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Assessing the Implementation of School Discipline Policy In Ghanaian Basic Schools

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Abstract

As part of the effort to create safer and more protective learning environments in Ghanaian schools, the Ghana Education Service in 2017 officially banned all forms of corporal punishment and required teachers to adopt a positive discipline toolkit based on a manual prescribed as an alternative to corporal punishment. This study sought to investigate the implementation of the alternative positive discipline policy in the basic schools of Ghana. The study utilized qualitative research approach to gather data from 15 teachers through semi-structured interviews. Based on thematic analysis, the study showed that the teachers used many discipline methods per the policy on school discipline. They included writing lines, manual work, physical punishments, time-out periods, classroom rules, appointment and withdrawal of positions, and counselling to manage students' behavior. The study, however, found that teachers perceive the positive discipline methods to be ineffective in managing students' behavior compared to the use of corporal punishment. The implication drawn from the study was that despite the use of some alternative discipline methods

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by the teachers, they have not abandoned all forms of corporal punishments in schools. The study therefore recommended, among other things, that school leaders and other authorities institute surveillance and monitoring systems to check violators and sanction teachers who refuse to employ the non-violent discipline methods prescribed by the Ghana Education Service.

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Introduction

School safety issues have become a topical discussion in education because of the need to make the school more effective and improve learning experiences of all learners (Gagnon et al., 2021). School authorities must ensure that the school environment is psychologically, socially and physically safe from threats, harassment or harm in all parts of the school (Bastable et al., 2021; Heekes et al., 2022). This is in recognition that the degree of feeling safe inside schools shapes the learners' educational behavior such as commitment to school attendance and the progress in their educational achievement (Abusamra et al., 2021; Quail & Ward, 2022). Similarly, feeling safe at school is found to be associated with enhanced classroom engagement, academic success, and overall student well-being (Durrant & Ensom, 2017; Heekes et al., 2022). Consequently, the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outline the need to end all forms of abuse, torture, and violence against children (Target 16.2), with a particular focus on learning environments in schools (Target 4a) (United Nations, 2016).

Despite the global call and declaration to develop safe schools, there is evidence that many schools across the globe subject students to different forms of corporal punishments as a behavior management strategy (Matofari, 2021; Quail & Ward, 2022). Corporal punishment relies on harsh punitive measures to establish deterrence of undesirable behavior (Mendenhall et al., 2021). Examples of such punishment include spanking, hitting, pinching, squeezing, smacking, scratching, slapping, making a child kneel on painful objects, and forcing a child to stand or sit in painful positions for long periods of time (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, 2018). According to Agbenyega (2006), corporal punishment has over the years been an accepted form of punishing students in Ghana. It compelled students to learn and improve their academic standards and also assisted them to be conformists and morally upright (Yeboah, 2020).

That notwithstanding, corporal punishment can have dire and enduring consequences on children across many domains (Heekes et al., 2022), including academic, emotional, and social lives of the students (Gershoff et al., 2017; Mahlangu et al., 2021). Research has established that continuously exposing children to corporal punishment makes them repeat offences and may become incorrigible and more entrenched in deviant behavior (Heekes et al., 2022). Moreover, there is evidence that violence against children feeds violence in the wider society (Quail & Ward, 2022), fosters aggression (Gershoff et al., 2017), and harms the mental and behavioral development of children (Betancourt & Khan, 2008).

As part of the effort to create safer and more protective learning environments in Ghanaian schools, the Ghana Education Service (GES) in 2017 officially banned all forms of corporal punishment occurring at

the basic (i.e., kindergarten, primary, and junior high) and senior high school levels. Instead, the GES directed that a Positive Discipline Toolkit manual which gives alternatives to corporal punishments be adopted by all teachers (Kuwornu, 2019). The new policy aimed at inculcating desired behavior into school children through participatory approaches, promoting mutual respect between the teacher and student, and employing reformative responses to misbehavior that commensurate offences (Gunu, 2019; Yeboah, 2020).

However, after five years of its implementation (i.e., 2017 to 2022), no information was available to show the teachers had a training to implement the policy. Also, no record showed that the policy was reviewed since its inception. Our literature search revealed that no study had been conducted to determine the success or otherwise of the policy. The situation appears to create a gap in the extant literature. The preoccupation in the current study was to fill the void and contribute to knowledge in the field of leadership and policy in schools. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. What positive disciplinary methods are employed by teachers to manage students' behavior following the ban on corporal punishment in schools?
2. How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of the policy on school discipline?

Although corporal punishment was prevalent at both basic and secondary education levels, this study focused on the former because learners at that stage are within the formative period of life, requiring much attention to avoid delinquency in later years. The study was necessary considering that the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has banned corporal punishment and required

all nations to take all appropriate measures to ensure that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's human dignity and in conformity with the present Convention (Kumar et al., 2022). Thus, if Ghana has abolished corporal punishment in schools and has directed all teachers to employ positive disciplinary strategies, it would be instructive to investigate how the policy directive has been implemented in schools. Doing so may complement the government's effort at eliminating corporal punishment and foster the use of positive discipline methods to create a safe school environment for all students.

