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## School Discipline: Alternatives to Corporal Punishment

### Abstract

Cameroon has been at the forefront of outlawing the prevalence of violence in the educational setup. These efforts have not been heeded to and educational stakeholders have continued using corporal punishment with impunity. Though violence may be attributed to colonial vestiges in Cameroon, schools have been seemingly imbued with such practices especially student leaders. With this study the theoretical base of corporal punishment was checked and the alternative ways of punishing children without violence were identified. Though corporal punishment has existed from time immemorial, the study revealed that alternatives to corporal punishment which acts as a conceptual change was attainable through continuous sensitization of the stakeholders.

**Keywords:** *Corporal punishment, school discipline, quality education*

### Zusammenfassung

Kamerun steht in vorderster Reihe im Kampf um die Abschaffung von Körperstrafe im schulischen Kontext. Entgegen dieser Bestrebungen verwenden Bildungsverantwortliche weiterhin ungestraft Körperstrafen. Auch wenn schulische Gewalt als koloniales Relikt in Kamerun wahrgenommen wird so gehört sie doch auch heute zum schulischen Alltag und wird besonders stark durch Klassensprecher oder ältere Peers angewendet. In dieser Studie werden der Diskurs um Körperstrafe beleuchtet und Alternativen zu körperlicher Bestrafung von Kindern und Jugendlichen aufgezeigt. Auch wenn Körperstrafe seit jeher existiert, zeigt diese Studie, dass eine konzeptionelle Veränderung hin zu nichtkörperlichen Bestrafungen mithilfe beständiger Sensibilisierung möglich war.

**Schlüsselworte:** *Körperstrafe, Schuldisziplin, Bildungsqualität*

### Introduction

School discipline is a socially constructed, contested, and symbolic “space of trouble” that a student falls into when she or he behaves outside of the normative expectations of a school setting (Irby, 2014, p. 517). It represents the rules that inform students what is right and to be done, and what is wrong and to be avoided. In a school setting where such rules are systematic and organized, corporal violence should be non-existent as this enhances the cognitive development of the learner and corresponds with the human rights (Straus & Paschall, 2009).

This paper is aimed at identifying conceptual change towards non-violent approaches of responsible student leaders.

### Context and problem

The use of corporal punishment in Cameroonian (Protestant) schools is not accidental but seemingly rooted in the colonial history of Cameroon (Tangwe & Paul, 2009). Over time and space, this has been copied by those in authority as an easy way out for all deviant behaviour especially in schools in Cameroon today. “Corporal punishment of children is predicted by higher levels of social stratification and political integration, and long-term use of an alien currency” (Ember & Ember, 2005, p. 609). Over the years, schools have prided themselves with quality education and the plethora of legislation against corporal punishment (Mumthass, Munavirr & Gafoor, 2014) despite the fact that corporal punishment by teachers and students was highly practiced. The use of corporal punishment has been going on irrespective of the efforts of the Pedagogic In-Service Training Programme (ISTP) that has over the years from 1998–2000 organized training workshops against corporal punishment for teachers and administrators of Protestant schools.

Such punishment took the form of using the whip to beat the students on the buttocks and the palms of their hands or spanking with the intention of inflicting pains as a corrective measure for non-adequate behavior (Gershoff, 2002). All these actions have not taken cognizance of the alternative to corporal punishment methods available (Straus & Paschall, 2009; Scheunpflug & Wenz, 2012) and rather paid heed to the theoretical base of corporal punishment (Ellison & Sherkat, 1993; Ember & Ember, 2005) with student and student leaders aping same without due consideration of its after effects on the victims. Be that as it may, alternatives to corporal punishment measures (Agbenyega, 2006, p. 108; Arnstein, 2009, p. 4; Khewu, 2012, p. 2) if well applied in the context of a school are a very useful instrument for discipline as those subjected to it almost always come to self-realization and a strengthening of the school climate positively and this can help to improve quality education standards (Straus & Paschall, 2009; UNESCO, 2000). Besides the clear violation of human rights and children’s rights by violence in school and the foundation of the discourse of banning violence in the human rights perspective, the causal effect of the deviation from corporal punishment to alternatives to corporal punishment is rooted in the quality discourse (Straus & Paschall, 2009;

UNESCO, 2000) because education that is steeped in the application of violence through corporal punishment ends up derailing the perception of the beneficiaries and the society suffers. In light of the foregoing, alternatives to corporal punishment remains a glaring tool or indicator to meet the UNESCO EFA goals especially in the Protestant schools and Cameroon in general because it leads to human rights, harmony and a better learning climate.

