



## **Behaviour Modification Techniques in Secondary Schools in Imo State, Nigeria: The Roles of the School Counsellors**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examined behavior modification techniques in secondary schools in Imo State, Nigeria with emphasis on the roles of school counselors. The descriptive research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 450, while a sample of 214 counsellors were drawn through stratified random sampling technique. The descriptive statistic of mean was used to answer the research questions. Corporal punishment was found to be a disciplinary method in which a supervising adult deliberately inflicts pain upon a child in response to a child's unacceptable behaviour and/or inappropriate language. The study also observed that negative reinforcement, positive reinforcement and extinction alike have a great influence on the school system. Thus, it was therefore concluded that the behavior modification techniques of negative reinforcement, positive reinforcement, and extinction should be modified as to improve the school system. The use of corporal punishment in the school environment falsely and perfidiously reinforces physical aggression as an acceptable and effective means of eliminating unwanted behavior in our society. Corporal punishment in schools is an ineffective, dangerous, and unacceptable method of discipline. The study among others recommended that corporal punishment in schools should be banned and that nonviolent methods of classroom control should be utilized in all our school systems, finally that teachers should be educated in the use of alternative methods of discipline, with an emphasis on employing evidence-based behavior modification and other techniques to maintain control of the classroom without resorting to violence.

**Keywords:** School counsellors, Corporal punishment, positive and negative reinforcement.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In our contemporary society today, the different level of education is expected to influence behaviour of those who experience it. This applies to those in primary and secondary schools. The students basically react to issues around them. Such happening originates from the changing nature of the society and the prevailing circumstances. These are educational, technological, physical, psychological, intellectual, emotional, economic, political and social changes all taking place at the same time. Outside societal pressures, parents, siblings, peers and teachers exert their own conflicting pressures. Thus, students at the secondary school level have basic needs which prove their behaviour.

Alhassan (1993) stated that the general public and the government authorities have become increasingly concerned at the huge increase in indiscipline in general among students in primary and secondary schools.

However in Nigeria, there is a tendency to emphasize success as an important and legitimate goal in life.

But this emphasis is not matched by an equal emphasis on legitimate means of achieving it. Dishonesty,

violence and law breaking are often rewarded by power, prestige and money. If winning the game becomes all-important and those who cheat are rewarded by material and financial gains, the rules are apt to go overboard; it is difficult to instill standards when 'sin' is rewarded. In the light of the actualities, youth easily takes the attitude that anything goes (Alhassan, 2000). The school thus is a microcosm of the society where high discipline is expected to be observed and maintained among its members especially the students or pupils. In this connection, Kilinci (2009) opined that schools are meant to be one of the safest places where students fulfill their educational aspirations.

Umezina and Elendu (2012) noted that indiscipline among learners in all levels of Nigerian educational system including secondary schools has been at a very high prevalence. In traditional African society, the use of the cane in behaviour modification was very rampant. Parents administer the cane on the children. This situation found expression in Miller (2007) who wondered that 'We do not yet know, above all, what the world might be like if children were to grow up without being subjected to humiliation, if parents would respect them and take them seriously as people'. Teachers use the cane a lot hoping that they can maintain discipline in schools and control antisocial behaviour of pupils. They use the cane in the classroom during the process of instruction. However, from the counselors view, it is not the best behavior modification techniques but counseling. Alhassan (2000) explained the concept of discipline to mean training that enables an individual to develop an orderly conduct and self control as well as self direction.

Adeloye (2009) defined corporal punishment as the physical punishment as distinguished from pecuniary punishment or a fine; any kind of punishment of inflicted on body" or "the infliction of pain by a teacher or other educational official upon the body of the student as a penalty for doing something which has been disapproved of by the punisher. From counselors perspective, punishment is a disciplinary method in which a supervising adult deliberately inflicts pain upon a child in response to a child's unacceptable behaviour and/or inappropriate language.

From the standpoint of the school system, discipline is a situation whereby pupils and students are taught to respect the school authorities to observe the school laws and regulations and to maintain established standard of behaviour (Reynolds, 2007). As has been argued elsewhere (Alhassan 2000), effective discipline does not rely upon external application of consequences designed to elicit compliance; when desire drives activity, discipline comes from within; when good judgment is valued over blind obedience, the pupils and students develop a self dedication that allows them to forgo short-term pleasure in the pursuit of loftier goals.

