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Innovative Modes of Discipline: Biblical and Secular Modes of Discipline among Secondary Schools in Bomet County, Kenya

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Abstract:

This was a comparative study of biblical and secular modes of discipline within secondary schools in Bomet County, it was important to distinguish between problems with discipline in schools and the various ways in which schools respond to those problems. The study objectives; to find out the forms of disciplinary measures used within Christians and Secular secondary schools in Bomet County; to establish the efforts in place to use positive discipline to curb infraction in Christians and Secular secondary schools within Bomet County; to investigate students' and teachers preferences in regard to correction of infraction within Christians and Secular secondary schools in Bomet County; to establish Christians and secular methods of discipline within Christians and Secular secondary schools in Bomet County

1. Introduction

With a wide spread debate on the best methods of discipline needed to be used in learning institutions, this study was carried out to find out the effectiveness of various modes of disciplines. Choosing to compare biblical and secular modes of discipline would, *inter alia*, ensure from the start that a study would not be biased.

Convention on the Rights of the Child indicates that States take on the obligation to implement the rights enshrined in the Convention. Article 28 (2) of the Convention states that school discipline methods should take into account child's human dignity and in conformity with other conceptions of Human rights. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, which monitors implementation of the Convention, has consistently interpreted this article as requiring prohibition of corporal punishment in schools. The monitoring bodies of other treaties have also emphasized that international and regional human rights law requires prohibition of school corporal punishment (Council of Europe, 2007).

Schools have practiced physical punishment even after being banned by the government. The public schools and religious schools have had divergent views on physical punishment to children, religious schools have argue that physical punishments is biblically supported. Some cites verses such as, Proverbs 20:30 "Blows that hurt cleanse away evil, as do stripes the inner debts of the heart" (NIV). From the above Bible quotation the church and other religious schools derive their support of the corporal punishment in schools while most government schools have argued that corporal punishment is against children rights and dignity (Ozkilinc&Sabanci, 2010).

Public concern about excessive school disciplinary exclusion and the related racial disparities has grown recently. Most suspensions are a matter of the routine enforcement of minor school rules, such as violating dress codes, truancy, excessive tardiness, cell phone use, loitering, or disruption (Danaoglu, 2009). There is no argument that serious misbehavior should be addressed, but as this body of new research suggests, harsh discipline policies increase the number of young people who are disengaged from school, which has damaging academic consequences and long-term economic and societal costs. Policymakers have been reluctant to change this harsh approach to school discipline, in part because the social costs have been hidden and in part because effective alternatives have taken time to develop (Ozkilinc&Sabanci, 2010).

According to Bear (2005) physical punishment against children has received support for thousands of year's interpretation of legal and religious doctrines in most Christian schools corporal punishment is still in enforcement with the belief that the bible supports it. In the United States, corporal punishments have been a conventional method in disciplining children and youth since colonial times. Only during the past 30 years has a growing outcry emerged condemning such practices with school children.

Many fundamentalists and religious Christian schools believe that hitting children is sanctioned or mandated by the Bible. They cite these verses in the Old Testament's Proverbs as authority for their belief: 3:11-12 "My son don't despise the chastening of the lord or detest His correction; for whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights" (NIV), 13:24, 19:18 "Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction" (NIV), 22:15 "Foolishness is bound

up in the heart of a child; the rod of correction will drive it far from him” (NIV), and 23:13-14. The latter claims that if you beat a child with a rod, he will not die, but instead will have his soul saved (Ozkilinc&Sabanci, 2010).

According to (Eloff, Oosthuizen& Van Staden, 2010) no recorded words of Jesus recommend corporal punishment of children or subjugating them. No New Testament verses say that children should be struck with the hand or with implements. In Hebrews 12, St. Paul speaks of fathers “chastening” and “correcting” their sons as an analogy for the trials Christians encounter in their spiritual growth, but the verses do not indicate that chastening should be physical. Paul says that children should honor and obey their parents, but also says fathers should not anger or discourage children (Ephesians 6:2-4, Colossians 3:20).

