

THE RELEVANCE OF PLATO'S CONCEPT OF PUNISHMENT TO SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ENUGU STATE

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Abstract

The study was undertaken to explore Plato's concept of punishment and its implications for using punishment in secondary schools in Enugu State. Three research questions were posed to guide the study. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from 60 teachers randomly selected from three local government areas in Enugu State. The major findings of the study revealed that a well-applied punishment will obviously reform the individual and enhance learning, as already suggested by Plato. Moreover, school administrators do not administer punishment in a way to reform the student as Plato suggested. Based on the findings, recommendations were made to educational administrators, guidance counselors, curriculum developers and educational planners, as well as well as teachers to fully adopt Plato's theory of punishment in the educational system and ensure that punishment is administered with the view of reforming the disciplinary system in the state's secondary schools.

Background

Punishment is a kind of pain inflicted on evil-doers for a certain purpose. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* defined

punishment as the infliction of some pain, suffering, loss or social disability as a direct consequence of some action or omission on the part of the person punished. Punishment can also be defined as the authoritative deprivation of food, operating on some wrong doers against his will, in order to wipe out a fault committed (Higgnus, 1949). The above definitions suggest that punishment is to cause an offender to suffer for his/her offence by inflicting a penalty or by making him/her suffer either mental or physical pain. Again, it serves as deterrence to non-offenders.

Plato's conceptual view of punishment is centered on the education of a child. For instance, according to Plato, cited in Barker (1960), punishment in education probes the motive and general mentality of the culprit. The child or student should understand clearly what he or she is being punished for (Plato in Rusk, 1969). This is where our concern rests because punishment in Nigerian schools are punitively oriented. Punishment in the school system is expected to be applied for corrective measures so as to enhance learning and the moral upbringing of the learner.

The necessity of punishment in school cannot be over emphasized. Plato believed that a well-intentioned punishment is necessary so as to enable the child to select an alternative that is rewarding. Thus, Plato opined that the purpose of punishment is informative and preventive in nature. Punishment is suffering or discomfort for wrongdoing. For Plato, punishment is another remedy for crime. Thus, he maintains that punishment should be inflicted on the offender but that punishment should neither

be severe nor minimal otherwise, it becomes counterproductive. Plato, knowing very well the effect of punishment on the offender, believed that it is better to be punished than to go unpunished. This is because, for Plato, punishment is reformatory and preventive. Punishment may include censure, ridicule and loss of privilege, as well as corporal punishment. It does not give, provide a conducive atmosphere for learning good things (Jowett, 1937). Lending its support to the above view, Bruise and White (1981) said that punishment relating to teaching/learning, when applied should have a significant effect on the enhancement of the child's learning.

Administering punishment in schools as preventive and reformatory measures will minimize the rate of crime among students and enable them to learn effectively in schools. According to Achebe (1970) and Durojaiye (1972), punishment is a widely applied method of controlling behaviour in the Nigerian and African communities. Parents use punishment more than any other method to correct and control their children's behaviour. Communities use it on recalcitrant citizens to serve as a deterrent to other citizens.

Teachers and parents use punishment a great deal in the training and teaching of their children. Many psychologists and educationists, such as Skinnah (1953) and Travers (1977), have, however, pointed out that the use of punishment has an adverse effect. Despite the cry of some psychologists and some educationist against its use, punishment, when appropriately applied, can be effective in correcting criminal behaviours.

The ban on the use of punishment by the Nigerian government and the Federal Ministry of Education (1981) edict which allowed the use of punishment by only the school head-masters/principals or any other teacher authorized to apply punishment in the course of teaching and learning has watered down the effectiveness of punishment in schools, such that teachers no longer have the courage to punish any student for a misdeed for fear of retaliation or being queried. In spite of this, however, the application of punishment in schools is still operative, yet its reduction has had a significant impact made on indiscipline in our school systems which is on geometric rate of increase.

There is general notion that application of punishment in school system is declining. Probably because of that, there is an increase in student's indiscipline, such as truancy, lateness to school, laxity, irresponsibility in one's duties, lack of motivation, loitering, bullying, fighting, dishonesty and other forms of scandalous behaviour and non-observance of school rules and regulations. Moreover, the increase in students' indiscipline in schools could be due to the inappropriateness in the application of punishment in schools. Research has proved that there is an influx of untrained teachers into the teaching profession. Those groups of teachers are not properly groomed in the use of punishment. They either punish students severely or minimally without making effort to help the student see reasons for the punishment. Counseling the students helps them accept the responsibility for their offence and then take bold steps to avoid such bad actions in the future.

