

## **Abolition of Corporal Punishment and its Impact on Teacher Motivation in Secondary Schools**

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**Abstract:** Discipline and disciplinary measures in South African public schools are principal concerns for all stakeholders in the educational process. The present situation in South African schools suggests that a lack of discipline and self-discipline among high school students has led to a continuation of ineffective learning and teaching. Section 10 of the South African Schools Act (84 of 1996) has criminalised the administration of physical punishment in South African schools. However, media reports suggest that corporal punishment is still practiced in many schools. In light of the above and with the implications of the implementation of the Schools Act in mind this study was conducted to establish whether the South African Government's decision to abolish corporal punishment was viable and whether it has any impact on teacher motivation. The objective of the study was to investigate the impact that the abolition of corporal punishment had on the morale and motivation of teachers. A sample of 300 educators was drawn (including principals) from 30 high schools in three educational regions of the North-West Province of South Africa. In contrast to the theoretical investigation which revealed that the abolition of physical punishment would probably lead to a decrease in teacher motivation, the empirical investigation, particularly the application of the Pearson coefficient correlation test indicated a positive relationship between the abolition of corporal punishment and teacher motivation. This study therefore, recommends the use of alternative interaction techniques which could contribute to better understanding of learners such as giving them advice and curtailing their allowance and perks rather than applying the traditional punitive measures.

**Key words:** Punishment, corporal punishment, motivation, discipline, abolition

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Discipline is essential for creating a positive school climate that is conducive to sound academic performance. Discipline refers to learning, regulated scholarship, guidance and orderliness and may therefore, qualify as an integral part of an effective educational endeavour in which parents and teachers give assistance to a learner seeking help. Thus, because discipline or control involves the feelings of people it should be dealt with fairly, tactfully and justly. The learner should be well informed as to what is expected of them and what the resultant disciplinary action would be should such expectations not be met.

According to Bru *et al.* (2001), learner misconduct in the Scandinavian and other Western countries has escalated tremendously and this trend is also evident in South Africa. The lack of discipline among students has been a worrying factor for teachers consequently.

Dixon indicates that when teachers are not motivated and do not have enthusiasm, the likelihood of failure is great. Lack of motivation and enthusiasm are therefore

two important factors that lead to failure and living a mediocre life. It is further submitted that people lacking in motivation are usually passive, blame everything and everyone for their circumstances and often come up with excuses about why they should not do certain things. On the other hand, the motivated educator takes the initiative, tries and does not give up or even think of such behaviour. This study was conducted to determine the relationship if any between the abolition of corporal punishment and teacher motivation.

**Literature review:** Ancer indicates that corporal punishment is physical punishment inflicted on a person often a child by an adult in authority. Corporal punishment is controversial with some psychologists arguing in its favour and others calling for its abolition. Corporal punishment belongs to the traditional school room where it was the only form of coercive behaviour aimed at getting perceived outcomes through punishment. It also passed down the ages in the history of schooling until it was challenged by educational theorists of the progressive era. In the modern world, however, corporal

punishment remains a common way of disciplining children. Debates surrounding religious, social and cultural norms and practices suggest that it is necessary to punish children even by means of corporal punishment to instil in them the values of society, good behaviour and discipline whereas the constitution of SA regards any form of corporal punishment as illegal. In general therefore there is agreement regarding the need for disciplinary measures but disagreement regarding the types of measures to be applied (Masitsa, 2008). Corporal punishment may at times be seen as cruel and sending the wrong signal to students. Consequently, its application remains mired in the controversies outlined.

Many studies have been undertaken on the effectiveness of corporal punishment and it seems that the majority of researchers accept the results of corporal punishment as unpredictable. Even if this punishment discourages misbehaviour it does not foster appropriate behaviour. It is also argued that corporal punishment negatively affects relationships and often creates resentment and hostility which have been associated with school dropout and vandalism.

Maphumulo and Vakalisa indicate that corporal punishment belongs to the ancient traditional schoolroom where it was the only form of punishment. In the modern world, corporal punishment remains a common way of disciplining children. While corporal punishment has almost completely been abandoned in Europe, North America and most African countries including South Africa, the widespread use of corporal punishment is still evident in some countries and these include Botswana, Malaysia Singapore and Zimbabwe. Although, it has been outlawed in the educational system in some European and African countries, most schools and legal systems permit parents to discipline their children in the manner they deem fit. This implies that there is a distinction between reasonable punishment and abuse (Essex, 2004).