Student discipline and its relationship to school climate and classroom instructional capacity has always been a central concern of educators. Traditionally, with respect to school discipline, American educators have had two distinct aims: to help create and maintain a safe, orderly, and positive learning environment, which often requires the use of discipline to correct misbehavior; and; to teach or develop self-discipline (Eloff, Oosthuizen& Van Staden, 2010). Both aims are equally important and should always be included in the development and evaluation of school discipline practices. Whereas the first is generally viewed as an immediate aim (to stop misbehavior and bring about compliance), the second is viewed as long term (to develop autonomy and responsible citizenship). Both aims are reciprocally related in that each promotes the other. Both also serve a preventive function. That is, by correcting misbehavior and developing self-discipline, schools help prevent the future occurrence of behavior problems (Bear, 2008; pp. 1403–1420).

Larzelere (2000) and Whelchel (2000) states that due to limitations of physical punishment, when correcting misbehavior, effective educators work hard to avoid using punishment. Instead, they focus on strategies for developing self-discipline and for preventing misbehavior. When correcting misbehavior, they are much more likely to use mild forms of punishment, such as physical proximity, taking away privileges, verbal reprimands, and “the evil eye” than harsh forms of punishment such as suspension. When punishment is used, it is used fairly, judiciously, in the context of a caring and supportive relationship, and typically in combination with replacement techniques that teach or strengthen desired behaviors (Manzon, 2011). The latter would include techniques that emphasize social and emotional competencies and positive teacher–student relations, such as joint social problem-solving and induction, where the focus is on the impact of one’s behavior on others.

A peaceful school environment nurtures security in the hearts of the children and receptivity to learning in their minds. A peaceful environment also maximizes the effectiveness of the teacher for the good of all children. In the ideal sense, all disciplinary actions within the school must be communicated in a loving way to cultivate self-discipline and control among the students (Eloff, Oosthuizen& Van Staden, 2010).

Understanding the negative effects of corporal punishments in schools can help in communicating with teachers about the need for prohibition and in putting in place appropriate measures to ensure implementation of prohibition. But no factor should be used as an excuse for retaining corporal punishment, even as a “last resort” and none should change the obligation to prohibit all corporal punishment.

2. Research Questions

These were some of the research questions.

- What forms of disciplinary measures were used within Christians and Secular secondary schools in Bomet County?
- What was the effectiveness of Christian and secular modes of discipline within secondary schools in Bomet County?
- What integrative negotiations were recommended by Christian participants in Bomet County?

3. Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the Skinner's Theory of Operant Conditioning as seen Through Positive Behavior Support (Skinner, 1979). In order to explain his theory of operant conditioning, Skinner defined two main terms: reinforcement and punishment. Reinforcement is simply defined as "the effect of a reinforce (Lefrancois, 2006). A reinforcer is an event that follows a response and that changes the probability of a response's occurring again. Additionally, reinforcers are defined by observable and measureable behaviors. Reinforcement can then be broken down into positive and negative reinforcement. Positive reinforcement occurs when the consequences of the behavior, when added to a situation after a response, increase the probability of the response's occurring again in similar conditions. In recent years, many schools have been moving towards employing more positive means of dealing with problem behavior through the use of positive behavior support, after it has been shown that punishment, which had commonly been used as the most widely used technique of dealing with problem behaviors, may actually do more harm than good.

Bohanon, Fenning, Carney, Minnis-Kim, Anderson, Moroz, Hicks, Kasper, Culos, Sailor and Pigott, (2006) tell us that positive behavior support employs a wide variety of strategies in an attempt to improve the quality of life of students while at the same time reducing the incidence of problem behaviors through more positive means of reinforcement. PBS applies more positive, preventative, collaborative techniques rather than the harsh, reactive, disciplinary practices that have been employed in the past. It focuses on antecedent and consequent factors that contribute to both appropriate and problematic behavior as well as arranging environments to maximize prosocial behavior. Behavioral expectations for various school settings are defined and explicitly taught to students. As Skinner described in his theory of operant conditioning, punishment and reinforcement can be used in a variety of settings including at home and even at school. Skinner relates a classroom to a giant Skinner box. He said that teachers could profit from knowing that reinforcement is effective in helping to elicit changes in behavior (Lefrancois, 2006). He said that there are five categories of reinforcers: consumables such as food or candy, manipulatables such as toys or trinkets, visual and auditory stimuli such as a bell signal that means “good work”, social stimuli such as praise, and tokens such as disks that can be exchanged for other reinforcers. All of these things increase the probability that a response will occur again.

