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Managing Teaching and Learning in South African Secondary Schools After the Abolition of Corporal Punishment

Abstract

The abolition of corporal punishment in South African schools has significantly reshaped classroom management and disciplinary practices. This study explores how principals and teachers in Umlazi District navigate teaching and learning in the absence of corporal punishment. Using a qualitative interpretivist approach, the research draws on the lived experiences of 16 school management team members across four secondary schools. Findings reveal a disconnect between policy ideals and classroom realities, with educators facing increased learner defiance, strained teacher-student relationships, and emotional burnout. The study identifies systemic challenges, including inadequate training, limited resources, and inconsistent parental support. Despite these constraints, some educators have adopted restorative and learner-centred strategies, including behaviour tracking and collaborative learning. The Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) provides a framework for analysing educators' responses to disciplinary reform, highlighting varied levels of adaptation and use. International comparisons underscore the need for culturally responsive and contextually grounded approaches to discipline. The study contributes to ongoing debates on post-corporal punishment education and offers practical insights for policymakers, teacher educators, and school leaders seeking to foster inclusive, respectful, and effective learning environments.

1. Introduction

The abolition of corporal punishment in South Africa gave new meaning to the existing school policy framework established through the South African Schools Act (1996) and the Abolition of Corporal Punishment Act (1997). These changes were intended to align disciplinary measures with constitutional protections against punishment that infringe on dignity, equality, and non-violence. Implementation, however, posed some bittersweet challenges, especially in under-resourced districts such as Umlazi in KwaZulu-Natal. In practice, it is said that corporal punishment is still meted out in schools, yet this is against the law. With the removal, discipline is perceived to have declined; defiance among learners is viewed as more common, and teacher-student relations are perceived as deteriorating. These developments raise serious questions about whether punitive alternatives are genuinely effective and to what extent they hinder the management of teaching and learning. While the national and international literatures have studied the impact of corporal punishment, few analyses have been conducted to evaluate its abolition within the specific socio-cultural and economic context of Umlazi District. This study fills that gap by examining how school management teams navigate their roles in the post-corporal punishment era. The study aims to examine the effect of the abolition of corporal punishment on the management of teaching and learning in secondary schools. It focuses on stakeholder perceptions, implementation challenges, and adaptive strategies employed by educators and administrators.

The Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) provides a framework for understanding how individuals and institutions respond to genuinely educational innovations. CBAM stages of concern, levels of use, and innovation configurations are utilised to analyse the process of adaptation and implementation by educators. Research findings contribute to the discourse on educational reform, discipline policy, and school leadership. They offer practical insights for policymakers, teacher educators, and school administrators seeking to foster more inclusive, respectful, and meaningful learning environments. This study proceeded under three questions:

1. How do stakeholders perceive changes in the disciplinary climate post-abolition?

2. Which challenges do educators face in the management of teaching and learning?

3. How are these challenges negotiated within the school context?

The research followed the qualitative, interpretivist tradition, with 16 SMT members across four secondary schools selected and interviewed semi-structuredly. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and obtain insights from participant narratives. An understudied case due to its socio-economic diversity, the Ullwazi District has been a legacy of educational inequality, with current efforts to restructure school governance and instruction. To understand disciplinary dynamics, a proper context must be in place for policy development within the discipline. The paper then consists of the literature review, theoretical landmark, presentation of results alongside five themes, discussion of findings, implications for policy and practice, and a summarising conclusion. Increasingly, each section builds on the CBAM framework and incorporates participants' voices to shed light on the lived realities of education without corporal punishment.

