

Research Article

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# The BELA Amendment and Discipline in Schools: Rhetoric or Real Change in Combating Corporal Punishment?

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## Abstract

**Background/purpose.** Educational systems have moved towards more constructive and non-violent disciplinary practices, due to the negative impact of corporal punishment on learner well-being and academic outcomes. This study explored alternatives to corporal punishment strategies employed in schools and the challenges associated with their implementation.

**Materials/methods.** The study adopted a qualitative approach within an interpretive paradigm, using a phenomenological multi-case study design. It was grounded in Self-Efficacy Theory. Data was collected from six teachers and four school management team members purposively selected from two quintile three secondary schools. Inductive content analysis was used to analyse the data.

**Results.** The findings reveal the influence of teachers' beliefs, professional environments, and systemic factors on using an alternative to corporal punishment strategies. These include teachers' reluctance, lack of training, and learners' attitudes toward alternatives. Low self-efficacy, often linked to inadequate training and support, was identified as a barrier to embracing new disciplinary approaches.

**Conclusion.** The study concludes that the persistence of corporal punishment may be due primarily to a lack of training in alternative disciplinary measures, emphasising the urgent need for professional development initiatives focused on discipline to enhance teacher self-efficacy and promote sustainable change.

## 1. Introduction

Media platforms and literature attest that South Africa still struggles with learners' indiscipline. A video of a learner throwing a book at the teacher at Three Rivers Secondary School leaked in 2018 (Slatter, 2018). The Centre for Child Law (CCL) and two parents, represented by Section 27, sued the South African Council for Educators (SACE) in the Pretoria High Court over its lenient disciplinary procedures. Two accused teachers used Corporal Punishment (CP) on learners, yet it is prohibited. In the Children Series Volume I: Children Exposed to Maltreatment, 2021, Statistics South Africa reported that CP was the most common form of school violence (Statistics South Africa [SSA], 2021). Mokoena (2024) describes another event at Glenvista High School where male learners and teachers threw chairs at each other in class, highlighting further school indiscipline nationwide. Similarly, the Mpumalanga Department of Education suspended a teacher for forcibly cutting a learner's braided hair with scissors in front of another learner after a classroom fight (Tshikalange, 2024). At Hoër Tegniese Skool in Welkom, Free State, a teacher fought with a student over a phone after asking them to turn it off, disrupting the lesson (Mashamaite, 2024).

The Basic Education Laws Amendment (BELA) has revised previous legislation on corporal punishment, notably broadening its definition to encompass actions such as inflicting pain during school activities and in school hostels. Along with these changes, BELA has introduced stricter consequences for perpetrators (Republic of South Africa [RSA] 2024). However, this raises the question: Is this amendment indeed a solution to the persistent use of Corporal Punishment (CP) in South African schools, or is it merely a strategy to enforce greater teacher compliance? This concern stems from the continued practice of CP despite the introduction of various laws in the past that explicitly banned it. To understand the root of the issue, it is essential to explore the alternative strategies teachers employ and their challenges in implementing these alternatives.

Since the dawn of democracy in South Africa in 1994, legislative changes have sought to reinforce democratic school governance and reshape the education system. During this period, section 10 of the South African Schools Act (SASA) was a landmark reform, explicitly prohibiting CP in schools Mutlokwa (2022). This shift was essential, as before this change, teachers often relied on CP as the primary means of managing learner behaviour (Fatau & Pylman, 2020). The ban was intended to create a safer, more supportive learning environment, fostering respect for the rights of learners while encouraging alternative disciplinary methods.

Following the enactment of SASA, the Abolishing of Corporal Punishment Act No. 33 of 1997 was introduced, further solidifying the prohibition of CP in schools. This legislation reflected a broader societal shift towards upholding human rights and dignity within the educational sphere. However, while the ban on CP marked a significant step forward, it left a gap in practical strategies for teachers to manage classroom discipline. Ndlovu et al. (2023) allude that teachers, who had long relied on CP, faced the challenge of maintaining order without a clear framework for alternatives.

