, no. 1 (2013): 19.

Moreover, teachers usually feel helpless because there are no practical solutions to school discipline-related problems.¹³ Discipline-related issues, especially in public schools, have left an incredible 87% (eighty-seven percent) of teachers feeling helpless in the Northwest Province of South Africa. In comparison, 75% (seventy-five percent) of teachers in the Northwest Province of South Africa have admitted that they lack effective strategies to deal with misbehaviour, leaving them frustrated and burned out.¹⁴

The preceding statements could not be further from the truth, as all these outcomes potentially compromise the quality of teaching and the well-being of teachers and learners. Cases of learner indiscipline are on the increase in most schools in Africa, and teachers have generally felt powerless to keep discipline in schools, as corporal punishment is not an optional remedial mechanism.¹⁵ Such a scenario is painted by Aborisade, who found that learner aggression towards teachers is a significant problem in many African countries, and teachers report experiences of some form of violence from their learners.¹⁶

Importantly, teachers have often reported feeling ill-equipped with alternative disciplinary measures, such that this has usually resulted in escalated disruptive behaviour from learners. The corollary is that a subset of learners seems to interpret the absence of corporal punishment as weakening authority, leading to increased disrespect towards teachers, defiance and classroom indiscipline.¹⁷ Furthermore, a report from a study conducted in the Eastern Cape Province's rural and township schools on corporal punishment found that unless a nation fosters mutual trust among its people, beginning in the classroom, it cannot hope to live in peace and prosperity.¹⁸ The current researchers believe that this pattern indicates that eliminating traditional approaches of punishment in schools has led to a shortfall in sustaining learner discipline, pointing to an urgent need to create more efficient and holistic behaviour in school and classroom management techniques.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework serves as the foundation for research, guiding the study by providing a structured lens through which to examine the relationship between variables.¹⁹ This study is underpinned by constructivist theory, which emphasises that individuals and groups actively construct knowledge and meaning through their experiences, perceptions, and social interactions.²⁰ Constructivism challenges the notion of an objective, unchanging reality, arguing instead that understanding is shaped by interpretation and influenced by social and cultural contexts.²¹ Given its focus on how people make sense of their experiences, this framework is particularly suited to exploring the challenges of alternative effective measures to corporal punishment to enhance the teacher-learner relationship in the O.R. Tambo Inland Education District.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopted a qualitative research approach, which emphasises exploring and interpreting individuals' subjective experiences within their natural contexts.²² This methodology was deemed the most suitable for capturing the depth and complexity of the research topic, as it provides rich, nuanced

¹³ Bosman, "Relationship-Centred Strategies for Improving Discipline in Rural Secondary Schools: A PALAR Approach."

¹⁴ Bosman, "Relationship-Centred Strategies for Improving Discipline in Rural Secondary Schools: A PALAR Approach."

¹⁵ Egunlusi, "Teachers' Authority: Strategies for Instilling Discipline in a Post-Corporal Punishment Era."

¹⁶ Richard Abayomi Aborisade, "Student Violence against High School Teachers in Africa: The Context, Impacts, and Interventions," in *Handbook of School Violence, Bullying and Safety* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2024), 151–66, <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035301362.00021>.

¹⁷ Makhasane and Majong, "Exploring the School Management Team's Perspectives about the Challenges of Addressing Learner-on-Teacher Violence in Secondary Schools: Implications for Invitational Leadership."

¹⁸ Abayomi Aborisade, "Student Violence against High School Teachers in Africa: The Context, Impacts, and Interventions."

¹⁹ Ronald Osei Mensah et al., "Discourses on Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks in Research: Meaning and Implications for Researchers," *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies* 4, no. 5 (2020): 53–64.

²⁰ Earl R Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research* (Cengage Au, 2020).

²¹ Arlene Fink, *Conducting Research Literature Reviews: From the Internet to Paper* (Sage publications, 2019).

