

## Impact of abolition of punishment in schools: Teachers' perceptions from elementary education



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### ABSTRACT

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The abolition of punishment in schools has been introduced in many education systems with the intention of promoting child-friendly and non-punitive learning environments. However, the actual impact of this reform depends largely on teachers' experiences and perceptions in everyday school contexts. The present study examined teachers' perceptions of the impact of abolishing punishment in elementary schools across four dimensions: school environment, student-teacher relationships, student motivation and study habits, and teacher behaviour. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 160 elementary school teachers through a self-constructed questionnaire comprising statements related to the perceived effects of the no-punishment policy. The data were analysed using frequency and percentage analysis. The findings indicate that a substantial proportion of teachers perceived no visible change in school environment, student motivation, and teacher behaviour following the abolition of punishment. In contrast, perceptions regarding student-teacher relationships were predominantly negative, with many teachers reporting signs of degradation. Although some teachers perceived improvements across the studied dimensions, these views were not dominant. Overall, the results suggest that the abolition of punishment, as perceived by teachers, has produced mixed and largely neutral outcomes, with particular challenges evident in maintaining student-teacher relationships. The study highlights the complexity of discipline reform and underscores the importance of contextual and institutional factors in shaping the perceived impact of no-punishment policies in elementary education.

**Contribution/ Originality:** This study contributes to the existing literature by examining elementary school teachers' perceptions of the abolition of punishment across four key dimensions: school environment, student-teacher relationships, student motivation and study habits, and teacher behaviour. The study provides context-specific empirical evidence from Indian elementary schools regarding the perceived outcomes of no-punishment disciplinary policies.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Rationale of the Study

School discipline and corporal punishment of children have long been regarded as a crucial component of effective teaching-learning processes and the maintenance of an orderly school environment (Gershoff, 2017; Obadire & Sinthumule, 2021). Traditionally, punitive measures, including corporal punishment, were used as dominant tools for controlling student behaviour (Heekes, Kruger, Lester, & Ward, 2022). Punishment in schools

represents a form of institutionalized violence against children and remains widespread across the globe (Devries et al., 2014; Devries et al., 2015). This practice constitutes a violation of children's human rights and reflects the inability of states to effectively uphold Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which guarantees protection from all forms of physical and mental violence. However, growing concerns regarding children's rights, psychological well-being, and the adverse effects of punishment on learning and development have led to a global shift toward the abolition of punishment in schools and the promotion of non-punitive disciplinary approaches (Gershoff, 2017). In many education systems, including India, punitive discipline has been legally and ethically challenged, necessitating alternative frameworks for managing student behavior (Dupper, 2010).

The abolition of punishment has been justified on the grounds that punitive practices can negatively affect students' emotional health, self-esteem, and academic engagement, while fostering fear rather than self-discipline (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016; Straus, 1997). Proponents of non-punitive discipline argue that supportive, guidance-oriented approaches promote positive behaviour, intrinsic motivation, and healthier teacher–student relationships (Bear, 2010). Consequently, schools are increasingly encouraged to adopt counselling, positive reinforcement, and restorative practices as substitutes for punishment (Oxley, 2021; Simuyaba, 2020).