4. Conceptual Framework

Using the principles of Skinner’s Theory, outlined above, the researcher came up with a conceptual framework, to try and establish the relationship(s) among various variables.

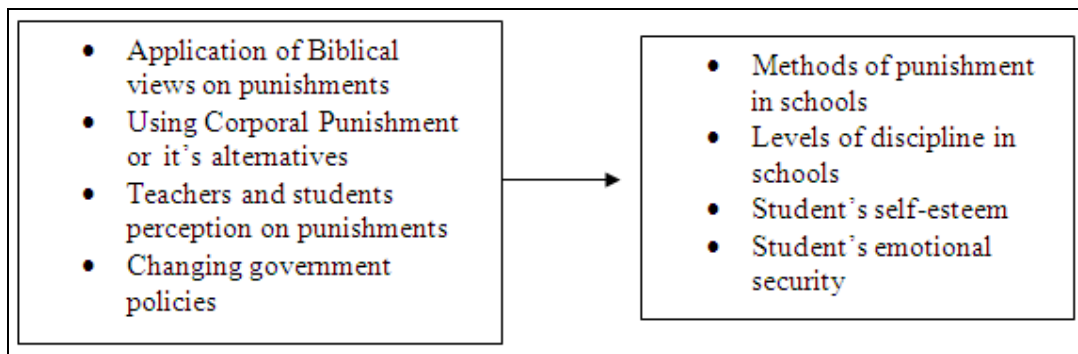


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework (Source – Gershoff, 2002)

The study adopted a comparative research design; the population target was 20 principals’, 288 teachers and 568 students in all public secondary schools. Random sampling was used in selecting the respondents for the study; data analysis procedure used was quantitative analysis methods. Quantitative data derived from the demographic section of the questionnaires from closed questions was analyzed using descriptive statistics that included the use of percentages and frequencies. The study established that there was high prevalence use of corporal punishment in religious schools than public schools. The study also established that most of the schools do not have guidance and counseling departments in schools.

The study was carried out in public secondary schools and Christian secondary schools in Bomet County. Random sampling was used in selecting the respondents that were used in the study, according to Borg and Gall (1989), a sample size of any study should be based on what a researcher considers being statistical and practicable. Random sampling was used in selecting schools. This was to allow all members of the population to have an equal chance of being selected. For descriptive studies, 10% and above of the accessible population is enough for the entire study Mugenda and Mugenda (1999). It is ideal sample because it is large enough to serve as an adequate representation of the population about which the researcher wishes to generalize and small enough to be selected economically in terms of subject availability and expenses in both time and money.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretation

5.1. Forms of disciplinary measures used in secondary schools

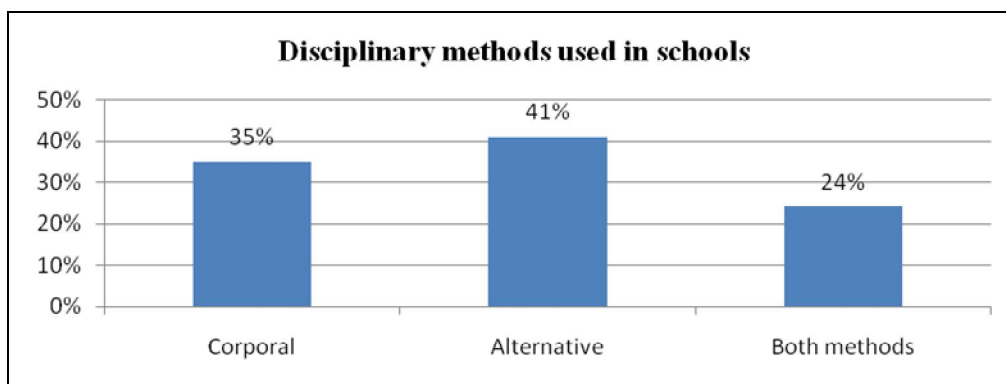


Figure 2: Disciplinary methods used in secondary schools

The above figure shows the types of disciplinary methods used in schools, the majority of the schools at 41% used alternative methods of disciplinary methods such as counseling, parent involvement, 35% of the schools use corporal punishment and a minority at 24% uses both methods. Corporal punishment and a combination of both corporal and alternative methods was very common among the schools Christian schools while in public schools alternative methods was very common as shown on the table below.