²² Richa Awasthy, "Nature of Qualitative Research," in *Methodological Issues in Management Research: Advances, Challenges, and the Way Ahead* (Emerald Publishing Limited, 2019), 145–61, <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-78973-973-220191010>.

insights into participants' thoughts, behaviours, and underlying motivations.²³ Grounded in an interpretative paradigm, this approach provided valuable insights into the impact of teacher-learner relationship breakdowns on violence and indiscipline in schools.

In this study, the researchers adopted an interpretative research paradigm because it is beneficial for understanding complex social phenomena, such as social identity, culture, and power relationships.²⁴ Interpretivism concentrates on people's subjective experiences, how individuals 'construct' social reality by exchanging meanings, and how individuals engage in relationships or interact with one another.²⁵ The interpretative paradigm is particularly relevant to this study as it is socially oriented and deals with people, allowing the researcher to gain insight into the internal perspectives of individuals.

This paper adopted a case study research design to analyse the challenges of implementing alternative disciplinary measures after the abolition of corporal punishment and their impact on the teacher-learner relationship in the O.R. Tambo Inland Education District. The case study method involves a thorough investigation of a specific contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, using multiple sources of evidence to fully understand the subject.²⁶ Identifying these challenges allows the study to develop strategies that foster positive interactions between teachers and learners, ultimately contributing to a more supportive educational environment.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires, enabling an in-depth exploration of the subject. These methods offered deep qualitative insights into how the abolition of corporal punishment shaped learners' learning experiences, academic performance, and overall engagement, providing a nuanced understanding of its impact on teacher-learner relationships and classroom dynamics.

Casteel Bridier explain that a population is a complete set of items (people or objects) that possess particular qualities.²⁷ Researchers analyse population data by employing statistical methods to examine demographic, social, and economic variables within specific populations. The researchers identified and selected participants for the purpose of this study from learners, teachers, principals, parents, and community members from three O.R. Tambo Inland Education District High Schools.

A sample is defined as the set of units selected to represent the population of interest. In this study, the researchers utilised purposive sampling to strategically select participants, including principals, teachers, learners, and community members, ensuring that the sample was diverse and aligned with the study's objectives. The participants in the study included individuals, dyads, groups, organisations, or other entities one seeks to understand and to whom or to which the study results may be generalised or transferred.

According to Mojtaba and Snelgrove, thematic analysis involves identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data by providing a rich and detailed account of the data set.²⁸ Therefore, the paper used thematic analysis as the primary method of data analysis because it allows for a systematic examination of the data and enables the identification of key themes and insights.²⁹

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study to ensure the protection and well-being of participants. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Faculty Higher Degrees Research Committee at iYuniversity Walter Sisulu, along with permission from the O.R. Tambo Inland

²³ Feyisa Mulisa, "When Does a Researcher Choose a Quantitative, Qualitative, or Mixed Research Approach?," *Interchange* 53, no. 1 (March 26, 2022): 113–31, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10780-021-09447-z>.

²⁴ Nasrin Pervin and Mahani Mokhtar, "The Interpretivist Research Paradigm: A Subjective Notion of a Social Context," *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development* 11, no. 2 (2022): 419–28.

²⁵ Giampietro Gobo, "Mixed Methods and Their Pragmatic Approach: Is There a Risk of Being Entangled in a Positivist Epistemology and Methodology? Limits, Pitfalls and Consequences of a Bricolage Methodology," in *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, vol. 24 (DEU, 2023).

²⁶ Arya Priya, "Case Study Methodology of Qualitative Research: Key Attributes and Navigating the Conundrums in Its Application," *Sociological Bulletin* 70, no. 1 (January 19, 2021): 94–110, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038022920970318>.

²⁷ Alex Casteel and Nancy Bridier, "Describing Populations and Samples in Doctoral Student Research," *International Journal of Doctoral Studies* 16 (2021): 339–62, <https://doi.org/10.28945/4766>.