2. Literature Review

This ban on corporal punishment has provoked scholarly debates, with some focusing on issues of discipline, pedagogy, and learner outcomes. For centuries, corporal punishment has been regarded as a legitimate and effective means of disciplining misbehaving children and students, as well as maintaining

classroom order. There was a deep-seated use of physical punishment in the South African education system, as it acted as a social control mechanism and a tool for racial oppression. In line with the constitutional values of dignity, equality, and non-violence, the post-apartheid legislative reforms, particularly the South African Schools Act (1996) and the Abolition of Corporal Punishment Act (1997), attempted to redesign disciplinary mechanisms. From a global perspective, corporal punishment is legally permitted in varying degrees. Finland and Sweden have banned corporal punishment for many years, whereas in some U.S. states, Nigeria, and Ghana, it remains legally permitted in certain situations. According to the Menino Bernardo Law of 2014, corporal punishment is prohibited in Brazil; however, its implementation is spotty at best, particularly in rural areas. In a similar vein, progress has been made in Cuba and Jamaica regarding the development of positive disciplinary approaches, even though physical punishment remains acceptable. These international comparisons illustrate the complexity of the relationships between law, culture, and education policy.

Corporal punishment still prevails in Africa, despite being prohibited by law. When studied in Nigeria, Ghana, and Zimbabwe, it was found that cultural and religious ideas tend to support its use, with many parents and teachers considering the infliction of pain as necessary to instill discipline and moral values (Khathi et al., 2021b). For example, some Ghanaians justify physical punishment using biblical texts, while some Zimbabwean laws still provide a window of usage in home and school settings. Again, the lesson here is the enormous difficulties encountered in promoting non-violent forms of discipline in environments where corporal punishment is an accepted part of culture. Childhood adversities, resultant from exposure to harsh treatment and punishment, detrimentally affect children for life. More specifically, physical punishment leads to increased anxiety, depression, aggressiveness, and low self-esteem. Academically, it entails underperformance, absenteeism, and dropping out of school. Gershoff et al. (2019) and Hornor et al. (2015) reveal that corporal punishment demotivates learners and fosters hostility in learning environments. Such emphasis on exclusionary discipline, through suspensions and expulsions, to circumvent learning to prison is markedly opposite to the interests of disenfranchised learners.

Several factors contribute to teachers' views on corporal punishment, including personal experience, cultural background, religion, and social status. Some educators are against its use and favour alternative methods, while others, especially older male teachers, call for its continued use. Research, however, shows that teachers who view themselves as efficacious often lean toward democratic classroom management practices, suggesting that the approach to classroom discipline is influenced by professional development and support (Govender et al., 2023).

Alternative approaches to discipline, including restorative justice, positive behaviour interventions, and social-emotional learning (SEL), have become popular in recent years. These approaches emphasize empathy, accountability, and relationships, thereby providing a wider framework for managing learner behaviour. However, implementation is often hindered by resource constraints, limited training, and resistance from educators and parents (Ahiaku & Ajani, 2022). Restorative practices are encouraged by the Revised National Policy on Learner Discipline (2013) in South Africa, but their uptake remains uneven across schools and provinces. The Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) provides a valuable conceptual framework for understanding the transition from corporal punishment to alternative forms of discipline. CBAM focuses on issues such as individual concerns, support for implementation, and phases of adoption among teachers. The model thereby emphasises the importance of continuous professional development, engaging stakeholders, and being sensitive to context through educational reform (Govender & Ajani, 2021).

The abolition of corporal punishment, which creates far from ideal situations, presents an opportunity for stakeholders to consider what discipline should look like in schools. It promotes a shift towards learner-centred pedagogies, enhanced teacher-student relationships, and inclusive educational environments. Such an overhaul, sustaining purposes of training, resources, and policy alignment, demands a culture shift

emphasising respect, empathy, and collaboration rather than intimidation and coercion. To conclude, it is apparent from the literature that corporal punishment is multidimensional and that its abolition is consequently concrete and multifaceted. It conflicts with legal and societal expectations, affecting learners' psyches and academic performance, as well as teachers' perceptions of the disciplinary climate. As South Africa continues to navigate this path, research should continue to inform policy and practice, enabling schools to become safe environments that support all learners.

