

# Intervention Strategies in Child Discipline Besides Corporal Punishment

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**Abstract:** *This is part of a broad study that sought to find out views of parents in Zimbabwe on the use of corporal punishment by teachers in schools. This paper looks at other intervention strategies that can be used to discipline pupils instead of corporal punishment in view of the implementation of the policy that bars the use of corporal punishment in schools. The study used case study as a research design. The study used questionnaires in the collection of data. The research participants consisted of two hundred and fifty parents who were randomly selected when they were attending a consultation days at schools in Goromonzi District, Zimbabwe. The study found out that teachers were still using corporal punishment in classes as way of enforcing discipline and making sure pupils abide by accepted behaviour. The study found out that guidance and counselling was effective in controlling the behaviour of children with untoward behaviour. Teachers could also withdraw some benefits the children usually have and engage in time out. Teachers could also reinforce all good behaviour by use of awards and giving public comments of good behaviours. Teachers could also keep the children busy as much as possible so that they do not have time to misbehave. The study recommends that the government makes an effort to educate citizens on new policies that will have been made so that they are fully implemented. There is need for teachers to fully implement government policies. Teachers are also urged to use child friendly methods of making children change unbecoming behaviour to socially accepted behaviours. The study recommends that teachers use methods like guidance and counselling, modelling and positive reinforcement in effecting discipline and behaviour change in pupils.*

**Keywords:** corporal punishment, perceptions, policy, discipline and behaviour

## 1. Introduction

The use of corporal punishment in schools and even in homes has been frowned at for a long time now though long ago it was the expected way of disciplining children. Despite it receiving negative attention it continues to be practised. There are a number of strategies that can be employed to reign in untoward behaviour by children in class. These strategies involve co-opting parents in the practice of disciplining their children and making sure children are aware of acceptable ways of behaviour.

## 2. Research Question

What are the other intervention strategies that can be used besides corporal punishment?

## 3. Literature Review

### Corporal punishment - definition and background

There are many definitions for corporal punishment. Donnelly and Strauss (2005) say that corporal punishment is the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child to experience pain, but not injury for the purpose of controlling or correcting a child's behaviour. Benator (2001) defines corporal punishment as the infliction of physical pain upon the occurrence of perceived misbehaviour. Furthermore corporal punishment is defined under human rights law as any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain and discomfort (corporal punishment, 2011). These definitions show that there is use of physical force to cause pain in corporal punishment. Corporal punishment is usually inflicted through canning, slapping, swatting and spanking. Corpun (2007) says that corporal punishment has been present since early civilization of Greece, Rome, Israel and Egypt in Africa. The stick was

the most used form of administering corporal punishment. There is an old saying which is frequently quoted which goes, "spare the rod and spoil the child."

Benator (2005) says that theories of corporal punishment can be described as utilitarian and retributive. The utilitarian theories of punishment recognize that punishment has consequences for the offender and society upholds that the total good produced by the punishment should exceed the evil. It seeks to punish the offender and to discourage future wrongdoing. Retributive theories argue that punishment is justified if it is deserved. It is not concerned about the consequences but the means of punishment which should prevent other people from committing similar acts. This then shows that the theories of corporal punishment focus on being retributive, preventive, reformatory and deterrent on the premise that an offence has been committed which one has to be punished for.

Most of the studies done to date show that spanking increases aggressive behaviour especially towards other people (Jenny, 2009). As the adults inflict corporal punishment they will actually be modelling to the young children how to solve problems using aggressive means. However many regard corporal punishment positively as a customary and necessary technique of child rearing. Corporal punishment in schools can thus be seen as serving a useful educational purpose. According to Corpun (2007), the writings of John Locke influenced Polish legislators to call for the plan of corporal punishment in Polish schools in 1783. The convention on the rights of the child which was adopted by the UN in 1989 forbids physical abuse of children by parents, caregivers or any other person. The convention has been ratified by all UN members except USA and Somalia. By the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century more than 100 countries had abandoned corporal punishment in schools (Corporal punishment, 2011). Corporal punishment has thus

been outlawed in many countries of Western Europe, China, Japan New Zealand, Russia, South Africa, Thailand and Zimbabwe. This view was supported by the International Convention on the rights of children (UN Children's Fund, 1999).