²⁸ Mojtaba Vaismoradi and Sherrill Snelgrove, "Theme in Qualitative Content Analysis and Thematic Analysis," in *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, vol. 20 (DEU, 2019).

²⁹ Sirwan Khalid Ahmed et al., "Using Thematic Analysis in Qualitative Research," *Journal of Medicine, Surgery, and Public Health* 6 (2025): 100198.

Education District. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained after participants were fully informed about the study. Anonymity and confidentiality of the participants were maintained through the use of pseudonyms and restricted data access. The rights of the participants, their dignity, and their privacy were respected, and language inclusivity was ensured by allowing their responses to be in isiXhosa, where necessary.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS /FINDINGS

Table 1: The Representation of Participants

Participants	Age	Gender	Code Names	Participants
Principal	51	Male	PR-MT-01	Principal
Deputy Principal	44	Male	PR-MT-02	Deputy Principal
Teacher	44	Male	TEA-MT-01	Teacher
Teacher	46	Female	TEA-MT-02	Teacher
Teacher	42	Male	TEA-MT-03	Teacher
Teacher	30	Female	TEA-FT-04	Teacher
Teacher	33	Female	TEA-FT-05	Teacher
Learner	16	Female	LEA-FL-03	Learner
Learner	17	Male	LEA-ML-04	Learner
Parent	40	Female	PRT-FP-01	Parent
Parent	43	Female	PRT-FP-02	Parent
Parent	38	Male	PRT-MP-03	Parent
Community Member	37	Female	CM-FM-01	Community Member
Community Member	30	Female	CM-FM-03	Community Member
Total				14

As mentioned in the research methodology, the above table shows the sample of 14 participants, including principals, teachers, learners, parents, and community members, categorised by age, gender, and code numbers.

While the abolition of corporal punishment in schools was intended to create a more compassionate and supportive atmosphere for learners, the process has resulted in several adverse effects on learner behaviour and poor academic performance as a result of the breakdown in the teacher-learner relationship. Consequently, this has significantly transformed the teacher-learner relationship, leading to adverse outcomes and considerable difficulties with classroom management. According to Obadire and Sinthumule, this change has fostered an atmosphere in which some learners feel less responsible for their actions, leading to increased disruptive behaviour, thereby making it difficult for teachers to deliver lessons and negatively impacting overall educational performance and results.³⁰

Research conducted by Hamomba noted that learning in schools currently faces challenges such as the proliferation of weapons, the recruitment of learners into criminal organisations, competition among gangs, drugs and substance abuse, trafficking, and the radicalisation of youth.³¹ The erosion of authority has created chaos within the classrooms, and this has resulted in increased stress and burnout among teachers, which has negatively impacted the performance and enthusiasm of teachers within the noble profession. As disruptive behaviour within the school environment escalates, the likelihood of academic failure, suspensions, and expulsions has increased significantly. As the researchers mentioned earlier in the literature review, many learners feel that "Children's Rights" protect them from facing consequences, and this has allowed them to challenge established norms and authority figures in the classroom.³² Consequently, this has significantly impacted the effectiveness of teaching and learning, as well as the overall administration of the schools. The researchers argue that the overall learning

³⁰ Obadire and Sinthumule, "Learner Discipline in the Post-Corporal Punishment Era: What an Experience!"

³¹ Ian Hamomba, "Trends and Management Strategies of Pupil Indiscipline in Selected Secondary Schools in Luanshya District Post the Abolishment of Corporal Punishment in Zambia." (The University of Zambia, 2019).

³² Hamomba, "Trends and Management Strategies of Pupil Indiscipline in Selected Secondary Schools in Luanshya District Post the Abolishment of Corporal Punishment in Zambia."

experience has been compromised as a result of the exhibition of bad behaviour, which has impacted the overall teaching and learning environment, which has in turn negatively impacted teacher-learner interaction and academic performance, as well as achievement.

