



Curbing Teachers' Physical Violence of Learners in Lubombo Region Primary Schools in Eswatini

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ABSTRACT: Eswatini National Education and Training Sector Policy states that schools should create protective and secure healthy learning environments. The Ministry of Education and Training announced the abolishment of corporal punishment in schools; however, the media reported cases where teachers' physical violence against learners. The study aimed to investigate the teachers' physical violence against learners in the Lubombo primary schools in Eswatini. Recommendations for curbing violent disciplinary measures were developed. The study measured the physical violence of the learners against the rights of the child in the Constitution of Eswatini. A qualitative approach was used, employing a case study design for the study. A semi-structured interview guide was used to collect data from 15 learners in three primary schools, and purposive sampling was used to collect data from five learners in grade six from each school. The study portrayed that teachers used physical violence in disciplining learners, causing drop-outs, and schools allowed corporal punishment, causing learners' lapse of concentration. Teachers used corporal punishment as a quick solution. The recommendation was that teachers should use non-violent disciplinary methods on learners. Government and school principals should workshop teachers on positive discipline. A quantitative study including schools from all regions of Eswatini was needed.

KEYWORDS: physical violence, corporal punishment, discipline

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INTRODUCTION

The Eswatini National Education and Training Policy states that the school environment should be safe and violent approaches to discipline learners in all schools in Eswatini (Eswatini, National Education and Training Policy, 2018). The Ministry of Education and Training intended to abolish the use of corporal punishment by introducing positive discipline, to get rid of the physical abuse on the learners. The constitution of Eswatini also disallows the physical abuse of children. The Swaziland Constitution (Swaziland Constitution, 2005, s 29(2)) states, "...a child shall not be subjected to abuse or torture or other cruel inhumane and degrading treatment or punishment subject to lawful and moderate chastisement for purposes of correction." However, the Eswatini media revealed that school teachers administer corporal punishment to learners. It was reported by the Times of Swaziland that a learner's hand was temporarily paralysed because a teacher administered corporal punishment to him (Ndela, 2010). Learners from different schools where they had met to commemorate the day of the African child, indicated that teachers administer corporal punishment to them, and they suggested that it should be completely abolished (World Vision, 2022).

Even though the Ministry of Education and Training banned corporal punishment in Eswatini schools through a policy, some schools still use it as a way of disciplining learners; hence, the researcher decided to conduct the study on curbing teachers' physical violence of learners in the Lubombo region at two selected primary schools in Eswatini. The study answered the main question; How can physical violence by teachers be curbed at two selected primary schools in the Lubombo region in Eswatini? In responding to the main question, the following two questions had to be answered;

- What is the perception of learners regarding the use of physical violence by teachers in the selected primary schools?
- How can physical violence be curbed by teachers in the selected primary schools?

The study will assist the schools where it was carried out on how they would desist from physical abuse on learners and also the schools with similar situations. The policymakers can also make use of the recommendations of the study to deal with the use of physical abuse in Eswatini schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Different opinions about corporal punishment have been highlighted in the literature and the researcher discussed some relevant ones. Corporal punishment is frowned upon by different conventions including the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989) from the perspective of the United Nations.

Physical abuse on learners has been reported as a challenge in the Sub-Sahara countries, which is indicated by a huge number of countries that allow the use of corporal punishment in their countries (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2021). This was regardless that the Convention on the Rights of the Child requested that all countries should refrain from child physical abuse (UN, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). The perpetual use of corporal punishment in school may be due to religious and cultural perspectives on dealing with a child by teachers. Most of the Christian countries believe that a child should be raised by the stick as indicated by the Bible. For example, the Bible (Proverbs 19:18) states, "Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction." Such verses from the Bible make parents and teachers believe that a stick should not be set aside if you want to raise a child that would become a response in life. On the issue of cultural perspective, teachers believe that it is difficult not to use a stick if the parents at home always use it as a corrective measure because most African cultures advocate administering corporal punishment as a way of discipline (Ember and Ember, 2005). Parents believe in the use of corporal punishment because they were raised by it and they feel if children are to be good members of society, they should be raised by a stick like them (Shongwe, 2015).

