



Abolition of corporal punishment and the unfinished project of guidance and counselling: A critical comparative review

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a critical and comparative review of Ghana's recent educational reforms, focusing on the introduction of the Standards-Based Curriculum (SBC), the abolition of corporal punishment, and the institutionalization of guidance and counselling (G&C) as instruments of Positive Discipline. It examines how these reforms reflect Ghana's moral and pedagogical transition towards humane education. The paper employs an integrative-critical review design that synthesizes historical, policy, and empirical evidence from Ghana alongside comparative cases from Kenya, Nigeria, and India. Literature was drawn from peer-reviewed journals, government directives, and international frameworks on child rights and educational reform. The study reveals that the SBC's learner-centred philosophy coheres with non-violent disciplinary approaches; however, weak legislation, limited teacher preparation, inadequate counselling infrastructure, and persistent cultural acceptance of corporal punishment hinder implementation. Comparative analysis indicates that reform sustainability depends on statutory clarity, teacher capacity development, and community engagement. The paper situates Ghana's reforms within a broader moral-educational discourse, arguing that discipline and learning must be reconciled through dignity, empathy, and institutional strength. It proposes a framework integrating Positive Discipline, robust G&C systems, and legal reinforcement to align moral authority with learner rights and pedagogical effectiveness.

Keywords: Corporal punishment, Curriculum review, Educational reform, Ghana, Guidance and counselling, Positive Discipline, Standards-Based Curriculum

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, Ghana's education system has undergone one of the most profound reformations since independence. The introduction of the Standards-Based Curriculum (SBC) in 2019 and the Ghana Education Service's (GES) 2017 directive abolishing corporal punishment in pre-tertiary schools signalled a decisive moral and pedagogical shift. Together, these policies redefined the Ghanaian learner not as a passive recipient of instruction but as an active participant in meaning-making; an individual whose dignity, rights, and agency are integral to learning. Yet this vision of humane and learner-centred education remains incomplete. Despite the formal ban, corporal punishment persists in many schools, sustained by deep-seated cultural acceptance, parental expectation, and inadequate institutional alternatives. Guidance and counselling (G&C), the policy's intended replacement pillar, remains underdeveloped and under-resourced. Teachers, caught between policy directives and social tradition, often find themselves oscillating between reform and habit, forced to navigate the tension between state regulation and community norms.

These contradictions reveal a broader question at the heart of Ghana's educational transformation: how can discipline and learning be reconciled within a framework of dignity, rights, and pedagogical purpose? The issue is not simply administrative but philosophical, reflecting competing historical narratives of authority, morality, and order. This review seeks to interrogate these complexities by situating Ghana's reforms within their historical and comparative contexts. It explores how the abolition of corporal punishment interacts with the learner-centred ethos of the SBC, and how G&C, as the institutional alternative, has fared in practice. Through a critical synthesis of policy documents, scholarly literature, and comparative case studies from Kenya, Nigeria, and India, the paper highlights both the promise and fragility of Ghana's moral turn in education.

The discussion is organised thematically. The first section traces the historical foundations of discipline and authority in Ghanaian schooling, from missionary pedagogy to postcolonial reforms. The second analyses the philosophical and pedagogical aspirations of the SBC. The third examines the abolition of corporal punishment as both moral progress and practical paradox. The fourth assesses the current state of G&C as an unfinished institutional project. The fifth offers a

comparative analysis with Kenya, Nigeria, and India, and the final section outlines a roadmap for building sustainable, rights-respecting discipline systems.

Ultimately, this review argues that Ghana's reforms will achieve their transformative potential only when dignity becomes institutionalized, when legal frameworks, professional capacity, and cultural consciousness converge to create classrooms governed by trust rather than fear.

Research questions

Guided by an integrative-critical logic, this review was structured around the following review questions:

1. How can discipline and learning be reconciled in Ghana within a framework of dignity, rights, and pedagogical purpose?
2. In what ways does the Standards-Based Curriculum (SBC) align with, or require, a shift from punitive discipline to Positive Discipline?
3. Why does corporal punishment persist in Ghanaian schools despite the Ghana Education Service's (GES) abolition directive, and what institutional and cultural conditions sustain that persistence?
4. How has guidance and counselling (G&C), as the intended alternative to corporal punishment, performed in practice, and what explains its under-development?
5. What comparative lessons from Kenya, Nigeria, and India illuminate the conditions that make discipline reform sustainable, and what do these lessons imply for Ghana?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Educational reform in discipline is never merely bureaucratic, but deeply philosophical. Ghana's shift from corporal punishment toward Positive Discipline under the Standards-Based Curriculum (SBC) and expanded Guidance & Counselling (G&C) should be read as a convergence of competing moral-logical visions of childhood, authority, and learning. To interpret this shift, this review draws on four theoretical strands: humanistic psychology, constructivist pedagogy, rights-based educational philosophy, and institutional change theory, each enriched by Ghanaian evidence.