3. Theoretical framework

This study draws from the theory of the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM), which Hall and Hord (1976) developed to analyse the implementation of educational innovations. CBAM provides a structured framework for understanding how individuals and institutions navigate change, particularly in situations such as policy shifts, as exemplified by the abolition of corporal punishment. It is highly pertinent to the enquiry into the behavioural, emotional, and practical responses of teachers responsible for managing teaching and learning during this post-corporal-punishment period. CBAM consists of three components: Stages of Concern (SoC), Levels of Use (LoU), and Innovation Configurations (IC). The Stages of Concern address educators' situational emotional responses during times of change. These shall range from awareness and informational concerns to personal, management, and impact concerns. Within the scope of this research, educators now harbour concerns, some still at the earliest stages, others at more intermediate levels, about how alternative disciplinary strategies will work in practice and what effects those strategies will have on them.

Manuwgmitho's Levels of Use classify the various measures of intervention among individuals, namely, non-use, orientation, mechanical use, routine, refinement, integration, and renewal. In the Umlazi District, findings showed that teachers are at different levels of use; some still use punitive measures, while others are exploring restorative justice, positive reinforcement, and collaborative discipline. This amply demonstrates the need for differentiated support and professional development (Ajani, 2018), aligned with an educator's current level of engagement. Innovation Configurations denote the different modes of an innovation's actual application. CBAM acknowledges that innovations are rarely adopted uniformly; instead, they are adapted to local contexts, resources, and individual preferences. In this study, the abolition of corporal punishment is expected to lead to the emergence of different disciplinary practices in schools, which will affect factors such as teacher experience, school leadership, community involvement, and resource availability. In-between configurations range from informal peer mediation and tracking systems for behaviour to more formalised restorative justice programmes and parental engagement measures.

Thus, the CBAM framework also stresses addressing individual and organisational concerns for successful change. Findings indicate that personal beliefs, cultural norms, and past experiences shape teachers' attitudes toward corporal punishment and its alternatives. Resistance to change was notably strong among elderly teachers and those without exposure to non-punitive methods. This highlights the need for targeted interventions that acknowledge and address these concerns, thereby creating a supportive environment for professional growth and instructional improvement. Additionally, CBAM's diagnostic function facilitates the recognition of implementation barriers and the formation of strategies to overcome them. Some of the difficulties faced in implementing alternative disciplinary measures in the Umlazi District include inadequate training, inconsistent enforcement of policy, and limited resources. With CBAM, these challenges can be addressed systematically through capacity-building, stakeholder engagement, and policy improvement.

The model also enables the evaluation of the innovation's impact by linking educator concerns and levels of use to student outcomes. Here, the perceived worsening of academic performance and classroom discipline after abolition points to a gap between policy expectations and on-the-ground realities. CBAM

acts as a vehicle for closing this gap by putting support mechanisms in place that are aligned with the needs of educators, and, through sometimes formalised, iterative processes of feedback and reflection, engendering continuous enhancements. The Concerns-Based Adoption Model is one osteopathic means, taking into consideration all circumstances, designed to consider all aspects of the dynamics of educational change. This study reveals the complex interplay between policy, practice, and perception as they collectively shape the governance of teaching and learning following the abolition of corporal punishment. With CBAM putting educator concerns, usage levels, and implementation configurations front and centre, disciplinary reform can be viewed through a fine-grained analysis and guide the creation of inclusive, sustainable, and effective educational practices.

4. Methods section

The study employed a qualitative research methodology operating within an interpretivist paradigm to explore the effect of the banning of corporal punishment on teaching and learning management in secondary schools within the Umlazi District, KwaZulu-Natal. The phenomenological research design aimed to understand the lived experiences and perceptions of educational stakeholders regarding disciplinary practices and pedagogical management since the abolition. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to select 16 participants from four secondary schools, comprising principals, deputy principals, and department heads. The sample included circuits from Durban Central and Phumelthelela in the Umlazi District, representing both urban and township contexts. Participants were selected based on their direct involvement in school management and their experience implementing disciplinary policies.