In 2000, the Department of Basic Education introduced Alternatives to Corporal Punishment (ATCP) strategies to address this issue (Kalisti, 2021). The measures include disciplinary actions, such as verbal warnings, detention, demerits, and time-out (Fahri, 2024). These were designed to guide teachers in managing learner behaviour more constructively. ATCP was deemed necessary, as there was a recognised need to support teachers accustomed to CP as their primary disciplinary tool (Ntuli, 2020). Without proper guidance, many teachers struggled to find effective, non-violent ways to address behavioural issues in the classroom (Mphuthi, 2024).

However, the implementation of ATCP faced significant resistance. One of the main criticisms was that these alternatives were introduced without sufficient consultation with key stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, and communities (Ghati, 2023). As a result, many teachers felt that the strategies were imposed upon them and did not consider their unique challenges in different school

contexts. For example, Mayisela (2021) indicates that detention as an alternative to CP was viewed by many as impractical, especially for teachers in rural areas; learners often walk home in groups for safety in these areas, and detaining some learners after school could jeopardise their well-being. The lack of consultation led to alienation among teachers, who felt that the alternatives were irrelevant to their needs.

Furthermore, even if stakeholder consultation had taken place, it can be argued that a one-size-fits-all approach would have failed to address the diverse needs of schools nationwide. Location, socio-economic conditions, and community values shape each school's unique context. Thus, the challenge remains. Several years following the implementation of ATCP, teachers were compelled to express their apprehensions over declining classroom management and pervasive indiscipline (Marais & Meier, 2010; Mtsweni, 2008). One would have assumed that it should have been teachers who had experienced nothing beyond CP. However, nearly two decades after the implementation of ATCP, other scholars have observed the same trend (Zondo & Mncube, 2024; Gagnon et al., 2021; Ntuli, 2020). One question that perhaps sparks interest is whether teachers understand how to contextualise and apply these innovations to their specific circumstances or whether they need to be provided with something working for them to apply. O'Leary (2024) and Martinez (2024) assert that teachers with elevated self-efficacy are inclined to discover diverse alternatives to address the issues they encounter in educational settings. Conversely, those with low self-efficacy prefer to attribute challenges to insufficient support instead of their creative and inventive abilities (Robinson, 2024; Sithole et al., 2024).

Scholars have noted that despite the introduction of ATCP, CP has not been fully eradicated from South African schools. Reports from the South African Council for Educators (SACE) teachers' cases reveal that some teachers continue to use CP despite its legal prohibition (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2024; Kau, 2024; Letuma, 2023). This suggests that ATCP, as implemented, has not been fully effective in changing teacher behaviour and classroom dynamics. In response, BELA has been introduced to reinforce the ban on CP, provide a broader definition of what constitutes such punishment, and tighten the consequences.

BELA's revisions regarding corporal punishment indicated the presence of a problem. Nonetheless, the issue is whether it enables teachers to enhance their alternate approaches to corporal punishment. To investigate the root cause of the persistent use of CP in schools, it is essential to examine the implementation of approved measures to understand teachers' practices and the problems they encounter. Therefore, the study explored the alternative strategies to corporal punishment used in schools and the challenges teachers encounter when implementing these strategies.

The following questions guided the study:

- What ATCP strategies do teachers use?
- What challenges do teachers encounter when employing ATCP strategies?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Alternatives to corporal punishment

Alternatives to corporal punishment are disciplinary approaches designed to manage and correct student behaviour to promote personal development, respect for authority, and accountability, all without physical force (Mlambo & Kiyala, 2024). These methods focus on cultivating healthy behaviours, emotional growth, and social competencies while avoiding corporal punishment's harmful physical and psychological effects (Kau, 2024). A key component of these alternatives is

ensuring that students understand the impact of their actions and are provided with constructive means to improve their behaviour.

