



Gender and Age Differences in the Attitudes of Junior High School Students Towards Punishment

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to investigate gender and age differences of Junior High School (JHS) students in the Sissala East Municipality in terms of their attitudes towards punishment. The study used the descriptive survey design to carry out the investigation. Data for the study was collected by administering a closed-ended Likert scale questionnaire to respondents with a sample size of 291. Responses were analyzed using the Mann-Whitney U test. Findings of the study show no statistically significant differences in the attitude of JHS students in the Sissala East Municipality towards punishment on the bases of both sex and age. The study concluded that gender and age have no influence in the attitude of JHS students in the Municipality towards punishment.

INTRODUCTION

Success in any human activity is determined by discipline and good behaviour. One can only agree with Gyan, McCarthy, McCarthy, and Baah-Korang (2015) when they pronounced that the assertion that discipline is the mother of all great achievements cannot be overemphasized in the field of education. Good discipline allows children to do their best in academic attainments. It also leads to the effective achievement of the goals of the school and the aspirations of the community. One of the key goals of teachers' work in the school is to ensure successful student teaching and learning, as this is necessary for successful results and for the teacher to be able to establish favourable teaching environments for the students (Jiménez, Valero Valenzuela, Anguera, & Suárez, 2016).

Even though good behaviour is necessary to achieve learning outcomes, Yeboah, Nyarko-Sampson and Forde (2020) discovered that indiscipline is one of the major concerns teachers are facing. Similarly, Yunisa, Aliyu & Ezeani (2019) submitted that problems brought about by students' misbehaviour, and the management techniques used by teachers worry teachers around the world. Sulbarán and León (as cited in Jiménez, Valero Valenzuela, Anguera, & Suárez, 2016) stated that poor student behaviour in the classroom has an increasing detrimental impact and occurs frequently. Peña and Ángulo (cited in, Jiménez, Valero Valenzuela, Anguera, & Suárez, 2016) also contend that this serves as one of the worrying problems in education which must be addressed.

Meeting undesirable behaviour of students cannot be averted (Seidman, 2005). This is a challenge met by all teachers, regardless of their level of effectiveness or experience (Kerr & Nelson, 2010). Behaviour management is more a challenge for inexperienced teachers (Gordon, 2001). Gordon identified different levels of students' disruptive behaviour which range from minor behaviours such as playing in class, to major disruptive behaviours which include physical violence.

Maphosa and Mammen (as cited in Ofori, Tordro, Asamoah, & Achiaa 2018) revealed that basic school learners of today in Ghana often engage in different forms of misbehaviour including disrespecting authorities, lateness, bullying, poor dressing habits, destroying school property and physically harming instructors because they have disciplined them or their peers. Other undesirable behaviours identified to be carried out by students are pre-marital sex, armed robbery, drug abuse, and alcoholism according to Asare and Twene (as cited in Ofori, Tordro, Asamoah, & Achiaa, 2018).

Ngozi (2004), bluntly stated that indiscipline in the school, particularly at junior and senior high schools in Ghana, is occurring at very alarming levels. According to Ngozi, most high school students are in the adolescent age group and are transitioning from childhood to adulthood. They often rebel against authority because it is one key characteristic of that milestone.

Lansing Community College (2018) defined disruptive behaviour as any incident that disrupts teaching, learning, and implementation of disciplinary measures either on or outside school. This means that it is any student behaviours that prevent a teacher from teaching and/or students from learning.

Indiscipline has blatant repercussions and bad effects. It impairs instructional delivery because focus moves from the academic activities to the diversions supplied by negative behaviours, raising the psychological and physical stress levels for both the teacher and learners (Parsonson, 2012). It is imperative for teachers and educators to put much effort into managing the behaviour of learners because in order for teaching and learning to occur, student indiscipline must be appropriately managed (Nanyele, Kuranchie & Owusu-Addo, 2018).

