Beating of Children in Schools:

To Beat or Not to Beat?

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Abstract

This paper examined corporal punishment in general and beating in particular as a disciplinary strategy by teachers in Nigerian schools. Twenty teachers participated in an open-ended interview regarding their beliefs about beating of children in schools. Qualitative content data analysis was used to analyse the data. Only 10% of the teachers believed that beating was effective, and teachers suggested that beating had more disadvantages than advantages. Since most teachers believed that beating has more disadvantages, including that it can lead to stubbornness in pupils, alternative forms of discipline that will be more effective should be encouraged in schools.

Introduction

The responsibility of bringing up younger ones according to the norms and values of the society is purely saddled on the shoulders of the older generation. As babies are born, parents and older ones alike begin to teach and discipline them regarding acceptable social behavior. Parents are usually the child's first teachers. But as the child grows older, he or she moves from the home environment to the school environment.

Within the framework of the school, teachers are the parent figure. Their responsibility is not only to teach "book," but also to help in "promoting all forms of learner development" (Eggen & Kauchak, 2004, p. 96). Thus, ensuring good discipline amongst students is also important in order to promote moral development. Effective discipline in the school is also important because effective teaching and learning cannot occur without proper discipline (Marzano, Marzano, & Pickering, 2003). Discipline, according to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, is the practice of training people to obey rules and orders and punishing them if they do not (Hornby, 2008). Discipline is an important component of guiding children who misbehave (Henninger, 2005). There are many discipline strategies that teachers can use in their classroom, including fostering teacher-student relationships, setting clear rules and procedures, monitoring student behavior by predicting student misbehavior and taking steps to prevent the misbehavior, and implementing disciplinary interventions when students do misbehave (Marzano et al., 2003). This paper will focus on one specific disciplinary intervention in Nigerian schools: corporal punishment in general, and beating specifically.

Corporal Punishment

The concept of corporal punishment has been looked at and explained from different vantage points. Thus, there is no single universally agreed upon definition of corporal punishment. According to Strauss (1994a, as cited in Gershoff, 2002), corporal punishment

"is the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain but not injury for the purposes of correction or control of the child's behavior." The Society for Adolescent Medicine (1992, p. 240) refers to corporal punishment as the:

> Intentional application of physical pain as a method of changing behavior. It includes a wide variety of methods such as hitting, slapping, punching, kicking, pinching, shaking, choking, use of various objects…painful body postures, use of electric shock, use of excessive drills or prevention of urine or stool elimination.

In the same vein, Cohen (1984, as cited in Paintal, 1999) saw corporal punishment as a painful, intentionally inflicted physical penalty administered by a person in authority for disciplinary purposes. He further explained that corporal punishment can occur anywhere on the body, and whippings, beatings, paddlings, and flogging are specific forms of corporal punishment.

Several studies have been carried out to determine the effects of corporal punishment on children. Gershoff (2002) conducted a meta-analysis of research to determine the effects of parents' use of corporal punishment on children. An advantage of corporal punishment is that it generally stops misbehavior in the short term, which confirms that it is indeed effective in bringing about immediate compliance by children. But it may not facilitate moral internalization. Moral internalization is taking over society's values and attitudes as one's own, not for the fear of external consequences, but for intrinsic reasons. Corporal punishment does not teach children reasons to behave correctly, nor does it involve meaningful communication. Rather, corporal punishment oftentimes teaches children the desirability of not getting caught in their misbehaviors.

Though debatable, corporal punishment has been said to be related with increases in children's aggressive behavior because corporal punishment models aggression (Gershoff,

2002). Also, corporal punishment has been fingered at as one of the causes of delinquent, criminal, and antisocial behaviors in both children and adults.

Gershoff (2002) also found that the quality of parent-child relationship is believed to be damaged by corporal punishment. For example, corporal punishment is said to evoke feelings of fear, anxiety, and anger in children which can affect the way children relate with their parent. There's also the tendency of corporally punished individuals to exert the same kind of behavior towards one's own child or spouse. In other words, they may view violence, aggression, or hostile behavior as legitimate ways of addressing conflict issues

Severe and too frequent administration of corporal punishment can also lead to physical abuse. Also, harsh punishment has been postulated to be significantly associated with, and is specifically a potential source of stress, depression, and distress. In fact, coercive techniques are said to decrease children's feelings of confidence while increasing their feelings of humiliation and helplessness.