2.2. Humanistic Foundations of Positive Discipline

Positive Discipline rests fundamentally on humanistic psychology, especially the work of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, which treats learners not as blank containers but as persons seeking meaning, esteem, and growth. Rogers argued that learning flourishes where conditions of safety, empathy, and respect exist. In Ghana, this philosophical turn is mirrored in the policy that frames corporal punishment not only as harmful physically but as damaging to the learner's dignity (Ministry of Education, Ghana), a view echoed in the UNICEF-Ghana position paper on corporal punishment.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs suggests that only when learners feel safe, respected, and valued will they be open to higher cognitive engagement. In Ghanaian classrooms, the legacy of punitive discipline often undermines those foundational conditions, which is one reason why the shift to non-violent discipline must be understood as moral, not just managerial.

2.3. Constructivism and Learner Agency

The SBC is explicitly constructed on constructivist principles; knowledge is actively built by learners through interaction, reflection, and discourse, rather than delivered unilaterally by the teacher. A standards-based curriculum demands environments where students speak, collaborate, inquire, and even err, conditions antithetical to a regime of fear. Recent scholarship in curriculum studies emphasises that standards-based reforms require "creative facilitation, authentic assessment, and professional community" for success (Anapy, 2025). In Ghana itself, a study of Religious and Moral Education (RME) teachers in Kwahu West found that teachers were "somewhat prepared" and were, to a large extent, implementing key features of the SBC in classrooms, though gaps in pedagogic support and coherence remained (Chaitey, 2024). This suggests that the SBC's constructivist orientation is plausible in principle but contested in practice.

2.4. Rights-Based and Child Protection Perspective

From a rights-based view, discipline in schooling is not a privilege of authority but a domain in which children's dignity, participation, and protection must be honoured. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and regional instruments implicate states in prohibiting all forms of corporal punishment. In Ghana, though corporal punishment is legally permitted under certain laws, the state has acknowledged the need for prohibition. As of 2019, Ghana endorsed the Safe to Learn call, committing to prohibit corporal punishment in schools and promote positive discipline (Chaitey, 2024).

Moreover, Ghana's Ministry of Education and GES issued a directive in 2017 banning corporal punishment in schools and mandated adoption of a Positive Discipline Toolkit (Kuwornu, 2019). Yet legal prohibition is uneven in its reach: the existing Children's Act does not explicitly ban corporal punishment in the home or in all educational settings.

This gap between normative ideal and legal codification helps explain why punitive practices persist despite reform.

2.5. Institutional & Change Theory Perspectives

To understand why reform efforts fall short, one must adopt theories of institutional change and policy-practice disjunction. Michael Fullan's model of educational change (Fullan, 2007) emphasises that reforms succeed only when three elements converge: capacity-building, system coherence, and local adoption. In Ghana, the ambition of moving to non-violent discipline has outpaced capacity: teacher training, monitoring, and resources lag behind policy rhetoric.

Similarly, Busse and August's theory of policy–practice incongruence reminds us that even well-designed policies often fail when institutional scaffolding is weak or when local norms resist change. In Ghana, studies show that some teachers continue to view corporal punishment as indispensable for maintaining discipline. For instance, Quansah et al. (2022) found that a majority of teachers in a Ghanaian high school saw the ban as inappropriate, believing that alternative strategies insufficiently address indiscipline. Other work surveying teachers in basic and high schools showed significant disagreement with the abolition of caning. These continuities lie at the heart of why reform remains “unfinished”: policy is not enough; institutional change must be deep and sustained.

2.6. Cultural and Postcolonial Lens: The Memory of the Cane

Any account of discipline in Ghana must also reckon with the cultural legacy of colonial schooling. Corporal punishment was institutionalised in colonial and missionary education as a normative method of controlling bodies and enforcing obedience. That history endures in the “cane ethos”, the belief that respect is earned through fear, and that authority requires visible power. Postcolonial theory suggests that reform must do more than legislate: it must provoke cultural reorientation.

Ghanaian studies confirm this persistence. In Greater Accra, a comparative study of inclusive and non-inclusive schools showed corporal punishment remained widespread, particularly in schools less exposed to progressive pedagogical practices. In qualitative interviews, teachers express that students become “wayward” without corporal punishment; others assert that the ban undermines respect for teachers. These attitudes betray a cultural memory wherein discipline by pain is normalised.