Research context: The school discipline policy of Ghana

In 2017, the Ghana Education Service (GES) introduced a school discipline policy for implementation at the basic and secondary levels of education. With the support of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Service developed a set of tools for implementing positive discipline in schools (Kuwornu, 2019; Yeboah, 2020). The positive toolkit offers options for effectively applying positive discipline for different forms of misbehavior and proposes suitable proactive or reactive measures for addressing them (Coverghana.com.gh, 2022).

The positive toolkit has four levels (Coverghana.com.gh, 2022; Gunu, 2019; Kuwornu, 2019). At level one (creating a disciplined environment), school leaders and teachers spell out rules and set expectations for students. They are also supposed to express approval of and encourage good behavior and set an environment of mutual respect that recognizes teachers' authority. The prescribed disciplinary methods at this level include a classroom rule book, notice board poster, encouragement, and classroom behavior statement.

At level two, which concerns early detection/intervention, school leaders and teachers institute non-punitive actions intended to remind students of standards of behavior and expectations and the importance of conforming to them. Teachers investigate the reasons behind the identified misbehavior or the conditions that encouraged it to address. Strategies to be employed include an explanation, caution, agreement, and student behavior log.

At level three (repeated/more serious offences), schools institute corrective measures to draw attention to the severity of offences if they are repeated severally. The teacher at this level must combine deterring measures with counselling, agreements, and consistent follow-ups on the student's response to the actions taken. Finally, at level four, where students engage in chronic, dangerous, and disruptive behavior, schools are expected to institute rehabilitative measures such as inviting other members of the school administration and the child's family to support in the assessment of the child's behavior and determination of an appropriate response. Tools such as reflection period, writing lines, cleaning, designated seating position, and extra tasks are prescribed for level three, while withdrawing a responsibility, letter to parents, parent-teacher meeting, counselling, and daily report are prescribed in level four.

Literature Review

Due to the harmful physical, mental, and behavioral effects of corporal punishments on students (Gershoff et al., 2017; Yeboah, 2020) and the lack of evidence that corporal punishments make school safer and increase students' academic achievement (Heekes et al., 2022), there is a global push for the use of alternative positive disciplinary strategies to manage students' misbehavior in schools. These

alternative disciplinary approaches provide a more supportive environment for behavioral management and guide the behavior of students by paying attention to their emotional and psychological needs (Gagnon et al., 2021). They provide support services for students to address their specific needs and help them to take responsibility for making good decisions and understanding why those decisions are in their best interests (Crawford & Burns, 2020). Several alternative disciplinary strategies have been highlighted in the literature and they include behavior education plan, conflict resolution, guidance and counselling, detention and in-school suspension, and social and emotional learning (Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018).

The behavioral education plan requires that an assigned staff member engages with a student twice daily, before and after classes (Goodman-Scott, 2013; Quail & Ward, 2022). The students, following a behavioral analysis and assessment, is expected to maintain a daily progress report on his/her behavior which would be rated and commented by the teachers and to signed by parents at home each day. The students then receive a reward during the day's end check-out when they behave adequately all day based on the school's code of conduct. Another alternative disciplinary strategy employed in managing misbehavior in school is guidance and counselling which assist students to acquire self-regulation skills through the exploration of emotions, motives, consequences of behavior, and positive reinforcement of good behavior (Gunu, 2019; Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018). Exploring the alternative disciplinary methods used by teachers in Nyeri Central Sub-County in Kenya, Kagoiya, Kimosop, & Kagema (2017) found that majority of the teachers used guidance and counselling as a method of instilling discipline.

Other studies have advocated praising and encouraging students for appropriate behaviors and systematic reinforcement for progress; home contact which involves calling home and explaining to the students' parent(s) exactly what happened and seek support in helping the child succeed in school; maintaining a stimulating and active class environment; encouraging students' autonomy by allowing them to think for themselves, and to monitor their own behavior and letting their conscience guide them; allowing children to participate in setting rules and identify consequences for breaking them which will empower them to learn how to manage their own behavior; teaching students conflict resolution and mediations skills, including listening actively, speaking clearly, showing trust and being trustworthy, accepting differences, setting group goals, negotiating, and mediating conflicts; detention/time-out and removing privileges; manual punishment; and establishing a reinforcement system which involves positive reinforcement systems used by individual teachers to reward proper behavior (Gunu, 2019; Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018; Prins et al., 2019; Quail & Ward, 2022).

The perceived effectiveness of the alternative disciplinary strategies in managing students' misbehavior and maintaining discipline in schools has been explored in some African context. Generally, results from these studies show that the use of alternative disciplinary strategies in maintaining discipline in schools remain problematic, ineffective, time consuming, and further complicate the issue of disciplining students in schools (Maphosa & Shumba, 2010; Matofari, 2021; Mayisela, 2021; Nene, 2013). Other studies further found that alternatives to corporal punishment have negatively affected discipline at schools because learners no longer fear the consequences of engaging in disruptive behavior (Moyo et al., 2014;

Mtswevi, 2008; Nene, 2013). Mtswevi (2008) observed that after the banning of corporal punishment in schools in South Africa, most educators felt powerless, incapacitated, and helpless in dealing with learner indiscipline in schools. In other instances, learners take advantage of educators since they know that the punishment given, may not be equal to the pain of corporal punishment (Agesa, 2015; Mayisela, 2021).