Gershoff conclusively stated that:

> Parental corporal punishment is associated significantly with a range of child behaviors and experiences, including both short- and long-term, individual and relationship level, and direct (physical abuse) and indirect (e.g., delinquency and antisocial behavior) constructs…There is general consensus that corporal punishment is effective in getting children to comply immediately, but at the same time there is caution from child abuse researchers that corporal punishment by its nature can escalate into physical maltreatment (2002, p. 549).

In addition to the points buttressed above, Paintal (1999) stated that corporal punishment negatively affects children's cognitive development, and that spanked children are more likely to cheat, lie, bully others, be disobedient, and show less remorse for

wrongdoing. Also, the use of corporal punishment increases the probability of children assaulting parents in retaliation as they grow.

Corporal Punishment in Nigerian Schools

A discipline strategy that has been adopted by teachers in Nigerian schools is corporal punishment in general, and beating in particular. Daki (2010) reported that 69% of mathematics teachers in Yobe State beat their students as a discipline strategy. Also, undergraduate students in the Faculty of Education at the University of Jos reported how often their secondary school teachers used beating as a discipline strategy. Thirty-percent reported that their teachers beat daily, 7% weekly, 20% monthly, 37% rarely, and 7% never (Korb, 2010). When further asked on what discipline practice they plan on using as teachers, 10% reported that they plan on using beating daily, 10% weekly, 13% monthly, 33% rarely, and 33% never. Therefore, pre-service teachers plan on using beating as a discipline strategy less frequently than their teachers used beating on them.

The use of corporal punishment generally, and beating in particular as a disciplinary measure has generated a heated debate among professionals (Gershoff, 2002). Most of the research on corporal punishment has found largely negative effects on children, to the point where the Society for Adolescent Medicine has concluded that “Corporal punishment in schools is an ineffective, dangerous, and unacceptable method of discipline” (1992, p. 245).

However, virtually all of the research on the use of corporal punishment has been conducted in a Western context. Most of the research has also been conducted on the effects of parents beating their children, and not on teachers beating students. As shown above, beating is a common discipline strategy in Nigerian schools. Nigerian teachers are divided on the effectiveness of beating usage in schools. While some teachers on the one hand seem to favour beating, some on the other hand are against it. Therefore, this paper is set to examine Nigerian teachers’ beliefs about beating in classrooms.

In addition to teachers having different beliefs regarding beating, Nigerian schools also have differing policies regarding beating. For example, most of the teachers in this study were selected from two different schools: one school administration forbid beating within the school, while the other school administration allowed teachers the freedom of using any form of discipline including beating. Therefore, an additional purpose of this study was to determine whether school policies regarding beating influence teachers beliefs about beating by comparing teachers beliefs in a school that does allow beating (School A) to a school that does not allow beating (School B).

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to examine Nigerian teachers' beliefs about beating in schools. Based on the purposes of the study, research questions were developed for the purposes that required descriptive analyses whereas research hypotheses were developed for the comparisons that required inferential statistics. This study specifically intends to:

- Identify teachers' beliefs about the use of beating in the classroom, including the advantages and the disadvantages of beating.
- Compare the number of advantages and disadvantages of beating as suggested by teachers to determine whether teachers think there are more advantages or disadvantages of beating.
- Examine teachers beliefs of the advantages and disadvantages of beating in relation to teachers' educational qualifications.
- Find out the relationship between teachers beliefs of the advantages and disadvantages of beating and teachers' years of teaching experience.
- Compare teachers beliefs of the advantages and disadvantages of beating provided by teachers based on their school policies regarding beating.