Punishment in the school system has caused an overwhelming concern for those parents who are witnessing their students become more involved in crime. Onu (1985), while trying to define the actions of teachers with regard to the punishment of students, said that it frightens him to hear that some parents go to court because his or her child is flogged or subjected to one punishment or the other for his or her involvement in some bad act. But regrettably, they (parents) in their own homes engage their children and wards to a more stressful punishment. Okeke (1985) states that some teachers use or apply punishment for the purpose of class control and maintenance of attention span. The use of punishment in the school system appears to be controversial and therefore need further enquiries to clarify the controversy.

Based on this controversy, this study is designed to investigate how Plato's concept of punishment can help to enhance learning and moral upbringing in secondary schools in Enugu State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine Plato's concept of punishment with a view to enhancing learning and good moral behaviours in secondary schools in Enugu State. Specifically, this study intends to:

- Determine whether the measures Plato advanced for addressing punishment in his own time are tenable in secondary schools in Enugu State;
- Determine the extent to which these measures can be applied to enhance learning in secondary schools in Enugu State;

- Identify the perception of the respondents of the impact of punishment in secondary schools.

Significance of the Study

The findings and conclusions of the study could be used through a well articulated programme of moral education to help improve the condition and restore sanity, particularly among students, and among youths at large. For instance, it is the opinion of Plato that a well-intentioned and applied punishment will lead to good moral upbringing and enhance learning.

The findings of the study will prompt policy makers to evaluate their policies as they relate to administration of punishment in secondary schools, and especially to formulate policies that will help to enhance learning and good moral behaviour among the students.

Administering punishment in schools as preventive and reformatory measures will minimize the rate of crime among students and enable them learn effectively in schools. It is therefore hoped that the findings of this study will enable the teacher and heads of schools to appreciate the psychology of the offender and Plato's postulation on punishment while administering punishment against an offense committed.

Research Questions

To guide the study, the following research questions were posed:

1. What were the measures Plato advocated to address punishment in his own time that are tenable in secondary schools in Enugu State?

2. To what extent could the measures advanced by Plato to address punishment be applied to enhance learning in secondary schools in Enugu State?
3. What are the perceptions of the respondents of the impact of punishment in secondary schools?

Scope of the Study

The study was focused on the thoughts of Plato with regards to punishment in order to discover the extent to which his wisdom can be applied in the secondary schools in Enugu State.

The study will also highlight the measures that Plato advocated in addressing punishment in his own time and survey the perception of the respondents on the impact of punishment in our schools. The study was limited to secondary schools in Enugu State.

Literature Review

This section will focus on acknowledging some of the existing theoretical and empirical concepts related to the study under investigation.

Higgins (1949) defined punishment as the authoritative deprivation of food, operating on some wrong doer against his will, in order to wipe out a fault committed. It follows from his assertion that punishment is chiefly the taking back of freedom from one felt unworthy for it. It includes also wiping out of a committed fault. On the other hand, Blumenthal (1975), defined punishment as inflicting of physical or mental suffering or both upon violation of certain

standards of behaviour for anyone or a combination of these three reasons:

- Sheer revenge for the violation
- To teach violator to conform in the future
- To make an example to deter others who might consider the same offence

In the above definition of punishment by Blumenthal, to punish, therefore, is to cause an offender to suffer for his/her offence by inflicting a penalty or by making him/her suffer either mental or physical pain. It also serves as deterrence.

Punishment is strictly considered in relation to human acts and has practically proved useful to the achievement of order in any society, especially the modern society where crime and criminalities appear to be on a geometric increase. In the same vein, Betham, in Morris (1959, 27) put it in this way:

The immediate principal end of punishment is to control action. This action is either that of the offender or others; the offender it controls by its influence, either on his will... or his physical power... others by influence over their will... by way of example.

The acceptance of the wrong done in the past and readiness to improve in the future helps one a great deal to better one's character, and there has never been an age in the world of civilization that does not recognize the concept of punishment. Punishment is also defined by Akubue (1991)

in a narrow sense, as suffering or deprivation intentionally inflicted on an offender for the infraction of a law. Many, like Akubue, view punishment as the infliction of penalty upon a person for a misdeed. For instance, O'Leary (1992) is in support of this view in his definition of punishment as a consequence of behaviour, which reduces the future probability of that behaviour.