**Nature and characteristics of corporal punishment in South Africa:** Many studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of corporal punishment and it seems that the majority of researchers found the end results of corporal punishment to be unpredictable. In South Africa, corporal punishment has become a subject of heated debate. Section 10 of the Schools Act of 1996 made the administration of corporal punishment a criminal offence in schools. The Act states that no person may administer corporal punishment at a school to a learner and any person who violates this ruling is guilty of an offence and liable to a sentence if convicted of assault charges which can be brought against him.

Research by Oliver reveal that in South Africa up to 70% of primary schools and 50% of high school learners are still subjected to corporal punishment. The introduction of the Schools Act 84 of 1996 did not help the discipline process much as corporal punishment was done away with. Abolition is the act of doing away with a practice totally. In essence it is to annul or destroy completely. It is the act of making a practice non-existent, wholly ineffective or inactive. By 1996 South Africa outlawed physical punishment and this banning was however not an easy policy change and many teachers found it difficult to accept. Masitsa (2008) suggests that disciplinary measures at schools have generated a great deal of debate and differing opinions in South Africa since they have their origin in religious, social and cultural norms and practices on the one hand and the country's constitution on the other hand.

Despite this, promotion of good behaviour is a daunting task facing teachers and it requires a motivated teacher to inspire learners to display positive behaviour. Thus, many teachers are of the opinion that without corporal punishment, classrooms are out of control (Busienei, 2012). Teachers also believe that they are not equipped with alternatives to effectively deal with classroom management, nor do they feel supported by the relevant education departments. In a study by Maphosa and Shumba (2010) it was found that alternatives to corporal punishment were ineffective as a disciplinary measure in schools, hence corporal punishment has been used as a quick-fix solution which raises fear and pain and should therefore be replaced by instilling self-discipline. In terms of punishment in educational settings, approaches differ throughout the world.

Many South African educators have difficulty finding an alternative to this traditional method of punishment and it is argued that corporal punishment persists because parents use it at home and support its use at school (Morrell, 2006; Mabeba and Prinsloo, 2005). However, Kaieteur indicates that children are valuable assets hence the dire need to invest time into grooming them to achieve discipline through other acceptable methods and not use the easiest method which is corporal punishment. Moyo, Khewu and Bayaga argue that alternative ways of instilling discipline should become the norm but these alternative measures should go beyond punitive practices and lead to building an ambience in school culture suffused with non-violence and self-discipline.

**Corporal punishment and teacher motivation:** Those who advocate corporal punishment argue that the

ever-growing disregard for authority among the youth stems from the abolition of corporal punishment both at home and at school. This is tantamount to the teacher becoming frustrated with the learner. Hence, the inference that if used properly, corporal punishment can be an appropriate measure of discipline for serious offences. However, this measure needs to be monitored consistently to ensure its correct administration (Masitsa, 2008). Moreover, corporal punishment often leads to short-term compliance and therefore appears to be briefly effective but actually it has negative short-term and long-term effects asserts. Despite this, teachers and learners need to be motivated and according to Louw and Edwards, motivation initiates, sustains and directs thinking and behaviour. The motivational process they contend, makes us seek and find the things we need for our survival and development. Kidwell thus believes that a teacher should be highly motivated to create learning environments where learners can be motivated and are active participants as individuals and as members of groups. The teaching profession thus needs to be competitive with other occupations in attracting highly motivated people as argued by Maphosa *et al.* (2014).

The current situation in South African schools demonstrates that a lack of general discipline and self-discipline among high school learners has led to a continuation of unsuccessful learning and teaching. Studies conducted on teachers' attitudes towards corporal punishment in South Africa are rather limited but numerous newspapers have documented teachers' desires for a return to the traditional method of disciplining students, viz. corporal punishment. Alam and Farid (2012) thus assert that amongst the factors that lead to low or high levels of motivation in teachers is whether they can control their classes or not. Failure to do so creates anxiety in teachers. In their study, Alam and Farid found that teachers had a high level of motivation because they successfully controlled their learners. An empirical investigation was conducted based on the theoretical insights that flowed from the literature discussions set out above. The next section reports on the research methods and the findings of the study.