There is a growing worldwide movement to end legal approval of corporal punishment in schools. As a result the following countries have recently banned corporal punishment by legislation or judicial decision. These are New Zealand, South Africa, Namibia, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago, Fiji and Thailand. (Repeal 43 Committee). In Eastern Caribbean, corporal punishment in schools was socially and legally accepted until UNICEF piloted training for teachers in Barbados in behaviour management techniques which aimed at giving alternative approaches to teachers and eventually proved successful. (UNICEF, 2009). In Mauritania, corporal punishment was broadly practiced in Koranic schools, secular primary schools and within families. However efforts to abolish corporal punishment are being effected after UNICEF in 2009 presented research findings to the president of the Imam's Network Hademine Onid Saleck. There is now a widespread understanding that corporal punishment is unlawful child abuse and harmful. The eradication of corporal punishment in India is proving difficult. India ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992 and has many policies that ban corporal punishment in schools but these seem out of kilter with everyday realities. The government of India commissioned research that included more than 3000 children aged from 5-18 asking about physical abuse by teachers. In all age groups 65% reported being beaten at school. (The Guardian May 2015)

In the United States of America many states have banned corporal punishment in public schools, while several others including Texas, allow the practice but give parents the opportunity to opt out. In Texas corporal punishment in public schools is considered lawful unless a parent or legal guardian has refused to give permission with a signed written statement to the school board. (State Laws, 2015). Because the Supreme Court of Canada decided in 2004 that school teachers can no longer use section 43 as a defence to corporal punishment of students such punishment is now illegal throughout Canada. (Repeal 43 committee, 2015). In Britain corporal punishment in state schools was banned in 1986 and in all schools in 1998. The 1998 amendment to the UK Education act expressly allows teachers to use reasonable force to restrain students from committing an offence, causing personal injury or damage to property, or engaging in behaviour prejudicial to good order and discipline. All European countries have banned corporal punishment in schools. In Austria it was banned as long ago as 1870. According to Farrell (2015) British style formal caning for male students only is fully lawful as a punishment in Singapore schools and is strongly supported by the government. Now that school corporal punishment has been completely abolished in the UK and most of its other former outposts, Singapore is probably the only country where English school caning traditions are still most faithfully upheld. (Repeal 43 Committee, 2015)

Studies done by Zindi in 1997 found out that corporal punishment is still a popular method of behavioural correction in Zimbabwe in spite of calls to be cautious in its use in schools. Similarly, Peters (1980) argues that of all the forms of punishment in schools, the cane would be effective when used soon after the misbehaviour so that students can associate the punishment and appreciate why the act is forbidden. Spencer and Spencer (2001) maintain that corporal punishment is an integral part of the process through which schools achieve the fundamental objective they were established for, including the developing and moulding of a loyal and productive future citizen of Zimbabwe.

### **Possible intervention strategies in child discipline other than corporal punishment**

Educators and Psychologists who oppose the use of corporal punishment state that teachers should impose non physical disciplinary measures as an alternative to beatings. The International Committee on the Rights of the Child (ICRC) recommends that the state party adopts appropriate legislative measures to forbid the use of any form of corporal punishment within the family and in school. Instead of effecting corporal punishment, adults should engage other different ways such as counselling the children and communicating effectively for them to realize wrong doing and rehabilitate for their betterment. The Human Rights Watch (1999) says advocates propose that teachers can require students to write a statement describing the negative effects of their behaviour or apologize for their mistakes in front of classmates. Instructors can also require the misbehaving child to sit on a chair or a mat at the back of the classroom and to think about his/her mistakes and ways to improve his/her behaviour. Busienei (2012) says that alternative ways of child discipline may include praising pupils' behaviour, imposing non physical punishment and involving children in making the school rules significantly reduces disciplinary problems.