Despite these policy-level reforms, the actual impact of abolishing punishment in school settings remains contested, particularly from the perspective of teachers who are directly responsible for classroom management. Research suggests that while some teachers perceive corporal punishment should be continued but with monitored observation and management. Abrahams, Casey, and Daro (1992); Makewa, Myriam, and Benson (2017); Mulinga (2012) and Wadesango, Gudyanga, and Mbengo (2014), others report challenges such as reduced authority, increased classroom disruption, and strained teacher–student relationships (Busienei, 2012; Cheruvalath & Tripathi, 2015; Lodhi & Siddiqui, 2014; Shukla & Singh, 2013) and some teachers perceived punishment to be unacceptable to them as a means of correcting a pupil (Umezina & Elendu, 2012). These mixed findings indicate that the outcomes of abolition policies are highly context-dependent and influenced by factors such as teacher preparedness, institutional support, and student socio-cultural backgrounds. Teachers' perceptions are especially significant because they mediate the implementation and effectiveness of disciplinary policies (Mohapatra & Bania, 2026a). As Konti (2011) argues, teachers' beliefs and interpretations of discipline reforms shape how such policies are enacted in everyday classroom practice. If teachers perceive the abolition of punishment as undermining discipline or classroom control, they may experience professional stress or resistance, thereby limiting the intended benefits of reform (Mohapatra & Bania, 2026b). Conversely, positive perceptions may facilitate the adoption of constructive discipline strategies and enhance school functioning (Mumthas, Munavvir, & Abdul Gafoor, 2014). Although several studies have examined teachers' attitudes toward corporal punishment and discipline, relatively fewer have systematically explored teachers' perceptions of the broader impact of abolishing punishment across multiple school dimensions, such as school environment, student–teacher relationships, student motivation, and teacher behaviour. This gap is particularly evident at the elementary level, where behavioural guidance plays a foundational role in students' socialisation and learning. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates teachers' perceptions of the impact of abolishing punishment in schools across these key dimensions, providing empirical insight into the perceived outcomes and challenges associated with no-punishment policies in elementary education.

### 1.2. Research Questions

1. What do teachers perceive as the impact of the abolition of punishment on the school environment?
2. What are teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of the abolition of punishment on student–teacher relationships?

3. How do teachers perceive the impact of the abolition of punishment on students' motivation and study habits?
4. What are teachers' perceptions of the impact of the abolition of punishment on teacher behaviour?

### *1.3. Objectives of the Study*

1. To examine teachers' perceptions of the impact of the abolition of punishment on the school environment.
2. To analyse teachers' perceptions of the impact of the abolition of punishment on student–teacher relationships.
3. To assess teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of the abolition of punishment on student motivation and study habits.
4. To study teachers' perceptions of the impact of the abolition of punishment on teacher behaviour.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### *2.1. Research Design*

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine teachers' perceptions of the impact of the abolition of punishment in schools. This design was considered appropriate as the study aimed to describe and summarize teachers' views regarding perceived changes in specific school-related dimensions following the implementation of a no-punishment policy, without attempting to establish causal relationships.

### *2.2. Population and Sample*

The population of the study comprised elementary school teachers working in government schools. A sample of 160 teachers was selected for the study using a purposive sampling technique, ensuring the inclusion of teachers who had direct classroom experience and were actively involved in managing student behavior under a no-punishment policy.

### *2.3. Tool for Data Collection*

Data were collected using a self-constructed questionnaire developed by the researcher. The questionnaire included 52 statements related to the possible impact of abolishing punishment in schools. These statements were organized under five perspectives, of which four perspectives were used in the present article.

1. School environment.
2. Student–teacher relationship.
3. Student motivation and study habits.
4. Teacher behaviour.

Teachers were asked to indicate their perceptions of change using a five-point categorical response format.

- Significant improvement seen.
- Some signs of improvement seen.
- No visible change happens.
- Signs of degradation seen.
- Significant degradation seen.

### *2.4. Validity and Reliability*

The content validity of the questionnaire was ensured through expert review by teacher educators and education experts, who examined the relevance, clarity, and adequacy of the statements in relation to the study's objectives. Necessary modifications were made based on their suggestions.

The reliability of the tool was established using the test–retest method, and the reliability coefficient was found to be 0.76, indicating acceptable consistency of the instrument.

### 2.5. Procedure of Data Collection

The questionnaire was administered personally to the selected teachers with prior permission from school authorities. Teachers were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Adequate time was provided to complete the questionnaire, and all responses were collected for analysis.

### 2.6. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, specifically frequency and percentage analysis. Teachers' responses for each perspective were tabulated and presented in the form of tables and graphs to depict the distribution of perceptions regarding improvement, no change, or degradation following the abolition of punishment.