Research Questions

1. What do teachers believe about the use of beating in the classroom?
2. What do teachers believe are the advantages of beating in the classroom?
3. What do teachers believe are the disadvantages of beating in the classroom?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference between the number of advantages that teachers believe about beating and the number of disadvantages.
2. There is no significant difference in the number of advantages that teachers believe about beating between teachers with a degree and those with an NCE.
3. There is no significant relationship between the number of advantages that teachers suggest of beating and their years of teaching experience.
4. There is no significant difference between Schools A and B in the number of advantages that teachers suggest of beating.

Methodology

Participants

Twenty teachers participated in this study. The teachers were predominantly female (60%; 40% male). Their age ranged from 23 years through 46.5 years, with an average age of 33.5 years. Most of the participants had earned an NCE or diploma (65%), 30% had earned a degree, and 5% had a secondary school certificate. A majority of the participants had been trained in education (60%). Teachers ranged in their teaching experience from 1 month through 23 years, with an average of 7.5 years of teaching experience. Teachers were somewhat equally distributed between levels of teaching, with 30% teaching at the nursery level, 45% teaching at the primary level, and 25% teaching at the secondary level.

Teachers were selected to participate in this study at an in-service training that was attended by teachers from five private schools within the Jos metropolis, though based on

selection procedures, only teachers from three of these schools participated. Teachers were selected from the training to participate in the study. Though the training was open to any school that wanted to participate, only private school teachers were in attendance.

Instrument

The instrument used for this study was an open-ended interview. Participants were asked three questions regarding their beliefs about beating in the classroom: What do you think about beating or flogging children in school? What are the advantages of beating or flogging a learner? What are the disadvantages of beating or flogging a learner?

Procedure[1]

Participants were interviewed individually on the first day of the in-service training workshop. Selected participants went into a quiet room where a researcher audio-recorded participants' responses. The responses were later transcribed.

Data Analysis

Teachers' responses to the interview questions were analysed using qualitative content analysis. First, themes for each research question were identified, and an operational definition for each theme was developed (see Tables 1, 2, and 3 for the themes). Then the interview transcripts were analysed for the presence or absence of each theme. The frequency of each theme was then calculated and analysed based on the research questions and hypotheses.

Findings

The first research question asked, "What do teachers believe about the use of beating in the classroom?" This research question was answered by asking teachers about their thoughts of beating children in schools. Teachers' responses were coded as believing that

[1] Special thanks to Grace Selzing-Musa and Swanta Blessing Skinner-Bonat for their assistance in conducting the interviews.

beating is good (mostly helpful for managing student behavior), bad (largely unhelpful for managing student behavior), mixed (can be both good and bad), and rarely (beating should only be used in rare instances.) The results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Teachers' Beliefs about the Use of Beating in the Classroom.

Response	Number of Teachers	Percentage
Good	2	10%
Bad	8	40%
Mixed	6	30%
Rarely	3	15%
Other	1	5%

As can be seen from Table 1, a higher percentage of teachers (40%) see the beating of children in schools as bad with an additional 30% stating that it is both good and bad (mixed). Also, 15% of the teachers posit that beating should only be used in rare instances. This leaves only 10% of teachers believing that beating is helpful for managing student behavior. (Note that one response could not be clearly classified in any category and placed in an "other" category.)

The second research question asked what teachers believe are the advantages of beating in the classroom. An interview question explicitly asked teachers what they thought were the advantages of beating. The data summary of teachers' responses is given in Table 2.

Table 2. Teachers Beliefs of the Advantages of Beating.

Theme	Description	Percentage[1]
Stop	Students will stop bad behavior	40%
Other Advantage	An advantage that does not fit in another category	25%
Learn Bad Behavior	Students learn what behaviors are bad	15%
None	No advantages of beating	15%
Fear Other Beating	Student not repeat behavior for fear of another beating	10%
Other Student Learn	Other students learn from the punishment	5%

[1] The percent in Table 2 is the percent of the teachers who suggested that advantage. Since some teachers stated multiple advantages, the sum of the percentages is greater than 100%.

Table 2 shows that 40% of the teachers believe that beating makes children stop the bad behavior. Another 25% provided other advantages of beating that did not fit into the other themes, such as helping children to concentrate as well as putting them in check, Fifteen percent of the teachers explicitly stated that there are no advantages of beating. Finally, 15%, 10%, and 5% of respondents stated that advantages of beating include helping children identify bad behavior, fear of another punishment, and other students learning from the punishment, respectively.