2.7. Conceptual Synthesis

This theoretical framework brings into view the tensions in Ghana's reforms. The humanistic and constructivist strands affirm the moral necessity and pedagogic coherence of Positive Discipline. The rights-based perspective situates the reforms within global child protection norms. Institutional and change theories help explain why policy often stumbles, and the cultural lens surfaces the deep sediment of colonial and social memory resisting transformation. In the following sections, the empirical and comparative evidence will be examined through this woven conceptual lens.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1. Method of the Review

3.1.1. Review Design and Philosophical Orientation

This paper employs an integrative-critical review design aimed at synthesising conceptual, historical, and empirical insights surrounding Ghana's Standards-Based Curriculum (SBC), the abolition of corporal punishment, and the institutionalisation of guidance and counselling (G&C). The integrative approach is particularly suited for topics characterised by multidisciplinary intersections, enabling the merging of theoretical, policy, and empirical literature into a unified interpretation (Torraco, 2016).

While the review draws on systematic search principles for transparency and replicability, it privileges interpretive critique over statistical aggregation. This orientation follows Snyder's (2019) argument that integrative reviews are most valuable when they “rethink and reconceptualise” complex educational issues. The study thus adopts an interpretivist stance, emphasising contextual understanding and conceptual refinement, consistent with Ghana's socio-cultural educational landscape (Adu-Gyamfi, 2022).

3.1.2. Scope and Foci

The review addresses three interconnected strands within Ghana's educational reform:

- i. The Standards-Based Curriculum (SBC) and its philosophical and pedagogical implications.
- ii. The abolition of corporal punishment and its moral, cultural, and policy consequences.
- iii. The evolution of guidance and counselling (G&C) as an institutional substitute for punitive discipline.

The geographical focus is Ghana, but with comparative reference to Kenya, Nigeria, and India - nations that share similar postcolonial educational histories yet display diverse disciplinary trajectories. The temporal frame spans 2000 to 2024, encompassing Ghana's democratic consolidation, its curricular transitions, and growing global commitments to child rights.

3.1.3. Sources of Data and Search Strategy

To ensure breadth and credibility, data were drawn from five key source categories:

- Peer-reviewed academic journals indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect (Cogent Education, Pedagogy, Culture & Society, International Journal of Educational Development, and Comparative Education Review).
- Ghanaian studies and institutional publications were retrieved from the University of Education, Winneba Institutional Repository, the Ghana Education Service (GES), and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NaCCA).
- Policy documents and legal instruments, including the GES Circular on the Ban of Corporal Punishment (2017), the Education Act (Act 778, 2008), and the Children's Act (Act 560, 1998). International frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990).
- Grey literature including UNICEF Ghana reports, child protection studies, and Ministry of Education policy briefs.
- The search terms included combinations of "Standards-Based Curriculum Ghana", "corporal punishment ban Ghana", "Positive Discipline", "guidance and counselling Ghana", "teacher discipline Africa", and "competency-based education Africa". Boolean operators (AND, OR) and truncations were applied to enhance precision. Searches were conducted in Scopus, Taylor & Francis Online, ERIC, and ResearchGate databases.

3.1.4. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they:

- Examined educational reform, discipline, or counselling in Ghanaian pre-tertiary schools.
- Presented empirical evidence or theoretical analysis relevant to SBC or discipline.
- Were published between 2000 and 2024 in English.

Exclusion criteria eliminated studies focusing solely on tertiary education, teacher pay, or non-disciplinary reforms. Publications lacking methodological rigour or peer-review validation were also excluded. This approach aligns with practices recommended by Cronin, Ryan, and Coughlan (2008), who advocate transparent inclusion criteria to enhance credibility in educational reviews.

3.1.5. Analytical Process

The review employed a three-phase thematic synthesis (Braun & Clarke, 2006): Codes and themes were developed and refined with explicit reference to the review questions, so that the synthesis could be traced from question to theme to implication.

- Familiarisation and Data Extraction – Reading, annotating, and summarising documents to identify initial codes related to historical evolution, policy enactment, and teacher adaptation.
- Categorisation and Theme Development – Clustering codes into meta-themes such as "discipline as pedagogy", "policy–practice incongruence", and "cultural persistence of corporal punishment".
- Interpretive Integration – Relating emerging themes to theoretical frameworks, highlighting intersections between humanistic, constructivist, and rights-based theories.
- This qualitative synthesis allowed for the identification of conceptual continuities across sources, revealing that Ghana's disciplinary reforms are both moral and structural enterprises.

3.1.6. Credibility and Ethical Considerations

All secondary materials were sourced from publicly accessible repositories or licensed databases. References were verified for authorship, date, and relevance, ensuring intellectual authenticity (Polit & Beck, 2017). Although no human participants were involved, the study adheres to ethical norms in literature synthesis, maintaining fair attribution and cultural sensitivity, particularly in interpreting disciplinary practices within African moral traditions (Owusu-Ansah & Agyeman, 2020).