**Problem statement:** Today, more than ever, school discipline and disciplinary measures are areas of discussion and debate, discipline refers to an appropriate behaviour and as such it is a commitment to uphold certain convictions and norms of decency since issues of indiscipline in schools have attracted growing attention the world over.

Masitsa (2008) argues that contestations founded on religious, social and cultural values suggests that it is

essential to punish children, even by means of corporal punishment because it helps to bring about the values of society, good conduct and discipline in them hence the abolition of corporal punishment is seen as loosening the teachers' grip on learners. According to this argument, corporal punishment should act as a deterrent with a view to fostering positive attitudes and acceptable behaviour. The inference here is that, if used judiciously, corporal punishment could effectively prevent and curb mis conduct. Marais and Meier (2010) believe that physical punishment places emphasis on mandates and rules which though essential is not sufficient.

It can be argued, on the other hand that corporal punishment does not result in long-term behavioural change it rather carries lasting scars on learners and must be banned in schools as it violates human rights, physical integrity and human dignity. It is suggested that violent punishment only helps to instil pain, stress and anxiety on learners, thus, the emotional and physical effects there of can be indelible. The focus of this study was to investigate the impact of abolishing corporal punishment on the classroom teacher's motivation. This study therefore reports on the research methods, the findings and the recommendations regarding impact of the abolition of corporal punishment on teacher motivation.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This research was framed by a post-positivist paradigm based on the premise that all knowledge is conjectural therefore absolute truth cannot be established. The second premise was that research is a process of making claims thereafter refining them or abandoning them to accommodate other claims that deserve more attention. Finally, post-positivism is not a form of relativism and can therefore retain the idea of objective truth. This means that evidence found in research is always imperfect and fallible since research is a process of making claims which deserve interrogation.

The investigation was of a quantitative nature and as a data collecting technique it was underpinned by post-positivistic research theory whose assumptions represent the traditional form of research. These hold true more for quantitative research than the qualitative approach (Creswell, 2012). Empirical observation and measurement were utilised to determine the effects of the abolition of corporal punishment on teacher motivation. In order to discover such effects, the null hypothesis tested was "there is no significant relationship between the morale/motivation of teachers and abolition of corporal punishment".

**Table 1: Population and sample**

Schools in three regions of NW			
Population		Sample	
No. of schools	Educators	No. of schools selected	Educators
90	800	30	300

**Research strategy:** Survey design was used to describe and explain the status of phenomena to trace change and to draw comparisons. Thus, implicit in the notion of survey is the idea that research should have a wide range a breath-taking view, i.e., a panoramic view and ‘taking it all in’. Similar to this research, surveys relate to the present state of affairs viz. what impact does the abolition of corporal punishment have on teacher motivation and involves an attempt to provide a view of how things are currently at which data is collected (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005).

**Population and sampling:** The target population included high schools in three educational regions of the North-West Province of South Africa (n = 30), selected with the assistance of the regional managers. The findings of the study are therefore valid for schools in this region only.

Simple random sampling was used and the sample size included thirty schools (n = 30) and 10 teachers who were randomly selected from each school. In total, 300 questionnaires were distributed to 300 teachers. The response rate was 95%. Table 1 provides details about the population and sample (Table 1).

**Instrumentation:** Data was gathered directly from respondents by means of a scheduled structured questionnaire based on a set of questions with fixed wording and indicators of how to answer each question. In this study, a structured (close-ended) questionnaire using a 4-point Likert scale was used since it is characterised by choices between alternative responses that are given (Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly disagree). A questionnaire with fifteen items was used. The questionnaire had only one section and the wording was such that it could easily elicit appropriate reactions from the respondents.

**Ethical considerations:** Ethical guidelines were followed which included guaranteeing confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. Permission to carry out this investigation was granted by the North-West Department of Education and further consent was given by principals to conduct research at their schools.

**Table 2: Cronbach’s alpha**

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Cronbach’s	Comment
Schools	30	3.75	1.27	0.905	Instrument was very good and consistent

**Trustworthiness issues:** To observe reliability and content validity, the questionnaire was structured in such a manner that questions were clear. Face validity (where all the items related explicitly and implicitly to corporal punishment) and content validity (where all items used had a bearing on learner conduct and corporal punishment as described in the theoretical study) were applied.

