

# Methodological Approach to A Study of Teachers' Perceptions of Alternative Strategies to Corporal Punishment in Basic Schools in Ghana

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## **Abstract**

This study reveals the methodological procedures adopted to carry out a study on teachers' perceptions of alternative strategies to corporal punishment in basic schools in Ghana. The study adopted the constructivism-interpretivism paradigms and the qualitative research approach to guide the study. Phenomenological research design was used to identify, describe and understand the teachers' perceptions of alternative strategies. Other methodological procedures adopted for the study as well as the reasons for adopting them are explained to guide future researchers in this area of research. Conclusion is drawn from the discussion for the adoption of this methodology in conducting similar studies to attain the necessary results.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Methodology is the revolving pillar of a good research. Its selection requires careful considerations to achieve the necessary results in a research study. This write-up posits the research paradigm, research approach and design, population and measures that were taken to ensure trustworthiness of a study of teachers' perceptions of alternative strategies to corporal punishment in Basic schools in Ghana. The study was undertaken to achieve the following objectives:

1. To identify, describe and understand the alternative strategies used by teachers and the reasons for their use.
2. To identify, describe and understand the teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the alternative strategies.
3. To identify, describe and understand the teachers' perceptions of the ineffectiveness of the alternative strategies.
4. To identify, describe and understand the teachers' perceptions of how the alternative strategies could be made more effective to bring lasting discipline in basic schools.
5. To identify, describe and understand the teachers' perceptions of restorative discipline practices in Ghanaian basic schools.

## **2. RESEARCH PARADIGM**

Research studies are informed by underlying research paradigms (Kuhn cited in Slavutych, 2011). Thus, each research study is cast in the light of a particular research paradigm. A research paradigm refers to "a

perspective about research held by a community of researchers that is based on a set of shared assumptions, concepts, values and practices” (Johnson & Christensen, 2014:31). Ritzer, as cited in Iofrida et al. (2018:469), on the other hand, sees paradigm as a fundamental picture of a discipline in the realm of science. To him, a paradigm carves out what, in particular, should be studied, what questions should be posed by the researcher and how they should be posed? Again, to him, a paradigm addresses the issue of what rules should be followed in posing out the questions.

Paradigms are fundamentally based on ontological, epistemological and methodological reasonings in relation to knowledge (Guba, 1990, Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Epistemology is the theory of knowledge. It looks at the foundation, nature, source, scope and origin of knowledge; hence, it addresses the question “what is knowledge?” (Crotty, 1998). Hesse-Biber (2010:126) sees epistemology as the “philosophical standpoint onto the research process that asks such questions as, what can we know and who can know?” To him, therefore, the epistemology of a researcher embraces his/her viewpoint on the nature of knowledge.

Ontology, another basis of a research paradigm, refers to the science and theory of reality. Therefore, the question often posed in connection with ontology is: what is reality? (Slevitch, 2011). Hesse-Biber (2010:126) sees ontology as “a philosophical standpoint onto the research process that asks such questions as what is the nature of reality?” He further alludes that ontological questions address the issue of nature of being and existence. Guba (1990:18) reiterates that ontology involves the question “what is the nature of the knowledge or what is the nature of reality?” The ontological viewpoint of a researcher influences his choice of the methods and approaches of searching for knowledge and hence arriving at his perceived sense of reality (Lohse, 2017). Similarly, one’s ontological beliefs determine the choice of a research topic and the research’s epistemological position (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Iofrida et al., 2014).

Another element of research paradigms is methodology. Methodology is the “theoretical bridge that connects the research problem with the research method” (Hesse-Biber, 2010: 11). It is the practical demonstration of the epistemological position of the research and, hence, determines how data would be gathered and analyzed to come out with the knowledge to form the theory (Iofrida et al., 2018; Mertons, 2007). The three (3) elements of research paradigms, namely, epistemology, ontology and methodology, are interrelated, and they guide the planning, design and execution or implementation of a research (Iofrida et al., 2018).

Various typologies of research paradigms exist. In organizational theory, Burrell and Morgan cited in Bogna, Raineri and Dell (2020) identified four (4) commonly used typologies. These are interpretive, functionalist, radical structuralist and radical humanist paradigms. Crotty (1998), on the other hand, states that there are three (3) main theoretical perspective-based research paradigms namely objectivism, constructionism and subjectivism. In the arena of management and social sciences research, works by Cupchik (2001), Girod-Séville and Perret (1999), Guba (1990), Guba and Lincoln (1994), Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), Iofrida et al. (2014), Levers (2013), Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011) and Phoenix et al. (2013) stipulate four main typologies: positivism, post-positivism, constructivism and interpretivism. These four (4) paradigms are briefly explained in Table 1 below in terms of their epistemology, ontology and methodologies employed in research.

**Table 1: Paradigms based on ontology, epistemology and methodology**

Paradigm	Ontology	Epistemology	Methodology
Positivism	Realism (there is a “true” apprehensible reality).	Objective, separating object under study from the researcher.	Mainly experimental, controlling confounding factors to verify theories.
Postpositivism	Critical realism (there is a “true” reality but it is not apprehensible by a fallible human mind).	Objectivity is not reachable but a goal. Findings are probably true and are falsifiable.	Critical multiplism. More natural settings and possible use of qualitative methods.
Constructivism-Interpretivism	Relativism: the reality is built based on the interpretation from those that experience it. Multiple and equally valid realities.	Knowledge is built on the interaction between researcher and the study object.	Hermeneutical and dialectic. Based on the interaction between researchers and subjects. Importance of qualitative methods.

**Source: Adapted from Guba (1990)**

This study adopted the constructivism-interpretivism paradigms to achieve the objectives of the study. The explanation of the adopted paradigms and the justification for the choice of these paradigms are explained next in line.