3.1.7. Methodological Limitations

Despite its breadth, this review recognises several constraints. The limited number of empirical studies specifically evaluating the implementation of Positive Discipline in Ghana restricts meta-analytic comparison. Much of the available evidence derives from qualitative accounts or policy analysis rather than longitudinal data. Moreover, although comparative insights from Kenya, Nigeria, and India enrich contextual understanding, they are illustrative rather than exhaustive. These limitations underscore the need for further empirical research into teacher preparedness, community engagement, and the operational capacity of G&C units.

3.1.8. Summary

The methodological design of this study seeks to balance analytical rigour with interpretive depth. By integrating systematic search methods with conceptual synthesis, it constructs a nuanced portrait of Ghana's reform efforts, grounded in evidence but alert to history and culture. The next section presents the thematic synthesis and findings, organised around six major themes emerging from the literature.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1. Thematic Synthesis and Findings

This section presents the major themes that emerged from the integrative review, reflecting the historical, pedagogical, and institutional contours of Ghana's educational reforms. The themes converge on a central argument: that the success of Ghana's Standards-Based Curriculum (SBC) and the abolition of corporal punishment depend on a systemic reorientation of discipline through guidance and counselling (G&C), professional training, and cultural transformation. Six key themes are discussed below.

Review question (RQ) - led synthesis

To support clarity, the thematic evidence is first summarised under each review question. The thematic sub-sections that follow then expand the same arguments with fuller historical, empirical, and comparative detail.

RQ1. Reconciling discipline and learning through dignity and purpose

Across the literature, the central tension is that policy language has moved towards dignity and learner rights, yet everyday disciplinary practice often remains anchored in older moral logics of obedience-through-fear. The sources converge on a simple conclusion: discipline becomes educational only when it is anchored in legitimate authority, relational trust, and workable non-violent routines that protect learning time without humiliating the learner.

RQ2. SBC and the need for Positive Discipline

The evidence indicates conceptual coherence between the SBC's learner-centred philosophy and Positive Discipline. A curriculum built on participation, inquiry, and learner agency implicitly requires classrooms where learners can attempt, err, and recover without fear. Where punitive discipline persists, the SBC's aims are undermined, not only ethically but pedagogically, because fear narrows participation and suppresses the very behaviours competency-based learning requires.

RQ3. Persistence of corporal punishment after abolition

Studies repeatedly describe a policy-practice gap driven by weak enforcement, limited teacher preparation in behaviour support, and community expectations that equate physical punishment with seriousness. In practice, teachers often stand between state directives and local moral pressure, and where viable alternatives are not institutionalised, habitual punitive routines reassert themselves. The result is that abolition becomes symbolic rather than transformational.

RQ4. Guidance and counselling as the unfinished alternative

The review finds that G&C has not yet matured into a fully resourced system capable of carrying the behavioural, psychosocial, and restorative work that corporal punishment once performed in many schools. Shortfalls include inadequate specialist staffing, limited infrastructure and confidentiality, and weak operational integration into school routines. Consequently, the intended replacement pillar remains thin, and teachers revert to familiar punitive tools when behavioural pressures rise.

RQ5. Comparative lessons from Kenya, Nigeria, and India

The comparative evidence points to three conditions that shape sustainability: statutory clarity (clear legal backing, not only circulars), teacher capacity development (training plus ongoing support), and community engagement (shifting public moral expectations of discipline). Jurisdictions that strengthen law and accountability mechanisms, while resourcing non-violent alternatives, show more credible progress. These lessons suggest that Ghana's reform agenda requires stronger legal embedding and greater investment in teacher and counselling systems to endure.

4.2. The Historical Evolution of Discipline in Ghanaian Schooling

Discipline in Ghanaian education has deep historical roots, stretching from missionary-era schooling to the civic and socialist experiments of post-independence governments. The missionary model introduced in the nineteenth century established a culture of obedience reinforced by corporal punishment, which was viewed as both moral correction and divine duty (McWilliam & Kwamena-Poh, 1975). This legacy persisted into the nationalist and military eras, where discipline became a metaphor for civic responsibility and loyalty to the state (Fobih & Koomson, 1998).

Despite policy changes, the ethos of fear and control has remained structurally embedded in school practice. Adjei

and Amponsah (2016) observed that postcolonial curriculum reforms in Ghana have often been accompanied by rhetoric of moral citizenship, yet with little change in classroom power dynamics. The SBC's introduction in 2019, and the ban on corporal punishment in 2017, therefore mark not a new beginning but an inflection point in a long history of attempts to balance authority with moral respect. Similar historical continuities are reported in Kenya and Nigeria, where postcolonial reforms preserved authoritarian vestiges under the guise of discipline (Ngwiri, 2019; Eke, 2020).