To establish the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was calculated for the questionnaire dealing with teacher motivation and the abolition of physical punishment and the result was 0.905 which suggests that the questionnaire was valid and consistent (Table 2).

**Data collection and administration:** The researchers distributed the questionnaires personally. This had the advantage that the purpose of the study was explained clearly before the respondents provided their views on the questions. Most of the completed questionnaires were collected immediately but some had to be collected at a later stage due to some teachers not being available at the time of questionnaire administration.

**Data processing:** The quantitative method was applied in analysing data. The raw data were organised and analysed and the Pearson’s correlation coefficient test was applied to test the null hypothesis. With the assistance of statistical consultants, computer-aided statistical analysis was employed in the form of calculating frequencies, percentages, means and Pearson’s correlation by means of meta-analysis.

## RESULTS

**Abolition of corporal punishment and its effect on motivation:** Table 3 presents the responses to the questionnaire relating to teacher motivation. The respondents were requested to respond to fifteen statements in connection with teacher motivation and morale. They were asked to rate each item on a scale of 1-4 (1 = Strongly agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Disagree, 4 = Strongly disagree).

Table 3 above presents the responses to the statements relating to teacher motivation after the abolition of corporal punishment. The respondents were asked to respond to fifteen statements in all.

Results show that 92.1% of the respondents believed that teachers put in extra effort to prepare for lessons;

Table 3: Responses to questionnaire on motivation after the abolition of corporal punishment

Statements	Strongly agree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly disagree (%)	Total (%)
You are motivated to put in extra effort to prepare for your lessons despite the abolition of corporal punishment	43.7	48.4	6.3	1.6	100
You put in extra effort to make your lessons interesting	38.9	54.8	5.6	0.8	100
You talk to and listen attentively to learners who want to talk to you	43.5	53.2	1.6	1.6	100
You are highly motivated to encourage learners to give their opinions or discuss their problems with you	46.0	48.4	4.8	0.8	100
You are trustworthy and fair to each learner	49.6	47.2	1.6	1.6	100
You make that extra effort to help learners with the problems of life despite the banning of corporal punishment	38.1	56.4	4.8	0.8	100
You are interested in helping learners with learning problems	34.9	58.7	5.6	0.8	100
If you suspect something you ask learners about problems they may have	26.2	57.2	15.1	1.6	100
The abolition of corporal punishment has not affected my morale in the classroom	52.0	43.2	4.0	0.8	100
You encourage your students to behave correctly	62.7	35.0	1.6	0.8	100
The abolition of corporal punishment has not changed my attitude towards my school work	40.8	54.4	3.2	0.8	100
You act as a role model for your learners regarding correct behaviour	54.8	41.9	2.4	0.8	100
You regard your private life as part of your professional life as you are not demotivated by the abolition of corporal punishment	30.6		15.3	16.9	100
You consider good character in education as part of your work as a subject teacher despite the abolition of corporal punishment	36.1	59.1	3.3	1.6	100
You encourage learners to work very hard as you are not demotivated by the abolition of corporal punishment at school	62.7	34.9	1.6	0.8	100

93.2% indicated that teachers put in extra effort to make their lessons interesting and 96.9% of the respondents agreed that educators talk and listen attentively to learners who want to talk to them. It emerged that 94.4% of the respondents agreed that teachers encourage learners to discuss their problems with them 96.8% believed that teachers are trustworthy and fair towards each learner while 94.5% of the respondents agreed that teachers are interested in and do help learners with their problems of life. It is significant that 93.6% asserted that teachers are interested in and they help learners with learning problems; 83.4% of the respondents said that if teachers suspect something they ask learners about problems they might possibly have. In tandem with the positive responses above, 95.2% strongly agreed that educators put in extra effort to make their learners work and give feedback. In addition, 97.6% believed that teachers encourage students to work very hard and 97.7% of the respondents suggested that teachers do encourage learners to behave in a decent manner. Teachers are role models for learners concerning industriousness was the opinion of 95.2% of the respondents. To underscore this observation, 96.7% of the respondents strongly agreed that teachers are role models for learners concerning correct behaviour but it was telling that 67.7% agreed that teachers consider their private life as part of their professional life. A large proportion of the respondents (95.2%) maintained that educators view character education as part of their work as subject teachers.