### **Corporal Punishment**

Pandey (2001) stated that corporal punishment is being used as means of disciplinary action against children and students worldwide but as catalyst action of education. He suggests that it needs to be planned meticulously and executed with great sensitivity. Furthermore, in the view of Adeloye (2009), corporal punishment is physical punishment as distinguished from pecuniary punishment or a fine; any kind of punishment on body" or "the infliction of pain by a teacher or other educational official upon the body of the student as a penalty for doing something which has been disapproved of by the punisher. Corporal punishment is a disciplinary method in which a supervising adult deliberately inflicts pain upon a child in response to a child's unacceptable behaviour and/or inappropriate language. Alhassan (2012) identified some items of unacceptable behaviours which are categorized as personality problems: stealing, cheating at examinations, mid-school truancy, lateness, impoliteness, failure to do homework, non-completion of homework, temper tantrum; conduct problems: vandalism, fighting, disregards of the rights of other students, verbal abuse, verbally threatens teachers, rudeness, disrespecting teachers, and damages class furniture; problems of emotional and social immaturity: restlessness, hyperactive and having a short attention span.

Corporal punishment is the use of physical force with the intention of causing a child pain, but not injury, for the purpose of correction or control of the child's behaviour (Straus 2001).

### **Types of Corporal Punishment**

According to Alhassan (2012), corporal punishment which is a kind of physical punishment that involves a deliberate infliction of pain as retribution for an offence may be divided into the following;

**Parental or domestic corporal punishment:** This is referred to as that inflicted by parents/guardians on their ward because most parents believed nothing else has worked except corporal punishment. It encompasses all forms of corporal punishment administered at home by parents or guardians.

**Judicial corporal punishment:** This entails part of a criminal sentence ordered by a court of law, closely related to, it is prison corporal punishment ordered either by the prison authorities or by a visiting court.

#### **Different forms of Corporal Punishment**

Umezina and Elendu (2012) advanced the following forms of corporal punishment: Scolding and verbal assault to the pupil, making the pupil to stay back after school, the pupil cutting of grasses, the pupil fetching of water, the pupil scrubbing the floor of the class, the pupil sweeping the whole class, the pupil washing the whole toilets, sending the pupil out of the class, the pupil kneeling down or standing for a long time, flogging the pupil with stick or cane, giving the pupil knock on the head, slapping or beating the pupil with hands, kicking and pushing the pupil with legs, pulling the pupil's ear or hair.

#### **Administration of Corporal Punishment (ACP)**

In 2012, a teacher, Mrs Njideka Imoka, flogged her pupil, Chidinma Ukachukwu, to death. The girl was a pupil of St. John of God Secondary School Awka, Anambra State. Her offence: She refused to do her assignment. In Osun State, Joshua Ajayi, a pupil of Geometry International Group of Schools was beaten to death by his teacher over a case of truancy. The killer teacher is still facing trial. In Port Harcourt, Rivers State a 13-year-old student of Shiloh Hills Remedial and Advanced College was flogged till he slumped and died by his Principal, Mr. Chudi Nwoko. Omotunde Azeez, the 12-year-old pupil of a primary school in EtiOsa LGA and Kabiru Lawal of the same school, were both sad examples of the psychological trauma corporal punishment can inflict on children. In spite of several campaigns, Acts of Parliament and treaties against the administration of corporal punishment, the situation unfortunately persists in public and private schools in Nigeria. Public schools across Nigeria are still like police stations where out-of-control teachers apply the severe form of corporal punishment on helpless pupils. The result is that more pupils are dropping out of school out of fear (<http://www.punchng.com>).

It is to be noted that the prevalence of corporal punishment in Nigeria's schools today is contrary to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child (UNCRC) which Nigeria, as a member nation, ratified and signed in 1990. Article 19 of the UNCRC says State parties shall take all legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s) or any other person who has the care of the child. However, the Lagos State House of Assembly in 2011 for example, assented to a bill banning all forms of corporal punishment in public schools in the State. Yet, many teachers continue to flout the rule banning the administration of corporal punishment.