The Views of the Participants

Principals, teachers, learners, parents and community members have noted that following the abolition of corporal punishment, ineffective alternative disciplinary methods have resulted in a number of challenges. They have further raised concerns that strategies such as verbal reprimand and restorative practices do not often elicit the same level of discipline and compliance from learners as physical discipline used to. As a result, these alternative approaches have created inconsistencies in managing learner behaviour both in the classroom and at home. This lack of effectiveness has disrupted the educational environment and increased disruptive behaviour, making it difficult for teachers and principals to maintain order and cultivate a supportive teaching and learning atmosphere. Consequently, classroom dynamics have become more unbearable, placing significant hurdles to promoting a positive and engaging educational experience.

The participants shared their concerns about the declining discipline in schools, and pointed out how learners no longer take accountability for their responsibilities. This is what participant PR-MT-01 had to say:

Learners know that one cannot do anything to them; they no longer care about their responsibilities as people who need education.

Another participant reflected on the difficulties experienced after the abolition of corporal punishment by emphasising the initial challenges and the gradual process of adaptation. This is what participant PR-MT-02 said:

When corporal punishment was abolished, it was very difficult at the beginning; as time passed, we had to adapt to this difficult situation.

One teacher voiced concerns over the deterioration of learner behaviour and academic performance, linking it to a lack of school discipline and accountability. Participant TEA-MT-01 felt it was necessary to articulate the following:

It is clear that for learners to be focused on school duties, they must fear something; they have become unruly and disrespectful. They perform poorly because they spend minimal time on teaching and learning; sometimes, they fail to do their homework, and they do not study.

Similarly, another participant expressed concern about the increase in disrespect among learners, who neglect their teachers' instructions and academic duties, noting an increase in reckless behaviour and criminal activities. Participant TEA-MT-02 had this to say:

Learners have become disrespectful and neglectful towards their teachers and schoolwork, and reckless behaviour and high incidents of criminal activities have increased as well. They have become ignorant about their work and discipline.

Another participant noted that learners frequently ignore their teachers and freely act out, believing that there would be no repercussions for their behaviour. This means that learners do not listen to their teachers, and that they do this because they know that nothing will be done to them. This is what teacher TEA-MT-03 said:

Learners do not listen to a teacher; they do not behave because they know that nothing will be done to them. They say that nothing will be done to them even if they fail.

Some teachers have expressed concern regarding the abolition of corporal punishment in South African schools because this has negatively impacted the educational environment and affected teaching and learning, as it is challenging to maintain discipline. Teacher TEA-FT-04 noted that:

The abolition of corporal punishment in South African schools negatively affected learning and teaching because it is difficult to maintain discipline.

Some learners explained that the abolition of corporal punishment has led to disrespect towards teachers, since the former are aware that there are consequences to face, the result being that they verbally abusing their teachers. This is what learner LEA-FL-03 had to say:

The abolition of corporal punishment has caused disrespect towards teachers, as the learners know that they will not receive any form of punishment, thus leading to learners even verbally abusing teachers. Teachers have sometimes punished learners by making them do the school's physical work or expelling them, but that has not stopped them from being unruly. These disciplinary measures are ineffective because they do not positively impact the learners.

Furthermore, some learners mentioned that although their school has introduced punishments such as crop irrigation, fines, and cleaning duties, these measures have proven to be ineffective. Regardless of these steps, learners continue to break the rules despite previously facing these consequences. This is what participant LEA-ML-04 had to say:

There are punishments such as irrigation of crops, being fined and cleaning the school that the school has come up with, but they are ineffective as learners continue breaking the school rules, while they previously received punishment.