Disciplinary method	Public school		Christian school	
	Yes	%	No	%
Corporal punishment	1	34%	2	66%
Alternative methods	2	66%	1	34%
Both methods	1	50%	1	50%
Total	4		4	

Table 1: Disciplinary Methods

The above table shows that a majority of public schools at 66% favored alternative disciplinary methods while a majority of Christian schools favored corporal punishment. This could be attributed to the church stance in biblical interpretation. This concurs with the findings of (Greven, 1991) that the church and other religious schools derive their support of the corporal punishment in schools from the biblical interpretation while most government schools have argued that corporal punishment is against children rights and dignity.

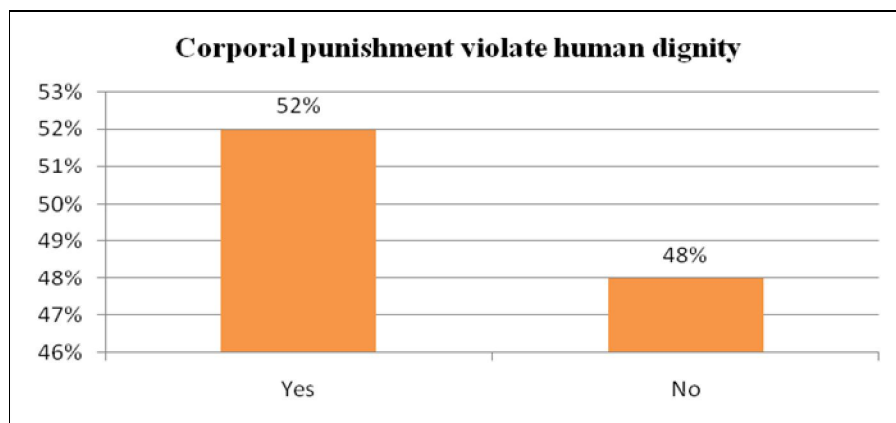


Figure 3: Corporal Punishment violates human dignity

The above figure shows that a majority of the respondents at 52% agrees that corporal punishment violates human dignity while a significant minority at 48% disagrees. The perhaps has negatively contributed in the government inability to eliminate this vice in schools. This confirms the argument by (Larzelere, 2000; Marion & Marian, 2007) that corporal punishment violates the fundamental principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child where human dignity is upheld. Awareness of such convections needs to be created for both the teachers and parents to understand children rights.

6. Data Analysis and Interpretation

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Several studies indicate that religious belief is a better predictor of corporal punishment than socioeconomic status (Karanja, 2005; Kohn, 2005; Joane, 2005). Features of the larger society, however, may shape religious beliefs or parenting practices. For example, rates of corporal punishment and of religious belief are high in the African-American community.

Corporal punishment as per the study, serves as negative model to the students, this concurs with the findings by (Kohn, 2005) who stated that punishment serves as a negative model for aggressive behavior for both the punished student and others. It actively demonstrates that the use of force is a method to reduce conflict. While possibly effective in the short run, in the long term it does not teach alternative problem-solving methods. Corporal punishment has been associated with school vandalism and juvenile delinquency.

The study found that most of the schools do not carry out an educational awareness programme to teacher the teachers and students on the effects of corporal punishment, this was in agreement with the findings by (Karanja, 2005) who argues that awareness of the problems associated with corporal punishment is low, and children, parents, or teachers who complain about corporal punishment still run a serious risk of facing ridicule or retaliation. This causes most to remain silent except in the face of particularly appalling abuses (Karanja, 2005).

The study established that even after causing seriously injuries to children in schools most of the teachers are not will to leave the vise, this was also confirmed by the findings of Karanja (2005) and Kemigisho (1996) argue although some teachers inflict severe forms of corporal punishment on students out of deliberate cruelty, probably the great majority of teachers genuinely intend to "educate" children by caning or whipping them. To the extent that children are seriously injured, many Kenyans are willing to

write such incidents off as tragic exceptions in a generally acceptable system, the result of the occasional sadistic teacher or of unfortunate but unavoidable accidents. Some teachers dismissed abuses by noting that serious injuries usually occurred only if a student disobediently thrust out an arm to ward off the cane, and thus ended up with a broken wrist or similar injury.