A verbal warning is one example of a strategy which involves clear and direct communication from the teacher or school authority regarding inappropriate behaviour (Guskey & Bailey, 2024). According to Burden (2020), verbal warnings are an initial step in addressing minor misbehaviours, allowing students to correct their actions before further consequences are necessary. This method is especially useful for addressing more minor infractions, allowing educators to guide students without escalating the situation. However, teachers must issue these warnings composed and respectfully, focusing on the specific behaviour rather than criticising the student's character (Guskey & Bailey, 2024; Karasova & Nehyba, 2023).

A more structured alternative, such as detention, may be employed if misbehaviour persists. Detention requires students to stay after school or during break times, either in silence or while completing additional tasks, as a consequence of their actions (Buell et al., 2022). This approach removes students from their regular activities, giving them time for reflection or an opportunity to complete missed assignments. For example, a student who consistently arrives late to class might be assigned detention to reflect on the importance of punctuality or to catch up on work (Buell et al., 2022). Alongside detention, other methods like demerits can be used. A demerit involves a deduction in a student's grade or the assignment of a penalty for poor performance or inappropriate behaviour, marking an additional way to acknowledge and address misconduct (Makendano & Mahlangu, 2023).

In addition to these more corrective methods, guidance and counselling provide a more supportive approach to addressing the root causes of student misbehaviour. Counselling helps students explore the underlying emotional, social, or behavioural issues contributing to their actions (Ford, 2024). School counsellors or psychologists can work closely with students to address personal challenges and develop coping strategies for managing emotions. For instance, if a student is acting out due to family issues, the counsellor might meet with them to discuss their feelings and help them process emotions like anger or frustration (Buthelezi et al., 2024; Therese et al., 2023). Counselling sessions should be confidential, built on trust, and designed to provide a safe space for students to express their feelings openly (Adanna & Olumide, 2023). To ensure lasting impact, counsellors should use evidence-based methods to guide students toward better emotional regulation and decision-making (Su et al., 2024) while also offering follow-up support to monitor progress and promote ongoing development (Su et al., 2024).

## ***2.2. Factors inhibiting the implementation of ATCP***

The continuation of CP in schools can be attributed to several factors, including a lack of teacher training in alternative disciplinary measures, the reactive nature of ATCP, limited resources, and societal influences. One of the main challenges is that many teachers are not adequately trained in alternative disciplinary approaches, such as conflict mediation, positive behaviour interventions, and restorative justice (Kim, 2024). Teachers may feel ill-equipped to manage student behaviours without proper training, leading them to revert to CP as a quick and familiar solution (Ntuli, 2020). This issue is particularly significant in South Africa, where a substantial portion of the current teaching staff was trained in a system where CP was the primary discipline. Even those certified after 1996 may have been trained by teachers who believed that CP was an appropriate method of discipline (Hunter & Morrell, 2021). Sefolo (2023) argues that teachers who lack knowledge of alternative, non-violent discipline may perceive abandoning CP as losing control over their classrooms. Consequently, it becomes difficult for such teachers to move away from CP without targeted training in alternative disciplinary methods.

In addition to the lack of training, some obstacles to the successful deployment of ATCP are attributed to its reactive nature. Literature indicates that methods such as detention, verbal

warnings, and demerits are implemented after the conduct has occurred. The implication is that a shift towards proactive alternatives may be beneficial in reducing teachers' use of corporal punishment in schools. Moreover, limited resources within schools exacerbate the issue. Ismail et al. (2023) highlight that teachers often face significant stress due to limited resources, large class sizes, and the diverse needs of students. In such high-pressure environments, maintaining student discipline becomes considerably more challenging (Bardach et al., 2023). Feeling overwhelmed, teachers may resort to CP to quickly restore order in chaotic or difficult classrooms (Bardach et al., 2023).

Furthermore, societal influences also play a role in the continued use of corporal punishment in schools. Since schools are often seen as extensions of the community, the argument is made that if CP is still practised at home, it is not surprising that it continues in educational settings. Students accustomed to CP at home may find alternative disciplinary measures insufficient, further influencing teachers to use CP. Dhaliwal et al. (2024) note that CP is still widely tolerated in many communities, and parents who use this method at home may expect schools to do the same (Sithole et al., 2024). As a result, teachers who might prefer alternative strategies may feel pressured by parents to continue using CP as a means of discipline.