### Research question

In view of the foregoing, the study focused on the following main research question: 'What are student leaders' experiences with the implementation of alternatives to corporal punishment?' This is in a bid to ascertain how they accept alternatives to the practice of corporal punishment which they have been used to in their school roles as student leaders. This main research question can be further operationalized with an in depth presentation of answers through the following sub research questions:

(1) How are student leaders dealing in the face of provocation from other students without using violence? (2) In terms of challenges that students leaders face in trying to implement alternatives to corporal punishment, (2a) in what ways do they handle petty disturbances or deviant behavior by the students? (2b) how do they deal with communication through leading? (2c) what is their behavior on interaction? (2d) how regular is their use of corporal punishment with the other students?

### The methodology

The methodology needed empirical evidence through the organization of a controlled intervention of student leaders of both primary and secondary schools and some teachers to acquire knowledge and competences towards alternatives to corporal punishment. To overcome the challenges of unleashing violence on the students, it was therefore necessary to bring student leaders to share and exchange on the experiences they first had with corporal punishment, to reflect alternatives to corporal punishment and to discursively identify the challenges involved in their attempts in implementing such alternatives.

After the training, five teacher students involved in the training were observed during their practice. The observation took place over a period of one month and a key area of observation was the student's halls of residence or the hostels, assembly grounds where they gathered for prayers, the academic blocs and the play grounds. The observation was criteria based (see tab. 1). Every observation was filled in a table based on these criteria. By this, the frequency of occurrence became visible. Also, to make the data more explicit, the mean score for each category was calculated to make for easy appreciation and analysis. In general, as higher the rating, as higher the behavior is related to violence.

### Data analysis

The rate of observation was ten times spanning in all a period of one month as forecasted thereby scoring an observation rate of 100 % envisaged for the entire duration of the

Main Criterion	Categories	Description	Ratings
Communication	Tone	The use of verbal instructions to students.	1= Very friendly tone 2= Friendly tone 3= Moderate 4= Aggressive tone 5= Very aggressive tone
	Choice of words/ Language	Is the use of language sarcastic (mocking at others), couth (good manners towards the students), polite (kind, helpful, supportive), vulgar/obscene (indecent, disgusting, repulsive)?	1= Very simple and polite 2= Simple and polite 3= Courteous and sarcastic 4= Vulgar and obscene 5= Very vulgar and obscene
Interaction	Behavior	How do they interact or behave towards the students?	1= Very spiteful 2= Domineering 3= Bossy 4= Irritating 5= Very rude
	Corporal punishment	Using the cane or belts.	1= Not at all 2= Sparingly 3= Fairly 4= Frequently 5= Very frequently
		Asking them to kneel or stand at a particular spot.	1= Not at all 2= Sparingly 3= Fairly 4= Frequently 5= Very frequently
Alternatives to corporal punishment	Patient	Interrupting students in a conversation.	1= Not at all 2= Sparingly 3= Fairly 4= Frequently 5= Very frequently
		Tolerating delays from students and generally self-restraining.	1= Very frequently 2= Frequently 3= Fairly 4= Sparingly 5= Not at all
	Personalising address	Calling students by their names.	1= Very often 2= Often 3= Sparingly 4= Hardly 5= Never
	Non-verbal correction	The use of body language (eye contact, moving close to the student) to check a deviant action by a student.	1= Very frequently 2= Frequently 3= Fairly 4= Sparingly 5= Not at all
	Counselling	Listening to a student.	1= Very frequently 2= Frequently 3= Fairly 4= Sparingly 5= Not at all
		Talking to a student.	1= Very frequently 2= Frequently 3= Fairly 4= Sparingly 5= Not at all

Table 1: observation criteria; source: own presentation

exercise that took in all 34 hours. The data was rated (see tab. 1). Every student was observed ten times. Each action was rated and at the end depending on the number of times, the total figures were all added up and divided by ten (= the frequency of being observed) to get the mean or average rating for that category.