Theoretical framework: Behavioural Theory

This study is grounded in the behavioural theory to behaviour management which assumes that learned challenging behaviours can be unlearned and replaced with positive behaviours (Browne, 2013; Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018). The focus of behavioural theory is therefore to reinforce positive behaviour and eliminate challenging behaviours through rewards and punishments (Browne, 2013; Quail & Ward, 2022). According to the behaviour theory, while children will repeat a behaviour if it is being rewarded, they are less likely to repeat a behaviour if sanctions are issued (Gershoff et al., 2017; Heekes et al., 2022). Educators reward desired behaviour with praise and enjoyable prizes and punish undesirable behaviour by withholding all rewards. Behaviours that are followed by positive consequences increase their frequency and probability of occurrence. The researchers considered the theory relevant to the study because teachers in Ghanaian basic schools are used to corporal punishment as a discipline strategy, until the recent ban, and thus it is probable that they would resort to other forms of punitive punishments other than caning as well as rewards to achieve desired behaviour in students following the ban on corporal punishments.

Method

Research approach & setting

To gain insights into the alternative disciplinary measures employed by teachers following the ban on corporal punishment in Ghanaian basic schools, the study utilized the qualitative research approach. We conducted the study guided by the assertion that qualitative researchers are interested in studying human beings in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The approach was deemed appropriate for the research problem investigated in the study as it allowed participants to describe the nature of alternative disciplinary measures they employed in their context and settings.

Research setting

The study was conducted in selected basic schools in the La Nkwantanang-Madina Municipal Assembly of the Greater Accra region of Ghana. The La Nkwantanang-Madina Municipality is one of the 29 districts in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana with an estimated population of 244676 comprising of 123830 females (50.6%) and 120846 males (49.4%) (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). Almost 36% of the economically active segment of the population in the Municipality are engaged in commerce. The Municipality has 21 Kindergartens, 61 primary schools, 53 Junior High Schools (JHS), and two Senior High Schools in the public school system with 1,426 teachers (La Nkwantanang-Madina Municipal Assembly, 2020). The study was conducted in this municipality because as part of its strategic plan, it aims to improve equitable access to education, quality of education, and education management in all their schools (La Nkwantanang-

Madina Municipal Assembly, 2020). To achieve this, it is expected that educational leaders and teachers would create a safe and violent-free school environment for the learners through an effective implementation of the prescribed alternative discipline methods in all schools.

Sample and sampling techniques

The researchers employed convenience sampling strategy to select five public basic schools in the Municipality. Considering that all basic schools in Ghana are mandated to employ the positive discipline strategies and reframe from using corporal punishment as a discipline strategy, the researchers assumed that any basic school in the municipality could be selected to assess the implementation of the policy in an exploratory study. It is anticipated that such exploratory study could inform future studies to draw larger sample to inform policy on discipline in schools.

With reference to the selection of the study participants, we employed purposive sampling technique. The selection criteria were that the selected teachers should have been in active service prior to the ban of the corporal punishment as a discipline strategy. The goal of sampling in qualitative studies is to select cases to learn a great deal about issues of great importance to the purpose of the research (Patton, 2002). The rationale therefore was to gain insight from teachers who had possibly employed corporal punishment as a discipline method prior to the ban and had thus gained enormous experiences in dealing with disciplinary actions both before and after the ban. By employing the eligibility criteria in the selected schools, 45 teachers qualified to participate in the study out of the total number of 63 teachers (Table 1). We further employed convenience sampling method to select three qualified participants from each school based on their availability and

willingness to participate in the research but on a first-come, first-served basis (Luborsky & Rubinstein, 1995).

Table 1.

Breakdown of participants according to their schools

Name of school	Number of teachers	Number of teacher eligible	Number of teachers selected
School A	11	8	3
School B	13	10	3
School C	12	7	3
School D	13	11	3
School E	14	9	3

Data collection method and procedure

We gathered data through face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The one-on-one semi-structured interviews enabled the participants to freely express themselves and to provide privacy. It further enabled the researchers to follow-up on answers given by the participants and to observe the body languages of participants. All the interviews were conducted by one of the research team in each of the seven schools. In order not to disrupt school activities, the interviews were conducted after school hours. We designed an interview guide based on the literature we reviewed, the positive toolkit prescribed by the GES, and our experiences as practitioners in the education sector of Ghana. After seeking the consent of the participants, we digitally recorded each interview session which lasted between 30 - 45 minutes. The interview strategy enabled the researchers to elicit from participants detailed information about their experiences and opinions

on the use of positive discipline methods and the challenges encountered in maintaining discipline following the ban on corporal punishment. Some key questions employed include: what disciplinary methods do you use to ensure discipline in your classroom? What challenges do you face in dealing with student indiscipline in your school? What challenges do you face in implementing the positive disciplinary methods in managing student misbehaviour? How effective is the alternative discipline methods in addressing student misbehavior in your school? Probing and follow-up questions were used to seek for clarification from interviewees.

Ethical considerations

To meet ethical requirements, we sought permission from the education directorate and principals of the selected schools. We also ensured that each participant verbally consented to participate in the research. We informed them their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any stage. We also guaranteed the privacy and anonymity of the participants by not revealing their real names or identity; thus, acronyms (T1 – T15) were used for all the participants. Finally, we sought the consent of the participants before we recorded each interview session.