4.3. The Standards-Based Curriculum as a Pedagogical and Moral Reform

The SBC redefines both the content and philosophy of Ghanaian education. It promotes a competency-based framework that emphasises critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity rather than rote memorisation (NaCCA, 2019). Scholars interpret this as a radical pedagogical shift toward constructivist learning (Adzrolo, Osei & Agyeman, 2022). Yet, as Tanye (2023) cautions, the transition from teacher-dominated instruction to learner-centred pedagogy requires a corresponding transformation in disciplinary practices.

The SBC implicitly assumes classrooms governed by mutual respect, emotional safety, and learner agency. However, research indicates that many teachers lack the skills or resources to manage behaviour without corporal punishment. In a mixed-methods study, Agyemang (2021) found that while teachers supported the principles of Positive Discipline, they struggled with implementation due to insufficient training and heavy workloads. This mirrors findings from studies on classroom reform across Sub-Saharan Africa, which show that reforms fail when pedagogy is detached from teacher identity and community values (Hardman et al., 2019). Thus, the SBC's success hinges on the alignment of curricular philosophy with disciplinary culture. Without this, the moral dimension of the curriculum remains aspirational.

4.4. The Abolition of Corporal Punishment: Policy, Paradox, and Persistence

The Ghana Education Service's (GES) 2017 directive banning corporal punishment, later reinforced in 2019, represents a milestone in child protection. The policy aligns Ghana with global conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. The ban also reflects a moral recognition that violence undermines learning (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016).

Yet, studies consistently reveal a gap between policy and practice. A qualitative investigation in the Mampong Municipality found that teachers continued to employ informal punishments, such as prolonged kneeling or physical drills, citing parental pressure and lack of alternatives (Akyina & Heeralal, 2024). Twumasi (2023) reported similar findings in Wassa Amenfi West, where parents associated the absence of caning with moral laxity. These findings confirm Busse and August's (2020) policy–practice incongruence theory, which attributes such persistence to institutional under-preparation and cultural inertia.

Comparative evidence reinforces this pattern. In Kenya, despite legal prohibition since 2001, corporal punishment remains widespread due to weak enforcement (Ngwiri, 2019). In Nigeria, fragmented laws and regional disparities permit its survival in many states (Eke, 2020). Ghana thus occupies a middle ground, progressive in intention but fragile in execution

4.5. Guidance and Counselling as the Unfinished Project

Guidance and counselling (G&C) were envisioned as the moral and institutional replacement for the cane. In principle, G&C was to promote holistic learner development through emotional support, conflict resolution, and behavioural restoration. However, empirical evidence reveals severe implementation gaps. Boateng (2023) found that many Ghanaian schools either lacked trained counsellors or relied on teachers with minimal psychological training, who often handled over 1,000 pupils each.

At the basic level, G&C is largely symbolic; offices are non-existent, confidentiality is limited, and counselling duties are appended to already heavy teaching schedules. This structural weakness has been observed across Sub-Saharan contexts where counselling reforms were introduced without financial or legislative backing (Adotey & Koomson, 2021). Culturally, counselling is often perceived as a “soft” or Western practice, ill-suited to Ghanaian notions of moral correction (Owusu-Ansah & Agyeman, 2020). The absence of statutory protection further weakens legitimacy, unlike India's Right to Education Act (2009), which embeds counselling in law and institutional grievance mechanisms (Ramachandran, 2017). As such, G&C remains an unfinished project, conceptually sound, politically endorsed, but practically under-resourced.

4.6. Comparative Insights: Kenya, Nigeria, and India

Comparative analysis offers valuable insights into Ghana's reform efforts. In Kenya, despite the legal ban on corporal punishment since 2001, it remains widespread due to weak enforcement (Ngwiri, 2019). In Nigeria, fragmented legal frameworks allow corporal punishment to persist in several states, upheld by the Criminal and Penal Codes (Eke, 2020). However, India offers a more successful model: the Right to Education Act (2009) explicitly bans corporal punishment and mandates grievance-redress mechanisms through School Management Committees (Ramachandran, 2017). These comparisons highlight three key lessons. First, embedding legislation strengthens the sustainability of reforms. Second,

teacher training plays a crucial role in translating reforms into practice. Third, community attitudes ultimately determine the success and longevity of these reforms. As a Nature Education editorial aptly puts it, “Educational reform without cultural realignment is policy in suspension” (Nature Human Behaviour, 2020).