### 2.7. Delimitation of the Study

The study was limited to teachers' perceptions of the impact of abolishing punishment in elementary schools. It did not consider students' perceptions, parents' views, or objective behavioral outcomes. The analysis focused solely on the four reported dimensions and was based exclusively on self-reported data.

## 3. RESULT

This section presents the findings of the study related to teachers' perceptions of the impact of abolishing punishment in schools. The data collected from 160 elementary school teachers were analyzed using frequency and percentage analysis. The results are organized into four sub-sections corresponding to the major dimensions examined in the study: impact on school environment, student–teacher relationships, student motivation and study habits, and teacher behavior.

### 3.1. Impact of Abolition of Punishment on School Environment

Table 1 and Figure 1 present teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of the abolition of punishment on the overall school environment. Teachers were asked to indicate whether they observed improvement, no visible change, or degradation in the school climate following the implementation of a no-punishment approach.

**Table 1.** Impact of no punishment on the school environment.

Teachers' perceptions	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Significant Improvement seen	10	6.3	6.3	6.3
Some signs of improvement were seen	40	25.0	25.0	31.3
No visible Change happens	75	46.9	46.9	78.1
Signs of Degradation seen	29	18.1	18.1	96.3
Significant degradation seen	6	3.8	3.8	100.0
Total	160	100.0	100.0	

As a response to impact of no punishment on school environment, of the 160 teacher (6.3%)of teacher views that there is significant improvement seen in school environment, (25.0%) of teachers views that there is some signs of improvement seen in the school environment, majority of teachers (49.9%)views that there is no improvement seen in the school environment,(18.1%)of teachers views that signs of degradation seen in the school environment and (3.8%) of teachers perceive that there is significant degradation seen in school environment as an effect of no punishment.