**2.1 Constructivism-Interpretivism paradigms**

The epistemology, ontology and methodology dictate of constructivism-interpretivism paradigms are set off in the writings of the following writers: Cupchik (2001), Girod-Séville and Perret (1999), Guba (1990), Guba and Lincoln (1994), Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), Iofrida et al. (2014), Levers (2013), Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011) and Phoenix et al. (2013). In terms of epistemology, these authors assert that constructivists believe that knowledge does not exist in an objective or real sense as alluded to by positivists but is constructed and hence, realities are also constructed. On the side of interpretivists, they also believe that knowledge is not objective, but knowledge is interpreted and hence reality can be described in order to be understood. In terms of ontology (theory of reality), both paradigms assert that reality is not one hard and fast thing but rather, it is relative and numerous. The actual crux of what is real cannot be ascertained. What is real is constructed and interpreted through our views or perceptions. In the arena of methodologies, the above authors assert that constructivism largely uses qualitative methods where participants with requisite experience of the phenomenon of study are studied for knowledge to be constructed. Interpretivism, on the other hand, employs hermeneutical and dialectical analyses of perceptions of stakeholders on a phenomenon as a means of interpreting knowledge. Interpretivism largely employs the qualitative approach in its studies.

There are a number of strengths and weaknesses associated with the use of constructivism-interpretivism paradigms. From the works of Guba and Lincoln (1994), Phoenix et al. (2013) and Iofrida (2016), they can be summarized as follows. First, they allow for the generation of rich meaning and values of knowledge. Second, they make for an in-depth investigation and produce a holistic picture at the end of a study. Third, they allow for an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon because perceptions are sought from experts of the phenomenon. In terms of weaknesses, they are context specific and, hence, weak in predictability and generalizability.

These paradigms were adopted for this study for a number of reasons. Since the study intended to undertake an in-depth study of teachers’ perceptions of what is working, what is not working and what could be done to make alternative strategies more effective as well as teachers’ perceptions of restorative practices, the choice of these paradigms was appropriate. The choice was in line with the assertion of Iofrida et al. (2018) that interpretivism-oriented paradigms (constructivism and interpretivism) aim at an in-depth study of a phenomenon to ascertain the values and significance of the phenomenon as against positivism-oriented paradigms (positivism and post-positivism) which aim at finding the objective truth

and generalization of the findings. The use of the constructivism and interpretivism paradigms helped to generate rich information from the participants (teachers and head teachers) of the study. These participants, being regular users of alternatives strategies to corporal punishment, were able to share their perceptions of the use of the strategies because the method and design employed on the bases of these paradigms allowed for an in-depth investigation of the phenomenon and rich data were obtained from the participants.

### 3. RESEARCH APPROACH

There are three (3) approaches to research: quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. These approaches are based on research paradigms. Quantitative approach largely utilizes the philosophical beliefs of positivism-oriented paradigms (positivism and post-positivism) while qualitative approach largely employs the beliefs of interpretivism-oriented paradigms (constructivism and interpretivism). Mixed approach, on the other hand, utilizes the tenets of both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Iofrida et al., 2018; Johnson & Christenson, 2004). However, these alignments of approaches to paradigms are challenged by some authors as misleading (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This is because to them, each approach can be carried out in each paradigm. Notwithstanding this, however, the alignment classification still goes on in the literature. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), Edmonds and Kennedy (2016), Jason and Glenwick (2016) and Mertens (2019), quantitative approach, among others, deals with collection of numerical data while qualitative approach deals with the collection of non-numerical data such as pictures, words and artifacts. Mixed approach deals with both numerical and nonnumerical data.

This study, by its nature, adopted the qualitative research approach to achieve its objectives. This was because the study obtained non-numerical data (words, opinion of respondents) for analysis. This led to the attainment of rich data on teachers' perceptions of alternative strategies to corporal punishment and the subsequent interpretation of the findings.

#### 3.1 Qualitative research

Blandford, Furniss and Makri (2016), Dillaway, Lysack and Luborsky (2017), Padgett (2017) and Pham (2018) described the major tenets of qualitative research approach as follows. First, qualitative research follows the bottom-up or inductive approach in arriving at conclusions. Information is compiled from data collected to reach conclusions or for formulation of theory. Second, qualitative approach sees human behaviour as variable, dynamic and situation-specific, and not objective and predictable as in the case of quantitative research. Third, conclusions of studies are arrived at through an explanation, description and exploration of the data collected on the participants' perceptions of the phenomenon. Fourth, qualitative research studies behaviours or situations in their natural setting and arrive at context-specific conclusions. Fifth, qualitative research holds that there is no objective reality but rather, there are subjective, multiple realities and realities are socially constructed. Sixth, in terms of data collection, qualitative approach collects non-numerical data (words, pictures) through in-depth interviews and observations of participants or situations through the use of open-ended questions. The researcher is the main collector of data. Seventh, in terms of data analysis, qualitative research finds themes, patterns and the holistic picture of the non-numerical data (words, picture) collected from the participants or situation. Lastly, results in qualitative research are not for generalization but rather present multiple perspectives to represent the participants' viewpoints and hence, the findings are particularistic to the participants or situation and the

context in which the study was carried out. Research reports are compiled using narrative reports with verbatim quotes of the participants or utilizing contextual descriptions.

All these characteristics of qualitative research approach were utilized in this study. Non-numerical data (words) on perceptions of teachers on the use of the alternative to corporal punishment were analyzed descriptively to discover patterns, themes and the holistic picture of the participants' perceptions. In the analysis of the data, verbatim quotes were used to back the themes identified.

#### **4. RESEARCH DESIGN**

Research design refers to the overall plan for carrying out a study prior to collecting data, when collecting data and when analyzing the data (Asenahabi, 2019). It is what provides a sense of direction to a study as to what type of data would be collected as well as how the data would be analyzed and reported (Creswell, 2014). Research design, therefore, is what details all the steps that a researcher would employ prior to data collection, the type of data to collect, how to collect the data and the way(s) data would be analyzed. The design, in essence, gives the direction as to how the study would be carried out. Among others, research design helps to adopt an approach to answering research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It also helps a researcher to decide how the data would be analyzed, the method(s) of data collection to be used and a particular analysis to be carried out to answer the research questions (Asenahabi, 2019). The study employed qualitative interpretive design, specifically, the phenomenological research design, to answer the research questions. This is because the phenomenological research considers individuals' opinions or perceptions of a phenomenon and allows expert opinions on a phenomenon to be obtained either through interviews, focus group discussions and/or observations (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019; Yüksel & Yıldırım, 2015). Phenomenological research design follows the constructivist/interpretivist paradigm (Qutoshi, 2018). This design was chosen to help the researcher have an in-depth interaction with the participants of the study so as to find and describe their perceptions of the use of the alternatives to corporal punishment.