Observations from a survey by the African Child Policy Forum in 2006 are that children do not believe in severe punishment as an effective approach to teaching them how to behave. In that study more than 70% of children responded that they learned nothing when violence is a form of discipline. Rather they indicate advising and other than non violent means to be more effective. (Kubatana.net, 2015). According to the Human Rights Watch (1999) some teachers say that they prefer not to use physical means of disciplining students however they say that they resort to these methods because they may be responsible for a large number of students per class and they think corporal punishment is quick and effective in controlling the students in the short run. Kgomotso, Tshegofatso and Boipono (2015) in their study on the perceptions of teachers on the use of corporal punishment in schools in Botswana suggested the child friendly school model, pastoral programmes and guidance and counselling as alternatives to corporal punishment.

### **Counselling**

Counselling can be defined as the provision of professional assistance and guidance in resolving personal or psychological problems. The Random House online

dictionary (2015) defines counselling as professional guidance in resolving personal conflicts and emotional problems. Students who display inappropriate or disruptive behaviours may be having personal or psychological problems as the driving force. If these are resolved the students may change their behaviour. School counsellors work together with teachers and administrators to help create the kind of school environments that stimulate growth and learning. Within schools the discipline process has great potential for affecting both positively and negatively, not only student behaviour but also such critical areas as attitudes, self concept and self esteem (Kubatana.net; 2015)

Some students may not conform to their teachers' requirements due to reasons outside of their control. They may not have enough to eat, they may travel a long distance to school, their parents may expect them to work when they are not at school, they may need to take care of their younger siblings or their parents may quarrel often. These external factors affect their abilities to concentrate and the amount of time and energy they can devote to school (Repeal 43 Committee; 2015). According to psychologists and educators who oppose corporal punishment, under these circumstances beating a child is unlikely to be a productive punishment. A teacher is more likely to elicit appropriate behaviour if the teacher can understand the situation that the child faces, and offer guidance and counselling to the student and student's family. According to a Namibian Ministry of Education text from the Repeal 43 Committee (2015) "talking and listening to a learner can frequently lead to a change in behaviour for the better. If the learner knows that there is someone who cares about his or her problems, the problems become easier to carry, even if there is no way to change them." According to Kimengi and Mwai (2014) Kenyan Ministry of Education officials state that they encourage their teachers to practice "guidance and counselling" as a first step in the disciplinary process. According to the officials they are strengthening their guidance and counselling in the schools and they had a guidance counsellor at every secondary school. They also said the Ministry and the schools also use the religious organizations to identify guidance and counselling for the various primary schools. Some teachers and educators noted that guidance and counselling programs are more effective with older students. However some teachers and educators state that they need more training in order for them to effectively implement guidance and counselling programs Brown, (2015)

### **Positive reinforcement**

Benshoff, Poidevant and Cashwell (1994) say that positive reinforcement is adding something that will motivate the child or individual to increase the likelihood they will engage in that behaviour again. They go on to say that positive reinforcement works by presenting a motivating stimulus to the person after the desired behaviour is exhibited, making the behaviour more likely to happen in the future. This shows that a reward is added following a desired behaviour (End corporal punishment; 2011). Educational experts who oppose the use of corporal punishment say the use of positive reinforcement techniques reduces the frequency and extent of student misbehaviour. Teachers can reward students in a variety of simple ways. An instructor

can praise a pupil in front of the student's classmates or other instructors, award special certificates to children who perform well or are particularly caring (Kubatana.net; 2015) The instructor can also list their names on notice boards, or can write positive comments in a child's exercise book. Teachers can hold school wide competitions and give material rewards like exercise books or pens to those who do well. If a teacher rewards students by giving them positive attention the teacher can punish a particular pupil by ignoring that pupil's attempts to be disruptive Brown, (2015)