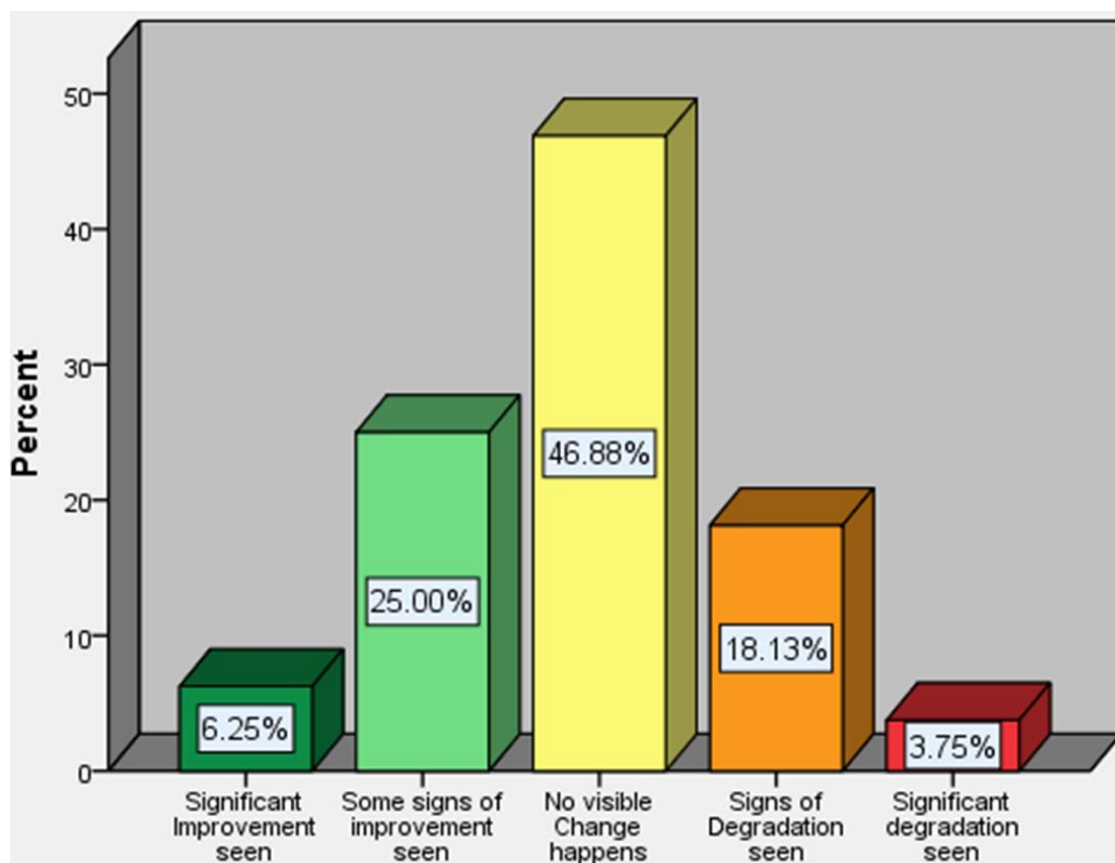


Figure 1. Impact of no punishment on the school environment.

### 3.2. Impact of Abolition of Punishment on Student–Teacher Relationship

Teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of the abolition of punishment on student motivation and study habits are reported in Table 2 and Figure 2. Teachers were asked to assess whether the no-punishment policy contributed to improvements, no visible change, or degradation in students' academic engagement and learning-related behaviour.

Table 2. Impact of no punishment on student-teacher relations.

Teachers' perceptions	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Significant Improvement seen	7	3.9	3.9	3.9
Some signs of improvement were seen	25	15.5	15.5	19.4
No visible Change happens	39	24.5	24.5	43.9
Signs of Degradation seen	74	46.5	46.5	90.3
Significant degradation seen	15	9.7	9.7	100.0
Total	160	100.0	100.0	

As a response to impact of no punishment on student teacher relationship, of the 160 teachers (3.8%) of teachers views that there is significant improvement seen in school environment, (15.0%) of teachers views that there is some signs of improvement seen in the school environment, (23.8%) views that there is no visible changes seen in the school environment, majority of teacher (45.0%) views that signs of degradation seen in the school environment and (9.4%) of teachers perceive that there is significant degradation seen in student teacher relationship as an effect of no punishment.