Yunisa, Aliyu and Ezeani (2019) expressed fear that it is difficult for teachers to find and use the appropriate techniques for modifying undesirable behaviour of students. Nonetheless, laws required for school safety and positive behaviour have compelled teachers and schools to be interested in effective ways of managing disruptive behaviour (Dentrich & Lewis, 2013). That notwithstanding, caregivers turn to use punishment to correct behaviour of students in schools globally (Kilimci, 2009).

Opoku-Adusei (2021) observed and reported that in Ghana, punishment is a common tool used in pre-tertiary institutions even though the practiced has been banned by the Ghana Education Service since 2017. It is speculated that administrative and social acceptance of punishment, including lack of competence in using alternative disciplinary measures account for the continuous use of punishment in schools.

It appears there is a dearth of studies on punishment despite its continuous usage. For instance, findings on sex (Darkwa, Akpanglo-Nartey & Kemetse, 2020) and age (UNICEF, 2015) differences with regards to attitudes towards punishment are inconclusive. Kutateladze and Crossman (2009) submitted that there exists a void in validated assessments that measure sex differences in punishment. Preliminary research in Ghana (Opoku-Adusei, 2021) shows that perceptions on the use of punishment wrong behaviour of students may be influenced by variables such as gender and age. This calls for further investigations on the topic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Therefore, this study sought to test the following research hypotheses:

H1: There is no statistically significant difference in the attitudes of male and female JHS students in the Sissala East Municipality towards the use punishment in behaviour management.

H2: There is no statistically significant difference in the attitudes of JHS students of different age groups in the Sissala East Municipality towards the use of punishment in behaviour management

METHODOLOGY

Research Model

The study used the descriptive survey design to examine the attitudes of respondents. This approach was chosen because it makes it possible to describe the nature of prevailing conditions such as attitudes (Best & Khan, 2014).

Research Sample

The target population for the study comprised all Junior High School students in the Sissala East Municipality of Ghana. According to the Ghana Education Service, Sissala East Municipal Education Office records (2022), the population of JHS students was estimated at 3,647. This is distributed across a total of 54 JHSs in the municipality. Out of this number, 1,837 were boys whilst 1,810 were girls. The accessible population however, comprised of JHS Two students in the municipality which was made up of 1,208 students.

A sample size of 291 participants was selected from the accessible population of 1,208 students based on the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling determination table. The study used proportionate stratified sampling technique to sample respondents based on the population and sex distribution of students. Probability sampling was used to ensure generalization of findings of results.

Data Collection Tools and Procedure

A closed-ended Likert scale questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. Amedahe and Gyimah (2013) contend questionnaire is often used to test hypotheses in the social sciences because it provides greater economy, reachability, and assurance of anonymity. It was also used because it offers opportunity for confidentiality to respondents (Sarantakos, 2013).

The instrument was adapted from two instruments (Yunisa, Aliyu & Ezeani, 2019; Ngussa & Mdalingwa, 2017). The reliability of the instrument yielded a Cronbach's Alpha value of .849. The research instrument was organized into two sections (A and B). Section A comprised demographic information of the participants. Item 1 required students to choose their sex by ticking the appropriate box for either Boy = 1 or Girl = 2. Item 2 also required participants to select their age bracket from three categories: 1 = (10 - 15), 2 = (16 - 20), and 3 = (21 and Above). Also, Section B comprised 20 items which required participants to indicate their attitudes towards each punishment type by choosing from a scale of Strongly Like = 4, Like = 3, Dislike = 2, and Strongly Dislike = 1 for each item.

Data Analysis

The hypotheses were tested by conducting a Mann-Whitney U test on the questionnaire items which comprised different types of punishment in which students rated their level of like or dislike for each. The median ranks for each of the twenty items were first calculated for each respondent to get each respondent's median attitude towards all the types of punishment when used to manage his or her behaviour. These median ranks of male students and female students were then compared using Mann-Whitney U test on SPSS. The median was chosen because the independent variable is ranked. This was done for the different age groups too by first of all assigning age group 10 - 15 was to rank 1 and the age group 16 - 20 was also assigned rank 2.