Trustworthiness and reliability

To ensure rigor, we reflected on our position before the start of the research and assumed the outsider position because we intended to detach ourselves from the data. Further, we used member checking, where after transcribing the interviews, we gave participants the transcript to verify if the notes reflected an account of what took place. We also used the peer debriefing technique and allowed three colleagues to review the entire research report before journal

submission. We again utilised the thick description strategy by providing a detailed account of the various steps used in the study.

Data analysis

To analyze the data gathered for the study, thematic analysis technique was chosen as it was best suited to the research problem investigated. This analytical technique aimed at identifying, organizing, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data (Cohen et al., 2007; Silverman, 2010). First, data generated were transcribed verbatim and manually by the researchers and read through several times for familiarity. While doing this, the researchers made notes about initial ideas (codes) whilst looking out for commonalities. The researchers then organized the codes into descriptive categories and finally into the two broad themes derived from the two research questions that guided the study. For example, codes such as 'cleaning', 'pick around', 'sweeping' and 'empty dustbins' were put under the category 'manual work' while codes such as 'ask to stand', 'kneeling down', 'raise your hand', and 'stand at the back' were put under the category 'physical punishment'. These two descriptive categories (manual work and physical punishment) were put under the first theme 'Alternative disciplinary strategies of teachers'. Direct quotations of interviewees' views were used to enhance credibility and authenticity of findings.

Results

To present the results, we have categorized the data into two broad thematic areas in line with our research objectives, namely alternative disciplinary strategies of teachers and teachers' perceptions of effectiveness of the policy on school discipline.

Alternative disciplinary strategies of teachers

The analysis of participants' responses to the implementation strategies of the policy on school discipline led to the use of writing lines, manual work, physical punishments, time-out periods, classroom rules and consequences, appointment and withdrawal of positions, and counselling. Table 2 presents the number and details of respondents associated with each of the themes and sub-themes.

Table 2.

Respondents associated with each theme and sub-themes

Theme 1: Alternative disciplinary strategies of teachers		
Sub-theme	**Number of participants**	**Details of participants**
Writing lines	11	T-1, T-3, T-4, T-5, T-6, T-7, T-9, T-10, T-11, T-12, T-14
Manual work	11	T-1, T-3, T-4, T-5, T-6, T-7, T-9, T-11, T-12, T-13, T-14
Physical punishment	11	T-1, T-3, T-4, T-5, T-6, T-7, T-9, T-11, T-12, T-13, T-14
Time-out	9	T-4, T-5, T-6, T-7, T-9, T-11, T-12, T-13, T-14
Classroom rules and consequences	12	T-1, T-3, T-4, T-5, T-6, T-7, T-9, T-10, T-11, T-12, T-13, T-14
Appointment and removal from positions	8	T-3, T-4, T-5, T-9, T-10, T-11, T-12, T-13
Counselling	12	T-1, T-3, T-4, T-5, T-6, T-7, T-9, T-10, T-11, T-12, T-13, T-14
Pupils conversant with the cane	12	T-1, T-2, T-4, T-5, T-6, T-7, T-8, T-9, T-10, T-11, T-12, T-15
Theme 2: Teachers' perceptions of effectiveness of the policy on school discipline		

Sub-theme	Number of participants	Details of participants
Pupils conversant with the cane	12	T-1, T-2, T-4, T-5, T-6, T-7, T-8, T-9, T-10, T-11, T-12, T-15
Do not generate immediate result	11	T-3, T-4, T-5, T-6, T-7, T-9, T-10, T-11, T-12, T-13, T-14
Affect the power and reverence of teachers	13	T-1, T-2, T-4, T-5, T-6, T-8, T-9, T-10, T-11, T-12, T-13, T-14, T-15
Affecting instructional time	10	T-2, T-5, T-6, T-8, T-9, T-10, T-11, T-12, T-13, T-14
Affect the academic performance of pupils	8	T-4, T-5, T-8, T-9, T-11, T-13, T-14, T-15
Increasing workload of teachers	14	T-1, T-2, T-3, T-4, T-5, T-6, T-8, T-9, T-10, T-11, T-12, T-13, T-14, T-15

Result obtained from eleven participants showed that writing lines is one of the alternative discipline methods that the teachers employed to reprimand misbehaving students. According to them, the practice involved asking misbehaving students to write many lines of a single word or sentence, sometimes to fill a whole exercise book. For instance, T-3 indicated that "… we make them write sentences. Depending on the severity of the offence, sometimes they write 100 lines or 200 lines with good handwriting". T-1 used the same disciplinary method but in a different manner as evidenced in the following extract:

> *We've been using so many disciplinary measures such as the writing lines method. For instance, if a child is late to school, his/her punishment can be to take a sheet and write "I will come to school early always" … I make the offender write what he or she ought to have done right several times and present to me.*

Some interviewees also reported that by using this strategy,

they asked misbehaving students form words out of bigger words. In her own words, T-5 said that:

> *Another thing that I have practised is to write on a manila card, any word, but words not familiar to the pupils … a little above their level. So, if a child misbehaves in class, the child goes to pick that word and sits in a corner alone to write a number of words that can come out of that bigger word.*

However, the interviewees were of the view that the pupils regarded the writing of lines as an activity easy to perform, making it appear they were not penalised.