Data collection was preceded by semi-structured interviews guided by an interview schedule aligned with the study's objectives. The interviews were conducted face-to-face, recorded with the participants' consent, and transcribed verbatim. Notes were taken to capture any non-verbal cues or contextual observations. Before the actual interviews, the schedule was pre-tested for question clarity and proper alignment with the study's objectives. Thematic analysis was conducted according to the six phases outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involved familiarisation with the transcripts, initial coding, generation of themes, review of the themes, definition and naming of themes, and final report. NVivo software aided in organising and retrieving the data, though manual coding was stressed to maintain close engagement with the data.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Zululand Research Ethics Committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were guaranteed confidentiality through the pseudonymisation of their responses. After interviews, participants were debriefed, and the data were stored safely in accordance with the institute's guidelines. Trustworthiness was ensured through credibility (triangulation and member checking), dependability (audit trails), confirmability (reflexive journaling), and transferability (thick description of context). Ethical principles of autonomy, beneficence, and non-maleficence were also upheld throughout the research process in this study.

5. Results

Using a qualitative design, the purposively selected participants were interviewed using semi-structured interviews to generate in-depth, rich information that answered the research questions. These interviews were thematically analysed, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) procedures, to arrive at the following themes, for the presentation of findings for this study.

Theme 1: Stakeholders' Perceptions of the Changes in the Disciplinary Climate Post-Abolition of Corporal Punishment

The stakeholders of the Umlazi District spoke of a significant change in the disciplinary atmosphere after the abolition of corporal punishment. Most of them felt that the learner conduct had worsened, and that insolence, absenteeism, and substance abuse incidents had increased. These changes in conduct were perceived as threatening to classroom order and disrupting teaching and learning. As DH2 put it, "Learners no longer worry about being disciplined, and with the same, there is less observance of school rules and cooperation with educators." The erosion of respect for authority has been a recurring matter of concern. Participants portrayed learners as increasingly disregarding school norms and educators' instructions. DH4 remarked, "Learners show a flagrant disdain for authoritative figures and norms at school by bringing guns and drugs onto campus and by showing up drunk." This aligns with the view of Gershoff and Grogan-Kaylor (2016), who argue that the abolishment of corporal punishment may affect traditional power relations within schools, particularly in the absence of well-established alternative disciplinary frameworks.

A breakdown in trust between educators and learners was also reported. DH3 said, "Educators no longer trust their students, and learners do not respect the current punishment methods." Such mutual distrust was regarded as exacerbating disciplinary challenges and hindering the development of positive teacher-student relationships. Bloom et al. (2005) note that trust is fundamental to trauma-informed education, and the absence of mutual trust would substantially hinder classroom functioning. From the outset, some participants expressed the view that the abolition of corporal punishment had led to a review of disciplinary measures. P1 furthered the thought: "We try our best to make sure that these learners are in line with the school's code of conduct. Maybe restorative processes and strengthening our relationship with them and their parents will help." This bears resemblance to the ideas promulgated by Morrison and Vaandering (2012), who argue for restorative justice as a process of repairing and strengthening relationships in wraparound educational accountability systems that operate post-punishment.

However, the efficacy of alternative disciplinary methods seemed questionable. DH1 argued, "Other forms of punishment, such as detention or suspension, are not effective in terms of teaching the learners self-control or discouraging misbehaviour." This concern is supported by Skiba et al. (2014), who found that exclusionary discipline rarely resolves the behavioural issues being addressed and often leads to greater disengagement. In brief, stakeholders perceived the abolition of corporal punishment as necessary yet challenging to implement. While it should occur in line with constitutional and human rights principles (South African Schools Act, 1996), its implementation has seen a few gaps in policy support, educator training, and community engagement. The findings highlight the need for systemic investment in restorative and relational disciplinary frameworks that foster respect, empathy, and accountability.

Theme 2: Challenges Associated with the Implementation of Alternative Disciplinary Measures Post-Abolition of Corporal Punishment

Since the abolition of corporal punishment, educators from the Umlazi District have identified several challenges in implementing alternative disciplinary measures. These challenges include inadequate training grounds, limited resources, time inefficiency, and constrained parental involvement. These factors, in total, not only complicate classroom management for teaching and learning but also conversely affect the efficacy of non-punitive disciplinary measures. Repeatedly expressed concerns include the lack of training that hinders professional growth and equips educators with skills for constructive discipline. DH1 said: "The biggest issue I have faced is the lack of proper training on how to handle discipline without corporal punishment. We have had a few workshops, but they barely scratch the surface." This corroborates the points made by Skiba et al. (2011), who noted that educators struggle to utilise restorative and relational discipline unless they receive continuous training and support.