#### **Behavior modification**

It refers to the techniques used to try and decrease or increase a particular type of behavior or reaction. This might sound very technical, but it's used very frequently by all of us. Parents use this to teach their children right from wrong. Therapists use it to promote healthy behaviors in their patients. Animal trainers use it to develop obedience between a pet and its owner. We even use it in our relationships with friends and significant others. Our responses to them teach them what we like and what we do not like.

#### **Techniques**

The purpose behind behavior modification is not to understand why or how a particular behavior started. Instead, it only focuses on changing the behavior, and there are various different methods used to accomplish it. These techniques are:

**Positive reinforcement:** It is pairing a positive stimulus to a behavior. A good example of this is when teachers reward their students for getting a good grade with stickers. Positive reinforcement is also often used in training dogs. Pairing a click with a good behavior, then rewarding with a treat, is positive reinforcement.

**Negative reinforcement:** It is the opposite and is the pairing of a behavior to the removal of a negative stimulus. A child that throws a tantrum because he or she doesn't want to eat vegetables and has his or her vegetables taken away would be a good example

**Extinction:** It is the removal of all reinforcement that might be associated with a behavior. This is a powerful tool and works well, especially with young children.

### **Effects of Corporal Punishment in School on Academic Success**

Hyman, McDowell, Rains (1998) persistently assert that approximately one-half of students who are subjected to severe punishment develop an illness called *Educationally Induced Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (EIPSD)*. In this disorder, there is symptomatology analogous to the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). As with PTSD, EIPSD is said to be regarded as a varying combination of symptoms characteristic of depression and anxiety. This mental health instability is induced by significant stress; with EIPSD the stress is the inflicted punishment. Such victimized students can have difficulty sleeping, fatigue, feelings of sadness and worthlessness, suicidal thoughts, anxiety episodes, increased anger with feelings of resentment and outbursts of aggression, deteriorating peer relationships, difficulty with concentration, *lowered school achievement*, antisocial behavior, intense dislike of authority, somatic complaints, *tendency for school avoidance*, *school drop-out*, and other evidence of negative high-risk adolescent behavior. (Reinholz, 2007) This does not predict nor encourage academic success in our school milieu.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Many students today conventionally respond only to corporal punishment. Is corporal punishment essential and effective in modifying inappropriate behaviours among primary and secondary school students in Nigeria? Flogging as a behavior modification technique has been used in schools system in Nigeria, over several years. What then, is the role of the school counselors? Does the school counselors prescribe flogging as disciplinary procedure in achieving behavior modification?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to examine behavior modification techniques in secondary schools in Imo State, Nigeria, with emphasis on the roles of school counselors. Specifically the study seeks to;

- 1) Investigate the extent to which school counselors use positive reinforcement for behavior modification.
- 2) Examine the extent to which school counselors use negative reinforcement for behavior modification.
- 3) Determine the extent to which school counselors use corporal punishment for behavior modification.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- (1) To what extent do school counselors use positive reinforcement for behavior modification?
- (2) To what extent do school counselors use negative reinforcement for behavior modification?
- (3) To what extent do school counselors use corporal punishment for behavior modification?

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted the descriptive research design. The population of this study was 450 respondents which consisted of school counselors in all the secondary schools in Imo State. A sample of 214 counsellors was drawn from the population through stratified sampling technique. A structured questionnaire entitled 'School Counsellors and Role of Counsellors Behaviour Modification Techniques in Secondary Schools (SCRCBMT)' with a four point rating scale was designed and used for data collection. The instrument was validated by two experts in the field of Measurement and Evaluation, and the study obtained a reliability coefficient of 0.83. The descriptive statistic of Mean was used to answer the research questions. The response options were given numbers – 'Strongly Accepted', 'Accepted', 'Moderately Accepted' and 'Not at All' respectively.