The third research question asked, what do teachers believe are the disadvantages of beating in the classroom. The results of the third research question are provided in Table 3.

Table 3. Teachers Beliefs of the Disadvantages of Beating.

Theme	Description	Percentage
Stubbornness	Hardens the student and/or student continues to misbehave	50%
Injury	Beating could injure the student	40%
Fear	Student begins to fear the teacher, school, and/or the class	35%
Negative Mood	The student is put into a negative mood and/or cannot focus	25%
Other Disadvantage	A disadvantage that does not fit in another category	20%
Not Learn	Student not learn what they are being beaten for	10%

As can be seen in Table 3, half of the respondents believe that the major disadvantage of beating is that it makes children become more stubborn. Additionally, 40%, 35%, and 25% stated injury, fear, and negative mood as disadvantages of beating, respectively. A further 25% of teachers suggested that the child cannot focus, study, and/or withdraws after a beating. Also, 10% of the teachers stated that children may not understand what they are being beaten for.

The first research hypothesis stated that there is no significant difference between the number of advantages that teachers believe about beating and the number of disadvantages. A correlated samples t-test was calculated based on the number of advantages and disadvantages about beating that each participant stated.

Table 4. Comparison of the Number of Advantages and Disadvantages of Beating Suggested by Teachers.

	n	Mean	t	df	p	Decision
Advantages of Beating	20	1.10	-3.04	19	.006	Significant
Disadvantages of Beating	20	1.80				

Since the p-value of 0.006 is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant difference in the number of advantages and disadvantages of beating provided by teachers. Teachers stated significantly more disadvantages of beating than advantages.

The second hypothesis stated that there is no significant difference between the number of advantages that teachers believe about beating between teachers with a degree and those with an NCE. To analyse this hypothesis, an independent samples t-test was computed. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Comparison of Number of Advantages of Beating between Teachers with Degree and those with NCE.

	n	Mean	t	df	p	Decision
Teachers with NCE	14	1.21	1.85	18	.08	Not Significant
Teachers with Degree	6	0.83				

The p-value for the t-test was 0.08, slightly greater than 0.05, so the null hypothesis is retained. However, the sample size for this research study was small, with only six teachers who had earned a degree. This small sample size reduced the statistical power for the t-test. It is possible that this hypothesis would be rejected with a larger sample size. It is interesting to note that teachers who earned a degree suggested fewer advantages of beating than those teachers who have earned an NCE. While this result does not meet the criteria for statistical significance, it is an important finding that should be further investigated.

Hypothesis three stated that there is no significant relationship between the number of advantages that teachers suggest of beating and their years of teaching experience. A

correlation was calculated between the number of advantages given by teachers and the number of years they have spent teaching.

Table 6. Correlation Between Number of Advantages of Beating Suggested and Years of Teaching.

	r	t	df	p	Decision
Advantages of Beating and Years of Teaching	0.35	1.58	18	0.13	Not Significant

The p of 0.13 is greater than 0.05, so the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, there is no significant relationship between the number of advantages of beating suggested by teachers and their years of teaching. However, this result may also be significant with a larger sample size. A correlation of 0.35 falls in the range of a moderate relationship (see Cohen, 1988). However, the small sample size of 20 again reduced the power of the t-test to reject the null hypothesis.

The fourth hypothesis stated that there is no significant difference between Schools A and B in the number of advantages that teachers suggest of beating. To analyse this hypothesis, an independent samples t-test was computed. Table 7 gives a summary of the result.

Table 7. Comparison of the Number of Advantages of Beating Given by Teachers in Schools A and B.

	n	Mean	t	df	p	Decision
School A (Allow Beating)	9	1.33	2.28	17	.03	Significant
School B (No Beating)	10	0.90				

Table 7 illustrates that the results of the t-test were significant because the p of 0.03 was less than 0.05. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis. Thus, there was a significant difference whereby teachers in the school that allows beating gave fewer advantages of beating than teachers in the school that does not allow beating.