### **2.3. Theoretical Framework**

#### **2.3.1. Self-Efficacy Theory**

This study was grounded on Self-Efficacy Theory (SET), founded by Albert Bandura. SET focuses on an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform tasks and achieve goals (Klassen, 2024). Bandura's work emphasises that SET influences how people approach challenges, their persistence in the face of difficulties, and their overall success in achieving desired outcomes (Visoso, 2024). In managing discipline in school, teachers' beliefs play a critical role in determining how they handle learner behaviour (Martinez, 2024). These beliefs reflect their confidence in their ability to address and influence student behaviour, a key aspect of self-efficacy. Therefore, in this study, teachers' beliefs about managing indiscipline serve as a valuable indicator of their perceived capabilities in this area. According to O'Leary (2024), teachers who believe in their ability to manage classrooms effectively are more likely to approach discipline confidently and implement positive, non-punitive alternatives to corporal punishment, such as positive reinforcement, restorative practices, or social-emotional learning techniques.

Muli (2024) asserts that when teachers strongly believe in their ability to manage disruptions, they are more likely to adopt proactive and positive strategies for behaviour management. Teachers with high self-efficacy are also more likely to explore and implement effective ATCP, such as peer mediation, setting clear behavioural expectations, and using engagement strategies that motivate learners to behave appropriately (O'Leary, 2024). On the other hand, teachers with low self-efficacy may struggle to manage learners' indiscipline and implement ATCP. Sithole et al. (2024) state that such teachers face numerous challenges. They may feel unsupported by their school administration or lack the necessary resources to address behavioural issues meaningfully (Sithole et al., 2024). They may feel uncertain about their ability to use new discipline methods effectively. They may fall back on corporal punishment because it is more familiar to them, or they perceive it as a more immediately effective solution (Gülsü et al., 2023).

SET offers valuable insights into how teachers' beliefs in their ability to manage classroom behaviour shape their approach to discipline. Teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to adopt and successfully implement alternatives to corporal punishment. In contrast, those with low self-efficacy may struggle to use these alternatives effectively, reverting to traditional methods due to a lack of confidence. This theory is crucial to understanding the factors that influence how teachers

adopt and apply new strategies for managing learner indiscipline in post-corporal punishment education systems.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Sites

The study was conducted in two secondary schools in the Free State province of South Africa, specifically at schools categorised as quintile 3. These schools are designated to serve economically deprived communities according to the classification of educational institutions. They are classified as non-tuition schools that obtain government funding to supply learners with meals and stationery.

**Table 1.** Details of research sites

Name of school	Number of principals	Number of deputy principal	Number of teachers	Number of learners	Quintile ranking
School A	1	1	20	686	3
School B	1	1	26	905	3

**Table 2.** Participants biographical details

Pseudonym	School	Gender	Experience
K1	A	Female	13
K2	A	Female	9
K3	B	Male	8
K4	B	Female	22
T5	A	Female	2
T6	A	Female	5
T7	A	Male	1
T8	B	Male	4
T9	B	Male	2
T10	B	Male	3

#### 3.2. Paradigm

The research utilised an interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm is appropriate for research as it examines teachers' perspectives on implementing ATCP and the challenges they face in managing discipline. An interpretive paradigm constitutes a research design wherein the researcher seeks to comprehend the phenomenon by synthesising the intended meanings conveyed through the participants' interpretations (Pham, 2024).

#### 3.3. Approach

The research utilises a qualitative methodology. Dehalwar and Sharma (2024) characterise qualitative research as a methodical empirical inquiry into significance. Qualitative research is a type of investigation grounded in the real experiences of teachers regarding the implementation of ATCP and their interpretations within a natural context.