Beyond the broader literature on discipline reforms in Ghana, recent empirical research published in the West African Journal of Educational Sciences and Practice adds depth to the conversation by exploring factors that influence school behaviour and teacher practices. For example, Mfum-Appiah et al. (2025) found that parental involvement significantly impacts student engagement and behaviour, highlighting the need for strong family-school collaboration to reinforce positive conduct and support alternatives to punitive methods like corporal punishment (journals.jozacpublishers.com). Similarly, Arthur and Obeng's (2023) study on teachers' readiness to implement Ghana's Standards-Based Curriculum highlights how gaps in professional training and resources undermine teachers' confidence and consistency in adopting new pedagogical approaches, a challenge also evident in the implementation of positive discipline strategies (e-iji.net). While not solely focused on discipline, Okoro, Aloka and Odongo's (2018) study in *WAJESP* emphasises the role of extrinsic motivation and school climate in shaping student behaviour and learning outcomes, suggesting that reinforcement structures and teacher incentives play a critical role in the success of non-corporal discipline approaches, which may also complement guidance and counselling services in schools (academia.edu). These contributions from *WAJESP* collectively reinforce the importance of integrated reforms that combine stakeholder engagement, teacher capacity building, and supportive school environments to sustain alternatives to corporal punishment and improve student behaviour management.

4.7. Toward a Framework of Dignified Discipline

Synthesising the findings, the review identifies four conditions necessary for sustaining reform in Ghana:

- i. *Statutory clarity*: Embedding the ban on corporal punishment in the Education Act or Children's Act will confer legal weight and close enforcement gaps.
- ii. *Institutional scaffolding*: Professionalising G&C through recruitment, certification, and funding will provide viable alternatives to punitive discipline (Boateng, 2023).
- iii. *Teacher empowerment*: In-service training on classroom management and socio-emotional learning should become compulsory across all pre-tertiary levels (Agyemang, 2021).
- iv. *Cultural reorientation*: Community dialogue, faith-based partnerships, and parental sensitisation are essential to dismantle the moral legitimacy of physical punishment.

As Fullan (2007) observes, sustainable reform requires “a synchrony between moral purpose and technical capacity.” The Ghanaian case epitomises that lesson: reform that honours child dignity must also equip those charged with enforcing it.

4.8. Summary of Thematic Findings

The review reveals a paradoxical landscape. Ghana's reforms are conceptually coherent and morally progressive, yet structurally fragile. The SBC's learner-centred ideals, the abolition of corporal punishment, and the institution of G&C collectively envision a humane educational future, but the machinery to support that vision remains partial. Historical continuities, institutional weakness, and cultural resistance constitute the triad impeding transformation

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1. Discussion

Educational reform is rarely a matter of policy alone; it is an act of moral imagination, a reconstruction of how society defines childhood, authority, and knowledge. Ghana's Standards-Based Curriculum (SBC), the abolition of corporal punishment, and the institutionalisation of guidance and counselling (G&C) together represent a paradigmatic moral turn in Ghanaian education. However, as this review reveals, the path from moral aspiration to classroom reality is obstructed by structural fragility and cultural inertia

5.2. The Paradox of Reform and Continuity

The findings confirm that Ghana's reform efforts mark a decisive philosophical break with the authoritarian traditions inherited from colonial and missionary education. The SBC's learner-centred philosophy and the prohibition of corporal punishment align with humanistic theories that prioritise dignity, empathy, and learner agency (Rogers, 1951; Maslow, 1970). However, this conceptual progress has not displaced entrenched practices.

Teachers, positioned as the agents of reform, embody the tension between innovation and inheritance. Many understand and even endorse Positive Discipline, yet revert to punitive methods under pressure from parents or institutional expectations. Studies by Agyemang (2021) and Twumasi (2023) illustrate that teachers' professional identity remains tethered to an older disciplinary logic, one that equates control with respect. This contradiction mirrors what Busse and August (2020) term policy–practice incongruence: the coexistence of progressive policy frameworks and conservative institutional cultures. The persistence of corporal punishment despite official prohibition suggests that reform has achieved discursive rather than transformative victory. In policy language, the cane is gone; in social memory,

it remains alive.

5.3. The Moral Foundations of Pedagogical Change

At the heart of Ghana's reforms lies a moral argument that education must nurture freedom rather than fear. The SBC, grounded in constructivist pedagogy, redefines learning as participation, dialogue, and discovery. This redefinition necessitates a corresponding reimagining of discipline. As Freire (1970) argued, pedagogy is always a political act: authoritarian classrooms reproduce authoritarian societies. In this sense, the abolition of corporal punishment is not a mere child-protection measure but a democratic imperative. It repositions the teacher not as a disciplinarian but as a moral facilitator. Ghana's alignment with global child-rights frameworks affirms this principle, yet the challenge lies in translating moral philosophy into professional practice.

The moral undercurrent resonates with the moral-educative turn in global curriculum theory, which views education as the cultivation of character, empathy, and civic virtue (Tanye, 2023). In Ghana's context, however, this moral turn risks rhetorical inflation unless anchored in the daily realities of school life where teachers require tools, not just principles, to manage behaviour constructively.