## Results

The research enable the perception of alternatives to corporal punishment which was not sufficient to check their understanding to practice the ideas discuss in the course of the one day workshop. Such ideas discussed in the seminar about alternatives to corporal punishment were not intense to make them understand at once. Hence, it was therefore important to carry a short term observation lasting one month to see their reaction in the field in their day to day work as student leaders. Moreover, it was also realized during their interaction that they were steeped in the practice of corporal punishment and could not be facing challenges that did not exist through their actions. The following is depicted in the following tables.

Main criterion	Category	Mean	
Communication	Tone (5= very aggressive tone of instruction)	4.2	
	Choice of language (5= very vulgar and obscene)	2.4	
Interaction	Behaviour (5= very rude)	2.4	
	Corporal punishment (5 = very frequently)	Using cane or belts (5= very frequently)	1.2
		Kneeling and other humiliating behaviour (5 = very frequently)	1.0
Alternatives to corporal punishment	Patience	Interrupting students in a conversation (5 = very frequently)	4.2
		Tolerating delays and generally self-restraining (5 = not at all)	2.4
	Personalising address (5= never)	1.0	
	Non-verbal correction (5= not at all)	1.6	
	Counselling	Talking (5= not at all)	1.0
		Listening (5 = not at all)	2.2

Table 2: Results of observation; source: Tangwe 2015

In regard to communication, five student leaders led by the Senior Prefect boy of the school under review indicate in their actions a high propensity towards aggressive and less polite communication in the hostels but moderated their tones in the school assembly and the academic block. They were rated on a scale of 1–5 with one being very friendly tone and five referring to very aggressive tone. As such, going by the tone noticed which was aggressively felt most of the time, it may be an indicator to explain the fact that though the social context and or environment may be prawn to doing things as it was before, the efforts made by the students in moderating in a conscious manner their tone is visibly lower at 3.2 when compared with their being aggressive at 4.2. Hence, though very aggressive in their approach to the other students, some conscious efforts were made to moderate their tone with some degree of polite-

ness. These maybe unsurprising because the indicators appear intrinsically linked and connected. Be that as it may, this category of the vulgarity or obscenity of language with a mean score of only 2.4 though in the category of aggressive tone may come under complete eradication with the right measures.

Furthermore, in the category of corporal punishment the carrying of belts was very frequent in the environment but conversely, not put into used at all thereby ending with a mean or average performance of 1.2. This contrasted the circumstances and the trend of the period and this may be linked to some scholars position on violence in a given environment as the opium for stress relieve and correction which somehow acts as a generational legacy in that it is simply aped or copied by the young and seen as a culture to be upheld. The environment and context in which they find themselves appear to have a profound influence or bearing in their actions. Interestingly, the culture of carrying a real cane in this particular context was completely absent as they were not seen carrying or using a cane on the other students.

The results registered in the observation in regard to alternatives of corporal punishment in a way are indicative of a mix of corporal punishment and alternatives to corporal punishment at the same time. Going by this, it becomes quite exacting to be able to decipher the orientation of the students whether they are pro-corporal punishment or for alternatives to corporal punishment though there are some visible indicators in the findings to show that alternatives to corporal punishment are so far slightly performing above average.

Their actions as seen in the observations, most of the time whether in an angry mode or not, the student leaders addressed the other students with their names and at times, nicknames. This more often than not lightened the students up and they appeared visibly relaxed in their encounters with the student leaders and the mean score for this activity was also 1. This was repeated with body language especially on the assembly grounds during prayers or devotion where this was rampant. Here, their performance was sort of stable and persistence as the student leaders were seen going close to students talking and the noise stopped almost immediately. This was frequently done and this explained why the average of the times witnessed was 1.6. Above all, an intent look directly in their eyes to make eye contact was enough to refocus them. This, the student leaders did with some degree of proper mastery.