Aside from writing method, twelve participants employed manual work such as cleaning, littering, weeding, sweeping, and scrubbing in place of the defunct corporal punishment. The teachers made offending pupils to clean the school compound. For example, T-7 noted that "I engage them in grounds work such as weeding, sweeping, and picking around. If they don't want to be useful in the class, they can be useful outside the class". T-11 adopted a similar disciplinary method and made her pupils "… clean classroom louvres or scrap the washrooms. The teachers' concern with this disciplinary method is that it cannot be meted out during instructional hours.

The third disciplinary method that eleven teachers used to correct erring pupils was physical punishments such as kneeling, sitting on the floor, standing in class, and carrying placards or weaving snail shells on the neck. Teachers reported that they asked students who misbehave to kneel down in the classroom for about 15 minutes. Alternatively, they may instruct their pupils to stand for a while. Interviewees however argued that this approach did not address classroom misbehavior as some recalcitrant pupils used the

opportunity to distract the class. According to the teachers, while some pupils made funny jokes, others made gimmicks, inducing their colleagues to laugh loudly during lessons. Some participants also reported that they asked misbehaving students to carry placards or weaved snail shells on their neck for some time. It emerged that misbehaving students could carry the placards or weaved snail shells on their neck for a whole day or for the period of a lesson until another teacher comes for the next lesson.

Time-out was the fourth disciplinary method employed by nine participants to manage learner-deviant behavior. Based on the technique, pupils found guilty were required to stay in a quiet place and reflect on their conducts for some time, after which they were invited to report on how they felt being there alone and whether they would repeat the deviant behavior. Narrating how she implemented the method, T-7 revealed the following:

> *… when pupils fight in my class, I take them out to sit under a tree alone. After some time, I invite them to tell me how they feel about the loneliness. After listening to them, I ask if they are happy to repeat the behavior that brought them the punishment. Usually, the reply is a no, so I use the opportunity to advise them and ask them to check on others who fight in class and report them to me. With that duty, they check themselves to make sure no one else fight and they are very critical in ensuring that they behave well.*

Other interviewees reported that during the breaktime, the misbehaving students are made to remain in the class, sit there quietly and reflect over their conducts.

Fifth, setting classroom rules and consequences for violating the rules emerged as an alternative discipline strategy employed by

twelve teachers in managing students' behavior. Participants reported that students under the guidance of their teachers have set classroom rules such as: return from break on time; do not bring food or water to class; do not eat in class; no singing and dancing in class; do not go out without permission from your teacher or class prefect; and do not sleep in class. Similarly, some of the corresponding punishments for violating those rules were: scrub the urinal after school; you will make the louvres clean/clean white board after class; pick refuse/sweep class after school; scrub the toilet for three days; wear placard and pick rubbish; wear snail shell chain; and read and answer three passages. According to the interviewees, students are collectively involved in the formation of classroom rules and thus they actively support their implementation. T-12, for example, indicated that:

> *Students make rules by themselves under the guidance of the class teacher. We put them into groups, like four-member groups, and then they will discuss it among themselves. They discuss the offence and then decide on the appropriate punishment if it is repeated for a number of times. They will do all these things and then we come together as a class, then each group comes to present their possible offences and then the punishment…. Then those that the whole class will agree on with the help of the teacher, they will paste them on the wall to guide them in their day-to-day class activities.*

Interviewees reported that once a student violate any rule, he or she is called to the board to read the offence and its corresponding punishment. The student is then given the punishment and the entire class monitor and follow up on the culprit to ensure that he or she does the punishment.

The sixth disciplinary method the teachers employed to correct deviant behavior of pupils was appointment and removal from

leadership positions. Out of the 15 participants in the study, eight participants utilized this as an alternative discipline strategy. The result showed that there were instances when teachers purposely appointed misbehaving students to hold leadership positions to reform them. The following excerpt is a participant's explanation of how he appointed a truant pupil to a leadership position change his habit:

> *What we have been doing is, if a child misbehaves a lot, we invite the child and assign him or her a role with the intention that he or she will change his attitude. An example was a child who was absent for several days from school and his parents reported him to the school. What we did was to assign a role to the child to be the class prefect which made him to always come to school. He realized that if he didn't come to school, the class prefect position will be taken away from him. We realized that he enjoyed being the class prefect so now he's been coming to school all the time. [T-9]*

According to the data, apart from appointments, the teachers also chose to revoke the appointment of pupil leaders as punishment for committing grievous offences and deterring other students. Participants reported that, in some instances they revoked the appointment for a short period of time and then re-instated them when they realize a change in behavior. However, there were other instances where the appointment was revoked forever, and the position given to someone else.