### **Involving parents**

Parent involvement or engagement is being positively involved and active in your child's learning. The parent's attitudes, values and behaviours can positively influence the child's education outcomes (Brown; 2015). Greenberg (1989) says research shows that children are more likely to succeed academically and less likely to present behaviour problems if their families are involved in their education. When parents are involved in their children's education, both children and parents are likely to benefit. Researchers report that parent participation in their children's schooling frequently enhances children's self esteem, improves children's academic achievement, improves parent child relationships, helps parents develop positive attitudes towards school and develop a better understanding of the schooling process.

### **Conferences with the parents**

When students are experiencing trouble with their behaviour or grades, Principal Priscilla Martinez, according to the handbook, sends a letter to parents inviting them to a Saturday morning conference at her school. Martinez uses the meeting to emphasize the importance of good behaviour and academic performance and parents' responsibility to help their children. This method works as all parties that is the teacher, the parent and the child are involved in the disciplinary process. There is also some counselling and guidance done when the instructor explains the importance of good behaviour and academic performance. The parents may also be motivated to take responsibility of their child's learning to avoid being called into the school again (Involving parents in education; 2015).

### **Urging parents to attend child's school**

Principal Lynn Redden in Involving parents in education (2015) was quoted as saying that when there is a persistent problem like poor attendance, the principal will call the parents and require him /her to attend school all day for 3 days with the student. Parents usually don't like the idea at first .Afterwards, though they admit it was time well spent. If a parent refuses to go along with the plan the principal will say that he will contact a judge and report the parent for violation of state compulsory attendance law. In Texas if this ruling is made because of discipline problems the only way a child can get back into school is with his/her parent. If the parent refuses to cooperate he/she is breaking the law. In Zimbabwe there isn't such a law but it seems an effective way of ensuring that parents, teachers, pupils and heads work together in ensuring child discipline (Wasef; 2011). Parents can be called in when the child persistently misbehaves and the parent can then be asked to monitor the child at home and the teacher monitors the child at school.



### **Getting parent's support for teacher's discipline plan**

Brown (2015) says discipline just won't work unless the teacher has parent's support. Principal J .H. Connell in *Involving parents in education* (2015) took his school's new discipline plan to the parents and asked for their support. He found that getting parents' approval means that there are fewer questions when there's an actual disciplinary situation involving their children. In Zimbabwe the head or teacher can talk to parents at meetings or on consultation days (Gomba; 2015). The rules need to be developed with input from students, parents and the community. Once they have been agreed to, it is important that they are broadly communicated and posted using a variety of formats (*Involving parents in education*; 2015). When parents and children are involved in the making of school rules they have a sense of owing the rules and they will willingly abide by them.

When behaviour problems escalate it is very important for the school and parents to communicate on a daily basis. This communication can take a number of forms including phone calls, communication book, e mail, and communication or monitoring forms (Corpun 2011). The purpose of all these communication devices is to ensure that information from both parties is being shared between the home and school .By working collaboratively the behaviour difficulty can be dealt with effectively. Contracts can also be used. They will usually involve the teacher, student, parents with other school personnel being added as necessary. The contract should contain a statement of the expected behaviours, a timeline for use, an agreed upon positive consequence for reaching the objective, a negative consequence for not meeting objective and a signing component (Human Rights Watch;1999). Brown (2015) says schools that actively involve parents and the community tend to establish better reputations in the community .According to Greenberg (1989) despite the advantages of involving parents, it is not always easy for parents to find time and energy to become involved or to coordinate with schedules for school events. For some parents a visit to school is perceived as an uncomfortable experience, perhaps a holdover from their own school days. Others may have their hands full with a job and other children.