Corporal punishment is prevalent in low-income countries like Eswatini both at school and home. In school, corporal punishment is associated with low performance and is the most common physical violence against children worldwide (End Violence Against Children and End Corporal Punishment, 2022). However, corporal punishment, through research, is associated with a wide range of negative results in learners. Some of the negative results in the external behaviour caused by corporal punishment include aggression, hyperactivity, and hostile behaviour in learners (Wodon, Fevre, McDonald and Quota, 2022). The negative results in the internal behaviour include but are not limited to, anxiety, depression, social inhibition and psychosomatic complaints. The trauma that is associated with corporal punishment can be severe and can last for the rest of the children's lives.

Since corporal punishment is regarded as a physical abuse of learners, there is a call worldwide to end it for learners' development and achievement. It is recommended that schools should employ positive behavioural interventions to deal with the behavioural challenges in learners rather than the corporal punishment they tend to use (Diament, 2023). In some African countries, the law give the rights to parents and teachers' reasonable chastisement which poses a legal defence (Vohito, 2021). For example, Eswatini constitution allows parents to exercise a moderate chastisement as a form of correction to their children (Swaziland Constitution, 2005).

Curbing physical violence for teachers is not easy because teachers are not conversant with positive discipline, especially in Eswatini (Mabuza, Makhondo and Bhebhe, 2017). This calls for teachers' training institutions to be rigorous about teaching positive discipline to pre-service teachers so that they cope with the situation in schools. Studies portrayed that teachers want to use positive discipline; however, they are not effectively applying it (Mabuza, Makhondo and Bhebhe, 2017). The knowledge of positive discipline among teachers would help in curbing physical violence in schools because positive discipline discourages physical violence. Positive discipline is about helping learners make responsible decisions and understand why the decisions are in their best interests (Durrant, 2016). Some teachers use positive discipline, but once they get frustrated due to limited knowledge about it, they revert to corporal punishment (Shongwe, 2022). It is recommended that teachers be workshopped on the use of positive discipline to limit physical violence in schools. One study conducted in Eswatini recommended that school principals should be made to enforce the banning of corporal punishment for the effective ban of it in schools (Shongwe, 2015).

Studies have suggested different strategies to end corporal punishment in schools as a way of keeping learners away from physical violence. Governments are required to formulate laws and policies that prohibit corporal punishment as the beginning of the process of ending corporal punishment (Ending violence against children, End corporal punishment, Coalition for good schools and Safe to learn, 2023). Outlawing corporal physical violence is also ensuring the right to education of learners as some learners end up dropping out of school because of corporal punishment. Local school policies should include a friendly way of disciplining learners without the involvement of physical violence (Shongwe, 2015).

The Ministry of Education and Training in Eswatini banned corporal punishment using policies; however, the Eswatini Constitution (2005) allows for moderate chastisement of children to discipline. Even though corporal punishment in Eswatini has been banned through policies, teachers in Eswatini schools still use it on learners citing different. Some of the reasons for using corporal punishment by teachers through different studies (Shongwe, 2015; Dlamini, Eden and Okeke, 2022) include:

- Big numbers of learners in each class, making it difficult to use other means of discipline.
- They are not conversant with the effective usage of positive discipline.
- Learners are used to corporal punishment at home, it is difficult to use other forms of discipline at school.
- Teachers believed that they managed to become teachers because they were beaten at school and they viewed corporal punishment as a way to go.
- Parents are not cooperating with the teachers and the learners become wild.

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- The learners are not respecting their teachers making it difficult to teach.
- Some parents are against some disciplinary measures.

It is time that studies find solutions to curbing the use of physical violence by teachers in schools; however, the above reasons by teachers should be taken into account.

METHODOLOGY

The study used the qualitative approach to investigate the problem of the study. Since the qualitative approach is concerned with an in-depth research problem, it was more appropriate for the study since the aim was to have a full understanding of the learners' perceptions of physical violence in the selected school and how it could be stopped (Gomez, 2019). A case study design of two selected primary schools was employed to investigate the problem of the learners who experienced physical violence from teachers (Burrow, Steber, Kreiling and Coleman, 2018). The case study design was appropriate because the intention was not to generalise the findings for every school, but only use them in the selected schools. The study focused on two primary schools with a sum of 1000 learners with one school having 600 learners and 400 for the other. The schools that were involved in the study were chosen because the school principals indicated that they use corporal punishment as a form of disciplining learners.