The last prescribed disciplinary method employed by twelve teacher-participants of this research to correct deviant pupil behavior was counselling. According to the teachers, they engaged misbehaving pupils in one-on-one or group counselling. However, when their efforts failed to yield results, they referred the culprits to the school

disciplinary committee, the school management committee (SMC), or the executive of parent-teacher associations. Using counselling as a behavior management strategy, the interviewees noted that they investigated and probed on what could explain the students' misbehavior. They used the opportunity to understand the misbehavior and ascertained whether the problems that the student may be facing at home could be a contributory factor to his or her deviant behavior. For example, T-4 commented that:

> *Sometimes when the students come to school, you could see from their behavior in the classroom, that some may be having other challenges from the house, like monetary issues and may be sometimes they don't even eat at home before they come to school. If you don't investigate further, you may unjustifiably punish the student without really solving the problem. We employ counselling in such situations to understand the misbehavior of students better. So, when they are misbehaving in school, we even call for the parents to enquire more about what is happening in the house to really understand the child's behavior.*

Teachers' perceptions of effectiveness of the policy on school discipline

This section presents results on the perceived effectiveness of the positive discipline methods in managing students' behavior in their schools. Overall, twelve interviewees indicated that the positive discipline techniques have not been effective in managing students' behavior. They argued that most children are conversant with the cane and act appropriately only when they see it. For example, T-8 observed that "I do not use the prescribed toolkits because students are so conversant with the cane that it is the only thing that would make them listen". T- 2 echoed that "to be honest with you, I do not really use these

methods. I only use the cane whenever they do wrong in the classroom". T-15 added that "the method is so new to us, and the students are much more disciplined when the cane is around". According to them, prior to the ban on corporal punishment, students were more composed in and out of the classroom because they knew that they would be caned should they misbehave. However, after the ban, these same students have become unbothered of what punishment may be given to them because they are aware that whatever the case, the cane they feared so much will not be used on them. Some participants argued that the alternative discipline method is not effective because it is not in alignment with the African culture, thus their preference for corporal punishment. T- 10, for example, argued that:

> *I would say this is not our culture, you see this in somewhere in Europe. The corporal punishment is the African culture, it is the Ghanaian culture. It makes them very attentive to instruction. So, this new method is not really effective.*

Thus, most participants believed that students best obey when they are aware that they will be canned should they misconduct themselves.

Eleven participants further indicated that unlike the corporal punishment, most of the positive disciplinary methods do not generate immediate results as the cane did. T-11 lamented the situation, saying "… with the corporal punishment, immediately, you are able to correct the child right there. The child is right aware of the reason why he/she is being punished." They added that it did not generate immediate results because aspects of it were performed in most Ghanaian homes by children as routine duties. As a result, their pupils did not recognize them as punishment to correct deviance. In the view of T-14, "... most

of the methods prescribed in the new policy rarely cause any pain, and thus the essence of the punishment is not achieved… children take it as normal things that go on at home."

Moreover, thirteen participants spoke about how the positive disciplinary method has somewhat taken away the power and reverence that comes with the teaching profession. Thus, making students indifferent about their attitude towards their teachers and academics in general. T-8 commented that:

> *Children do not take us serious anymore when it comes to discipline. They do not take us serious anymore with some of these alternative ways of disciplining them. For instance, you are teaching, and the child is misbehaving in the class, and you ask them to come and sit in front of the class. You think it is a way of curving the disturbance. The student would sit down and be doing something to make the other students laugh. And this is a whole thing all together. The GES is telling us there is always a way but meanwhile they know very well it is the corporal punishment which was effective during their days as students.*

T-10 echoed that:

> *Students don't respect us these days. That is why indiscipline in our schools have been on the rise. … A child can stand in front of you and talk to you as if you are equals, because they know you cannot hit them with the cane. You try to hit them, and they tell you 'I will take you to the police station or social media'. Just last week a teacher tried using the cane, and the student told him point blank he would take the teacher to the police station. So, most teachers now do not care how you behave; at the end of the month, I will get my pay. Whatever way*

you want to behave it is not our problem; it is between you and your parents.

Ten interviewees from the study also mentioned that the alternative disciplinary methods require supervision and monitoring thereby affecting instructional hours. According to them, they prepare their lesson plan or scheme of work for a designated period of time but because of the fact that there has to be supervision when they issue out punishments using the alternative discipline methods, the schedule hours assigned for their lessons do not suffice. This makes teachers not to finish up with the work scheme on time. According to them, this affects the learning objective because even though they do not finish the syllabus on time, they still have to set questions on it, and this makes the work so difficult. For example, T-15 noted that:

It takes us back in so many ways because you prepare your scheme of work for this term. I have about 23 weeks and I expect to complete about 12 topics. If they fail to adhere to some of these instructions and they take us back, some topics that's supposed to take us 2 weeks will take us 3 weeks. How will we end up completing the whole setup for the particular semester?"

Again, eight interviewees disclosed that the alternative methods of discipline really affect the academic performance of some of the students. They observed that because there is no infliction of pain, some students do not really find the urgency to study, and they do whatever that they want. And this in turn affect their academic performance. T-4 noted that "this disciplinary method is really affecting students' academic performance. Because they learn when they want to. And it's really bringing down the overall academic achievement. T-14 also added that:

> *It really affecting them, but they think that they have the freedom now to do whatever they want. Because as I said, discipline goes with performance so if you do not want to be disciplined, you cannot perform… they would not study because they know after all there is nothing you can do to them other than making them write lines. Recently there was a mock exam for the form 3s and the highest in my subject was 63 percent. And this was the best student, you can imagine what the others would get.*

Others commented that since they are not applying the cane, they sack misbehaving students from their class which affect them academically. T-13, for example, commented that "the moment I walk you out, it doesn't mean I'm going to stop teaching. I'm going to continue the lesson. So irrespective of your state if you are a bad student it will go against you".