7. Discussion of Findings

The study found that corporal punishment serves as negative model to the students, this concurs with the findings by (Kohn, 2005) who stated that punishment serves as a negative model for aggressive behavior for both the punished student and others. It actively demonstrates that the use of force is a method to reduce conflict. While possibly effective in the short run, in the long term it does not teach alternative problem-solving methods. Corporal punishment has been associated with school vandalism and juvenile delinquency.

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The study established that corporal punishment results in worse behavior among the children rather than being corrective, this was confirmed by (Larzelere, 2000) who argues that corporal punishment is a destructive form of discipline that is ineffective in producing educational environments in which students can thrive. Rather than relying on harsh and threatening disciplinary tactics, schools and teachers should be encouraged to develop positive behavior supports (PBS), which have proven effective in reducing the need for harsh discipline while supporting a safe and productive learning environment (Bear, 2005).

According to (Larzelere, 2000) while teachers and parents may feel it is necessary for a child to experience pain in order to learn, a significant amount of research has shown to the contrary-that the use of corporal punishment may hinder learning, encourage or lead children to drop out of school, and generally undermine the purposes of education as articulated in article 29 of the convention, this was confirmed by the study that all participants.

The study found that use of positive rewards such as reinforcement and motivation reduces misbehavior among the children, this was confirmed by (Human Rights Watch, 1999) who argue that the use of positive reinforcement techniques reduces the frequency and extent of misbehavior. Human Rights Watch (2002) states that teachers can reward students in a variety of simple ways.

8. Conclusion

The prevalence of corporal punishment of children in schools remains high and more prevalent in religious governed schools in Bomet County. In spite of many education and other national groups calling for corporal punishment in schools to be banned, most of the schools remain to use corporal punishment among the students. This work is consistent with other research concluding that punished children become more rebellious and are more likely to demonstrate vindictive behavior (Coyl, Roggman, Newlan, 2002) seeking retribution against school officials and others in society. Punishment is based on aversive techniques and produces very limited results.

The use of corporal punishment is associated with increased mental health problems in children including increased psychological distress, which may lead to anxiety, depression, alcohol and drug use, and general psychological maladjustment in those to whom it is applied. Also, in addition to personal distress, it may lead to vicarious learning of maladaptive methods of problem resolution by those students who witness it.

Teachers reported that there were a lot of negative changes in students discipline with outlawing of corporal punishment among schools in Bomet County. They also reported that they face challenges in dealing with students' discipline in schools with the outlawing of corporal punishment. With lack of clear assessment records on the general effects of presence or absence corporal punishment, this study provides a necessary information to fill the existing gap of information. That is, banning of corporal punishment is not entirely the best way of ensuring discipline and the academic success of learners.

9. Recommendations: Negotiation for Integrative Modes of Discipline

- The study found that most of the schools do not have guidance and counseling departments in schools and therefore to cater for indiscipline correction among the student's schools must establish the department. The will help in ensuring that corrective measures are used in schools rather than punitive.
- The study recommends that schools should establish the culture of involving the parents in student indiscipline cases. The study also established that most of the schools do not involve the parents in correcting student's indiscipline cases, which enhances monitoring of students behavior at school and at home.
- The study also recommends that the government officials should be in contact with the schools in order obtain the information on corporal punishment in schools and prosecute the concerned violators.

- The study found out that more experienced teachers should be employed by the learning institutions to assist in guidance and counseling.
- The study recommends that banning of corporal punishment should be lifted and managed properly to avoid abuse.
- The researcher recommends a continuous involvement of all the school administrations in assessing the effectiveness of all the corrective tools used in their institutions. This will help them choose the best one/mix and may even customize them for a specific group of students.

10. Recommendations for Further Studies

The study recommends further studies in the following areas.

- The effectiveness of alternative methods to Corporal Punishment in managing students Discipline.
- Teaching of Life Skills as an alternative to corporal punishment in secondary schools in Kenya.
- Students' perception on the use of Guidance and Counseling as an alternative to corporal punishment.
- The effectiveness of modes of discipline in students' academic performance.

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