Parents who participated in the study have noted that the abolition of corporal punishment has resulted in a decline in respect for teachers among learners. These changes have contributed to challenges such as high failure rates, poor attendance, and a general reluctance to learn, because they attend school primarily just to satisfy their parents. This is what parent PRT-FP-01 stated:

The impact of the abolition of corporal punishment makes learners disrespect teachers, leads to high failure rates at some schools, poor attendance, and some learners are reluctant to learn; they just go to school to please us as parents. Since the abolition of corporal punishment, children have faced challenges in maintaining self-discipline. Many now show little motivation to complete tasks effectively, demonstrating a lack of accountability. Learners are hesitant to share their ideas or actively participate in discussions. As a result, their enthusiasm for learning has diminished, resulting in a decline in academic performance. Instead of striving for deeper understanding, they often aim to pass with minimal effort. Additionally, their competitiveness has decreased, and their listening skills have noticeably worsened. On the other hand, ever since corporal punishment was abolished, the number of dropouts has decreased. There is peace, joy, and harmony at school, and learners no longer have negative attitudes toward some subjects.

Some parents noted that they increasingly deal with disruptive behaviour both at school and at home, which has negatively affected academic performance. Concerning to parents is that the performance of most learners who are their children has deteriorated since corporal punishment was abolished, as other disciplinary methods have been ineffective in fostering discipline in schools. Parent PRT-FP-02 noted the following:

Parents and teachers are now being confronted by disruptive behaviour in the daily activities of home and school life, which has a negative impact. The performance of most of our children has deteriorated since corporal punishment was abolished, as other methods of discipline are not effective when instilling discipline, especially at school. They have also become rebellious because nothing and no one holds them accountable for their actions.

Parents believe that their authority has been diminished, as corporal punishment was a good way to ensure compliance because it helped them manage disruptive behaviour, which is generally exhibited by children today. They maintain that these changes have negatively affected academic performance, such that only self-motivated learners take pride in education. Parent PRT-MP-03 added that:

Parents feel that their power has been taken away, as corporal punishment was an effective way of getting children to comply immediately and combat the bad behaviour that today's

children are displaying. Children's academic performance has declined, as only self-motivated children are taking pride in their academics.

Parents also expressed concern regarding the abolition of corporal punishment, and they complained that they observe great disrespect and lack of discipline, which makes them fearful about child safety. The effects on academic performance are complex and multifaceted because, without the fear of consequences, truant learners have become repeat offenders who lack concentration, with the result of many adverse impacts on their overall educational success. This is what community member CM-FM-01 had to say:

Parents have mixed views on the abolition of corporal punishment; however, some believe that it has led to increased disrespect, lack of discipline, and lack of child safety." The impact of the abolition of corporal punishment on children's performance is varied and complex because, now, without fear of retribution, children are more misbehaving and lose focus.

On the other hand, some community participants also observed that some learners exhibited significant improvement in emotional regulation, self-confidence, and social interactions without corporal punishment. They explained that corporal punishment could lead to increased aggression and anxiety in children. Community member CM-FM-03 said:

It has been seen that children's emotional control, self-esteem, and interpersonal connections improved in the absence of corporal punishment. Children who receive corporal punishment may become more aggressive and anxious.

The participants also highlighted that open communication allows teachers to showcase their expertise in guardianship, improve their credibility towards learners, and promote a culture of transparency. This is what teacher TEA-RT-05 said:

The removal of corporal punishment has significantly impacted the management of learner behaviour in schools. It has improved the teacher-learner relationship and placed an emphasis on alternative discipline methods.

The abolition of corporal punishment in South African schools has brought both challenges and opportunities in managing discipline and creating a productive learning environment. Teachers, parents, learners, and community members pointed out that alternative disciplinary approaches, such as verbal reprimand and restorative practices, often lack effectiveness in curbing misbehaviour. These methods do not frequently achieve respect and have led to increased classroom disruption and decreased learner accountability and academic performance. Teachers expressed difficulty addressing behavioural tendencies and emphasised the urgent need for additional training and resources to bridge the gap resulting from the absence of corporal punishment.