##### **4.1 Phenomenological design**

Phenomenology is defined as research that has as its underlying goal, to describe the core essence of a phenomenon through the exploration of perceptions of people who have experienced it (Alase, 2017; Picton, Moxham & Patterson, 2017; Teherani et al., 2015). Phenomenology seeks to achieve two basic goals in relation to human experience, namely, to describe what was experienced in relation to the phenomenon and how the phenomenon was experienced (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019; Van Manen, 2016). Phenomenological studies, therefore, help us to understand the universal nature of a phenomenon by exploring its essence from the views of those who have experienced it. This is done to gain an in-depth understanding of the way humans think and to expand the scope of knowledge of the researcher on the phenomenon (Delve & Limpaecher, 2022c). To this end, Georgi and Georgi (2003) allude that phenomenological studies are very helpful in clearly describing the insights, subjective experiences, beliefs and motivations of experiencers of a phenomenon rather than explaining them.

There are unique characteristics of phenomenological research. Delve and Limpaecher (2022c) explained four of them. First, the design of phenomenological research is descriptive. The aim of a researcher is to precisely describe a phenomenon's structure. Second, it aims at finding out what a certain experience means to a group of people and how they experienced it. Third, the method of phenomenology calls for researchers to put aside their preconceptions and presumptions of the phenomenon and concentrate



primarily on the present experience. Finally, a researcher must initially objectively describe the lived experiences before considering the description in the light of the phenomenon's existing ideas.

There are several types of phenomenology. These types have arisen because of different schools of philosophy. The Encyclopedia of phenomenology (1997) classifies phenomenology into seven types. However, the basic classification is two: transcendental (descriptive) phenomenology and hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology.

Transcendental (descriptive) phenomenology has its philosophical roots in the ideas and writings of Edmund Husserl (Fink, 2020; Zahavi, 2018). Ontologically, transcendental (descriptive) phenomenology holds the assumption that reality is in the knower and, therefore, what occurs in his consciousness. It further says that to acquire knowledge, the researcher should exclude himself/herself from the world to get to the transcendental I, that is, knowledge free from bias. Again, knowledge can be understood descriptively. During data collection, a researcher must set aside or bracket his/her subjective experiences to get to the transcendental I. In respect of data analysis, transcendental (descriptive) phenomenology holds the assertion that a phenomenon should be considered from diverse perspectives and common meanings identified and clustered into themes out of the textual description. Imaginative variations should be used to create structural descriptions, after which the descriptions are used to form the core essence of the phenomenon. Information on the methodology of transcendental (descriptive) phenomenology is found in the writings of Polkinghorne (1989), Moustakas (1994) and Giorgi (1985) (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019; Valentine, Kopcha & Vagle, 2018; Wertz, 2016).

Hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology, on the other hand, is based on the philosophical ideas of Hans-Georg Gadamer (McWhorter, 2021; Teichert, 2020) and Martin Heidegger (Duckham & Schreiber, 2016; Horrigan-Kelly, Millar & Dowling, 2016). In relation to what is reality, hermeneutic (interpretive) phenomenology holds that reality is found through the interpretation of individuals' lifeworld and hence, the search for reality is an interpretive process. Through reflections on essential features of the individual's experience of a phenomenon and reflections of one's own experience, knowledge is attained. Data obtained is analyzed through reflections of data collected and finding of how parts of the data contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon as a whole. Methodological texts are found in the works of Van Manen (1997) (Crowther & Thomson, 2020; Horrigan-Kelly, Millar & Dowling, 2016; Suddick et al., 2020).

There are, therefore, various typologies under the two main classifications of phenomenology. These typologies have different approaches to phenomenology. Thus, each of these typologies has its own disciplinary origin, methodology, aims and sample size of participants. Table 2 below depicts the various typologies of phenomenology and their various research methods.

**Table 1: Typologies of phenomenology**

	Phenomenology				
	Descriptive phenomenology (Husserlian)			Interpretive phenomenology (Heideggerian)	
	Sanders's phenomenology	Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method	van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenology	Benner's interpretive phenomenology	Smith's interpretative phenomenological analysis
<i>Disciplinary origin</i>	Organization studies	Psychology	Pedagogy	Nursing	Psychology
<i>Methodology as</i>	Technique	Scientific method	Poetry	Practice	Craft
<i>Aims</i>	To make explicit the implicit structure (or essences) and meaning of human experiences	To establish the essence of a particular phenomenon	To transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence	To articulate practical, everyday understandings and knowledge	To explore in detail how participants are making sense of their personal and social world
<i>Participants (sampling)</i>	3-6	At least 3	Unspecified	Until new informants reveal no new findings	1 or more
<i>Key concepts</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bracketing (epoché)</li> <li>• Eidetic reduction</li> <li>• Nomematic/noetic correlates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bracketing (epoché)</li> <li>• Eidetic reduction</li> <li>• Imaginative variation</li> <li>• Meaning units</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depthful writing</li> <li>• Orientation</li> <li>• Thoughtfulness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The background</li> <li>• Exemplars</li> <li>• Interpretive teams</li> <li>• Paradigm cases</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Double hermeneutic</li> <li>• Idiographic</li> <li>• Inductive</li> </ul>
<i>Applications in organization studies</i>	Kram and Isabella (1985)	McClure and Brown (2008)	Gibson (2004)	Yakhlef and Essén (2012)	Murtagh, Lopes, and Lyons (2011)