Additional constraints occurred when resources were limited. P2 noted: "I tried to establish a reward system for motivating students, but there were no funds to support this in the long term." The shortage of school counsellors and support staff was additionally witnessed. DP3 observed, "We do not have enough school

counsellors, and the ones we have are all overworked. Just this past week, a serious behavioural problem arose, but there was no one available to respond immediately." Such issues reflect higher systemic concerns of the type Osher et al. (2018) identify as infrastructure and personnel support for behavioural interventions. The other major issue was the inefficiency of time. DH4 explained, "I spend so much time trying to mediate and negotiate with students, and it leaves me feeling emotionally drained. I even had to take time off work last term due to burnout." In greater detail, implementing restorative practices, including counselling, accounts for a significant portion of the above approach, from lesson planning to instructional time. This also resonates with the findings of Martinez and Williams (2022), who noted that teachers often struggle to juggle teaching responsibilities and behavioural management in post-punitive contexts.

Student behaviour and engagement, hence, posed problems. DH2 stated, "Students no longer seem to fear consequences. Even when you threaten them with an incident report, they take it lightly." This sentiment supports the findings of Gershoff and Font (2016), who warn that removing corporal punishment without implementing effective alternatives can lead to an increased incidence of maladjusted behaviours and diminished respect for authority. Another barrier was parents' opposition to non-punitive approaches. P1 goes on from there, "One parent came to the school saying that we have violated his child's right to education because we made him stand facing the wall for being late. It is hard to enforce discipline when parents are against our methods." This resistance aligns with literature from Ghana and Nigeria, where the culture continues to support corporal punishment despite legal prohibitions (Akyina, 2024; Fakunmoju & Bammeke, 2015).

To summarise, alternative disciplinary measures remain difficult to implement due to systemic, pedagogical, and cultural challenges. The findings emphasise the need for holistic professional development, increased resources, and community engagement to support the shift to non-violent discipline. In the absence of these, teachers are not adequately prepared to manage learner behaviour, thereby compromising classroom order and student outcomes.

Theme 3: Navigating Challenges in Managing Teaching and Learning Post-Abolition of Corporal Punishment

Different approaches have been applied in Umlazi District to managing issues confronting teaching and learning after the abolishment of corporal punishment. The transition was met with resistance, frustration, and limited resources; however, participants also reported emerging practices aimed at enhancing learner engagement and classroom dynamics. The most common approach involved using group discussions and collaborative learning as behaviour management techniques. Respondent DH3 stated, "I started using group discussion to address behavioural issues, which took some time to gain traction. The adaptation process has been rather slow, but I have started to see some advantages." This resonates with Morrison and Vaandering (2012), who argue for restorative practices based on dialogue and mutual understanding rather than punitive discipline.

Educators tried behaviour tracking systems and positive reinforcement. P2 said, "At first, I did not believe in the effectiveness of behaviour tracking charts. However, they have enabled students to take ownership of their actions." The findings of Skiba et al. (2014) also emphasise the importance of structured behavioural intervention in encouraging accountability while reducing disruptions. The change called on educators to unlearn some deeply ingrained habits and develop new ones. P3 related, "I have had to unlearn some old habits and learn new strategies that align with the current policies. Collaborative learning has enabled a supportive classroom environment." DH8 added, "I began to use a student-led classroom council to deal with issues. It was initially resisted but later accepted." These practices align with the principles of learner-centred pedagogy and democratic classroom management (Tomlinson, 2001; Reeve & Deci, 2023).

However, the participants acknowledged that the transition was emotionally taxing and somewhat time-consuming. DH4 stated, "Managing behaviour now takes more time...but, morally and technically, it is a

better learning environment in the long run." The literature also supports this view by highlighting the emotional labour involved in non-punitive disciplinary action (Osher et al., 2018; Jungert et al., 2019). Support systems and educator collaboration emerged as critical enablers. DH5 stated, "We now meet regularly to discuss difficult cases and share what works. It is helpful to know I am not tackling these challenges alone." In other words, these professional learning communities help sustain innovation and build educators' confidence (Martinez & Williams, 2022).