The researcher used purposive sampling in selecting the learners because he wanted to involve those who experienced physical violence (Creswell, 2018), mostly in the form of corporal punishment. The purposive sample was appropriate because it provided information-rich participants. Since the study was from the perception of the learners, 10 learners participated in the study with five learners from each school. The five learners from each school were selected from the school with the assistance of the school principals of the two schools because they knew the class teachers who administered corporal punishment at their respective schools. The teachers whose learners were selected were confirmed to be using corporal punishment as a way of disciplining learners.

Data were collected from the learners using semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured interview was chosen because the researcher was able to make follow-up questions to get an in-depth of the problem (Punch and Oancea, 2014). The researcher developed the interview guide before the days for collecting the data. To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher paraphrased the responses by the participants to confirm that the understanding was the same. The presentation of the data was in themes that emerged during the data collection process. Participants were made to understand that they participated voluntarily and were free to withdraw from the data collection process at any time if they felt comfortable.

The researcher obtained permission to conduct the study from the Ministry of Education and Training. The school principals of the involved school granted consent to conduct the study as requested by the researcher. The researcher further sought assent from the parents of the learners participating in the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study's findings were presented in line with the research questions and themes that emerged during the data collection.

Learners' physical violence experiences

Learners highlighted that teachers administer corporal punishment by using a stick either on the hand or buttocks which is the most common form of physical violence against learners in the selected schools. The learners also stated that the severity of the punishment is highly dependent on how they have been angered by the learners. The learners were asked about the most frequent form of physical violence used by teachers against learners. For example, LA1 said, "Most of the teachers use a stick as a way of punishment and they don't stop until you cry." On the same issue, LB3 responded, "The teachers would use a stick on the buttocks or hand to hit you very hard if they are very angry with you, or beat you soft if the sin you committed is minor." It is worth noting that the teachers were also against the right of the learners not to be tortured (Children Protection and Welfare Act, 2012).

The learners indicated that besides using a stick, the teachers slap them with open hands if the stick is not nearby. The teachers also pinch them on the ears or make them stand on their toes with one leg. The learners were asked about other forms of physical violence by teachers on them. For instance, LB4 said, "Some teachers don't mind slapping you on the cheek if they don't have a stick around." While LA2, highlighted, "It depends on the teacher, some would make you stand on your toes with one leg if they have not brought their stick." On a similar issue, LB5 said, "If the stick is not there some teachers would pinch you on the ears very hard."

Learners' perceptions of physical violence by their teachers

The learners had accepted that caning is the correct method that should be used to correct unbecoming behaviour in learners because they were used to it. This is because even their parents approve of the use of corporal punishment. The learners accepted corporal punishment because the school principals talked about it frequently during morning assembly as the proper way of dealing with misbehaviour among learners. Learners were asked about their views about physical violence by their teachers. LB1 indicated, "We accept physical violence as a better way of punishment because it does not waste teaching time." LA4 said, "As much as we are aware that it is against our rights I think it is the quickest way to deal with misbehaviour. Even our parents approve of corporal punishment by our teachers." LB5 said this on the appropriateness of physical violence by their teachers, "Our principal would now and again remind us during morning assembly that teachers should always cane us if we break the school rules, and our mind is used that corporal punishment should be administered on us."

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Some of the learners perceive corporal punishment as the proper way of managing learners discipline and they believe without the use of a stick, the learners would be rude and chaotic. Learners further viewed that teachers did not have other disciplinary ideas to ensure that learners respected them. When the learners were asked if corporal punishment was the right way to be followed by teachers. LB3 said, "I'm in support of corporal punishment because learners would become rude and chaotic causing the school to be ungovernable. Corporal punishment helps in bringing order among learners in school otherwise it would be difficult to learn." However, one learner felt teachers should be friendly to learners for them to approach them. This is what LA3 highlighted, "I'm for the idea that teachers should not be caning learners throughout, but should be friendly to learners so that we are free to approach them for any questions we have regarding our subjects." LA4 said, "The teachers seem to be without any other ways of making us respect them besides using physical violence." What the learners said confirmed what the literature highlighted teachers are not conversant with positive disciplinary measures (Eden and Okeke, 2022).