More so, in the category of counselling, it was also noticed that they devoted quite some time to listen to the students whether angry or not. It was in such instances that some were visibly aggressive from their first encounter with the student involved in a deviant act and most of the time, after listening to them their countenance and tone of voice instantly changed with the role of the student leader reversed now enabling such a leader to talk more and softly as a counselling measure. Worthy of note from the results or finding is the fact that instances of corporal acts almost equated the instances of the alternative measures that they employed in their actions. This indicates that their socially constructed, contested, and symbolic space of trouble is contested in a certain way because the normative expectations are not met by them and this negates the efficacy of approaches to managing groups of often rebellious school students. Such modern methods as postulated by empirical ev-

idence which supports alternatives to corporal punishment as a sure way of attaining a conducive and positive school climate which in itself is a key indicator to quality education is also visible in their actions.

### Discussion

In this part of the paper I will present my findings in the context of the discourse on educational quality.

As such the research question of this research set out firstly to investigate the experiences that student leaders have with the implementation of alternatives to corporal punishment and secondly to identify the challenges they faced in trying to implement such alternative methods. It was realized that the experiences they have had with alternatives to corporal punishment was through the discussions and exchanges they had in the training. The intervention was based on the concept of identifying alternative measures to the use of corporal punishment. During the intervention, an attempt was made to try to harmonize the content of the training on alternatives to corporal punishment with the dispositive of the formation. In view of all these and looking at the outcry against the use of corporal punishment, some scholars of alternative measures (Khewu, 2012; Agbenyega, 2006; Arnstein, 2009) hold strongly that such alternatives supersedes any case for corporal punishment no matter the circumstances and or environment. As such and despite such setbacks as seen during observation, there is however a distinct show of consciousness by the student leaders with regards to the use of alternatives to corporal punishment; a positive departure or break with a past that functioned completely negating the norms of school quality enhancement and difficulties to adapt to changing trends.

It was also discovered that after the workshop, ideas related to alternatives to corporal punishment like tolerating the students actions, counselling through listening and talking and personalizing address were highly practiced by the student leaders. Conversely, the results of the study also showed that corporal punishment was still very present amongst the students though assuming a more psychological disposition than the physical practice they confessed to in the intervention. The findings of the intervention and in line with empirical evidence indicate that the student leaders were still involved in corporal punishment which to them also serves as a clear indication to the other students that rule violations are not tolerated thereby making living and accepting such action as a value norm (Ember & Ember, 2005). Again, Straus (1991) inches with his two assumptions that may be because of this background, student leaders are therefore prawn to maltreating other students and those teachers are important role models to the students through their actions. Therefore, if children frequently misbehave towards other children and if teachers who serve as role models use violence to correct misbehavior, a larger proportion would use violence to deal with other children whom they perceived as having mistreated them than would be the case if teachers did not provide a model of hitting wrongdoers. Conservative protestant scholars (Ellison & Sherkat, 1993) hold the view similar to the forgoing and argue that child upbringing is the cultivation of "healthy" psychosocial characteristics is necessary even if the attainment is in line with (Prov. 23:13,14) and not "sparing the rod and spoiling the child".

Such ideas and results obtained in the intervention indicate once more that contacts and knowledge of corporal punishment is firstly something contextual and environmental because they tend to simply copy what others are doing as correct but also that they were before the intervention not very knowledgeable with the alternative measure available to corporal punishment. Their level of practicability improved from corporal to alternatives to corporal punishment following the intervention to a certain degree.