In brief, the abolition of punishments through physical disciplinary controls has posed serious challenges. The teachers are slowly adapting through joint efforts, with some adaptations made in restorative and learner-centred areas, resulting in an apparently patchwork texture conditioned by scarce resources. However, this very patchiness also brings a certain resilience and a will to create an inclusive and respectful learning environment. The evidence sewn into the quilt spotlights continued professional development and peer support, coupled with alignment across all levels of policy, so that disciplinary reform can truly be embedded, and outcomes for teaching and learning can improve.

Theme 4: The Emotional and Psychological Impact on Teaching and Learning Post-Abolition of Corporal Punishment

The abolition of corporal punishment has had a profound impact. It continues to affect the teachers on emotional and psychological levels in the Umlazi District, to the extent that it has even impacted their professional identity, classroom management, and overall well-being. Respondents described experiencing significant stress, burnout, and feelings of helplessness as they navigated the disciplinary process, with all the punitive tools no longer available. DH1 stated, "The emotional toll has been significant since corporal punishment was abolished. I find myself feeling more stressed and frustrated as I struggle to manage disruptive students without the old disciplinary tools." Osher et al. (2018) have made similar arguments, claiming that removing punitive forms of discipline, when not backed by adequate support, serves only to drain teachers and diminish their emotional efficacy in the classroom.

DP4 shared, "I have started to dread arriving at school because the lack of disciplinary control is too sickening. After being restless and having failed a whole week to even make it through to a bunch of disrespectful students, I felt emotionally drained and questioned even my career." Such feelings are echoed in Jungert et al. (2019), who highlight the psychological strain that teachers experience when disciplinary practices change without adequate support in teacher training and within institutions. DH8 expressed, "There is so much time spent trying to mediate and negotiate with students that it just drains me emotionally. I even had to take time off last term due to burnout." This aligns with Weare's (2023) findings, which emphasise the importance of trauma-informed and emotionally supportive school environments in reducing educator stress.

The DP1 voiced, "The biggest emotional impact has been the feeling of helplessness. Without the option of corporal punishment, it often feels like there is nothing we can do to maintain order." Powerlessness aligns with the position set forth by Lazarides, Watt, and Richardson (2020), who concluded that teachers' emotional well-being is heavily contingent upon their perception of control and effectiveness in the classroom. P3 noticed, "Corporal punishment no more exists, and it has thus had a noticeable effect on learning outcomes: While some students respond well to the nurturant approach, many others have gone astray because of the absence of rigid discipline." This duality was mirrored by Gershoff et al. (2019), warning that non-violent discipline fosters emotional safety only if it is consistently applied and supported by adequate structures.

The monopoly of abolishing corporal punishments on the emotional and psychological being creates a prism of glare. While some educators take it in their stride and adopt an approach to kindness and restorative justice, many continue to struggle with non-punitive disciplinary measures in under-resourced and stressful milieus. Therefore, the findings strongly advocate for systemic interventions, on-the-ground mental health

support, professional development, and emancipatory frameworks to uphold the well-being of educators and that of the teaching and learning process itself.

Theme 5: Best Practices and International Comparisons

Participants in the Umlazi District shared insights from international and regional contexts that informed their understanding of discipline management following the abolition of corporal punishment. These reflections highlighted the potential for adopting best practices from other countries, while also acknowledging the socio-cultural limitations of direct policy transfer. P4 recounted, "In Eswatini, before a teacher administers corporal punishment, they must document the offence, the time, and the number of strokes, with witnesses present. Only the head can authorise it. This process helps avoid litigation." This structured approach, while still punitive, reflects a regulated disciplinary framework that contrasts with South Africa's outright ban. It aligns with findings by Akyina (2024), who notes that procedural safeguards in corporal punishment contexts can mitigate abuse but do not eliminate harm.