**RESULTS**

**Research Question 1:** *To what extent school counselors use positive reinforcement for behavior modification?*

**Table 1: Mean analysis of how school counselors use positive reinforcement for behavior modification.**

S/N	Questionnaire Items	$\bar{X}$	Decision
1	Positive reinforcement assists the school system.	2.90	Accepted
2	Positive reinforcement helps children to do well in school.	3.20	Accepted
3	Positive reinforcement provides sufficient opportunities for students to learn properly.	2.30	Moderately Accepted

**Source: Survey Data, 2017.**

The mean score of 2.90 implies that positive reinforcement assists the school system. The mean score of 3.20 accepts the fact that positive reinforcement helps children to do well in school while the mean score of 2.30 moderately accepts the fact that positive reinforcement provides sufficient opportunities for students to learn properly.

**Research Question 2:** *To what extent do school counselors use negative reinforcement for behavior modification?*

**Table 2: Mean analysis of how school counselors use negative reinforcement for behavior modification.**

S/N	Questionnaire Items	$\bar{X}$	Decision
1	Negative reinforcement assists students obtain proper counseling in the school system.	2.40	Moderately Accepted
2	Negative reinforcement assists student's learning ability and affects the school system.	2.90	Accepted
3	Negative reinforcement motivates students in learning.	2.60	Accepted

**Sources: Survey Data, 2017.**

The mean score of 2.40 moderately accepts that negative reinforcement assists students to obtain proper counseling in the school system. The mean score of 2.90 means that negative reinforcement assists student's learning ability and affects the school system, while the mean score of 2.60 entails that negative reinforcement motivates students in learning.

**Research Question 3:** *To what extent do school counselors use corporal punishment for behavior modification?*

**Table 3: Mean analysis of how school counselors use corporal punishment for behavior modification.**

S/N	Questionnaire Items	$\bar{X}$	Decision
1	Corporal punishment as a behaviour modification technique improves the school system.	3.30	Accepted
2	Corporal punishment as a behaviour modification assists the school in ensuring its improvement educational.	2.40	Moderately Accepted
3	Corporal punishment brings the best behaviour from the students.	3.00	Accepted

**Sources: Survey Data, 2017.**

The mean score of 3.30 means that extinction as a behaviour modification technique improves the school system. The mean score of 2.40 moderately agrees that extinction as a behaviour modification assists the school in ensuring its improvement educational, while the mean score of 3.00 means that extinction brings the best behaviour from the students.

### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

One of the major findings of this study was that positive reinforcement enhances school system in Imo State. This was evident from the mean scores (mean score of 2.90 implies that positive reinforcement assists the school system. The mean score of 3.20 accepts the fact that positive reinforcement helps children to do well in school while the mean score of 2.30 moderately accepts the fact that positive reinforcement provides sufficient opportunities for students to learn properly). This finding was supported by Beckett (2005) who asserted that positive reinforcement is pairing a positive stimulus to a behavior. A good example of this is when teachers reward their students for getting a good grade with stickers. Positive reinforcement is also often used in training dogs. Pairing a click with a good behavior, then rewarding with a treat, is positive reinforcement.

Also, it was found that negative reinforcement affects school systems in Imo State. This was also depicted in the mean score of the study (The mean score of 2.40 moderately accepts that negative reinforcement assists students to obtain proper counseling in the school system. The mean score of 2.90 means that negative reinforcement assists student's learning ability and affects the school system, while the mean score of 2.40 entails that negative reinforcement motivates students in learning). This finding is in line with the view of Poole, Ushokow, and Nader (1991) who opined that punishment is based on aversive techniques and produces very limited results. A student may cease acting out in one class only to continue in others. Such a child or adolescent learns the wrong message, one of avoidance or escape from getting caught or negative ways of eluding detection for wrong doing. This student very likely will learn techniques that actually lead to reduced self-control, with negative behavior characterized by more acting out, school absence, malingering, recidivism, and overt academic revocation (Reinholz, 2007). Some research notes that the more corporal punishment is used in schools, the higher is the rate of student violence and homicide (Straus, 1996).

Finally, it was found that extinction improve school system in Imo State. The finding of this study was drawn from the result of the data analysis (The mean score of 3.30 means that extinction as a behaviour modification technique improves the school system. The mean score of 2.40 moderately agrees that extinction as a behaviour modification assists the school in ensuring its improvement educational, while the mean score of 3.00 means that extinction brings the best behaviour from the students).