Furtherance to this, the behaviour or interaction of the student leaders with other students reveals certain characteristics; the fact that their environment or educational setting has an influence on their actions because they are copying what goes on in that environment (Ember & Ember, 2005; Straus, 1991). These actions of theirs therefore negates alternatives to corporal punishment ideals like helping the students to feel and experience "love and security" while in school (Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 1998, p. 723) through a friendly approach in dealing with them. In view of the foregoing, the didactical planning of the intervention took into consideration the atmosphere of the discussion which was made very conducive. This permitted them to talk freely and share their thoughts leading to the revelations from them. In the same way, if such was the practice in the hostels and the school environment in general, then best practices emanating from alternatives to corporal punishment would have been tenable. The research through observation was undertaken after the intervention which came on the heels of their constant use of corporal punishment as a corrective measure through hitting and beating with the belt as they revealed during the exchanges. As can be deciphered from the results of the study, corporal punishment by student leaders is fast metamorphosing into verbal and aggressive assaults as revealed by the score obtained for that category thereby confirming the postulations by Khewu (2012) who thinks that corporal punishment should not be limited only to the "infliction of pains on the physical body but that ... it can also be taken beyond the physical to emotional and psychological domains" (p. 12). This was because corporal punishment is in the most part seen as "hitting, striking, wounding or bruising a dependent child for the purpose of punishing, disciplining, or showing disapproval" (Ember & Ember, 2005, p. 609) but this contrast the processes leading to either hitting or striking the child. The processes leading to such beatings and hitting's starts with provocations through abuses and insults amongst others. It therefore indicates a shifting trend in school discipline and punishment wherein the cane is apparently giving way to violent action that is more psychological than physical as was the case before.

Practically on the field, the results of the study showed that the student leaders were attempting to implement the ideas or knowledge acquired during the training on alternative to corporal punishment and learning in the process but challenged by an intrinsic disposition to tilt to violence at the slightest opportunity by their propensity to carry belts round the hostels. The first step in finding alternatives to punitive disciplinary measures such as corporal punishment is to understand factors influencing children's behaviour which include fulfillment of their needs such as belonging, acceptance, phys-

ical and emotional security as well as being respected by their peers (Maphosa, 2011). Consideration should be made of the fact that if we can understand the expressive dimension of punishment, we should be able to perceive not only what kinds of punishment reform won't work but also which ones will (Kahan, 1996) and this if patience is exercise to identify what alternatives to corporal punishment methods can work and this in lieu of the context. From every indication, it is such patience that is apparently absent with the student leaders thereby needing a lot of re-orientation to refocus and guide them. Be that as it may, the findings revealed that they were still carrying belts and not using them as the case may be thereby contrasting this with their confession in the intervention that they were effectively using belts in the dormitories. Whatever meaning is made of these actions of theirs in carrying belts, the attainment of the quality paradigm (UNESCO, 2000) is not something to hurry with but to be very patient with. The fact remains that in their day to day actions, there is a very clear correlation between their intentions and the use of corporal punishment. The normative implication of this revolves around the fact that corporal punishment in the school under review is not an easy to stop phenomenon thereby indicating that the debate on the place of corporal punishment in school discipline (Ellison & Sherkat 1993) is still raging and difficult to resolve but not impossible. The very fact that school discipline is necessary and relevant with clear indications of methods that can enhance it without resorting to violence as indicated by empirical evidence remains relevant. The findings from the intervention and the evaluation show a clear indication that efforts are being made to break with a past that promoted violence through corporal punishment (Mulvaney & Mebert, 2007). The ideal is to completely attain values such as visibility, taking responsibility for ones actions, democratic practices, education for liberation through the inculcation of life skills, inclusive education, accessibility of that education to all and sundry and support services that enhances a positive and conducive school climate (Oparkiatikil, Arthur-Kelly & Dempsey, 2014; Straus & Paschall, 2009) which are profound characteristics of quality of education. Attaining all the indicators may appear preposterous at this moment but attempts already made through their experiential actions and trial of alternatives to corporal punishment measures in discipline appears to be positive.

### Conclusion

The attainment of school discipline through the use of alternatives to corporal punishment remains an achievable paradigm more likely in theory than practice to a certain degree and this despite the widespread public and professional debate over it (Irby, 2014). This may be debunked if a sustained attempt is undertaken towards best practices in alternatives to corporal punishment for in a school setting where such rules are systematic and organized, practice becomes evident and customary

thereby reducing violence and this enhances the cognitive development of the learner in a school environment that is inclusive, accommodating and very positive (Straus & Paschall, 2009).

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