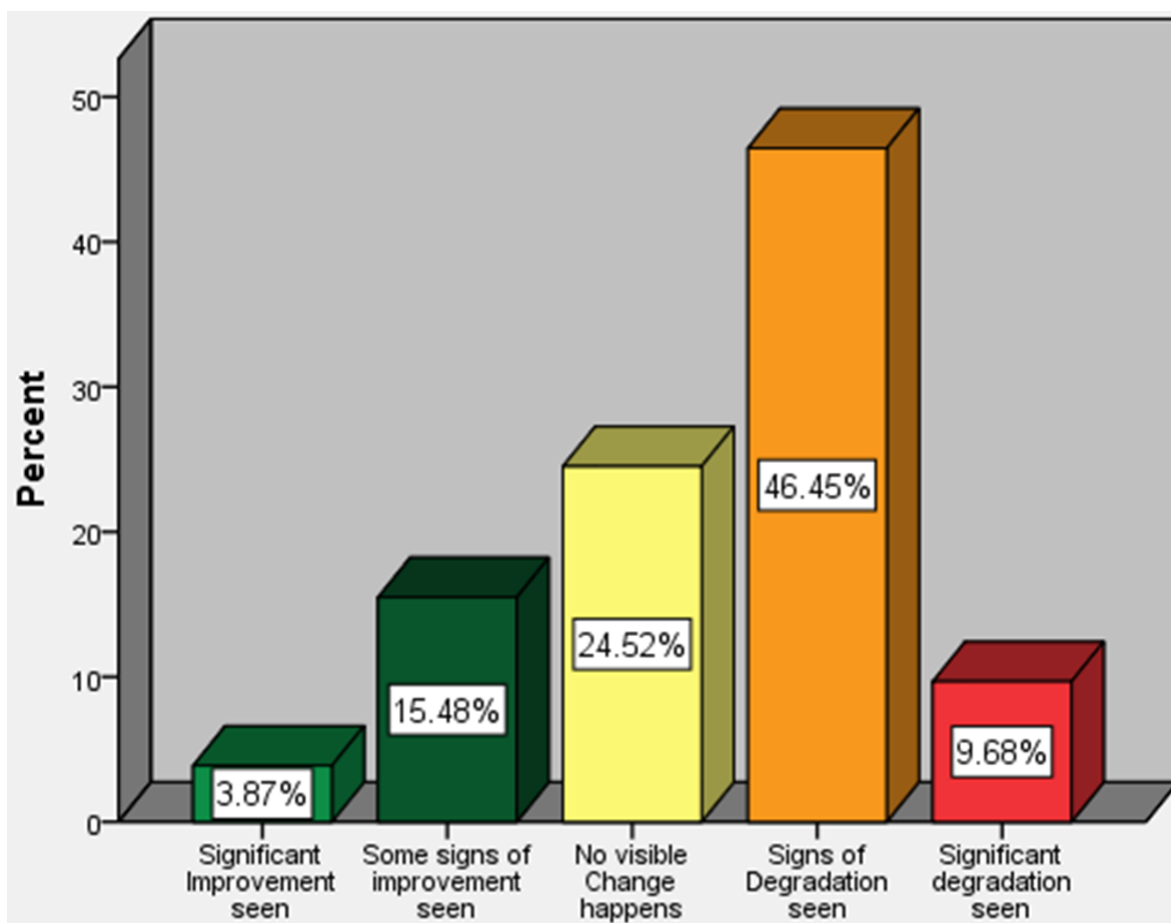


Figure 2. Impact of no punishment on student-teacher relations.

### 3.3. Impact of Abolition of Punishment on Student Motivation and Study Habits

Teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of the abolition of punishment on student motivation and study habits are reported in Table 3 and Figure 3. Teachers were asked to assess whether the no-punishment policy contributed to improvements, no visible change, or degradation in students' academic engagement and learning-related behaviour.

Table 3. Impact of no punishment on student motivation and study habits.

Teachers' perceptions	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Significant Improvement seen	7	4.4	4.4	4.4
Some signs of improvement were seen	57	35.6	35.6	40.0
No visible Change happens	76	47.5	47.5	87.5
Signs of Degradation seen	20	12.5	12.5	100.0
Total	160	100.0	100.0	

As a response to impact of no punishment on student motivation and study habit, of the 160 teacher (4.4%) of teacher views that there is significant improvement seen in school environment, (35.6%) of teacher views that there is some signs of improvement seen in the school environment, majority of teacher (47.5%) views that there is no visible changes seen in the school environment, majority of teacher (12.5%) views that signs of degradation seen in the in student motivation and study habit as an effect of no punishment.