This study is in line with other research findings that punished children become more rebellious and are more likely to demonstrate vindictive behavior, seeking retribution against school officials and others in society. Poole, et. al (1991) opined that punishment is based on aversive techniques and produces very limited results. A student may cease acting out in one class only to continue in others. Such a child or adolescent learns the wrong message, one of avoidance or escape from getting caught or negative ways of eluding detection for wrong doing. This student very likely will learn techniques that actually lead to reduced self-control, with negative behavior characterized by more acting out, school absence, malingering, recidivism, and overt academic revocation (Reinholz, 2007).

However, this study is in line with other research concluding that punished children become more rebellious and are more likely to demonstrate vindictive behavior, seeking retribution against school officials and others in society. Poole, Ushokow, and Nader (1991) opined that punishment is based on aversive techniques and produces very limited results. A student may cease acting out in one class only to continue in others. Such a child or adolescent learns the wrong message, one of avoidance or escape from getting caught or negative ways of eluding detection for wrong doing. This student very likely will learn techniques that actually lead to reduced self-control, with negative behavior characterized by more acting out, school absence, malingering, recidivism, and overt academic revocation (Reynold, 2007). Some research notes that the more corporal punishment is used in schools, the higher is the rate of student violence and homicide (Straus, 1996).

This study emphasizes that corporal punishment entails an environment of education that can be described as punitive, unproductive, and nullifying. Children become victims, and trepidation is introduced to all in such a classroom. However, the use of corporal punishment is associated with increased mental health problems in children including increased psychological distress, which may lead to anxiety, depression, alcohol and drug use, and general psychological maladjustment in those to whom it is applied (Greydanus, Pratt, Spates, Blake-Dreher, Greydanus-Gearhart, & Patel, 2003).

### **Implication for Counseling**

Teachers in primary and secondary schools administer corporal punishment to impose their will and authority on pupils. Corporal punishment is obviously a negative motive and is based on fear of failure, fear of losing prestige, fear of insult or rejection, fear of physical pain and so on. Personality development based on fear and punishment is inimical to democratic living which we in Nigeria (particularly) are striving to build. Corporal punishment and insulting experiences kill initiative, resourcefulness, leadership and the spirit of freethinking and adventurous living, the very qualities we seek to cultivate in our pupils. Pupils work, not because they want to learn, but because otherwise they may fail and be rejected. Such negative motives lead to a variety of negative and maladjusted activities, such as cramming, copying, stealing, quarrelling, even bribery and so on. In extreme cases, corporal punishment meted to pupils recoil on society itself. Pupils may grow into undesirable citizens. But punishment, such as a failure or a reprimand, no doubt negative in character, has certain advantages. These motivate children to work on desired lines so that they can avoid the experience of pain associated with corporal punishment.

Discipline in schools should be total in its ramification.

The test of discipline is whether or not the behaviour of the group permits everyone to work effectively. Both the pupils/students and teachers must exhibit a high standard of discipline. Parents and guardians must care for their children's education. Greater awareness must be created as far as discipline is concerned. It is imperative that this is so because the issue of discipline at all levels should not be compromised because a society which lacks good ethics and values is doomed.

### **CONCLUSION**

Corporal punishment is a disciplinary method in which a supervising adult deliberately inflicts pain upon a child in response to a child's unacceptable behaviour and/or inappropriate language. Corporal punishment is mainly divided into three: parental/domestic corporal punishment, judicial corporal punishment, and school corporal punishment. The behaviour modification techniques used to out stage corporal punishment are negative reinforcement positive reinforcement, and extinction. The use of corporal punishment in the school environment falsely and perfidiously reinforces physical aggression as an acceptable and effective means of eliminating unwanted behavior in our society. Corporal punishment in schools is an ineffective, dangerous, and unacceptable method of discipline.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

To achieve a stable society through the implementation of Guidance and Counseling services in the global context, the following recommendations are offered:

- Corporal punishment in schools should be banned.
- Nonviolent methods of classroom control should be utilized in all our school systems.
- Teachers should be educated in the use of alternative methods of discipline, with an emphasis on employing evidence-based behavior modification and other techniques to maintain control of the classroom without resorting to violence.

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