



Corporal punishment in Nigeria primary schools learning process: A moral issue

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Abstract

Moral awareness is a fundamental facet of human understanding. In spite of the traditionalist anchor of the biblical injunction of “Spare the rod and spoil the child”, it is necessary to examine the apparatuses adopted by the schools especially the primary schools to instill acceptable moral standards. The writer advocates the use of more modern methods of discipline.

Keywords: punishment, discipline, morality, learning

Introduction

Today as a result of population explosion through local urban immigration and proliferation of schools, we have those who advocate the western oriented and more modern idea of appealing to the conscience of the learner to the utter exclusion of corporal punishment. If we must hold to this philosophy, it is pertinent to evaluate corporal punishment in Nigerian schools as a moral issue, since it is construed as a main instrument used by the school to usher acceptable morality.

Moreover, as a philosophical discourse, we will rely on the analysis of data collected from philosophical works. To this regard, philosophical methodology can be classified into three interwoven and extricable meshed categories. All these methods in philosophy such as speculative, prescriptive and analytic will be adopted. Succinctly, to do justice to the topic, attention will be given to the analytical approach.

This analytical approach is the elucidation of the meaning of any concept, idea or unit of thought that we employ in seeking to understand ourselves and the world. We do this by reducing the concept or idea, breaking it down into more basic concepts that constitute it and thereby showing its relationship to a network of other concepts or discovering what the concept denotes (Hirst and White in Nziadem 2015) ^[3].

Punishment as a moral issue in Nigerian Primary Schools can be approached either of the following ways:

- i) Punishment as a means of ensuring moral standard or
- ii) Corporal punishment as an instrument of ensuring that in schools it can be carried out as a moral act. Above all three criteria must be satisfied if we are to establish a case of corporal punishment:
 - It must involve the intentional infliction of pain.
 - This pain must be inflicted on the offender as a consequence of breach of rules
 - It must be inflicted by someone in authority

For the purpose of this discussion, the criteria shall be how corporal punishment can be used without attracting criticism

(s) and the same time serve as a means of ushering acceptable morality, bearing in mind that punishment is a tool used by schools to guarantee morality is often associated to various criticisms.

Conceptual Definition of Terms

The system used in the definition of terms of this study is the “connotation definition” which assigns meanings to the variables or terms within the context of this research. This analytical approach of corporal punishment: some scholars restrict punishment to corporal punishment. To the layman, punishment may mean the administration or infliction of some degree of pain as a means of paying for the wrong he/she has done. Punishment according to Peters (1978) ^[5] implies “the infliction of pain to the guilty. Lalu (as cited in Iwundu, 2005) ^[2] ascertains if “the infliction of pain through canning or corporal punishment on an academic failure, a misbehaving learner, an appropriate corrective measure? Is corporal punishment an indispensable element in the process of learning? This notwithstanding, our guide in defining it shall be based on the following criteria:

- 1) Punishment must be merited
- 2) It must impact positively on the victim
- 3) It may be punitive or non-punitive in nature.

Going by these provisions and its relationship to morals, it should be better understood as the denial of certain rights and privileges against a victim with the primary target of enabling him/her exhibit cherishable behaviour. When corporal punishment is rationally and purposefully used, it becomes a powerful instrument in character building of many children. In agreement, Peters (1978) ^[5] opined that “of the usual forms of punishment, the cane is probably the most effective as a deterrent.

Discipline

There are some terms such as “Order”, “Control”, “Authority” and punishment that are frequently used with discipline.

Etymologically, the term 'discipline' can be traced to its Latin origin 'disciplina' which means a pupil or student. It connotes the science of one under the feet of the "Master" the teacher. It means "disciple"-Greek "discipulus". The disciple is schooled in, and by the words and deeds of the master, in the virtues, attitudes and refinement of the sages.

Abraham in Nziadem sees discipline as a system of arranging condition for healthy living and learning, conforming to established societal norms (Nziadem, 2015) [3]. Here, a considerable degree of force to compel obedience to authority, rules and regulations is applied. This type of discipline arises from our wise judgment on right and wrong, good and bad, which repudiate force and punishment.

It suffices to say that discipline in this paper has to do with a condition devoid of chaos and disorderliness which paves ways for the teaching and learning process to be effective.

Morality

To Plato, the education of the whole man involves the education of the man's morality, here is the sense of right and wrong in human behaviour. Morality is the awareness that good should be done and encouraged while evil should be avoided.

At the school level, punishment is necessarily an improvement types of situation and because the punishment meted out is seldom of very drastic sort we have to consider that when corporal punishment is rationally and purposefully used becomes a powerful instrument in the character building of many children. The attainment of decorum is known as one of the principal problems facing human relationship. The ultimate functions of punishment can be summed into three as follows:

- 1) To usher reforms: Primarily the target of any corporal punishment in schools is to free the system from overt and covert distortion tendencies. This implies that those who hunger or participate in criminal conducts such as bullying, drinking alcohol, truancy etc shall desist perhaps not due to their innate abilities but sequel to the nature and degree of punishment to culprits by the school authority.
- 2) Appeasement: Morality demands that when a standard is violated in an institution or a place punishment need to be administered in other to maintain law and order.
- 3) Deterrent: One important role of punishment in ensuring moral among members of the school is to determine chances for future reoccurrence.

Various views on the use of corporal punishment in the maintenance of discipline has for a long being a subject of debate. Many people are of the opinion that:

- 1) Frequent and severe use of the cane scare children from school as Flake in Anero succinctly puts it "We have observed reports from parents that the number of pupils playing truancy in school is on the increase. In some cases the children say their teachers beat them often".
- 2) Because of the bodily injury that may be involved the education law does not allow every teacher to administer corporal punishment.
- 3) Children could adapt to canning thus rendering it ineffective as an instrument of correction.

Conclusion

From all indication Corporal punishment should be the last resort. It does not improve academic performance rather it scares the children. The head teacher alone should be the only one to administer corporal punishment. Schools should adopt other methods of administering discipline to the children.

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