### **Time out**

Time out from reinforcement is a procedure in which a child is placed in a different, less rewarding situation or setting whenever he/she engages in undesirable or inappropriate behaviours. Zolten and Long (2006) say time out is a discipline technique that involves placing children in a very boring place for several minutes following unacceptable behaviours. Time out really means time out from any attention. It has been shown to be effective in decreasing various problem behaviours. When students are continually disruptive in a classroom, the teacher might have to remove the student from the present environment. It can be as simple as asking the student to put his head down on the desk, sit in a special area in the classroom or move to an area out of the room. The concept of proactive time out should be dealt with in a positive way (Human Rights Watch; 1999). Teachers should tell students that they require a few minutes of quiet time in order to regain control.

Time outs should be of short duration, with the student being welcomed back o the main classroom area. Proactive time outs should occur in the classroom whenever possible. The main benefit of this procedure is to provide students with a quiet period to regain control or to remove them from a reinforcer. It is used as a proactive strategy to support self calming and to provide an opportunity for students to reflect on their actions. In some situations the student may initiate the quiet time (Brown, 2015). Typically, time out is used in tandem with positive discipline techniques. For example time out might be employed to reduce the frequency of a student's negative behaviours. Teachers should keep in mind important ethical considerations when using time out. The approach should only be used when less intrusive behavioural interventions have been tried and found to be unsuccessful because one consequence of time out is that children may be excluded, even if briefly from their instructional settings. Also students cannot be deprived of lunch, bathroom breaks or extended periods of classroom instruction just because they are placed in time out. Students should be carefully monitored when time out is being used (End corporal punishment; 2015). All incidents in which the student is timed out should be recorded in writing. Any decision a school makes about the establishment of time out strategies must only be taken after consultation with the school community in the context of the development or review of the school's discipline policy. Procedures for the use of time out strategies should include clearly articulated steps to be followed if a student does not comply with the time out strategy.

## **4. Methodology**

This study employed a case study research design. This research method was used as the researcher felt it was the most ideal for the study. Bryman (2004) states that a case study is a type of observational information collection method in which an individual or group of people is studied in depth so as to recognise behavioural, emotional and cognitive virtues that are generally correct. Case study relates to the gathering and presentation of full information about a certain respondent or small group often including the details of participants. Emphasis according to Nkomo (2007) is positioned on examination and description of the issue being looked at. A case study looks at the interaction of all variables so as to offer absolute understanding of the situation. Nkomo (2007) puts it that there is an in-depth explanation of the issue under evaluation, the conditions under which it is used, the kind of people included in it and the nature of the area in which it is situated.

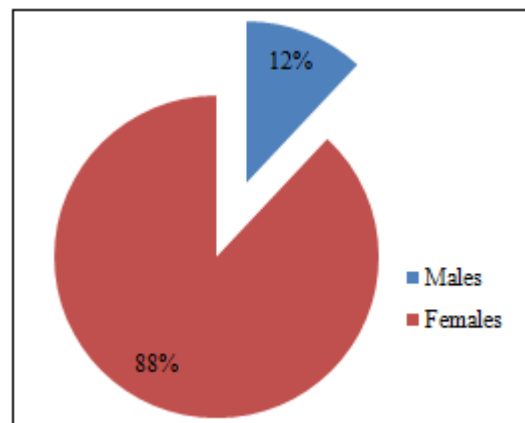
The research instruments were questionnaires. Questionnaires were convenient because it is possible for the research participants to analyse the subject and respond honestly and independently without the interference of the researcher. Tuckman (1972) supports the use of questionnaire saying it solicits information or data from inside a person's head and makes it possible to measure what a person knows, likes, dislikes and thinks.

The research used probability sampling technique of random sampling where there was a possibility of each person in the population being selected. The sample consisted of two

hundred and fifty parents from five randomly selected schools in Goromonzi district who were attending consultation days. The researcher sourced for information on when the randomly selected schools held their consultation days. The researcher then visited the schools on the consultation days to distribute the questionnaires. The data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics and qualitative data analysis techniques.