Despite these challenges, some positive changes have been observed since these policy changes. Regardless of this, some stakeholders noted improvement in learners' emotional regulation, confidence, and social skills, along with a decrease in dropout rate and the emergence of a more peaceful school environment. Enhanced communication and empathetic teaching methods have contributed to stronger teacher-learner relationships and fostered a more supportive atmosphere. However, participants generally highlighted the need for ongoing investment in teacher training, counselling services, and emotional intelligence development to strengthen alternative disciplinary strategies. This underscores the complexity of the transition and the continued effort required to balance discipline, respect, and academic achievement in schools.

DISCUSSION

The abolition of corporal punishment in South African schools has brought about complex and significant changes and challenges in relation to discipline, classroom dynamics, and academic outcomes.³³ This observation is consistent with Egunlusi, who argues that the abolition of corporal

³³ Muhammad Imtiaz, Hafiz Muhammad Afzal Haroon, and Muhammad Arif, "Impact of Corporal Punishment Law on The

punishment has complicated classroom management and weakened teacher authority, thereby creating an inconducive teaching and learning environment.³⁴ In view of this, in this paper, principals, teachers, parents, and learners have expressed concern regarding the ineffectiveness of alternative disciplinary methods such as verbal warnings, restorative practices, and non-punitive tasks. The researchers found that these approaches included the cleaning of classrooms and schoolyards as punishment in order to maintain respect in the relationship between teachers and learners vis-à-vis classroom management. The participants expressed the general sentiment that these approaches have often failed to instill the same level of respect and accountability that prevailed before the abolition of corporal punishment, with Mabaso expressing concern about increasing learner misconduct in the absence of strict disciplinary measures.³⁵ The result has been an increase in classroom disruptions and learner unruliness, a decline in teacher authority, and challenges in managing learner behaviour. Resultantly, this has weakened the authoritative relationship of teachers over the learners in a school environment. Furthermore, these developments have negatively affected academic performance, reduced learner responsibility, lowered their participation, and diminished motivation within the learning equation. In this regard, a study by Ekanem and Edet confirms that poor discipline is associated with declining academic outcomes.³⁶ In addition, issues such as disrespect towards teachers, poor attendance, and engagement in risky behaviour such as substance abuse and criminal activity have become more prevalent, thus further leading to deteriorating teacher-learner relationships.

The paper found that the abolition of corporal punishment in South African schools has resulted in notable difficulties in maintaining classroom discipline, management of learner behaviour and teacher-learner relationships. Reports from principals, teachers, parents, and learners in the OR Tambo Inland Education District indicate that there has been an increase in disruptive behaviour, increased lack of respect for teachers and a drop in academic performance. This flows from the fact that teachers have found it challenging and difficult to enforce discipline effectively, because alternative approaches such as verbal warnings and restorative practices have not successfully tackled unruly behaviour within the school environment in the OR Tambo Inland Education District. This is supported by Bosman, who cited Mampane's conclusion that a significant proportion of teachers feel helpless amidst a lack of effective strategies to manage discipline, with the result being frustration and burnout.³⁷ This has led to disorder in classrooms, less teaching time, and lower learner engagement, as well as lower and ineffective responsibility levels; thereby reinforcing Egunlusi's assertion that teachers often feel powerless to maintain discipline in the absence of corporal punishment.³⁸

The paper has also found that teachers have noted that learners are increasingly focused on their rights as enshrined in the South African Schools Act 1996 while neglecting their classroom responsibilities. This observation resonates with broader concerns in the literature the authors reviewed, which showed that the absence of strict disciplinary enforcement might lead to misinterpretation of rights as grounds for increased indiscipline.³⁹ The shift has led to more frequent classroom disruptions and a decline in respect for authority. Parents have expressed concern about their weakening authority in the home front and teachers' authority in school premises. They believe that this has contributed to a lack of motivation and poor academic performance. These concerns are echoed in studies which highlight how inadequate disciplinary measures are likely to contribute to poor learner behaviour and reduce academic commitment.⁴⁰

Academic Performance of the Students at the Secondary School Level," *PAKISTAN ISLAMICUS (An International Journal of Islamic & Social Sciences)* 3, no. 2 (2023): 460–77.