**Source: Gill (2020)**

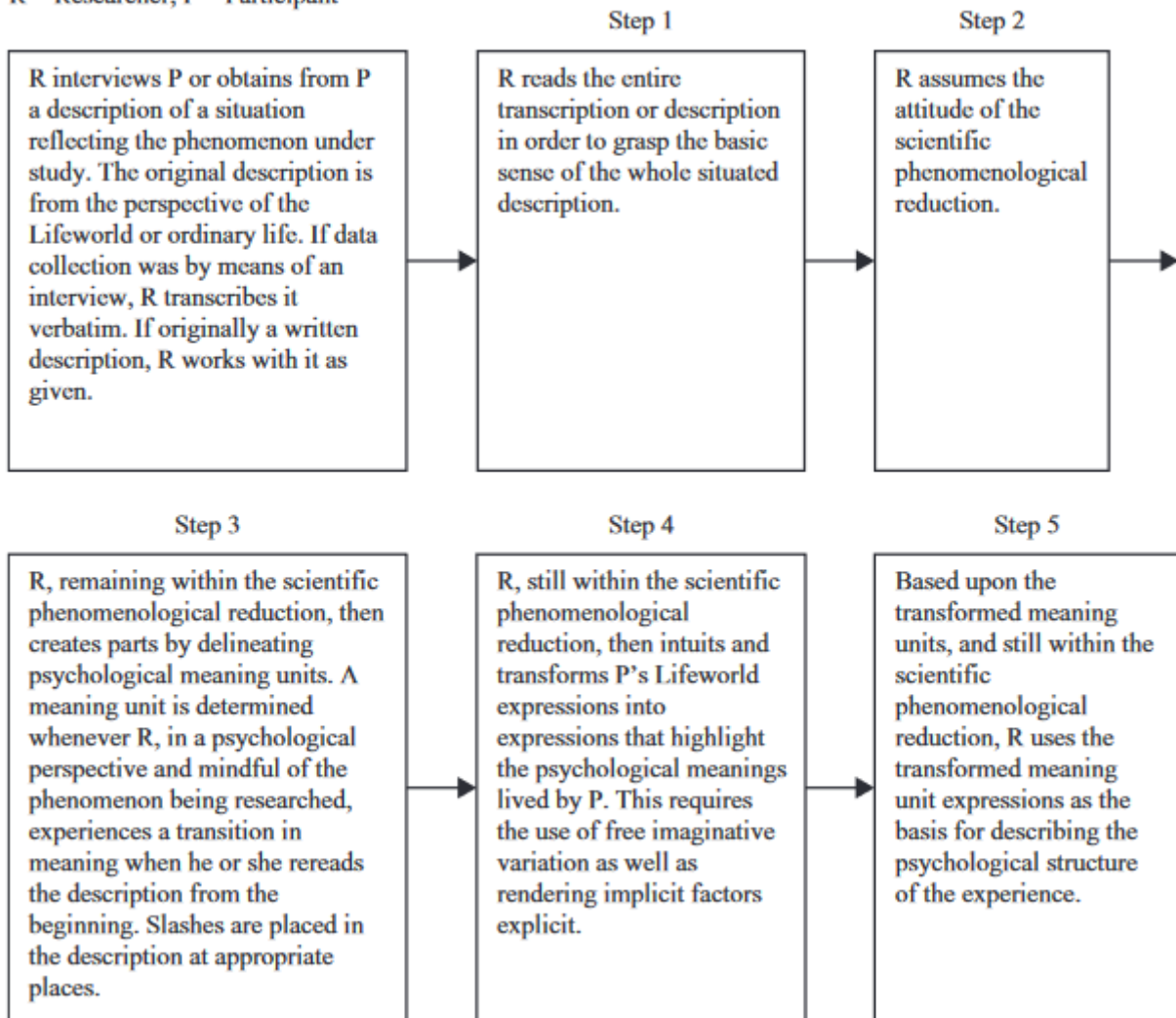
This study sought to find out teachers’ perceptions of the alternative strategies to corporal punishment. Thus, it found out their perceptions of the lived experiences of the use of alternative strategies to corporal punishment. Transcendental (descriptive) phenomenology design was, therefore, adopted for the study. This was because the researcher wanted to find out the lived experiences of the users of the alternative strategies. The researcher did not want to bring his perspectives to bear on their experiences so the researcher sought to just describe the experiences from the point of view of the users of the strategies (the research participants). The researcher, therefore, bracketed his ideas on the use of the alternative strategies to get to the actual essence of the experiences of the participants of the study. Transcendental (descriptive) phenomenology design, therefore, was the best approach to obtain the “expert opinion” necessary to answer the research questions of this study. Of the various typologies to transcendental (descriptive) phenomenology design, Giorgi’s descriptive phenomenological method was adopted for this study because it led to the core essence of the study. This typology was followed in the course of analyzing the data of the study.

**4.1.1 Giorgi’s descriptive phenomenological method**

From the description of various phenomenological typologies as in Table 2 above, Gill (2020) asserts that Giorgi’s descriptive phenomenological method follows the line of descriptive phenomenology by Husserl. It originated from psychology and its method of enquiry is scientific. The aim of Giorgi’s descriptive phenomenological method is to reach out to the core essence of a particular phenomenon. In terms of the participants selected to arrive at the core essence of a phenomenon, a minimum of three is suggested for use in this phenomenological method. Key concepts involved in this phenomenological method are bracketing (epoche), eidetic reduction, imaginative variation and meaning units. Its application is found in the writings of McClure and Brown (2008). Georgi, Georgi and Morley (2017) have presented the steps undertaken to arrive at the essence of a phenomenon in phenomenological studies. This is shown in Figure 2 below.

**Figure 2: Flowchart of the Steps of the Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method**

R = Researcher, P = Participant



Source: Georgi, Georgi and Morley (2017)

#### 4.5 POPULATION

Population refers to the units or persons a study seeks to consider and generalize the findings over. Taherdoost (2016) defined population as a clearly defined group of people who are known to share certain traits. Asiamah, Mensah and Oteng-Abayie (2017), similarly, defined it as individuals or units that have the necessary information of interest to a researcher and hence the researcher studies or solicits information from them. The population of the study was Basic school teachers and basic school head teachers in the Mampong Municipality of Ghana. This was because teachers and head teachers are the basic implementors of the discipline policy in the Ghanaian school system and hence, the researcher saw a study using them as appropriate.

##### 4.5.1 Study area

The study area was the Mampong Municipality. The Mampong Municipality is one of the municipalities in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. It has a population of 116,632 people and land area of 670.7 km<sup>2</sup> (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). The Mampong Municipality was selected for the study for two main reasons: first, because of its proximity to the researcher and second, because it had some schools with the



characteristics of interest to the researcher. These characteristics were schools with indiscipline records and schools with experienced teachers in the use of the alternative strategies to corporal punishment. Figure 4.3 below gives a pictorial view of the map of the Municipality.