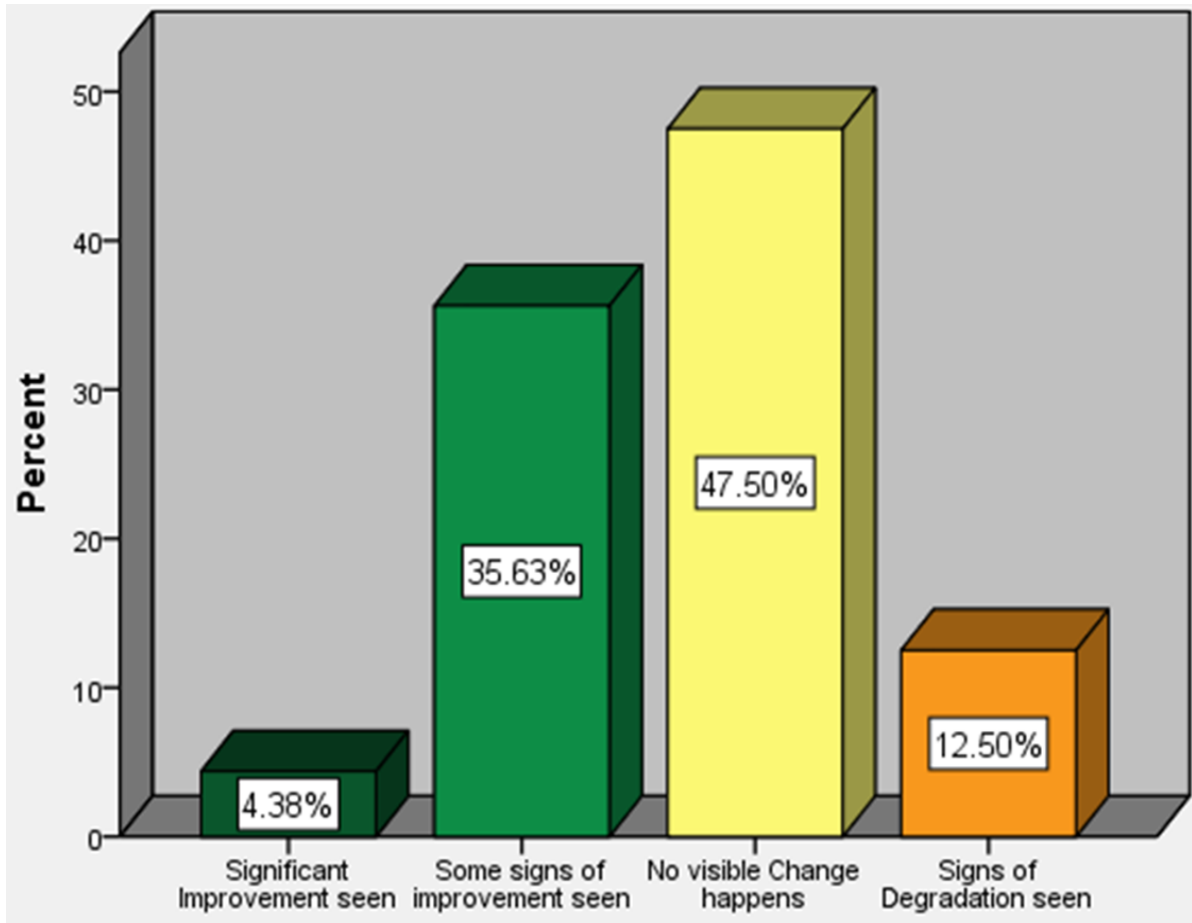


Figure 3. Impact of no punishment on student motivation and study habits.

### 3.4. Impact of Abolition of Punishment on Teacher Behaviour

Table 4 and Figure 4 present teachers' perceptions of how the abolition of punishment has influenced teacher behaviour in the school context. Teachers were asked to indicate whether the policy led to improvement, no visible change, or degradation in their own disciplinary and professional practices.

Table 4. Impact of no punishment on teacher behaviour.

Teachers' perceptions	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Significant Improvement seen	11	6.9	6.9	6.9
Some signs of improvement were seen	60	37.5	37.5	44.4
No visible Change happens	77	48.1	48.1	92.5
Signs of Degradation seen	12	7.5	7.5	100.0
Total	160	100.0	100.0	

As a response to impact of no punishment on teacher behavior of the 160 teacher (6.9%) of teacher views that there is significant improvement seen in school environment, (37.5%) of teacher views that there is some signs of improvement seen in the school environment, majority of teacher (48.1%) views that there is no visible changes seen in the school environment, (7.5%) views that signs of degradation seen in the in teacher behavior as an effect of no punishment.