³⁴ Egunlusi, "Teachers' Authority: Strategies for Instilling Discipline in a Post-Corporal Punishment Era."

³⁵ Mabaso, "Experiences of Teachers in Managing Learner Discipline: A Case Study of Two High Performing Schools in a Township."

³⁶ Ekanem and Edet, "Effects of Corporal Punishment on Disciplinary Control of Secondary School Students in Calabar Metropolis of Nigeria."

³⁷ Bosman, "Relationship-Centred Strategies for Improving Discipline in Rural Secondary Schools: A PALAR Approach."

³⁸ Egunlusi, "Teachers' Authority: Strategies for Instilling Discipline in a Post-Corporal Punishment Era."

³⁹ Makhasane and Majong, "Exploring the School Management Team's Perspectives about the Challenges of Addressing Learner-on-Teacher Violence in Secondary Schools: Implications for Invitational Leadership."

⁴⁰ Ekanem and Edet, "Effects of Corporal Punishment on Disciplinary Control of Secondary School Students in Calabar Metropolis of Nigeria."

Despite these challenges, positive signs have emerged during the period of the study. This aligns with the argument that discipline rooted in mutual trust and respect can foster a more peaceful and productive learning environment.⁴¹ Some participants noted that the abolition of corporal punishment has contributed to better emotional regulation, increased self-confidence, and improved social interactions among learners. It has also improved the emotional, psychological, and social development of learners and fostered their ability to thrive within a safe and supportive environment. Participants added that the classroom environment, free from fear, has fostered greater engagement and active participation and enhanced some learners' experience during teaching and learning. Furthermore, some participants have expressed observing a decrease in school dropout rate and a noticeable improvement in the overall school climate. Having said this, the findings of the study underscore a pressing need for more effective alternative disciplinary strategies in schools, enhanced teacher training, and stronger collaboration between parents and schools to address behavioural issues as well as maintain a balanced approach to learner discipline within the school environment.

Importantly, this paper has established that the findings highlight the necessity of collaborative efforts among teachers, parents, learners, and policymakers in order to create and apply more effective disciplinary methods in schools. The result is that this has raised an apparent demand for better alternative teacher training discipline strategies in schools, which should go hand in hand with emotional intelligence, which in turn logically has a bearing on classroom management in addressing behavioural issues. This approach is strongly supported by Makhasane and Majong, who highlight increasing learner aggression toward teachers, suggesting the importance of structured interventions and support systems.⁴² Having said this, schools and classroom management should be seen to enhance counselling services and support programmes to address the underlying social and emotional factors that contribute to misbehaviour within the school environment and the home front.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The paper recommends that the Department of Education (DoE) initiate a comprehensive review of existing disciplinary policies in schools. This review should identify effective alternative methods to replace corporal punishment while fostering a positive learning environment. The DoE must provide clear guidelines and frameworks to assist schools in effectively implementing these methods while ensuring that teachers have the necessary resources to promote discipline and accountability among learners.

Meanwhile, investing in teacher training would be essential for the successful adoption of new disciplinary approaches. The DoE should allocate funds for continuous professional development programmes that could equip teachers with skills in classroom management, emotional intelligence, and restorative practices. This training could focus on building a strong teacher-learner relationship while cultivating a culture of respect and accountability, and allowing teachers to manage their classrooms without resorting to punitive measures.

Schools must implement positive behavioural interventions, in line with the Constitution and the South African Schools Act of 1996, while encouraging good behaviour among learners. This approach might include the recognition of programmes that reward positive behaviour, and motivating learners to adhere to school rules. By reinforcing desirable behaviour, schools could cultivate a more respectful atmosphere conducive to learning, while creating a supportive learning environment, which is crucial for the enhancement of learner engagement and success. Teachers and school management should prioritise establishing an atmosphere where learners feel safe to express themselves through social-emotional learning programmes. Such programmes should teach learners about empathy, conflict management and resolution, as well as self-regulation. Such initiatives could help build resilience and promote positive interactions among peers.