Finally, fourteen interviewees complained how this new method of discipline has really increased their workload. They argued that this is so because whatever discipline method they are employing is being supervised and they have to ensure that students have really done what they are supposed to do very well. T-1 commented that:

> *As I am saying, you tell the child to write lines and you have to go through the sentences to see if there are mistakes. That is another work. I am a math teacher and now I have to go through the English work. I cannot give it to an English teacher to go through and mark for me. I cannot do that because they also have their own work to do. So that is another work for us. But with corporal punishment when a child misbehaves you call them and give them some lashes and they go back and sit. No need for any double attention.*

Discussion

This study sought to explore how teachers at the basic level of education in Ghana implemented a new policy on school discipline following the ban on corporal punishment in pre-tertiary schools. The results have shown that teachers used many disciplinary methods to manage pupil indiscipline behavior per the prescriptions in the policy (see the section on Research Context). Many of the prescribed discipline methods support extant literature advocating non-violent discipline measures to create safer learning environments for children, especially in the developing world (Gagnon et al., 2021; Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018; Quail & Ward, 2022). It is an indication that teachers are making effort to implement the positive toolkits prescribed by the GES to be implemented by all teachers. Some of the measures also appear more educative than punitive. For example, the teachers could use writing lines as an opportunity to improve the writing skills and vocabulary level of pupils in early grades, where research suggests that only 2% of them in the developing world can read (Ministry of Education, 2016; World Bank, 2004).

Furthermore, engaging pupils in light manual work such as cleaning, littering, weeding, sweeping, and scrubbing validates aspects of the literature advocating the use of non-abusive physical tasks to correct the indiscipline behavior of children (Kagoiya et al., 2017; Ntuli & Machaisa, 2014). However, assigning such manual punishments to pupils during instructional times is likely to negatively impact their academic performance (Moyo et al., 2014; Nene, 2013).

Again, using a time-out to either remove pupils from the classroom for a short time or bar them from participating in desired school activities may provide an opportunity for sobre reflection on

bad behavior and to learn from mistakes (Gunu, 2018; Jensen et al., 2018). It may also reduce or eliminate verbal and physical aggression, noncompliance, and disruptive or inappropriate behavior (Quail & Ward, 2022). However, the absence of alternative arrangements to compensate for lost learning times could negatively affect the child's academic performance.

Moreover, the results showed that establishment of classroom rules and consequences for violating such rules was employed in managing students' misbehavior. This support previous studies that have found that teachers in other jurisdictions managed students' behavior by setting rules and consequences to guide classroom (Gagnon et al., 2021; Moyo et al., 2014). It emerged that since the students collectively participated in setting the classroom rules, they collaborated in the implementation process. This supports the view that when students input are solicited and integrated in creating classroom rules, their voices are promoted in the decision making process and this encourage them to promote the changes they want and assume responsibility for their ideas (Alter & Haydon, 2017; Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018). It could also promote self-discipline, empower them to learn how to manage their own behavior, and then support them to learn to abide by such rules and regulations (Kagoiya et al., 2017; Mendenhall et al., 2021).

Again, the revelation that to manage misbehaving pupils, the participants deliberately appointed them to hold school leadership positions or withdrew them from such positions supports earlier research suggesting that withdrawal of privileges as punishment helps to minimize the occurrence of some behavioral problems (Gunu, 2019; Quail & Ward, 2022). Additionally, the management of pupils through one-on-one or group counselling sessions bolsters studies by Onyango,

Aloka, and Raburu (2018) and Gunu (2019) that consider guidance and counselling an effective alternative method of discipline employed in managing student behavior. It helps to elicit appropriate behavior from students since teachers take the needed steps to probe and understand the deviant learner's situation before offering guidance and counselling to them and their parents (Kagoiya et al., 2017).

Theoretically, it is evident from the study results that most of the discipline strategies employed by the teachers align with the behavioural theory, which encourages rewards and punishment to achieve desired behaviour (Browne, 2013; Jean-Pierre & Parris-Drummond, 2018). Teachers asking misbehaving students to write lines or form words out bigger words, engage in manual work such as cleaning the school compound, assigning physical punishments such as kneeling or siting on the floor, appointing misbehaving students to hold school positions or withdrawing them from such positions, and punishing those who violated school rules all aimed to reinforce positive behaviour and eliminate challenging behaviours though rewards and punishments. The expectation is that such misbehaving students are less likely to repeat the misbehaviour once they are sanctioned. This is likely to lead to immediate compliance and may not address students' disruptive behaviours overtime (Kagoiya et al., 2017; Quail & Ward, 2022).