### **3.4. Design**

The study employed a phenomenological multiple-case study. Case studies are an in-depth, detailed examination of a particular instance or case within a real-life context (Hunziker & Blankenagel, 2024). They are commonly used in qualitative research to explore complex issues, events, or phenomena in a thorough and holistic way (Karunaratna et al., 2024). A case study typically involves collecting detailed data from multiple sources (such as interviews, observations, documents, and reports) to gain insights into the particular case being studied context (Hunziker & Blankenagel, 2024). A multiple case study approach is particularly practical because it allows for a more comprehensive exploration of how various schools implement ATCP and the specific challenges they encounter. By studying multiple cases, the research captures a broader range of perspectives and experiences from different settings, providing a deeper understanding of the diversity in practices and obstacles across schools. This approach helps identify patterns, similarities, and differences, leading to more robust and nuanced insights. Employing multiple case studies strengthens the study by offering a richer, more varied data set that can better inform conclusions and recommendations.

According to Adeniran & Tayo-Ladega (2024), phenomenology design is a qualitative research design focused on exploring and understanding people's lived experiences and how they perceive and make sense of those experiences. In phenomenological research, the aim is to uncover a phenomenon's essence or core meaning from the perspective of those who have experienced it (Adeniran & Tayo-Ladega, 2024).

### **3.5. Data collection**

The individuals and research sites were purposely selected. Four members of the SMT engaged in semi-structured interviews (SSIs), while six teachers participated in a focus group discussion (FGD). Focus group discussion allowed the researchers to gather detailed data from a group of people on a specific topic. It helped the participants remind each other of some points they could have forgotten in a one-to-one interview, thereby assisting in rich data collection. SSI also assisted in allowing participants to respond to and communicate their insights on ATCP from their points of view. It also provided the researchers with numerous opportunities to probe further and gather further information about the implementation of ATCP. For that, triangulation provided credibility to the findings.

### **3.6. Data analysis**

Inductive Content Analysis (ICA) was employed to analyse the data. Vears and Gillam (2022) assert that researchers utilising ICA remain acutely cognisant of the phenomena under investigation and formulate interpretations that provide comprehensive answers to the research questions while maintaining the integrity of the context in which the data was generated. Employing ICA means that researchers allowed the data to take the lead throughout the analysis to present a realistic image of teachers' experiences applying ATCP to manage indiscipline. The researchers read the transcriptions multiple times, assigning initial broad codes. Through repeated readings, these codes were refined and combined to reveal key themes. This iterative process allowed for a more precise identification of relevant patterns. Once the final themes were established, they were supported by direct quotations from participants words. Using these direct quotes ensured the authenticity of the findings. Following the steps of inductive content analysis, this approach enhanced both the reliability and validity of the results. Lastly, a theoretical framework was applied to interpret and discuss the findings.

### 3.7. Ethical considerations

The research received ethical approval from the University of the Free State, under ethics number UFS-HSD2024/1448, and from the Provincial Department of Education in the Free State. Consent was obtained from the schools and the participants to conduct and document the interviews.

## 4. Results

Data in this paper revealed two major themes. The first is the ATCP strategies that teachers use and the second is the challenges they face.

### 4.1. The ATCP strategies that teachers use

Under this theme, three sub-themes emerged. The participants stated that although they occasionally use ATCP strategies like detention and verbal warnings, they stressed that these methods are ineffective, because learners are disruptive, resist punishment, and do not regard any other type of discipline as being as severe as corporal punishment. Nonetheless, the data also revealed that some participants do not use ATCP strategies.

#### 4.1.1. Detention

The participants indicated that they detain learners to manage indiscipline in schools. K3 (School B) explained:

*"We use detention sometimes, but this resorting matter given to us is not working because our learners know that after being detained, it's not only about him/her. It also punishes the teacher, so as teachers, we end up not implementing these measures as they punish us. There isn't even a compensation for teachers staying overtime to detain learners."*

T5 (School B) also added:

*"We also use detention at our school but we only implement it when we see fit, we are not consistent with it. The effectiveness of this alternative depends on how the alternative is administered. Some measures are less effective because some learners don't feel the punishment."*

#### 4.1.2. Warning

A warning and point system are other ATCP strategies that teachers employ to mitigate indiscipline in schools. The participants revealed that they use verbal warnings to discipline learners, K1 (School A) shared:

*"We use verbal warnings as a strategy at the school, even though it is not effective."*

Additionally, the results showed that teachers who are unfamiliar with or know little about the ATCP, employ their own methods to deal with indiscipline. K2 (School A) explained:

*"We do not really use the ATCP strategies, we avoid using them because they end up punishing us as teachers."*

K3 (School B) emphasised:

*"We only use SASAMS since we are not familiar with those ATCP strategies. We cannot implement what we don't know."*

K4 (School B) shared:

*"No, I don't use them, I do not even know how to implement them. I just heard about them. I tried to record misbehaving learners on the incident book, but that is not even clear how that will punish the learner."*



## 4.2. The challenges that teachers face when implementing ATCP

Under this theme, three sub-themes emerged. The participants indicated that insufficient training, teachers' reluctance to use ATCP and learners' resistance response, pose challenges to implementing ATCP.

### 4.2.1. Lack of training

The deficiency in training manifests in two distinct forms, according to the data collected from the participants. There is a deficiency of induction within schools and an absence of training from the DoE about ATCP, leading to a lack of support in schools. K1 (School A) stated:

*"We did not get training or education regarding ATCP. Teachers were not equipped with ATCP strategies after it was introduced to deal with discipline and this is a challenge because a large number of teachers have not been reached by training on ATCP and they are not equipped with skills to manage indiscipline in schools through non-violent means."*

K3 (School B) added:

*"Teachers are not inducted with the ATCP strategies, so they fail to implement them. The Department of Education did not orientate teachers on the alternative methods of discipline introduced by the Department of Education."*

T1 (School A) stated:

*"There is no support from the SMT. We are on our own. We are told to motivate them when we seek assistance."*

### 4.2.2. Teachers' Reluctance

The participants also showed that one of the challenges is that teachers are reluctant to implement ATCP. K2 (School A):

*"We avoid using ATCP strategies, because they end up punishing us as teachers."*

T5 (School B) shared:

*"We only use them when we see fit, we are not consistent at all. Teachers are not giving the strategies a chance, to see if they work."*

### 4.2.3. Learners' response

Furthermore, participants indicated that another challenge is that learners resist ATCP; they perceive the methods as entertaining or unimportant, thus undermining the authority of teachers. The subsequent assertions substantiate this claim:

T3 (School A) shared:

*"Learners make it tough to adopt ATCP strategies because they make fun of it and believe that any approach you offer will not be as severe as corporal punishment. This is the reason why ATCP strategies are impossible to implement."*

T6 (School B) also alluded:

*"Teachers are against the alternatives because the learners behave like wild animals; they do not see the difference between a teacher and a learner; they believe that corporal punishment is better off than the alternatives."*

## 5. Discussion

The study found that teachers use detention to manage indiscipline by depriving learners of breaks or keeping them after school. However, participants noted that detention is largely ineffective, with learners perceiving it as enjoyable rather than punitive. Zondo et al. (2023) define detention as

a strategy intended to remove learners from rewarding contexts, yet its implementation often fails to achieve this purpose. Walker (2023) concludes that detention frequently lacks the desired negative reinforcement effect. Similarly, Mayisela (2021) and Wang et al. (2024) observed that repeated use of detention leads to its ineffectiveness, as learners subjected to it are likely to reoffend. Teachers' frustrations with detention align with Lappert's (2012) findings that suggest contextualisation and consultation are necessary for effective implementation. From the perspective of self-efficacy theory, teachers' perception of their inability to effectively use detention diminishes their confidence in this strategy. They may feel unsupported or inadequately trained to adapt detention to their specific contexts, further undermining their belief in its efficacy.

Verbal warnings emerged as another frequently used ATCP strategy. Teachers deduct points from learners or issue formal reprimands for minor infractions, as Widiandi and Oktaviani (2024) describe. While this method is widely applied, its effectiveness depends on consistent enforcement and the teacher's authority. Teachers with low self-efficacy might struggle to enforce verbal warnings effectively, especially without supportive structures or training. Their perceived lack of control over classroom dynamics may reduce their willingness to rely on verbal warnings, leading to inconsistent application and reduced effectiveness.