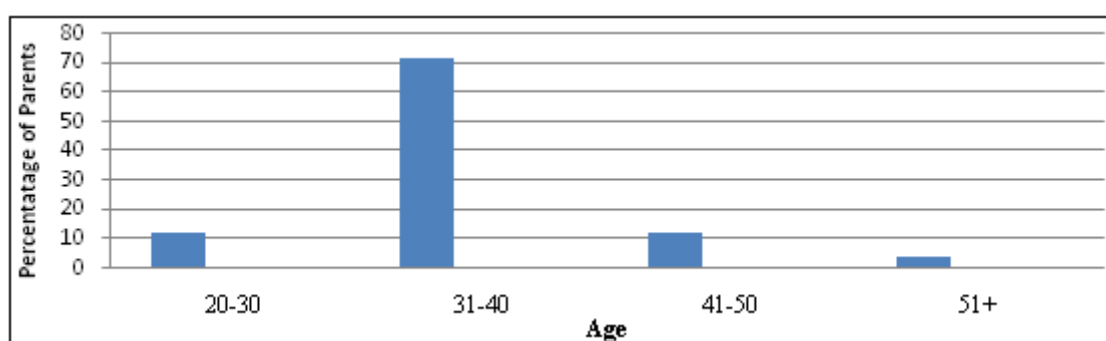
## 5. Results

### Demographic Data



**Figure 1:** Respondents by sex

The pie chart above shows that 12% of the respondents were males and 88% were females. This shows that many females in Goromonzi District stay at home mothers. They were available at home throughout the whole week thus were present to attend consultation during the week and assisted the researcher in collecting data.



**Figure 2:** Respondents by age

The presentation above shows that 12% of the respondents are between ages 20-30, 72% are between the ages 31-40, 12% are between the ages 41-50 and 4% are over 50 years..

**Table 1:** Respondents according to academic qualifications, N=250

Qualification	Grade 7	ZJC	'O' Level	'A' Level	Other	Total
No. of Parents	20	70	130	30	0	50
Percentage	8	28	52	12	0	100

The table shows that 8% of the respondents went up to grade 7, 28% attained ZJC, 52% have 'O' Level and 12% have 'A' Level. The presentation shows that the majority of the parents went up to 'O' Level. There are however some who only did primary education. Some went to form 2 and hold the Zimbabwe Junior Certificate. The majority went up to 'O' Level and very few had 'A' Level.

Results from the interviews held with parents emphasised the cooperation of teachers and parents in reigning untoward behaviour of children. Below are some of their responses:

#### Excerpt 1

*Sit down with the child and explain where he/she went wrong. Advise the child about appropriate ways of behaviour, good character and acceptable ways of living.*

#### Excerpt 2

*Counselling and also punishment in form of hard work or removal of benefits or positive reinforcement can be used in behaviour modification.*

#### Excerpt 3

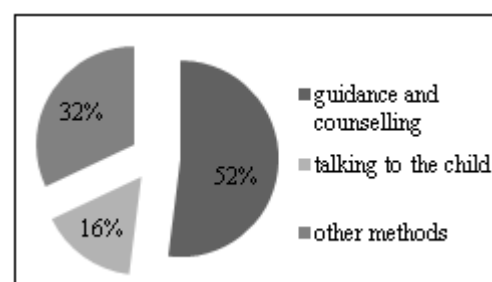
*Parents and teachers should work hand in hand in glove in disciplining the child*

#### Excerpt 4

*Children should be kept busy so as to reduce problems. They should be corrected in a polite way when they have done something wrong.*

#### Excerpt 5

*Children should pick papers and clean the school*



**Figure 3:** Alternative methods of child discipline

The above presentation shows that 52% of parents suggested counselling or talking to the child first before administering corporal punishment. 16% of the respondents indicated that there should be communication between parents and teachers on issues concerning child discipline. 32% of the parents indicated other methods of disciplining children like giving them hard work, picking up papers, positive reinforcement and keeping children busy so that they do not misbehave.