Impact of corporal punishment on learners

Some learners perceive that physical violence by teachers causes the learners to hate the subject they teach, which makes the learners not do well in that subject. LA4 stated, "If teachers are violent to us, we tend to hate the subjects they teach and consequently perform poorly in their subjects." It portrayed that some learners view violent teachers as hurting the performance of the learners. On the other hand, corporal punishment helps teachers to be in control of the learners causing the learners to respect them. LB2 responded, "I think teachers use a cane on us because they want us to respect them so that they can control us." One wonders if the teachers were aware that if they keep using a stick, the learners tend to hate them and further hate the subject they teach.

Some of the learners become morose each time they are caned and unable to concentrate on their studies. The learners tended to hate the teachers who administer corporal punishment and their minds switched off each time they taught them. If the teachers were to beat learners every day, the learners believe would fail and each time they see them they fear them. Due to the use of physical violence by some teachers, the learners developed anxiety because they feared them. For instance, LB1 had this say, "When I'm beaten by a teacher, I get frustrated and fail to concentrate on what is taught. Each time I see the teacher that caned me, my mind switches off." LA4 also had this to say, "If the teachers were to administer corporal punishment every day I strongly believe I would fail. We associate the subjects with teachers who beat us and then hate it." LB2 also said the same thing by responding, "Whenever I see a teacher that beats us enter our classroom I always get stressed and develop anxiety. The anxiety makes me fail to concentrate on what the teacher says." Shared a similar sentiment by saying, "I lose concentration in a class of a teacher that beats us due to fear and eventually miss important things in their teaching." LA2 portrayed some frustration by saying, "Each time a teacher who beats us is teaching, I always wish the lesson would end, and that disturbs my concentration." The learners concur with literature that physical violence causes anxiety in learners which affects them in their entire life (Wodon, Fevre, McDonald and Quota, 2022).

Physical violence encouraged absenteeism because some learners tended to skip lessons due to fear of corporal punishment. The learners not only missed lessons but also missed some tests if they anticipated that some teachers were to cane them because they would not go to school. Corporal punishment caused failure because some learners missed some lessons because they feared the physical violence by teachers. For example, LA1 said, "Sometimes when we anticipate that a particular teacher would cane us, we would plan to skip lessons to avoid the beating, unfortunately, when tests and examinations come we encounter challenges." LB 4 had the same thing by highlighting, "My friends and I would sometimes miss tests because we absent ourselves in fear of the corporal punishment in their lessons." Similarly, the literature also indicated that physical violence has an impact on learners' absenteeism and dropouts.

Curbing corporal punishment

In having intervention toward the use of corporal punishment in these selected schools the learners indicated different ideas after having been asked about different ways of curbing physical violence by teachers. The learners highlighted that teachers should decide on their own that they were to stop corporal punishment by using other forms of disciplinary measures besides physical violence. For instance, LA3 suggested, "The teachers should deliberately decide that they are stopping physical violence and use other forms of disciplinary measures." LB5 said this on the use of other forms of disciplinary measures, "We have also heard on the radio that teachers should use positive discipline; therefore, our teachers should try it instead of physical violence." What the learners recommended about using other forms of disciplinary measures other than corporal punishment was in line with Ndembu (2013) who suggested that schools should strengthen alternative strategies of discipline instead of physical violence.

Another way of curbing physical violence highlighted by the learners was the use of school guidance and counselling offices. Since the schools had the guidance and counselling offices, the learners recommended that learners with behavioural challenges should be sent for guidance and counselling instead of using corporal punishment. For example, LB3 said, "Instead of administering corporal punishment on us, the teachers should consider sending the learners with behaviour problems to the school guidance and counselling office to be guided. It portrayed that the learners are aware that guidance and counselling would help in dealing with learners' behavioural challenges. In a similar instance Ndembu (2013) highlighted that instead of using corporal punishment, engagement in counselling should take place in school to end physical violence in schools.