The study revealed that some teachers lack familiarity with ATCP strategies, leading them to rely on unsanctioned methods. Others resist ATCP due to scepticism about its effectiveness. This finding aligns with Tshabalala et al. (2024), who identified inadequate training as a primary barrier to implementing innovative disciplinary approaches. Cruz and Myers (2024) further noted that teachers' reluctance often stems from deeply ingrained beliefs about discipline, such as the perceived necessity of corporal punishment based on their own experiences.

From a self-efficacy perspective, this lack of knowledge and reluctance reflects a diminished sense of professional agency. Teachers who feel inadequately trained or unsupported may lack confidence in implementing ATCP effectively. A perceived lack of administrative support compounds this, as participants noted that school management teams (SMTs) often fail to provide guidance or oversight. Teachers may feel isolated in managing discipline without proper training or reinforcement, further eroding their self-efficacy.

Inadequate training was a recurring theme in the findings regarding the challenges teachers face. Participants highlighted a lack of induction programs within schools and insufficient training from the Department of Education (DoE) regarding ATCP. Sithole et al. (2024) observed that many teachers feel unsupported in transitioning away from corporal punishment, undermining their confidence and willingness to adopt new methods. According to self-efficacy theory, mastery experiences and vicarious learning are crucial for building confidence. The absence of structured training opportunities denies teachers these critical experiences, leaving them ill-equipped to handle indiscipline without resorting to traditional methods.

Another significant challenge is learners' resistance to ATCP. Participants indicated that learners often view these strategies as fun or ineffective, undermining teachers' authority. Sithole et al. (2024) and Giroux (2024) noted that shifting from culturally ingrained practices like corporal punishment to alternatives requires significant effort to reshape learners' perceptions. Bakia-William (2024) emphasised that learners accustomed to corporal punishment may not immediately recognise the benefits of ATCP. This resistance can further erode teachers' self-efficacy, as they may perceive their efforts as futile.

### 5.1. Research Limitations

The study was limited to a small sample size and conducted in two secondary schools within the Thabo Mofutsanyane Education District. The study only explored the ATCP used and was limited to the efficacy of implementations.

### 5.2. Further Research

From the findings of this study, the following research may be conducted for further contribution in this field:

- Framework for ATCP dissemination and implementation.
- The district official's views on the ATCP implementation in schools.
- Framework for ATCP professional development based on schools' needs regarding indiscipline challenges.
- The study was conducted in two Thabo Mofutsanyane Education District secondary schools. A quantitative study could be conducted to involve more schools in different districts.

## 6. Conclusion

The study explored the alternative to corporal punishment strategies that teachers use in schools and the challenges they face. The findings underscore the importance of addressing systemic and individual factors that influence the implementation of ATCP. Teachers with low self-efficacy may be less likely to adopt new methods, particularly when they feel unsupported or inadequately trained. To address these challenges, policymakers and school administrators may prioritise comprehensive training programs that equip teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to implement ATCP effectively. This study highlights the interplay between teachers' beliefs, professional environment, and disciplinary strategies. The study concludes that the persistence of corporal punishment may be due to a lack of training in alternative disciplinary measures, emphasising the urgent need for professional development initiatives focused on discipline to enhance teacher self-efficacy and promote sustainable change.

## 7. Suggestion

Strengthening teachers' self-efficacy through targeted interventions can contribute to more effective and sustainable implementation of ATCP, ultimately fostering a positive and disciplined learning environment. Therefore, urgent professional development initiatives focused on discipline to enhance teacher self-efficacy and promote sustainable change are recommended for schools. Additionally, training on fostering a culture of collaboration and support within schools is recommended for SMT to enhance teachers' confidence and willingness to embrace alternative strategies.

## Declarations

**Author Contributions.** All authors have read and approved the paper.

**Conflicts of Interest.** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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**Ethical Approval.** The Free State Department of Education and Ethics Committee of the University of Free State approved the study ethically.

**Data Availability Statement.** Data is available on request.

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