P2 shared experiences from Finland: "They do not force students to learn. Students have a high sense of responsibility. Schools have psychologists and therapists on hand. It is totally different." This observation resonates with literature on Finland's education system, which prioritises learner autonomy, emotional well-being, and inclusive support structures (Sahlberg, 2011). However, P2 cautioned, "We cannot do that here in South Africa. The socio-cultural gap is too wide." This aligns with Morrow's (2007) argument that educational reforms must be grounded in context to be effective.DH5 reflected on Zimbabwean church schools: "They have high moral standards. We teach knowledge and skills, but the values side is missing. What value is there in a child who does not respect both at home and at school?" This underscores the importance of moral education (Khathi et al., 2021a) and value-based discipline, as advocated by Waghid (2014), who calls for Ubuntu-inspired pedagogies that foster respect and communal responsibility.

P1 drew parallels with Cuba: "Their schools emphasise collective responsibility. Teachers, students, and parents work together to set behaviour expectations." This aligns with restorative justice principles, in which discipline is a shared responsibility and community engagement is central (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). South Africa's communal traditions offer fertile ground for such approaches, though implementation remains uneven.DH3 added, "We need to learn from countries that balance discipline with empathy. Our learners need both structure and support. Without both, we are just reacting to problems." This sentiment reflects the global shift toward trauma-informed and relational discipline, as discussed by Osher et al. (2018) and Weare (2023), who emphasise the need for integrated systems that address both behavioural and emotional needs.

In summary, participants recognised the value of international best practices but stressed the importance of contextual adaptation. While models from Finland, Cuba, Eswatini, and Zimbabwe offer valuable insights, their success depends on cultural relevance, resource availability, and stakeholder buy-in. The findings suggest that South Africa's disciplinary reform must be guided by local realities, informed by global evidence, and rooted in inclusive, value-driven educational principles.

6. Discussion

The study's findings suggest a multifaceted, complex influence of the abolition of corporal punishment on teaching and learning processes in secondary schools within the Umlazi District. Stakeholders' perceptions, implementation challenges, and strategies for adjustment collectively paint a picture of the tensions between policy reform and pragmatic realities in South African education. The perceived decline in learner discipline since the abrogation stands as yet another issue over the usefulness of existing disciplinary measures. Educators felt that a pattern of increased defiance, absenteeism, and substance abuse emerged (Nzama &

Ajani, 2021). These educators uphold the findings of Gershoff and Grogan-Kaylor (2016) that teaching in a classroom will become more difficult if corporal punishment were removed without enough alternatives to maintain class order. The situation becomes even more dire in under-resourced schools, where teachers must be equipped to pursue restorative or relational discipline, but are currently unable to do so.

Furthermore, from a disciplinary perspective, the erosion of respect for authority and trust between educators and learners complicates the issue. This reflects a shift in power dynamics that, while consistent with democratic and rights-based education, requires careful handling, as Morrison and Vaandering (2012) state. Restorative justice models need to be accompanied by cultural change and the engagement of stakeholders in order to realise effectiveness. The lack of consistent parental involvement, combined with inadequate community support in Umlazi, serves as a counterforce to this end. Implementing alternative disciplinary practices faced resistance due to insufficient training, resource shortages, and time inefficiencies. The teachers shared their grievances about the lack of practical training and continuing professional development, in line with Skiba et al. (2011) and Osher et al. (2018), advocating for ongoing support in discipline reform. On the other hand, the emotional impact on teachers includes stress, burnout, and helplessness, highlighting the need for trauma-informed psychological support in school environments (Weare, 2023; Jungert et al., 2019).

However, adaptive strategies suggested by this study seem promising. Educators reported success with collaboration, behaviour tracking, and student initiatives, demonstrating resilience and innovation. These practices reflect learner-centred pedagogy and democratic classroom management (Tomlinson, 2001; Reeve & Deci, 2023). Their effectiveness, however, depends on the specific context, including the educator's experience, school leadership, and resource availability. International comparisons thereby yield valuable insights into best practice. Models from Finland, Cuba, Eswatini, and Zimbabwe were presented as examples of structured, community-based, value-oriented disciplinary approaches. The participants wanted to advise against free policy transfer but instead emphasised the demand for culturally responsive and locally grounded solutions. This aligns with the idea of Morrow (2007) and Waghid (2014) that educational transformation should be grounded in South African realities and values.