⁴¹ Helen Cahill and Katherine Romei, *A Report Informing Approaches to the Prevention of School-Related Gender-Based Violence in Eastern and Southern Africa*.

⁴² Makhasane and Majong, "Exploring the School Management Team's Perspectives about the Challenges of Addressing Learner-on-Teacher Violence in Secondary Schools: Implications for Invitational Leadership."

Additionally, teachers must receive frequent training in effective classroom management techniques that do not rely on punitive measures. Strategies such as establishing clear routines, engaging lessons, and proactive behaviour management could help maintain order and promote a positive learning environment. By equipping teachers with these skills, schools could enhance their ability to address disruptive behaviour constructively. Active parental involvement would also be vital to reinforcing discipline at home. In this sense, schools should encourage parents to actively participate in the education of their children by participating in school activities and decision-making processes. Therefore, regular communication about learner progress and behavioural expectations could go a long way in creating a unified approach to discipline between the home and the school.

CONCLUSION

This paper investigated “The Challenges of Alternative Effective Measures to Corporal Punishment to Enhance Teacher-Learner Relationship in the O.R. Tambo Inland Education District.” The findings indicate that although this corrective policy change in education was intended to foster a more compassionate and supportive educational environment, it has led to several negative consequences for learner behaviour and teacher-learner relationships, which have impacted academic performance. Arguably, the abolition of corporal punishment has greatly changed the environment in the classroom since it has resulted in challenges related to classroom management due to a diminished sense of authority among teachers. Some participants noted that learners felt less accountable for their actions, which has led to increased disruptive behaviour and complicated effective teaching and adversely affected overall academic outcomes.

The paper also explored the effectiveness of alternative disciplinary methods that were implemented after the abolition of corporal punishment. Similarly, some participants expressed concerns that strategies such as verbal reprimand and restorative practices have often failed to command the same level of learner respect and compliance as corporal punishment did in the past. This ineffectiveness has created inconsistencies in the management of learner behaviour in classrooms and at home, further disrupting the educational environment and intensifying unruly conduct and behaviour among learners. As a result, classroom dynamics have become increasingly challenging, creating significant barriers to fostering a positive and engaging learning experience.

In summary, this paper underscores the challenge of managing discipline in schools since the abolition of corporal punishment. While considerable difficulties have persisted with respect to learner behaviour and academic achievement, there have also been significant opportunities for advancement within educational settings. By adopting positive behavioural support strategies and creating a nurturing environment, schools could improve learner engagement and cultivate a culture of respect and accountability. Collaborative efforts among teachers, parents, and learners would also be crucial in establishing a supportive and effective learning atmosphere.

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ABOUT AUTHOR(S)

Nikho Fayindlala is a Master of Education Candidate in the Department of Continuing Professional Teacher Development, Walter Sisulu University, South Africa.

Dr. Theodore Nkadameng Mahosi is a senior lecturer in the Department of Humanities and Creative Arts Education (HCAE), Faculty of Education at iYuniversity Walter Sisulu (WSU), Nelson Mandela Drive, Mthatha. He holds a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree in History. He writes book chapters and journal articles in the field of History, education, rural community development, traditional affairs, African History and Politics/International Affairs. He has worked as a Commissioner of the Limpopo Commission on Traditional Leadership Disputes and Claims (CTLDC) (2012-2017). He assists in resolving in traditional leadership disputes and claims, and land claims. He also worked as a Planner in the Directorate of Monitoring and Evaluation at the University of South Africa (2020-2022). He is currently a member of the Limpopo Province Geographic Names Committee (LPGNC), the Limpopo Province Archival Advisory Committee (LPAAC) and the Chairperson of the South African Geographical Names Council (SAGNC).