Despite the use of various alternative disciplinary methods by participants, evidence gathered from the study showed that the teachers perceived most of them as ineffective in managing pupils behavior. Participants maintained that the students were so conversant with the cane and that was the only strategy that would make them listen. They further argued that some of the alternative discipline methods were perceived to be household chores that are carried out in

a typical Ghanaian home and thus they are not punitive enough for students and they rarely cause any pain, and thus the essence of the punishment is not achieved. These views seem to suggest that while corporal punishment does more harm than good in both the short and long term (Mayisela, 2021), most teachers in the study were not comfortable with the implementation of the alternative disciplinary measures and were likely to resort to canning and other corporal punishments. Past studies in Ghana have suggested that the use of corporal punishment is often justified based on firmly held cultural, religious, and social beliefs and practices (Agbenyega, 2006; Ministry of Gender Children and Social Protection, 2018). Therefore, it could be inferred that teachers in the study found it difficult to comply with the new forms of discipline due to their religious beliefs, cultural norms, and the fact that they are accustomed to corporal punishment as a form of discipline. Moreover, these teachers were likely to have experienced corporal punishments when they were students, and may, therefore find it difficult to abandon them now (Heekes et al., 2022; Mahlangu et al., 2021).

The study results further indicated that unlike the corporal punishment, the alternative disciplinary methods do not generate immediate results and has somewhat taken away the power of teachers and reverence that comes with the teaching profession. These results are consistent with other studies that have found that following the ban on corporal punishment, teachers feel disempowered in their ability to maintain discipline in schools and there was a dramatic increase in students' disregard for teachers' instructions in schools (Agesa, 2015; Maphosa & Shumba, 2010; Mayisela, 2021). Participants further reported that since the alternative disciplinary methods require supervision and monitoring, it negatively affects instructional hours,

affect the academic performance of the students, and have really increased the workload of teachers. These results are consistent with studies that have found that the implementation of alternative disciplinary methods in schools are time consuming and strenuous (Ntuli & Machaisa, 2014) and has added additional burden to the workload of teachers (Agesa, 2015; Kagoiya et al., 2017).

Conclusion, implications, and recommendations

With the banning of corporal punishment in Ghanaian pre-tertiary schools, teachers and educational leaders are expected to implement the policy on school discipline prescribed by the Ghana Education Service to create a safer school environment for all children. The current study has highlighted a variety of discipline measures the teacher-participants employed to manage pupil deviancy. It does appear that the various discipline methods the teachers used are in line with the four levels of application of the positive toolkit prescribed by the Ghana Education Service. The results showed that teachers employ proactive/preventive measures which clearly spell out rules and expectations from students. They had also instituted non-punitive actions intended to remind students of laid out standards of behavior and made effort to investigate the reasons behind the identified misbehavior or the conditions that encouraged it in order to address. Thus, although the teachers were pessimistic about the effectiveness of the policy, on their own, they utilised preventive and corrective measures and drew pupils' attention to the severity of their infractions. Where necessary, they also worked collaboratively with parents and other stakeholders to manage pupil indiscipline.

Nonetheless, the results in the study also indicated that teachers do not perceive the alternative disciplinary measures to be

effective compared to the use of corporal punishment. Among other things, teachers in the study felt that the alternative disciplinary methods are not effective because children act appropriately only when they see the cane, that they do not generate immediate results, that they have taken away their power and respect, and that they have increased the workload of teachers. It could be deduced from the frustrations of teachers that the support systems that must be instituted in schools to promote and facilitate the effective implementation of the new policy on school discipline were not in place. This could explain the position of the teachers that the alternative disciplinary methods are ineffective compared to the corporal punishment and thus their inability to abandon all forms of corporal punishments in schools. Teachers have to still deal with large class sizes, supervise misbehaving students who were punished, and combine that with teaching without any support staff. In such a situation, teachers may express frustration and think that corporal punishment, which is quick to administer, is effective in managing students' behavior.

These results have implications for educational leaders and authorities regarding the implementation of the directive on the ban of corporal punishment in schools. Since some teachers are hesitant in using the new techniques and resort to corporal punishment and other punitive punishments, school leaders need to institute surveillance and monitoring systems to check violators. They need to sanction teachers who are refusing to employ such non-violent discipline strategies. Doing so has the propensity to develop the values of self-respect, empathy, and respect for pupils and their rights. They need to further cooperate with teachers to identify the challenges confronting them in implementing the new discipline policy in their schools. We

further recommend that the Ghana Education Service, an agency responsible for implementing all educational policies at the pre-tertiary level, assist in providing support staff for teachers with large class sizes to support in the implementation of the positive discipline methods. Also, educational authorities need to initiate regular training programmes to develop the capacity of teachers and school leaders to enable them to discipline their students using positive and nonviolent behavior management techniques.

Despite the insight drawn from the study on the effectiveness of the policy on school discipline, it has certain limitations. First, the study employed a qualitative research approach and thus relied on the views of a few participants in one educational district. The results obtained from the study can, therefore, not be generalised to other educational settings. Also, the study explored only the views of teachers and did not capture those of other key internal stakeholders in the school environment, such as headteachers and students. Again, in presenting the study results, a global presentation strategy was adopted, and we do not address differentiation across schools as well as other variables. Further studies may therefore explore the issue in other educational districts and employ methodologies that can draw on a larger sample to guarantee the generalisation of results across the country. Moreover, future studies should focus on differentiation in implementing the positive disciplinary strategies across schools in rural and urban districts, public and private schools, basic and secondary schools, male and female teachers, and other school characteristics.

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