## 6. Discussion

Results from this study indicated that about 52% of the parents thought guidance and counselling should be used. This is in line with what is expressed by the International Committee on the Rights of the child (2015) which recommends that instead of effecting corporal punishment adults should engage other different ways such as counselling the children and communicating effectively for them to realise wrongdoing and rehabilitate for their betterment. According to the Global Initiative to end corporal punishment (2015) talking and listening to a learner can frequently lead to a change in behaviour. If the learner knows that there is someone who cares about his/her problems, the problems become easier to carry, even if there is no way to change them. One parent wrote that *'Sit down with the child and explain where he/she went wrong. Discuss about good ways of behaving with the child.'*

According to the Repeal 43 Committee (2015) talking and listening to a learner can frequently lead to a change in behaviour for the better. Kimengi and Mwai (2014) say that Kenyan officials encourage their teachers to practise guidance and counselling as a first step in the disciplinary process.

16% of the parents thought that there should be communication between parents and teachers. Nelsen (2015) says ways of involving parents include holding a conference with the parents, inviting them to school and getting their support for your discipline plan. In this study most of the parents who participated indicated that they stayed at home as mothers and therefore can be asked to come into the school to discuss issues concerning their children's behaviour any time. Research shows that children are more likely to succeed academically and less likely to present behaviour problems if their families are involved in their education. When parents are involved in their children's education both parents and children are likely to benefit. According to Greenberg (1989) researchers report that parent participation in their children's schooling frequently enhances children's self esteem, improves children's academic achievement, improves parent child relationships, helps parents develop positive attitude towards school and develop a better understanding of the schooling process. Despite these advantages it is not always easy for parents to find time and energy to become actively involved or to coordinate with schedules for school invitations. Greenberg (1989) says for some parents a visit to school is perceived as an uncomfortable experience, perhaps a holdover from their own school days. Others may have their hands full with other jobs and other children. On the other hand Brown (2015) says schools that actively involve parents and the

community tend to establish better reputations in the community. According to Greenberg (1989) research shows that children are more likely to succeed academically and less likely to present behaviour problems if their families are involved in their education.

32% of the respondents suggested other methods of discipline including giving children hard work, keeping them busy, picking up litter and positive reinforcement. Busienei (2012) says that alternative ways of child discipline may include praising pupils' behaviour and involving children in making the school rules significantly reduces disciplinary problems. Benshoff, Poidevant and Cashwell (1994) say that teachers can reward students in a variety of simple ways like praising pupils, awarding certificates and writing positive comments about pupils. These findings are similar to the suggestions given by Wasef (2011) who said alternatives to child discipline other than corporal punishment included role of social workers who should act as a mediator between students and teachers. The social workers can also investigate student's learning and behaviour problems. In this study no parent indicated that they would talk to a social worker in matters concerning their children's discipline. This is because social workers are not common in Zimbabwe as they are only found in urban areas. Wasef (2011) suggested giving children meaningful work including that which may involve physical labour. He also suggested using rewarding techniques. The difference between Wasef's (2011) study and this study is that in Egypt corporal punishment is legally banned. No parent suggested the use of time out as a method of disciplining children but Zolten and Long (2006) say that time out has been shown to be very effective in decreasing various problem behaviours.

## 7. Conclusions

The study concluded that it was possible for teachers to use other strategies of disciplining their children. The strategies included giving children unpleasant school chores each time they behaved inappropriately, time out, working with parents to ensure appropriate behaviour, removal of pleasant benefits and reinforcing good behaviour in the form of awarding certificates.

## 8. Recommendations

In view of the study results the following recommendations are being made:

- Parents should be made aware of government policy in corporal punishment.
- Other methods that can be used in child discipline are guidance and counselling, positive reinforcement and involving parents.
- Communication between teachers and parents should increase so as to avoid untoward behaviour among children which leads to use of corporal punishment.
- Parents should be involved more in the discipline of their children



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