The study sought to answer the main question: How can physical violence by teachers be curbed at two selected primary schools in Eswatini? To answer the main question, the following two questions had to be answered;

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- What is the perception of learners regarding the use of physical violence by teachers in the selected primary schools?
- What can be done to stop physical violence by teachers in the selected primary schools?

CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

The conclusions of the study responded to the main question and further highlighted the conclusions responding to the sub-question of the study. To respond to the study's main question, the findings showed that there should be alternative forms of learners' disciplinary measures other than the different forms of corporal punishment currently used by teachers in the selected schools. The conclusion was a result of both the reviewed literature and the data collected from the study participants.

The conclusions on the first sub-question are highlighted, where regarding learners' perceptions regarding physical violence by teachers. The participants first highlighted that their teachers use physical violence against learners as a form of disciplinary measures. The physical violence used by the teachers included caning them with a stick on the buttocks, pinching learners on the ears, and slapping learners on the face with open hands. The severity of the physical violence by the teachers depended on the extent to which the teachers were angered.

The participants viewed the use of corporal punishment by teachers as a norm and have embraced it because the teachers are using it as the only form of dealing with unbecoming behaviour in learners. The learners got used to physical violence because even the school principals in the participating schools were always preaching about the use of corporal punishment as a way of correcting learners' behaviour. Learners perceive corporal punishment as the quickest way of maintaining discipline among learners without wasting teaching time. Teachers use physical violence as a means of controlling the learners. The learners also believe that teachers have no other ideas of maintaining discipline besides using corporal punishment because they constantly use it.

The learners perceived the physical violence as a cause for learners to hate teachers that administer corporal punishment because the learners associate the subject with teachers that teach it. The findings showed that physical violence by teachers had an impact on the performance of the learners because they developed a negative toward the subject. Learners who received corporal punishment developed anxiety because they tended to fear the teachers who abused them physically. Physical violence causes learners to absent themselves in fear of corporal punishment by teachers; hence, some of the learners even miss tests if they anticipate physical violence in some subjects of the day.

In curbing corporal punishment, the findings indicated that the ending of physical violence rested with the teachers themselves because they are the ones who would decide to use other forms of discipline among learners. Some of the disciplinary ways would include positive discipline, which has been advocated by the Ministry of Education and Training. The findings further showed that the schools should make use of guidance and counselling offices in their schools as an alternative to the corporal punishment currently administered by the teachers. Engaging the guidance and counselling offices would assist in curbing physical violence because they would handle learners with behavioural challenges.

Recommendations of the study

The recommendations of the study which were based on the findings of the study are as follows:

- The teachers should be workshopped on employing positive discipline since the selected schools were solely dependent on corporal punishment. School principals should ensure that teachers are conversant with different ways of disciplinary measures so that they realise that corporal punishment is a form of physical violence.
- The school principals of the selected schools should go over the government policies that prohibit corporal punishment and also read the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) which deals with the rights of children. These documents would assist the school principals in the need to go for alternative disciplinary measures.
- In a bid to end physical violence, the selected schools should make use of the guidance and counselling office in each school. This would help some learners with behaviour challenges who need some guidance and advice.
- A quantitative study on curbing physical violence involving schools from all regions of the country that would include learners, teachers, and school principals.

Model for Ending physical violence of learners

Considering the findings of the study, a model for ending physical violence of learners in the schools where the study was conducted was developed. The model was as follows:

- Principal to provide knowledge on children's physical violence from international conventions and Eswatini laws

The principals of the schools should familiarise themselves with children's welfare and violence from international conventions and Eswatini's legal prescript. The principals should then provide knowledge to teachers against learners' violence, which may be through workshopping the teachers.

- Workshop teachers on positive discipline and other forms of disciplinary measures

The principal should run a workshop on the importance of positive discipline and how to implement it in learners. The teachers' workshops should not only focus on positive discipline but other forms of violent free disciplinary measures.

- Willingness to end physical violence by teachers

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It is crucial that teachers get to child violence. a point of frowning against. It calls for attitude change among teachers toward child violence, causing the teachers to be willing to eradicate physical violence.

- Principal and teachers to develop non-physical violent disciplinary policy

The school management, together with the teachers should develop an instrument or policy that ensures learners are not subjected to physical violence. The learners should be consulted when developing the policy or instrument to make the learners appreciate the policy and cooperate.