5.4. Institutional Fragility and the Implementation Deficit

The review identifies institutional fragility as the principal obstacle to the full realisation of Ghana's reform vision. To address this, specific policy measures such as mandated training programs, dedicated funding, and legal frameworks for G&C are necessary. Strengthening these areas will transform G&C from symbolic to operational, supporting positive discipline effectively.

Similar trends are observed across Sub-Saharan Africa. In Kenya, the competency-based curriculum struggles with teacher retraining; in Nigeria, fragmented governance undermines reform coherence (Ngwiri, 2019; Eke, 2020). In contrast, India demonstrates that statutory embedding and institutional scaffolding through School Management Committees and grievance mechanisms create sustainability (Ramachandran, 2017).

Ghana's case thus highlights an enduring paradox: while moral commitment is strong, structural support is weak. As Adu-Gyamfi (2022) notes, Ghana's educational policy landscape often displays "visionary intent without procedural depth." Unless G&C is legally institutionalised and systematically resourced, Positive Discipline risks remaining a moral declaration rather than a lived reality.

5.5. Cultural Resistance and the Memory of the Cane

Perhaps the most enduring challenge is cultural rather than structural. The belief that "the child learns through pain" persists in many Ghanaian communities, shaped by generational experience and reinforced by religious and traditional authority (Owusu-Ansah & Agyeman, 2020). Parents and even some students regard corporal punishment as a sign of teacher seriousness rather than cruelty (Yeboah, 2020).

This cultural persistence reflects what postcolonial theorists call the pedagogy of subjection, a residual colonial inheritance that equates discipline with domination. Decolonising discipline, therefore, involves more than removing the cane; it demands reshaping collective beliefs about authority and learning. Steer's (2018) reflection captures this tension: "The cane may be banned by decree, yet it lingers in gesture, in expectation, in the gaze of the parent at the school gate." To overcome this, educational reform must engage communities not as passive recipients but as co-creators of a new moral order. Community engagement programmes, traditional leadership dialogues, and faith-based advocacy are crucial to transform cultural acceptance into moral conviction.

5.6. Reconciling Policy with Pedagogy

A recurring thread in the findings is the disjunction between policy and pedagogy. Policies such as the SBC and the GES directive are philosophically consistent but pedagogically under-implemented. Teachers, the immediate executors of reform, face both systemic constraints and moral ambiguities. A more coherent model requires what Fullan (2007) describes as capacity-driven reform: professional development, peer-learning networks, and reflective supervision. Incorporating modules on socio-emotional learning and restorative practices into pre-service teacher education is essential. As highlighted in the *International Journal of Educational Research* (Hardman et al., 2019), reforms grounded in teacher agency rather than compliance are more likely to endure. The dialogue between curriculum and discipline must, therefore, be intentional. If the SBC cultivates critical thinking and collaboration, discipline practices must echo the same moral rhythm: respect, dialogue, and empathy.

5.7. Ghana's Place in the Global Discourse on Humane Education

In a global perspective, Ghana's efforts resonate with an emerging paradigm that links quality education with non-violent discipline and social-emotional well-being (UNESCO, 2021). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) situates education as both a right and a moral pursuit. Ghana's reforms embody this alignment, positioning the nation within a continental conversation about humane education. However, global recognition depends on national coherence.

The absence of a statutory prohibition on corporal punishment in Ghana's education law remains a reputational gap in human rights reporting (UNICEF, 2023). Aligning the Education Act with international conventions would affirm Ghana's leadership in Africa's moral-educational renaissance.

As Nature Human Behaviour (2020) observed, "Education reforms that elevate empathy and rights above control and compliance are not only ethical achievements but evolutionary milestones." Ghana's reform, if completed, would place it among nations redefining education as an act of dignity.

5.8. Toward a Dignity-Based Paradigm

Synthesising these interpretations, the review proposes a dignity-based paradigm for discipline reform in Ghana. This paradigm rests on three interlocking pillars:

- Moral legitimacy: Discipline must affirm the learner's worth and autonomy, consistent with humanistic and rights-based theories.
- Institutional capacity: Counselling, monitoring, and teacher training systems must translate ideals into structures.
- Cultural transformation: Dialogue with parents, faith leaders, and traditional authorities must render Positive Discipline morally intelligible within Ghanaian value systems.
- Only when these dimensions intersect can Ghana's reforms transcend symbolism. As Busse and August (2020) caution, "Policies endure not through proclamation but through cultural inscription." The move from coercion to compassion, from punishment to pedagogy, therefore marks not only a policy transition but a reimagining of education as moral practice.

6. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

6.1. Conclusion and Policy Implications

The review has traced Ghana's educational reform along three converging paths: the introduction of the Standards-Based Curriculum (SBC), the abolition of corporal punishment, and the establishment of guidance and counselling (G&C) as a humane disciplinary framework. These reforms mark an epochal moral and pedagogical reorientation. They express Ghana's aspiration to build an education system anchored in dignity, empathy, and learner agency rather than fear or coercion. However, as the evidence demonstrates, this aspiration remains structurally fragile and culturally contested.

The central paradox revealed in the review is that Ghana's reform has achieved moral clarity but lacks institutional solidity. The SBC calls for classrooms where dialogue replaces domination, but the infrastructure to sustain such classrooms, trained counsellors, consistent teacher development, and clear statutory backing remains incomplete. The Ghana Education Service (GES) directive banning corporal punishment represents a bold moral stance, but without legislative embedding and systematic training, enforcement remains inconsistent.

Equally, the G&C framework, envisioned as the cornerstone of Positive Discipline, continues to exist largely in policy rhetoric rather than daily school practice. Teachers are overburdened, counsellors are few, and communities remain unconvinced that discipline without the cane can produce morally upright citizens. This tension, between moral vision and cultural endurance, defines the unfinished nature of Ghana's educational transformation.

6.2. Policy Implications

From the synthesis of theory, empirical evidence, and comparative experience, several practical implications emerge for policymakers, teacher educators, and reform advocates:

Embed Prohibition in Statute: Ghana should amend either the Education Act (Act 778, 2008) or the Children's Act (Act 560, 1998) to explicitly prohibit corporal punishment in all schools. The present administrative directive lacks legal permanence. As Kenya and India demonstrate, statutory clarity strengthens accountability and public legitimacy (Ngwiri, 2019; Ramachandran, 2017).

Professionalise Guidance and Counselling: The Ministry of Education and GES must institutionalise G&C units across all levels of schooling, with clear job descriptions, certification standards, and dedicated budget lines. One trained counsellor should serve each senior high school, with circuit-based counsellors assigned to basic schools. This recommendation aligns with Boateng's (2023) findings that G&C in Ghana suffers from "systemic invisibility" due to resource neglect.

Reform Teacher Education and Continuous Professional Development: Teacher education curricula should integrate modules on socio-emotional learning, classroom management, and restorative practices. In-service training must accompany policy reform. Fullan (2007) notes that reform without teacher empowerment creates compliance without conviction.

Strengthen Monitoring and Accountability Mechanisms: The National Schools Inspectorate Authority (NaSIA) should

incorporate discipline and learner protection indicators into its inspection frameworks. Routine behavioural audits and anonymous learner feedback would encourage compliance and transparency.

Engage Communities in Cultural Transformation: Sustainable reform depends on shifting collective attitudes toward discipline. The GES, religious bodies, and traditional authorities should collaborate to communicate the moral rationale of Positive Discipline through public dialogue and sensitisation campaigns. As Tanye (2023) observes, curriculum reform cannot succeed without parallel moral reform within the community.

Foster Research and Policy Feedback Loops: Ghanaian universities and colleges of education should conduct longitudinal studies on the impact of Positive Discipline on student behaviour, teacher morale, and learning outcomes. Evidence-based policy will ensure that reform evolves through feedback rather than decree.

6.3. Scholarly Implications

The findings contribute to the growing body of literature on educational humanisation in postcolonial contexts. They reaffirm that moral pedagogy cannot be imported; it must be culturally negotiated. Ghana's experience shows that sustainable reform in Africa requires both local grounding and global vision. Future research should explore how indigenous notions of discipline, such as communal responsibility and moral storytelling, can be harmonised with contemporary non-violent practices.

In theoretical terms, the review extends Busse and August's (2020) notion of policy–practice incongruence by demonstrating that moral consensus is insufficient without institutional scaffolding. It also supports Freire's (1970) view that education is a site of emancipation, not subjugation, and that pedagogy becomes oppressive when discipline loses its moral centre

7. CONCLUSION

Ghana's reform journey embodies both promise and paradox. The country stands at a threshold between two moral worlds: the world of the cane and the world of counsel. The first demands obedience through pain; the second seeks understanding through dialogue. The success of the reform will depend on whether teachers, parents, and policymakers can bridge these worlds through trust, empathy, and courage.

If Ghana completes this transformation, embedding law, nurturing capacity, and reshaping cultural imagination, its schools may yet become spaces where discipline is exercised not through fear but through respect, where authority educates rather than humiliates, and where the classroom becomes, in Steer's words, "a covenant, not a courtroom. Such a vision, once realised, would stand as Ghana's enduring contribution to the global movement for humane education, one in which every child learns in freedom and grows in dignity.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the manuscript preparation process

During the preparation of this work, the author used ChatGPT and Grammarly to proofread and enhance the language. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the published article

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