Based on the findings below, the pyramids in Fig. 1, indicate that the majority of participants agreed that the abolition of corporal punishment has influenced motivation and morale of teachers.

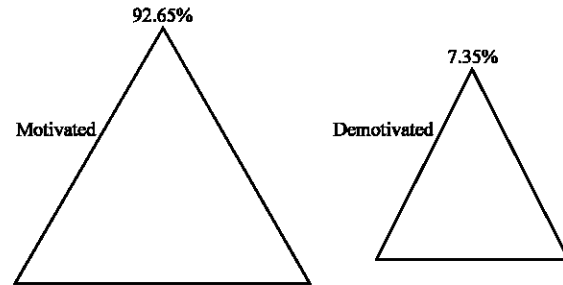


Fig. 1: Relationship between abolishing corporal punishment and teacher motivation

Based on the findings of the study it is evident that the abolition of corporal punishment did not demotivate the teachers. The Pearson coefficient correlation test applied to the findings indicates a positive relationship between teacher motivation and the abolition of corporal punishment. Since, p-value calculated was <0.01 and 0.05, it means that statistically the result is significant, implying that there is a significant relationship between teacher motivation and the abolition of corporal punishment hence the study empirically rejects the null hypothesis which states that here is no significant relationship between the morale and motivation of teachers and abolition of corporal punishment.

## DISCUSSION

Generally, the conceptual-theoretical framework used in this study suggests that teacher motivation might have decreased since the abolition of corporal punishment in schools. Masitsa (2008) found that learners were not

sufficiently disciplined; among others they were guilty of stealing other learners' property, vandalizing school property, fighting amongst themselves and also stealing school property. All this constitutes serious misdemeanours and could be demotivating to teachers. Many teachers thus believe that the abolition of corporal punishment makes their task more difficult, hence teachers should take punishment seriously since it is a very important part of their work. In the study by Bailey *et al.* (2014), the majority of teachers surveyed believe that corporal punishment was justified in the sense that it gives teachers control to ensure that violence among learners is curtailed or immediately dealt with through corporal punishment.

Masitsa (2008) further contends that poor discipline has a negative effect not only on the learners who are ill-disciplined but also affects the motivation of educators and other students. For this researcher, unruly behaviour has a negative effect on the learning and teaching culture at school. On the other hand, Moyo *et al.* (2014) argue that lack of effective alternatives to corporal punishment may further enhance misdemeanours among learners.

The empirical data in the study reported here were cross tabulated and a significant relationship was found between the abolition of corporal punishment in schools and teacher motivation. Whereas the theoretical analysis of this study seems to suggest a decrease in teacher morale and motivation due to the absence of corporal punishment (Masitsa, 2008; Bailey *et al.*, 2014), the Pearson coefficient correlation test applied to the finding here suggests a significant relationship between the abolition of corporal punishment and teacher motivation. This means that the abolition of corporal punishment has not demotivated teachers. One reason for this contradiction could be the presence of a possible (and unforeseen) bias inherent in the sample. This bias may have been present despite all efforts to draw a fully representative sample.

### **CONCLUSION**

The analysed data was subjected to a Pearson coefficient correlation test which confirmed that a positive connection exists between the abolition of corporal punishment and teacher motivation (Table 3). Corporal punishment is a negative demotivation measure because its impact depends on how much fear and coercion can be instilled in the learner. Thus, a useful way of achieving healthy child development is to promote words instead of punitive action.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Since, the findings and empirical evidence reveal a direct relationship between motivation of teachers and the abolition of corporal punishment it is the view of the researchers that in order to maintain positive morale and high motivation, stakeholders should consider a more positive approach to disciplining learners at school. Providing alternative techniques to teachers can contribute to better empathetic understanding of the learners. The use of such techniques brought about positive results as shown by the research results of this study. These researchers further assert that applying such techniques in classrooms by teachers would make them realise the value of a positive approach to ill-discipline and foster good classroom behaviour. In view of this it is suggested that educators and the Department of Education apply their minds to the problem of replacing corporal punishment with disciplinary measures that will be pedagogically justifiable such as giving learners good advice and asking parents to curtail their allowance and perks. Such an approach would also chime in with a more humane approach to education, discipline and punishment.

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