The non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test because the data is nonparametric data which had two respective independent variables, that is sex

and age, divided into two categories; and a dependent variable, attitude, which was measured on ordinal scale. The Mann - Whitney U test requires data on assumptions of ordinal scaling, and does not rely on the scores of the population to be normally distributed (Pagano, 2013). Also, the population distribution by the two groups are identical (Cohen & Lea, 2004).

Ethics

Ethical clearance was granted for this study by the University of Cape Coast Institutional Review Board (UCCIRB), Ghana, with protocol identification number: ID(UCCIRB/CoDE/2021/04).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Hypothesis 1

H₀: There is no statistically significant difference in the attitudes of male and female JHS students towards the use punishment in behaviour management in the Sissala East Municipality.

The null hypothesis sought to find out whether there was no statistically significant difference between the attitudes of male and the attitudes of female JHS students towards the use of punishment in behaviour management in the Sissala East Municipality. Tables 1 and 2 show the results of the descriptive statistics and Mann-Whitney U test for sex differences respectively.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics Attitude of Students Towards Punishment

Sex of respondent	Median	Mean
Male	2.00	1.74
Female	2.00	1.71
Total	2.00	1.72

Table 2. Mann-Whitney U Test for Sex Difference in the Attitudes of Students Towards Punishment

	Attitude of students towards punishment
Mann-Whitney U	10490.50
Wilcoxon W	20786.50
Z	-.14
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.87

From Table 1, the Mann-Whitney U test revealed that there is no statistically significant difference between the attitude of males (Md= 2.00, n = 148) towards the use of punishment in behaviour management compared with the attitude of female students (Md = 2.00, n = 143), U = 10490.50, z = -.14, Sig. = .87, shown in because the sig. value is greater than .05.

Table 3. The Decision is to Fail to Reject the Null Hypothesis

Research Hypothesis 2

Age of respondents	Median	Mean
10 - 15	2.00	1.70
16 - 20	2.00	1.76
Total	2.00	1.72

H₀: There is no statistically significant difference in the attitudes of JHS students of different age groups towards the use of punishment in behaviour management in the Sissala East Municipality.

The null hypothesis sought to find out whether there is a statistically significant difference between the attitudes of JHS students in the age group 10 - 15 and the attitudes of JHS students in the age group of 16 - 20 in the Sissala East Municipality towards punishment. Tables 3 and 4 show the descriptive statistics for the respondents based on age.

Table 3:

Age of Distribution of Respondents

Table 4:

Descriptive Statistic for Attitude of Students Towards Punishment

Table 3. Mann-Whitney U test for Age Difference in the Attitudes of Students Towards Punishment

	Attitude of students towards punishment
Mann-Whitney U	9330.00
Wilcoxon W	26535.00
Z	-.78
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.44
a. Grouping Variable: Age of respondents	

From Table 4, the Mann-Whitney U test revealed that there is no statistically significant difference between the attitude of students within the age group of 10 - 15 years (Md= 2.00, n = 185) towards the use of punishment in

behaviour management compared with the attitude of students in the age group of 16 - 20 years ($Md = 2.00$, $n = 106$), $U = 9330.00$, $z = -.78$, $Sig. = .44$, shown in Table 14. The decision is to fail to reject the null hypothesis because the sig. value is greater than the .05.

In respect of hypothesis 1 the study sought to find out whether there was a statistically significant difference between the attitudes of male and the attitudes of female JHS students towards the use of punishment in behaviour management in the Sissala East Municipality.