Peters (1979) is in support of the same view that the most promising justification of punishment is that provided by Bentham (1948), who argues that through the infliction of pains, to community reduces the incidence of offences that would be caused by the refusal to attach sanctions to socially important rules. Deterrence and preventions are therefore the basic reasons for punishment.

The above view of Peters is in agreement with Plato's view in "The Law" that punishment is given for two main reasons:

1. To correct and reform the offender;
2. To deter others from committing a similar offence.

According to Weiss (1947), punishment must be an honour. It must not only wipe out the stigma of the crime, but must be regarded as a supplementary form of education, promoting a higher devotion to public good. All in all, punishment should be used to pump reason, not bullets into the heads of the offenders. So the rope of law should be used to straighten the crooked life of criminals not to snuff it out. This is an analogy to the biblical belief that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.

Empirical studies on the punishment strategy prevailing in schools

A study conducted on the impact of corporal punishment in schools in Imo State by Ogu (2001:6) using 500 teachers as samples, discovered among others:

That corporal punishment in schools when it is mildly administered helps to reinforce positively, the academic performance of students. That some kind of close relationship exists between corporal punishment and effective teaching and learning to the extent that corrective corporal punishment helps to positively reinforce teaching and learning in schools.

Ogu (2001) further said that the ban on the use of corporal punishment by the Nigerian government was because of the inappropriateness in its application by teachers. This inappropriateness in its application is due to the influx of untrained teachers into the teaching profession. These groups of teachers were not properly groomed in the use of corporal punishment.

In another study on the application of corporal punishment as a tool for effective teaching conducted in Abia State by Onu (1985) using college staff in some selected secondary schools, he observed the positive effects of the use and application of corporal punishment in teaching and learning. He noted however that:

Excessive application of corporal punishment may produce a withdrawal syndrome on pupil,

thereby a child absents himself from school or becomes uninterested in school activities as well as may produce phobia in a child whereby he/she sees the school community as hostile environment.

Onu (1985) while trying to defend the actions of teachers towards the punishment of students said that it frightens him to hear that some parents go to court, because his or her child is flogged or engaged in one punishment or the other, for his or her involvement in some bad act. But regrettably, they (parents) in their own homes engage their children and wards to a more stressful punishment.

In a study by Nwosu (1986) on the effect of punishment on classroom teachers conducted in Anambra State using secondary school teachers, with a sample size of more than 500, it was reported of one Mr. Odo that he was manhandled by a group of young boys in Obigbo who claimed that teacher Odo flogged their sister in the school. Mr. Odo regretted being a teacher and wondered how a parent would send a child to school to learn under the custody of the teacher but later turn back to challenge the custodian for taking care of the child.

Research Methods

In carrying out the study, a survey design was used. The study was carried out in three local government areas of Enugu State namely:

1. Enugu South Local Government Area
2. Udi Local Government Area

3. Nsukka Local Government Area

The population of the study of 2,092 consists of teachers currently serving in 72 secondary schools in the three local government areas under the study in Enugu State. The administration of punishment cuts across all the secondary schools in the state. For purposes of the study, 20 teachers from each of the local government areas were randomly selected making a total of 60 teachers. The affected three local government areas used for the study were as well selected randomly, each local government area spread out from the Northern to the Southern part of the state respectively.

A structured questionnaire was developed by the researcher and used as the instrument for data collection for this study. The questionnaire was structured on a four-point response scale of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD). The responses were assigned in the values of 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively.

The questionnaire was administered to 60 respondents – teachers that fall within the sample in the three Local Government Area under study of the seventeen L.G.A. of Enugu State as at December, 2012.

The instrument was administered directly by hand by the researcher to the respondents. The completed questionnaires were also collected by the researcher on the spot and used for analysis.

Frequency counts and mean statistics were used to analyze the responses to each of the four research questions. The scaling prints for the upper and lower limits for the mean are shown below:

3.50-4.00=Strongly Agreed (SA),

2.50-3.49=Agreed (A)

1.50-2.49=Disagreed (D)

1.00-1.49=Strongly Disagreed (SD)

Based on these values, any item with a mean score of 2.50 and above was considered as accepted while any item with a mean below 2.50 was rejected

Results

Research Question 1: *What measures did Plato advance to address punishment in his own time that are tenable in secondary schools in Enugu State?*

Table 1: Mean response of the respondents on the measures advanced by Plato to address punishment in his own time which are tenable in the secondary schools in Enugu State.