**Figure 4.3: Map of the Mampong Municipality**



The Municipality had a total of seventy-seven (77) public kindergartens, seventy-eight (78) public primary schools and sixty-two (62) public junior high schools as of September 2022 (Mampong Municipal Educational Directorate, 2022) as shown in Table 4.3 below. Kindergarten, primary and junior high schools form the basic school sector of Ghana’s school system.

**Table 4.3: Number of public basic schools in Mampong Municipality**

Type of School	Number of schools
Kindergarten	77
Primary	78
Junior High School	62
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>217</b>

**Source: Mampong Municipal Educational Directorate (2022)**

#### 4.5.2 Sample and sampling procedure

A sample refers to a proportion of the population selected for a study (Andrade, 2020; Dovrat, Lang & Avidan, 2019; Johnson & Christensen, 2004). A sample is chosen because of the impossibility and

difficulty of complete enumeration of all the population in some studies. A representative sample of the population is, therefore, studied in place of the population. The sample size of the study was thirty (30) people, made up of fifteen (15) Basic school teachers and fifteen (15) basic school head teachers. The sample was selected from twenty (20) basic schools purposively sampled for the study.

Sample size is not a critical factor in phenomenological research (Flynn & Korcuska, 2018). The critical factor is the selection of units with critical information of interest to the researcher (Alase, 2017). Giorgi's phenomenological method used for this study recommends a lower number of at least three (3) for a phenomenological study. However, in this study, the number went up to thirty (30), made up of fifteen (15) teachers and fifteen (15) head teachers for the purpose of triangulation of the findings to get to the core essence of the perceptions of the teachers. The sample size of fifteen (15) teachers and fifteen (15) head teachers was, therefore, arrived at using the suggestion by Creswell cited in Somer, Somer and Jopp (2016) that the appropriate sample size for a phenomenological study should range between five (5) and twenty-five (25) to get to the core essence of the study. Furthermore, it was identified in the course of the data collection that data saturation had been reached by the time the fifteenth (15<sup>th</sup>) participant was interviewed and the three (3) focus groups discussions of fifteen (15) overall participants were done. Data saturation occurs when further data received do not add any new information to the already obtained information (Hennink, Kaiser & Weber, 2019). This sample size, therefore, was adopted for the study because data saturation was reached at that number of participants.

Purposive sampling technique was employed to select the participants of the study. In purposive sampling, participants who are considered to have the critical information of interest are sampled for the study (Etikan & Bala, 2017; Sharma, 2017). In this study, purposive sampling approach was used because it helped the researcher to easily reach out to the targeted participants.

The researcher purposively sampled fifteen (15) Basic school teachers and fifteen (15) basic school head teachers based on three main criteria. First, they had taught at the basic school level for not less than five years. Second, they were teaching or heading a school with a high indiscipline record and lastly, they were teachers who have used some alternative strategies to corporal punishment to manage pupils' indiscipline behaviour in school.

The following steps were utilized by the researcher to select the sample for the study. First, the researcher wrote a letter to the Mampong Municipal Education Directorate to request for names of basic schools with high disciplinary challenges (see Appendix D). When the names of these schools were obtained, the researcher contacted the schools personally and explained the purpose of the study to the head teachers and teachers. The researcher then purposively selected fifteen (15) teachers and fifteen (15) head teachers in those schools who had taught for a minimum of five years, had experience with the use of the alternative strategies to corporal punishment and willingly agreed to partake in the study.

#### **4.6 INSTRUMENTATION**

Two main instruments, namely, interview and focus group discussion, were employed to collect data from the participants of the study. These instruments were used as a means of obtaining rich information for the study as well as triangulate the data during the analysis. These instruments are discussed below:

##### **4.6.1 interview**

Interview is one common means of obtaining information for a study (McGrath, Palmgren & Liljedahl, 2019; Moser & Korstjens, 2018; Smith & Sparkes, 2016). It is usually utilized in qualitative research methods. Interview, according to Johnson and Christensen (2004), is an instrument for soliciting

information whereby an interviewer poses questions to an interviewee. It can be done face-to-face or on the telephone. Patton cited in Johnson and Christensen (2004) brought to notice four types of interviews. These are informal conversation interview, interview guide approach, standardized open-ended interview and closed quantitative interview. Others have, however, classified the types into structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017; Mannan, 2020; Roulston & Choi, 2018). Semi-structured interview was used in this study. It is an interview type that is often used in qualitative research (Alshenqeeti, 2014). In the semi-structured method, the researcher uses a set of predetermined (open-ended) questions to gather data. However, if an intriguing or novel line of inquiry emerges throughout the interview process, it enables the researcher to pose further queries (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017; Mannan, 2020; Young et al., 2018). This type of interview enables the researcher to solicit a lot of information from the interviewee because of its flexible nature. This accounted for why this type of interview was adopted for this study. In the use of it, I was able to further probe into the lines of conversation with the interviewees on their perceptions of the use of alternative strategies to corporal punishment. In this study, I developed an interview guide consisting of seven (7) items to help solicit information from the participants (see Appendix J). The items in the interview guide were mainly drawn from issues discussed in the literature review of this study.

There are a number of benefits with the use of interviews. Showkat and Parveen (2017) noted that it avails itself for solicitation of a lot of information as compared with other methods like questionnaire. It also allows for the study of the behaviour of the participants and gives the researcher an in-depth understanding of the themes of the study. On the drawbacks of interviews, they allude that a lot of participants are not sampled for the study, hence, affecting the generalizability of the findings. The researcher can be biased in reporting the findings and breach some ethical requirements of its use. In this study, however, measures were taken to minimize the impact of these drawbacks. Since the study was qualitative, with no intention of generalizing the findings, the sample selected was appropriate. It was ensured that the participants were experienced teachers who could provide the key information required of the study for dependability and confirmability of the findings. The member checking as well as the triangulation done in the course of the study eliminated biasness in the study and finally, all ethical requirements were adhered to in the course of the interview.