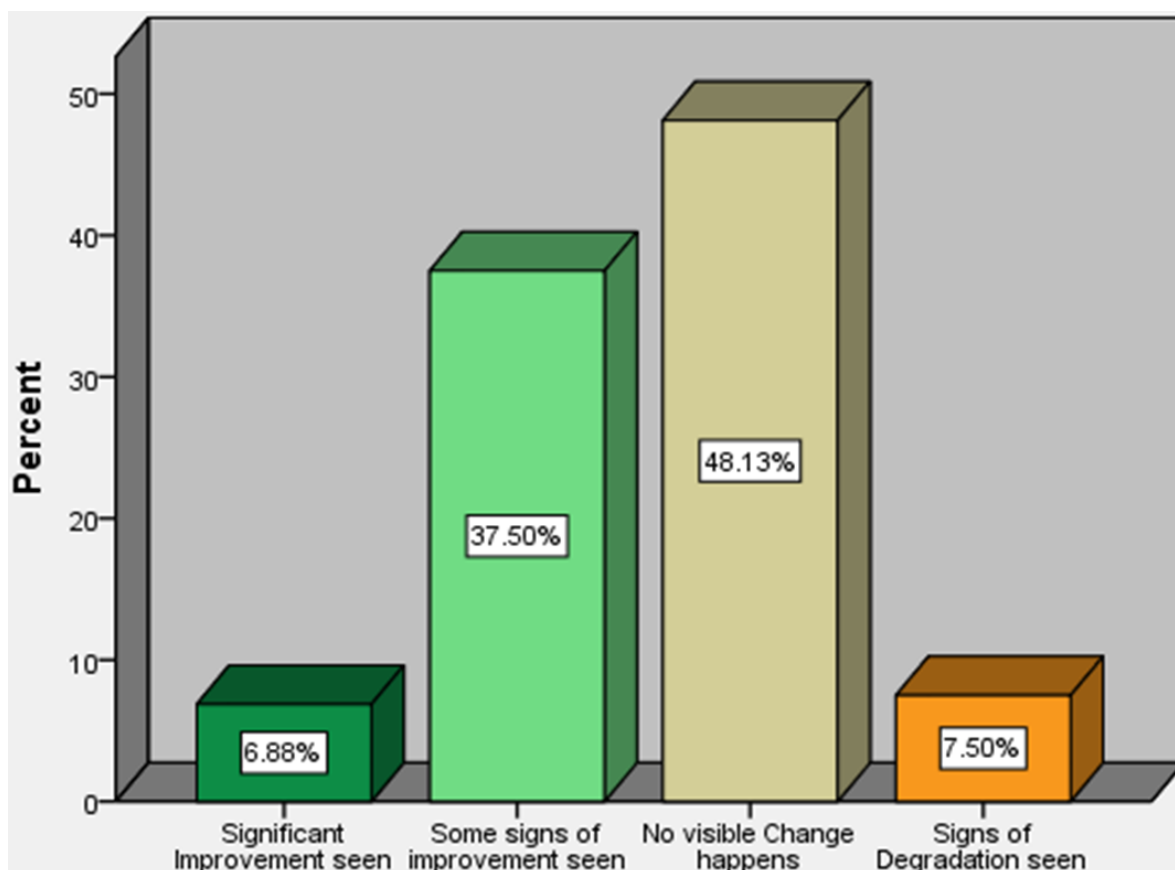


Figure 4. Impact of no punishment on teacher behavior.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The findings of the study reveal that teachers' perceptions of the impact of abolishing punishment in schools are largely mixed and non-conclusive, with a dominant trend toward *no visible change* across most dimensions. With regard to the school environment, nearly half of the teachers reported that the abolition of punishment had not resulted in any noticeable improvement, while a smaller proportion perceived either improvement or degradation. This suggests that the removal of punishment alone may not be sufficient to bring about visible changes in overall school climate. Similar observations have been reported in earlier studies, which indicate that discipline reforms require complementary institutional and pedagogical support to influence the school environment meaningfully (Busienei, 2012). The coexistence of perceived improvement and degradation further indicates that the impact of abolition is experienced unevenly across school contexts.