S/N	Items	Agreed	Strongly Agreed	Dis-agreed	Strongly Dis-agreed	Mean X	Decision
1	Punishment is preven-tive as well as reformative.	20	25	5		3.3	A
2	Punishment should neither be severe nor minimal when inflicted to individual.	30	10	20	-	3.4	A
3	Punishment that is cor-rective is beneficial to the recipient and the society.	22	25	3	-	3.38	A
4	Moral instruction and counseling are necessary.	19	30	1	-	3.36	A
Total (Grand Mean) X						3.36	

Accept at $x > 2.5$

Table 1 reveals that the teachers agreed that all the items on measures advanced by Plato to address punishment are tenable in secondary schools in Enugu State. All the above items are the means score of 2.5.

Research Question 2: To what extent could the measures advanced by Plato to address punishment be applied to enhance learning in secondary schools in Enugu State?

Table 2: Mean response of the respondents on the extent measures advanced by Plato to address punishment could be applied to enhance learning in secondary schools in Enugu State.

S/N	Items	Agreed	Strongly Agreed	Dis-agreed	Strongly Dis-agreed	Mean X	Decision
5	The use of punish-ment should not be abolished.	25	20	-	5	3.3	A
6	Punishment should be moderate so that the students do not learn in fears and tears.	20	26	2	2	3.28	A
7	Teachers as well as students who fail to carry out their responsibilities should be punished.	30	15	-	5	3.4	A
8	Students should be taught to accept the responsibility of their offence.	20	20	6	4	3.12	A
9	Punishment should be administered with the view to prevent future occurrence.	25	22	-	3	3.38	A
10	Administer punish-ment with the view to reforming the child.	20	25	3	2	3.26	A
11	Teachers should make their lessons interesting to the students.	25	25	-	-	3.5	A
12	Teachers should create enabling and conducive environment suitable for learning.	5	10	30	5	2.3	R
13	Punishment should be applied with counseling and moral instruction.	20	25	5	-	3.3	A
Total (Grand Mean) X						3.58	

Accept at $x > 2.5$

From the analysis of data on Table 2, the respondents agreed with items 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 13 but however, disagreed with item 12, which indicated that teachers should create an enabling and conducive environment suitable for learning.

Research Question 3: What are the perceptions of the respondents of the impact of punishment in secondary schools in Enugu State?

Table 3: Mean response of the respondents on impact of punishment in secondary schools in Enugu State.

S/N	Items	Agreed	Strongly Agreed	Dis-agreed	Strongly Dis-agreed	Mean X	Decision
14	Severe punishment disrupts classroom activities.	10	5	25	10	2.3	R
15	Punishment that is moderate helps to control classroom activities.	5	30	5	10	2.6	A
16	The use of force as a way of soliciting student's compliance always meet violent protest from students.	20	25	2	3	3.24	A
17	Punishment applied with counseling service would reduce crime among students in Nigerian schools.	25	25	-	-	3.5	A
18	Keeping the students busy with intensive lessons in schools makes them less prone to misbehaviour.	28	20	2	-	3.52	A
19	Punishment reduces crime in schools.	10	10	20	10	2.4	R
20	Punishment pre-vents crime in society.	18	22	5	5	3.06	A
21	Reduction in the application of punishment in schools has led to increase in crime rate in Nigerian schools.	10	10	30	-	2.6	A
22	Punishment should be used by well trained teachers.	25	25	-	-	3.5	A
Total (Grand Mean) X						3.0	

Accept at $x > 2.5$

From the above Table 3, it shows that the respondents rated the items on the impact of punishments in our secondary schools significantly.

Item 17 with a mean score of 3.52 and item 22 with also a mean score of 3.5 are rated highly significantly as impact of punishment in our schools. However, item 14 with a mean score of 2.3 and item 19 with a mean score of 2.4 were rejected, which state respectively that severe punishment disrupts classroom activities and punishment reduces crime in the schools.

Discussion of Results

From the finding, the results support the measures Plato advanced to address punishment in his day. Plato believed that punishment is a remedy for enhancing teaching and learning. It appears in various forms as: punishment is preventive as well as reformative; punishment should neither be severe nor minimal when inflicted on an individual; punishment that is corrective is beneficial to the recipient and the society; moral instruction and counseling are necessary. Punishment serves as a correction to the offender and a lesson to the observer as those who have never indulged in any punishable act have the persistent urge to do so.