- Principal to enforce the school disciplinary policy

The diagram shows a recommended model for ending physical violence in the selected schools.

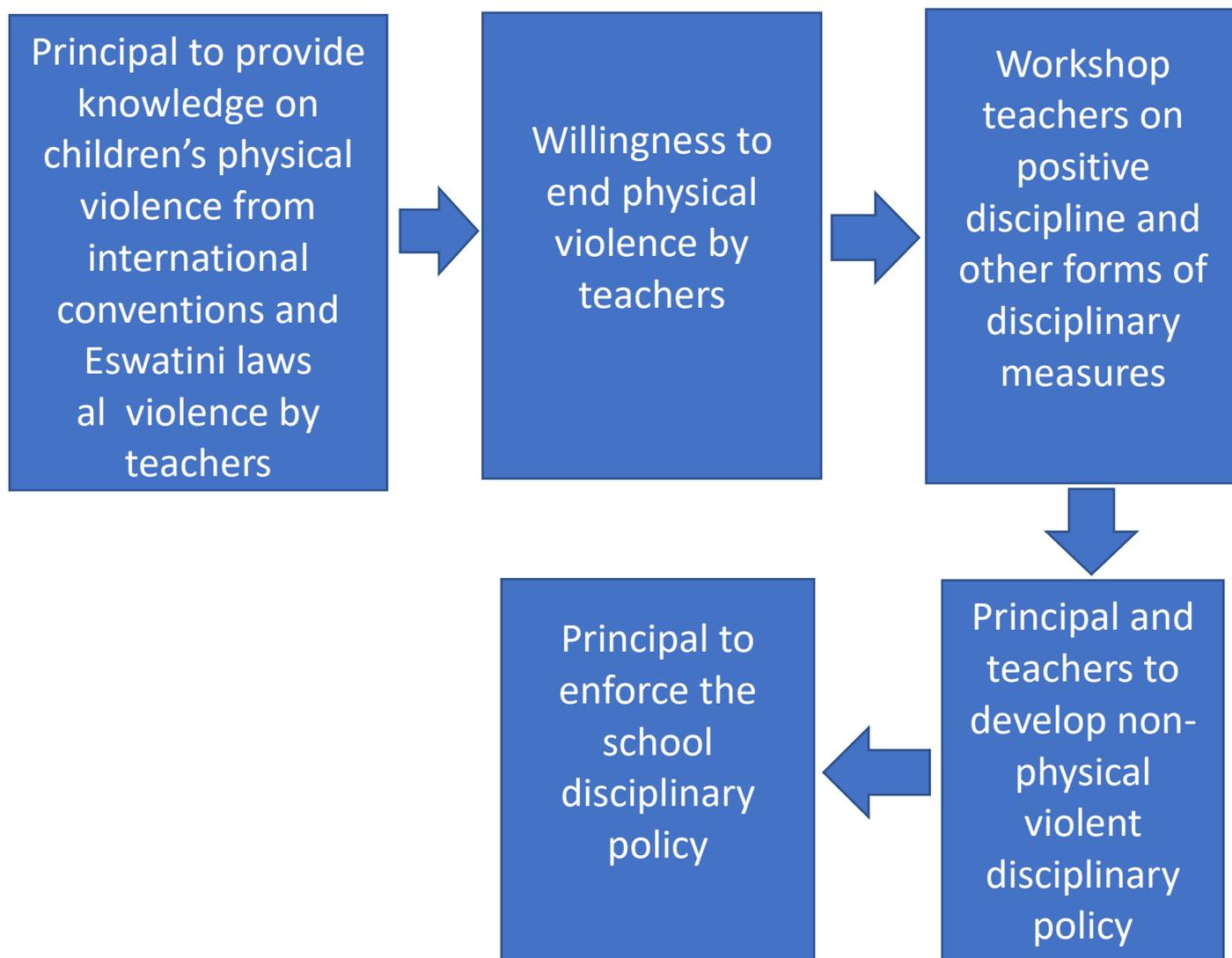


Figure: Model for Ending physical violence of learners

A quantitative study is necessary on curbing physical violence involving schools from all regions of Eswatini that would include learners, teachers, and school principals.

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