#### **4.6.2 Focus group discussion**

Focus group discussion involves the assemble of 'experts' on an issue to deliberate on that issue (Nyumba et al., 2017). Stewart (2018) defined it as a particular style of topic-focused group discussion facilitated by a qualified group moderator. Focus group discussion, which emanated from the works of Sociologist Robert Merton (Merton, Fiske, & Kendall, 1956), is a means of generating qualitative data in the form of words from the participants of the group. The discussion, often, results in the attainment of rich information on the phenomenon of study. Stewart and Shamdasani (1998) noted that focus group discussion is used to ascertain general information on an issue of interest, generate new ideas and find out how participants discuss a phenomenon of interest. Focus groups normally contain homogeneous groups of people, purposively sampled to discuss an issue of interest. The discussion is usually regulated by the researcher (moderator/ facilitator).

The size of focus groups as well as the number of focus groups appropriate for each study is not static. Debate still exists in the literature on the appropriate number and size of focus groups. Guest, Namey and McKenna (2017), in an exploration of the rate of achievement of themes of 40 focus groups studies, found that 80% of the themes were achieved with two (2) to three (3) focus groups while 90% were achieved

with three (3) to six (6) groups. The use of three (3) focus groups in a study, they identified, was enough to achieve all the themes of the study. Hennink, Kaiser and Weber (2019), on the other hand, assert that four focus groups are needed to uncover new ideas of a study but more than four is needed to understand an issue fully. Johnson and Christensen (2004) suggest groups of two (2) to four (4) in a single study in order to get rich information for a study. In terms of the size of a focus group, Mishra (2016) suggests that it can range from six to eight or more, even though as low as three can also do. Others like Johnson and Christensen (2004) stipulate six (6) to twelve (12) as the appropriate group size. A number of studies, however, suggest that the appropriate number of members for a focus group should range from 4-12 (Barbour, 2010; Stalmeijer, McNaughton & Van Mook, 2014; Webb & Doman, 2008). Issues that take a long time to discuss must have a smaller number (Nagle & Williams, 2013).

In this study, focus group discussions were held with three (3) focus groups made up of five (5) basic school head teachers in each focus group. Five (5) head teachers were made to form each focus group in order to afford the members of the group ample opportunity and time to engage in fruitful discussion. The five (5) basic school head teachers in each of the three (3) focus groups engaged in a discussion based on a discussion guide (see Appendix K) to unearth their perceptions of the use of alternative strategies to corporal punishment. The assignment of the selected school head teachers to the three (3) focus groups was done on the basis of proximity of their schools and their belonging to a common circuit. Basic schools in a District or Municipality in Ghana are grouped into circuits based on proximity. To facilitate easy discussion among the head teachers, the constitution of the focus groups was done on the basis of the circuits the head teachers belonged to. This ensured familiarity with each other in the group. Head teachers selected for the study from one circuit formed one focus group in that order and hence, free discussions went on among them in the course of each of the focus discussion groups. The items in the focus group discussion guide were mainly drawn from issues discussed in the literature review of this study.

There are several advantages and disadvantages with the use of focus group discussions. Krueger and Casey (2015) and Mishra (2016), in sum, noted that a focus group discussion helps in understanding issues of concern and reaching out to effective decisions. It also helps in the development of programmes and finding out people's insight and perceptions into things. Furthermore, it costs less in relation to other methods. However, the use of it is not helpful in delving into emotions of people. Again, in the use of it, some members can dominate in discussions, giving others no opportunity. In the use of this technique, I made sure as a moderator of the groups that the best sides of focus groups were achieved. Members were encouraged to freely discuss the issues on board and measures were put in place not to have some few members dominate in the discussions. These measures ensured the utilization of the best sides of focus groups.

#### **4.7 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE**

After obtaining ethical clearance from the University of South Africa (UNISA) (see Appendix A) to carry out the study, permission was sought from the Mampong Municipal Directorate of Education to carry out the study (see Appendix B). This led to the filling of Ethical Clearance Form of the Educational Directorate (see Appendix C). Subsequently, permission was granted by the Directorate of Education to carry out the study (see Appendix D). The researcher then further wrote to the Directorate of Education to request for names of schools with high disciplinary records in the Municipality (see Appendix E). The list of those schools was issued to the researcher. The Directorate then notified the head teachers of all those schools of this intended study and urged them to assist the researcher in information gathering.

When the list of the schools was obtained by the researcher, he contacted the head teachers of those schools and explained the purpose of the study to them. The head teachers were urged to contribute to the study by partaking in a focus group discussion. This led to the handing of a focus group participation information letter (see Appendix H) to each of the head teachers. The mode of constitution of the focus groups was explained to the head teachers. Fifteen (15) head teachers who willingly expressed interest in partaking in the focus group discussion were each given a consent form (see Appendix I) to fill to partake in the study. The mode of constitution of the focus groups was explained to them. Appointments were booked with the head teachers with respect to the date, time and venues of the focus group discussions.

Furthermore, the help of the head teachers was solicited to identify teachers with at least five (5) years' teaching experience in their schools to be engaged in the study. The teachers identified by the head teachers were contacted by the researcher to be interviewed. The researcher explained the purpose of the study to them and found out from them whether they have been using some alternative strategies to corporal punishment. The teachers who indicated that they have been using some alternative strategies to corporal punishment and were able to tell the researcher some of these strategies they use were selected and further handed the teacher participation information letter and urged by the researcher to be interviewed in the study. Fifteen (15) teachers who consented to take part in the study were given the consent form (see Appendix G) to fill as indicating their agreement to the terms of the interview. An interview appointment was booked with each of the teachers after the submission of the consent form.

The following additional measures were carried out to ensure a successful interview of the fifteen (15) teachers. First, the researcher met each interviewee at the appointed place and time for the interview. Each interview went on for approximately 30 minutes -1 hour. All the interviews were held in English, with the use of no interpreter as both the interviewer and the interviewees understood and could speak English. Covid-19 protocols of handwashing, sanitizing and wearing of nose mask were observed in the course of the interview. Each interview was phone-recorded. After each interview, a transcription of the recording was done within 48 hours. The transcribed recordings of each interviewee were given to him/her to check and confirm whether whatever he/she said was represented correctly. Corrections were made on the transcription on areas each interviewee pointed out as wrongly presented. A letter was written to thank each participant of the interview.