Teachers' perceptions were notably more negative in relation to student–teacher relationships, where a clear majority reported signs of degradation. This finding suggests that, from the teachers' perspective, the absence of punishment may have affected relational dynamics in ways that reduce perceived authority or control in the classroom. While a smaller proportion of teachers acknowledged improvement, the dominance of negative perceptions indicates that abolition policies may generate relational challenges when not accompanied by adequate guidance on alternative authority structures. Previous research similarly notes that teachers often experience uncertainty and strain in maintaining discipline under non-punitive regimes, particularly in the absence of systematic training (Cheruvath & Tripathi, 2015; Konti, 2011).

In contrast, teachers' perceptions of the impact of abolishing punishment on student motivation and study habits and teacher behaviour were characterised by a strong tendency toward *no visible change*, with moderate proportions indicating improvement and relatively fewer reporting degradation. These findings suggest that the abolition of punishment does not automatically enhance student motivation or transform teacher behaviour in a significant way. Rather, its impact appears limited unless supported by structured behavioural and instructional

strategies. Similar conclusions have been drawn in studies highlighting that non-punitive discipline reforms, when implemented in isolation, often lead to neutral outcomes rather than clear gains in motivation or professional practice (Mumthas et al., 2014). Overall, the discussion indicates that teachers perceive the impact of abolishing punishment as context-dependent, uneven, and largely neutral, underscoring the complexity of discipline reform at the elementary school level.

## 5. IMPLICATIONS

The findings indicate that the abolition of punishment, by itself, has not produced uniformly positive outcomes across school dimensions, as a substantial proportion of teachers reported no visible change in school environment, student motivation, and teacher behavior. This implies that policy-level abolition of punishment needs to be accompanied by clearly articulated school-level mechanisms to translate intent into observable change. Without structured behavioral frameworks, consistent guidelines, and shared expectations, teachers may perceive the reform as neutral in impact rather than transformative. The implication is that schools require supportive systems to operationalize no-punishment policies in ways that are visible and meaningful in everyday functioning.

The predominantly negative perceptions regarding student-teacher relationships suggest that teachers may experience challenges in maintaining authority and relational balance in the absence of punishment. This highlights the need for professional capacity-building focused on non-punitive authority, classroom communication, and relational discipline. Teachers may benefit from structured guidance on how to assert boundaries, manage defiance, and sustain respectful relationships without relying on punitive measures. Such support is essential to prevent perceived degradation in relationships and to ensure that the abolition of punishment does not unintentionally strain classroom interactions.

Finally, the mixed and neutral perceptions related to student motivation and teacher behavior imply that abolishing punishment alone does not automatically enhance intrinsic motivation or significantly alter professional practice. This underscores the importance of integrating no-punishment policies with pedagogical strategies, motivational supports, and institutional reinforcement. The implication is that discipline reform should be approached as a systemic change process, rather than a standalone policy directive, to ensure that intended outcomes are realized at the classroom level.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The present study examined teachers' perceptions of the impact of abolishing punishment in schools across four key dimensions: school environment, student-teacher relationships, student motivation and study habits, and teacher behavior. The findings reveal that teachers do not perceive the abolition of punishment as having a uniformly positive or transformative impact. Across most dimensions, the dominant response indicated no visible change, suggesting that the removal of punitive measures alone has limited influence on observable school functioning.

While some teachers reported signs of improvement in the school environment, student motivation, and teacher behavior, a notable proportion also perceived signs of degradation, particularly in student-teacher relationships. This indicates that the absence of punishment may create challenges in maintaining disciplinary balance and relational authority in classrooms when alternative mechanisms are not firmly established. The coexistence of improvement, neutrality, and degradation across all dimensions reflects the context-dependent nature of no-punishment policy outcomes.

Overall, the study concludes that abolishing punishment in schools is neither inherently beneficial nor inherently detrimental, as perceived by teachers. Instead, its impact appears contingent upon how the policy is implemented and supported at the school level. Teachers' perceptions underscore the need to view the abolition of punishment as part of a broader disciplinary and pedagogical framework rather than as an isolated reform. The

findings contribute empirical evidence to ongoing debates on non-punitive discipline by highlighting the nuanced and mixed realities experienced by teachers in elementary education.

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