The CBAM application was critical in analysing educators' responses to disciplinary reform. The Stages of Concern, Levels of Use, and Innovation Configurations offered ways of gaining a perspective, sometimes parametric and sometimes non-parametric, on the emotional, behavioural, and physical aspects of change. The emphasis shifts from individual concerns to differentiated support within the Implementation Approach (Hall & Hord, 1987; George & Mallery, 1997). Banning corporal punishment is a step forward toward human rights-based education. Nevertheless, achieving this goal requires concomitant investment in training, resources, and stakeholder engagement. The study highlights that any disciplinary reform must examine the issue holistically by balancing sympathy and accountability, as well as policy and practice. Going forward, equal emphasis must be placed on the health of those teaching, the development of those learning, and the collaboration of communities to transform schools into safe environments of inclusion and effective teaching and learning.

7. Implications of the Study

The study has several implications for educational policy, school administration, teacher development, and community participatory activities in South Africa's post-corporal-punishment era. Secondly, and more significantly, the study emphasises the inadequacy of training in alternative disciplinary strategies. Inadequate training renders many teachers incapable of effectively disciplining and managing pupils in their classrooms. Skiba et al. (2011) and Martinez and Williams (2022) advocate for professional development as something beyond sporadic workshops; it must extend through continued mentoring, scenario-based learning, and

reflection in real-world situations, applicable to local realities. Another argument concerns the emotional and psychological burdens imposed on teachers and the need for systemic supports to ensure the well-being of this profession. Burnout, stress, and feelings of powerlessness were themes that recurred throughout much of the dialogue, indicating how disciplinary reform procedures require trauma-informed policies and mental health resources (Weare, 2023; Jungert et al., 2019). This means that schools should prioritise teacher wellness as a key criterion for effective teaching and learning (Muthala et al., 2022).

Moreover, the study also highlights the importance of parental and community participation in maintaining non-punitive disciplinary systems. Resistance from parents, rooted in cultural norms and past practices, has hindered the implementation of restorative and relational techniques. As Morrison and Vaandering (2012) put it, disciplinary reform should be a collaborative activity in which families, communities, and educators work together to co-construct disciplinary expectations and support mechanisms. Hence, these findings indicate that adequate resources should accompany the implementation of the policy. The lack of school counsellors, behavioural specialists, and appropriate infrastructure has, at the very least, limited alternative measures. According to Osher et al. (2018), any disciplinary reform is unlikely to succeed without institutional support when needed. Investment in human and infrastructure resources is necessary to enable schools to implement inclusive and compassionate disciplinary interventions.

Conversely, the study calls for the reimagining of discipline through moral education (Khathi et al., 2021a), learner agency, and cultural relevance. Based on lessons gleaned from Cuba, Finland, and Zimbabwe, the study advocates for an integrated approach that balances care with accountability. South Africa's education system must adopt a values-based pedagogy that emphasises respect, responsibility, and community engagement, as outlined by Waghid (2014) and Morrow (2007).

8. Conclusion

The abolition of corporal punishment presents an opportunity to redefine discipline in South African schools, taking into account empathy, accountability, and inclusive learning environments. The study has illuminated some unexpected realities about teaching and learning management in South African secondary schools since the abolition of corporal punishment. Drawing on the experiences of school management teams in the Umlazi District, the findings reveal that, while the policy shift falls within constitutional and human rights parameters, its implications have posed serious pedagogical, emotional, and systemic challenges. Teachers face increased classroom disruption, diminished respect for authority, and possibly greater emotional distress, all while lacking adequate training and facing limited resources. Meanwhile, the development of restorative, collaborative, and learner-centred disciplinary methods indicates a slow change in the school's culture. The study emphasises the importance of continuous professional development, increased stakeholder involvement, and culturally responsive models in strengthening this change.

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