With regard to the focus group discussion, the researcher met each focus group at an agreed-upon place and the discussion ensued. Before and in the course of each discussion, Covid-19 preventive measures of handwashing, sanitizing and masking were observed. Discussions were held in English and were phone-recorded in each group. No interpreter was used as all the parties understood and could speak English. After each discussion, the phone recording was transcribed within 48 hours and given to the members of the group to confirm or otherwise. Points of wrong transcription were reported to the researcher and corrected accordingly. A letter was written to thank each participant of the focus group discussion.

#### **4.8 TRUSTWORTHINESS IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

A number of factors contribute to the trustworthiness of a study. They include dependability, transferability, credibility and confirmability of the study. The sub-sections below explain how these were achieved in this study to ensure its trustworthiness.

##### **4.8.1 Dependability**

Dependability, in sum, is when another researcher can follow the same steps that you employed and obtain the same or near the same results you obtained in the study. This is achieved when the study report, clearly,



outlines the steps utilized in conducting the study. In this research report, the design adopted, population, sample, sampling procedure, data collection procedure and data analysis procedure have all been clearly outlined to ensure that one can trace the tracks and obtain near results in a follow up study.

Member checking was also done to ensure dependability of the study. Member checking refers to going back to the participants to give them a copy of the transcription of the recordings or the themes discovered in the analysis, for them to confirm or point out errors in capturing or interpretation for appropriate corrections to be done (Candela, 2019; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Yen, 2014). This was done by playing back the recorded audio interviews and focus group discussions to the participants and allowing them to go through the written transcripts of their interviews and discussions for necessary corrections. Again, the recordings and the written transcripts were shown to the researcher's supervisor for approval. When these things were done, all wrong transcriptions and misrepresentations were pointed out and subsequently corrected to ensure that the final data for analyses were dependable.

Triangulation of the results of the interviews with that of the focus group discussions also ensured dependability of the study. Therefore, in the course of analyzing the data, the responses of the interviewees were triangulated with that of the focus group discussions for right conclusions to be drawn.

#### **4.8.2 Transferability**

Transferability is achieved if the nature of the population, research method employed, and steps carried out in collecting data for a study are clearly outlined for the reader so that he/she can transfer the findings to other places he/she is aware of. The researcher in this study, clearly, described the study area, Mampong-Ashanti, the sample and sampling procedures employed as well as the research methodology and design used. The detailing of these processes, it is envisaged, would lead to easy transfer of the procedures and findings to other similar settings to find out teachers' perceptions of alternative strategies to corporal punishment.

#### **4.8.3 Credibility**

Credibility of research has to do with how the findings of the study represents reality. To ensure credibility of this study, the interviews and focus group discussions conducted were phone-recorded to ensure accurate capture of the views of the participants. Furthermore, the researcher sought the perceptions of teachers and head teachers who were both users of the alternative strategies to corporal punishment in the school system so that their views could be compared with each other to reach the core essence or reality of the phenomenon of the study. By ascertaining the views of these two groups of participants, the findings and conclusions of the study were credible since there was a capture of their real views. The triangulation done further led to an accurate reporting of the findings.

#### **4.8.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability has to do with the extent to which the findings of the study can be corroborated by others. In this regard, measures must be put in place to ensure that the interpretation of the results of the study are not the views of the researcher but those of the participants of the study. To this end, the researcher, prior to analyzing the data, bracketed his perceptions of the phenomenon of study. Second, the transcription and interpretations of the results of the study were audited by two colleague lecturers in my institution of work, to confirm the findings and interpretations of the study. Third, the researcher's supervisor also audited the results and interpretations given and confirmed them as accurate for reporting.

### **4.9 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE**

The following processes took place prior to analyzing the data. First, there was a manual transcription of

the recordings of the interviews and focus group discussions. Following from this, to ensure the accuracy of the data collected from the participants, the researcher did member checking of the interviews and focus group discussions. This was done by taking the transcribed interviews and focus group discussions' transcripts for confirmation by the participants. This allowed the participants to correct errors captured in the data collected. Thereafter, the transcripts were manually analyzed.

In the analysis of the data, significant statements were coded using actual words (in vivo coding) and the imagery that the statements created. The codes created were used to form sub-themes. The sub-themes were grouped into themes and the themes were classified under various categories formed based on the sub-research questions. In the analysis and interpretation of the data, the five (5) main processes of phenomenological data analysis by Giorgi, Giorgi and Morley (2017) were followed. These processes are explained in the following paragraphs:

First, the researcher got the data ready for analyses. The researcher set aside (bracketed) his subjective perceptions of the phenomenon of study (epoche). This was done by the researcher noting down his perceptions of the phenomenon of study and becoming aware of them so that they do not influence the interpretations of the perceptions of the participants. The researcher, then, read the entire transcriptions thoroughly to get a sense of the whole idea of the expressed perceptions of the participants.

Second, the data were minimized phenomenologically. Four (4) steps were used to minimize the data from interviews and focus group discussions phenomenologically, with the goal of getting to the essence of the participants' experiences of the phenomenon. First, the researcher listed all the relevant statements in the interviews and focus group discussions and eliminated repeating and overlapping ones. This was done to clean up the data not essential for analysis. The essential statements were then coded using actual words of the participants and the imagery the statements created. Second, the codes were used as sub-themes. Third, the sub-themes were grouped into themes on the basis of the commonality of the ideas in the statements in the sub-themes. Fourth, the researcher grouped these themes under categories formed by the researcher based on the sub-research questions. The grouping of the themes was done based on the relationship of the themes with the categories.

Third, the researcher described the textual meanings of the statements of the participants under the various themes by using narrative descriptions of their perceptions of the phenomenon. This was done by using verbatim quotes from the interviews and focus group discussions. This facilitated the understanding of the participants' perceptions of the phenomenon.

The fourth step involved the generation of individual and composite structural descriptions. Here, the researcher interpreted the meanings of the textual statements of the participants by applying imaginations of how the experiences occurred and the underlying reasons for those thoughts.

Fifth, the researcher unraveled the essence of the experiences. The researcher deduced the essence of the participants' perceptions of the phenomenon. Johnson and Christensen (2004) assert that essence is "the commonality in human experience or invariant structure of the experience" (p. 365). The deduction was done by considering the textual and structural meanings of the participants' experiences. The essence formed the basis of the answer to the sub and main research questions.