Discussion of Findings

The purpose of this study is to examine Nigerian teachers' beliefs about beating in schools. In this study, only 10% of the sample believed that beating was effective for managing student behavior. The most frequently stated advantage of beating in the classroom was that it will stop the bad behavior from occurring. This is in line with empirical research that shows that beating does indeed stop misbehavior in the short-term (Gershoff, 2002). However, teachers reported significantly more disadvantages of beating than advantages, the most frequent disadvantages being that it will harden the child, the beating could injure the child, and the student will begin to fear education.

Administration policy regarding beating also had a significant effect on teachers' beliefs about the effectiveness of beating. Teachers in the school that did not allow beating suggested fewer advantages of beating than teachers in the school that did allow beating. This means that administration policy may influence teachers' beliefs about beating.

Teachers with a degree suggested fewer advantages of beating than teachers with an NCE or lower qualification, although this result did not meet the criteria for statistical significance. More experienced teachers also suggested more advantages of beating than newer teachers, though this result too did not reach statistical significance. Both of these findings should be confirmed in additional research studies with a larger sample size.

Recommendations

Since most teachers believed that beating has many disadvantages, including that it can lead to stubbornness in pupils, beating should be discouraged in schools. Instead,

alternative disciplinary measures that are more effective should be used by teachers in schools. Experts in education have identified many other disciplinary interventions that may be more effective than beating such as setting clear rules (Marzano et al., 2003); counseling (Henninger, 2005); and negative punishment, such as taking away something enjoyable that children have earned (Woolfolk, 2007).

It's possible that teachers have not thoughtfully considered the advantages or disadvantages about beating before being interviewed for this study, but instead use beating because it is the traditional disciplinary practice. Efforts need to be made by teachers and school administrators to provide opportunities for teachers to thoughtfully consider the advantages or disadvantages about beating. Then, teachers could discuss alternate strategies to beating in their classrooms.

This study found significant differences in teachers' beliefs regarding beating based on school discipline policies. Therefore, school administrators should develop and implement policies related to disciplinary practices for their teachers. These discipline policies have the potential of shaping teachers' beliefs and practices.

Discussions regarding discipline interventions need to be organized at teacher training programs. In addition, teachers who have learnt classroom management principles in school should apply what they have theoretically learnt in real life situations. Likewise, teacher trainers should not just teach theoretical principles, but also provide examples of how to apply classroom management practices.

Conclusion

Because teachers believed that there are more disadvantages of beating children in school than advantages, the authors therefore conclude that beating should only be used as a last resort as a discipline strategy in schools. This is in agreement with the majority of the teachers sampled, who believed that beating was either ineffective or should only be used in

rare instances. Indeed, educational experts have suggested alternative strategies for minimizing the instances of misbehavior in the classroom (see Marzano et al., 2003) and for correcting misbehavior nonviolently (see Eggen & Kauchak, 2004). Thus, instead of using beating to control students' behavior, which has many disadvantages, alternative strategies should be used to correct students' misbehavior that will have more positive long-term outcomes.

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Appendix

Interview Schedule

I'm working on a research through the University of Jos looking at teachers' beliefs about school discipline. I would like to do a short interview with you regarding your beliefs of discipline practices right now. The interview will last about 15 minutes.

Your responses will be confidential. Your name will not be associated with your answers to the interview questions. Your name will never be associated with your responses in the future. When we write the report, your name will never be included.

Only the researchers will have access to your answers. If there are any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering, please tell me and we can skip them.

Do you have any questions about the research or about your participation before we begin?

Thank you. Let us begin with some background questions.

1. What is your age?
2. What is the last qualification that you completed?
3. What field was your qualification in?
   - *Confirm:* Was that in education?
   - *If not education:* Have you ever completed formal training in education? If so, what was it?
4. How many years have you been a teacher?
5. What subjects do you teach?
6. What do you think about beating or flogging children in school?
7. What are the advantages of beating or flogging a learner?
8. What are the disadvantages of beating or flogging a learner?

Thank them very well for their participation.