The finding supports the view of Okonkwo (1989), who maintains that punishment is aimed not to punish the offender but to reclaim or reform him and make him turn voluntarily from evil to good ways. Moreover, the finding is in consonance with Chinawa (1984), who reported that

punishment is a character-shaping factor and that, without discipline in schools, there could be no order, neither can the teacher teach, nor students learn. It then appears that a well-applied punishment will obviously reform the individual and enhance learning as already suggested by Plato.

Furthermore, the findings of the study establish the extent to which measures advanced by Plato could be applied to the secondary schools in Enugu State. It was observed that actions be geared towards not abolishing the use of punishment in schools, instead, moderate punishment should be applied so that the child will not learn in fears and tears. Administering punishment with the view of reforming the child, teachers making their lesson interesting to the students among others were some of the measures advanced by Plato to address punishment that could be applied to the secondary school students.

This view was supported by Jeffery (1963), who upheld that measures like administering punishment to prevent further occurrence, a good philosophy of education for the teacher that supports the teacher's basic competencies in teaching as well as good classroom organisation. These are all positive ways of addressing or handling punishment in schools. The researcher believed that punishment should be moderate, for the learning environment to be child friendly. However, this finding appears to contradict earlier findings, which reported that some teachers use punishment as punitive measures instead of preventive and reformative measures. For instance, Akubue (1991), noted that the teacher should help the students develop an acceptable self-image and

understanding of their relationships with their teacher and within themselves in order to acquire set values. This is achieved through a well-intentioned punishment.

Based on the finding, it was observed here that a well-applied punishment geared towards Plato's ideology has a positive impact. The findings indicate also that punishment as applied today by many teachers does not enhance academic achievement of the students but rather hinders learning. This leads to insubordination and indiscipline among students.

Furthermore, the application of harsh punishment to students disrupts the classroom environment, resulting in students distancing themselves from their teachers. Severe punishment tends to fix behaviour rather than eliminate it. Probably because of this notion, Gibson (1976) insisted that harsh punishment is undesirable as it can provoke physical attack on the person of the teacher. Teachers who give harsh punishment are generally teachers who have a wrong conception of authority. It is further observed that school administrators do not administer punishment in a way to reform the student as Plato suggested. Also, the teachers do not use intensive lessons as a measure to keep students' mind away from deviants behaviour. This finding supports Nwachukwu and Anyanwu (1999), who all reported that kneeling the students down, canning and grass cutting for offences committed were not only used as punishment but were even perceived as serving the interest of the individual, the school and society.

Implications of the Study

The finding of this study could have far-reaching implications for the enhancement, teaching and learning through a well-intentioned punishment. The present study has implications on discipline (enhancement of learning). The resourceful teacher with personal integrity and understanding can help the students by administering and inflicting moderate punishment on them, which aim at the reformation, prevention and correction of the individual sometimes.

The outcome of this analysis has implications for general and specific methodologies for curriculum developers and educational planners. For instance, curriculum developers and educational planners should provide a place for productive and creative topics in areas such as drama, art and craft, poetry, composition and so on. These will help the students to achieve compliance to rules and regulations.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of this study:

1. Government, educational philosophers and practitioners, guidance counsellors, curriculum developers and educational planners should adopt fully Plato's theory of punishment in the educative enterprise and ensure that punishment is administered with the view of reforming the child so that the child does not learn in fear and tears, contrary to what hitherto obtained, where some

teachers use punishment as punitive measures instead of preventive and reformatory measures.

2. On the administration of punishment, this study recommends that teachers should be taught, through in-service education, appropriate methods of handling punishment in our schools. If this is done, positive learning will be enhanced.
3. Government should ensure the posting of experienced and mature teachers who have been taught the appropriate use of punishment in schools. This will obviously enhance learning in secondary schools in Enugu State.
4. It has been noted in the present study that suitable literature like epic, dramatic poetry, lyre-playing, among others are vital instruments through which the students can enhance learning.

Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it could be observed that emphasis on moderate punishment is a very important factor which determines the enhancement of learning and teaching. A well applied punishment helps in the molding of a child's character as well as helping one to learn effectively.

It has been discovered by this research work that administering punishment with the view of reforming the child and a well articulated punishment and Philosophy of Education, were some of the measures advanced by Plato to enhance effective learning.

The analysis of data collected also shows that a well intentioned punishment which aims at reformation, prevention and counseling will go a long way in enhancing teaching and learning. Constant use of moderate punishment and counseling will as well help to enhance learning and class control.

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