#### **4.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Research ethics refer to a collection of guidelines that help researchers perform ethical research (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Research ethics are concerned with the standards, principles and methods for gathering, analyzing and disseminating scientific knowledge about the world (Bos, 2020). They are the

principles of rights and wrongs that must be observed by a researcher in order not to cause harm and provoke unpleasant feeling on the part of the participants and also respect their integrity. Several organizations, including the American Psychological Association and American Counselling Association have outlined some ethical guidelines to govern the conduct of research studies. These can be applied in educational research. The following are some ethical considerations in any good research: seeking informed consent from the participants, assurance of participants of their freedom to withdraw from the study without notice, protection of participants from any form of harm, be it physical, emotional or mental as a result of the study, and ensuring anonymity and confidentiality of the responses of the participants (Barrow, Brannan & Khandhar, 2021; Bos, 2020; Dooly, Moore & Vallejo, 2017).

Ethical considerations namely permission, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity and harm to participants are discussed below as well as how they were ensured in this study.

#### **4.10.1 Permission**

Permission to conduct the study was first sought from the University of South Africa College of Education Research Ethics Committee after filling and submitting the ethical clearance application. This led to the issuance of Ethical Clearance Certificate to me to carry out the study (see Appendix A). Thereafter, permission was sought from the Mampong Municipal Directorate of Education to carry out the study (see Appendix B). When the permission was sought, an additional ethical clearance form was filled (see Appendix C) before the granting of permission by the Mampong Municipal Directorate of Education to carry out the study. After permission was granted by the Directorate of Education (see Appendix D), the researcher further wrote to the Directorate for the names of basic schools with poor discipline records (see Appendix E). When issued with the names of those schools, the researcher went to the given schools, identified the prospective participants, explained the nature and objectives of the study to them and sought their consent to partake in the study.

#### **4.10.2 Informed consent**

In a study involving human subjects, informed consent is a crucial ethical consideration (Bazzano, Durant & Brantley, 2021; Sim & Waterfield, 2019). Informed consent is the full disclosure of a research's purpose and the participants' role, proper participant understanding and the participants' voluntary decision to engage in the study (Dankar, Gergely & Dankar, 2019). Informed consent was obtained from all the participants of the study. In doing that, the objectives, aims and purpose of the study were explained to them. The prospective participants were urged to partake in the study on their own free will and were further notified that they could back-out of the study at any time even without notice. Thus, the participants were not in any way coerced into the study. Participants were further assured that in case any psychological, emotional and physical harm occurred as a result of taking part in the study, appropriate measures would be taken to deal with it. Participants were made to fill and sign a consent form (see Appendix G and I) as an indication of their willingly agreeing to partake in the study.

#### **4.10.3 Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is an obligation on the side of a researcher to ensure that any use of information received from or contributed by human subjects respects the participant's autonomy and dignity and does not go against the interests of people or communities (Bos, 2020). This is ensured by non-disclosure of sensitive information to the public. Bos (2020) outlined five major steps of ensuring confidentiality in research and all these five steps were implemented at various stages of this study to ensure confidentiality of the study. First, participants should be made to remain anonymous. Second, no private information should be obtained from participants unless absolutely necessary. Third, participants must be made aware of the

purpose of the study, how it is to be carried out and who is to have access to the information. Fourth, participants must give an active consent to take part in the study and should not in any way be coerced to partake in the study. Finally, participants must have the opportunity to review the data given to correct any mistakes they perceive.

In both the participants' information letters and the informed consent letters, prospective participants were assured of confidentiality of whatever views they would express in the study. To this end, nowhere in this study have their real names been revealed. Alphanumeric codes have been used to represent the views of the various participants of the study. Furthermore, in the course of the study, both the interviews and the focus group discussions were held at confidential places, that is, places where no intruder could interrupt with the study to know the identity of the participants or hear the conversations. These aforementioned measures gave the participants the assurance of confidentiality and made them to give their true views of the phenomenon under study.

#### 4.10.4 Anonymity

Coffelt (2017) defined anonymity as the state of not being able to know the identity of the participants, that is, keeping the real names and other identifiers of the participants a secret. Anonymity of the participants' responses was assured in the study. To this end, no participant was made to mention his/her name in the course of the interviews and focus group discussions. In the course of reporting the findings from the analysis of the data, no real name was mentioned in the verbatim quotes of the participants or in any form. Rather, alphanumeric codes were devised for the report and analysis of the data. The alphanumeric codes of the participants of the interview are indicated in Table 4.4 below:

**Table 4.4: Alphanumeric codes of interview participants**

Interviewees	Alphanumeric Code
1	P1
2	P2
3	P3
4	P4
5	P5
6	P6
7	P7
8	P8
9	P9
10	P10
11	P11
12	P12
13	P13
14	P14
15	P15

The alphanumeric codes of the focus discussion groups are indicated in Table 4.5 below:

**Table 4.5: Alphanumeric codes of the focus discussion groups**

Focus Groups	Group Code
1	FGD1
2	FGD2
3	FGD3

#### 4.10.5 Harm to participants

Harms like anger, invasion of privacy, embarrassment and discomfort are potential harms brought to bear on study participants. None of these was experienced by the participants, as attempts were consciously made to avoid them in the course of the study. No duress was put on any of the participants to answer a particular question. Participants had the liberty to not respond to a particular question if they thought hurts their feeling despite the effort made by the researcher not to harm their sensibility. The researcher framed the questions in both the interview and focus group discussion in such a way as not to harm the sensibility of the participants. The member checking done also ensured no misrepresentation of one's views to hurt his/her feelings. At the end of the study and its report, no participant expressed harm as a result of the study.

#### CONCLUSION

It can be concluded from the forgoing discussion that, the interpretivism-constructivism paradigms allow for people to generate their own knowledge and for the knowledge to be interpreted from their worldview. The constructed and the interpreted knowledge are depicted through verbatim quotes from the participants of the study who are purposefully selected for the study because they have lived the phenomenon of interest to the researcher. Phenomenological design on the other hand, allows for reaching the core essence of a phenomenon. It is therefore recommended that studies that aim at arriving at the core essence of a phenomenon may adopt a similar methodology as discussed above.

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