The Mann-Whitney U test which was conducted revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the attitude of males ($Md = 2.00$, $n = 148$) towards the use of punishment in behaviour management compared with the attitude of female students ($Md = 2.00$, $n = 143$), $U = 10490.50$, $z = -.14$, $Sig. = .89$. This means that male JHS students in the Sissala East Municipality did not differ from their female colleagues in terms of their attitude towards punishment. The null hypothesis was, accordingly, not rejected.

This finding accentuates the view of Teklu and Kumar (2014) who revealed that sex did not influence the attitudes of teachers towards corporal punishment because there was no significant statistical difference between the mean scores of females and males. Abrifor (2015) gave the same conclusion about the relationship between sex and perception of students and teachers in Nigeria. In Ghana, similar findings were reported by Yeboah (2020) that there was no statistically significant difference between the views of male and female teachers towards punishment. Other studies including Ogbe (2015), and Ghosh and Pasupathi (2016) also affirm this finding of the study. One possible reason for this finding of the study is because the students come from the same cultural and social setting with similar orientations. The submission of Teklu and Kumar (2014) corroborates well with this. They argued that both males and females who are within a cultural context were expected to share the same attitude towards a particular phenomenon, in this case punishment.

This study therefore negates the findings of Rice (1987) as well as Darkwa, Akpanglo-Nartey and Kemetse (2020) who claim that males showed positive attitude than females towards punishment. In respect of this hypothesis, this finding by the current study is equally at variance with Yuk-wah (1991) and Emily (2015) who contend that female students have a positive attitude towards punishment when compared with their male colleagues. This affirms the position of Darkwa, Akpanglo-Nartey and Kemetse that research on sex differences on punishment is not conclusive

Lastly, with respect to hypothesis 2, the study sought to find out whether there was a statistically significant difference between the attitudes of JHS students in the age group of 10 - 15 and the attitudes of students in the age group of 16 - 20 in the Sissala East Municipality towards punishment. This was tested by conducting a Mann-Whitney U test.

Results of the investigation revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the attitude of students within the age group of 10 - 15 years ($Md = 2.00$, $n = 185$) towards the use of punishment in behaviour management compared with the attitude of students in the age group of 16 - 20

years ($Md = 2.00$, $n = 106$), $U = 9330.00$, $z = -.775$, $Sig. = .44$. Accordingly, the null hypothesis was not rejected. This means that JHS Students in the Sissala East Municipality do not have statistically significant difference towards the use of punishment in behaviour management in terms of age.

This finding corroborates the report given by Teklu and Kumar (2014) as well as Abrifor (2015) which concluded that there was no statistically significant correlation between the age and attitudes of teachers towards corporal punishment. It is important to indicate that though that study was on teachers and not students, the age variable is a common variable investigated in both studies. Finding of this current study is however at variance with other studies. For instance, Sherbert Research, and Vittrup and Holden (cited in Carter-Davies & Bristow, 2018) revealed that with the experience of physical punishment, age appears to be a key factor in determining a child's opinions. They stated that younger children find punishment more acceptable than older children.

Studies in the area of age and attitudes towards corporal punishment as it stands are inconclusive. There appears to be a paucity of research in this area which requires more studies. UNICEF (2015) puts it more succinctly that there is a lack of longitudinal data, especially from Low- and Middle-Income countries in the area of punishment.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings of the study show no statistically significant difference in the attitude of male and female JHS students in Sissala East Municipality towards the use of punishment in behaviour management. It also found no statistically significant difference in the attitude of JHS students of different age groups in the Sissala East Municipality towards the use of punishment in behaviour management. This means that both male and female students have similar attitudes towards punishment. Lastly, JHS students of different age groups have similar attitudes towards punishment.

FURTHER STUDY

One limitation of the study is that findings of the study cannot be generalized to include JHS students in other districts because of geographical differences. Also, findings cannot be generalized to cover Senior High students, Primary and Kindergarten learners in the Sissala East Municipality because of differences in developmental factors. Further studies should consider examining age and sex differences in the attitudes of Senior High School towards punishment.

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