

MWALIMU

Public humiliation of teachers undermines learning in schools

The habit breeds disrespect

In many schools across Uganda, teachers are facing it rough from parents for administering punishments to learners. Although teachers sometimes go overboard, humiliating them in front of children is not right, writes **RICHARD ATEGEKA**

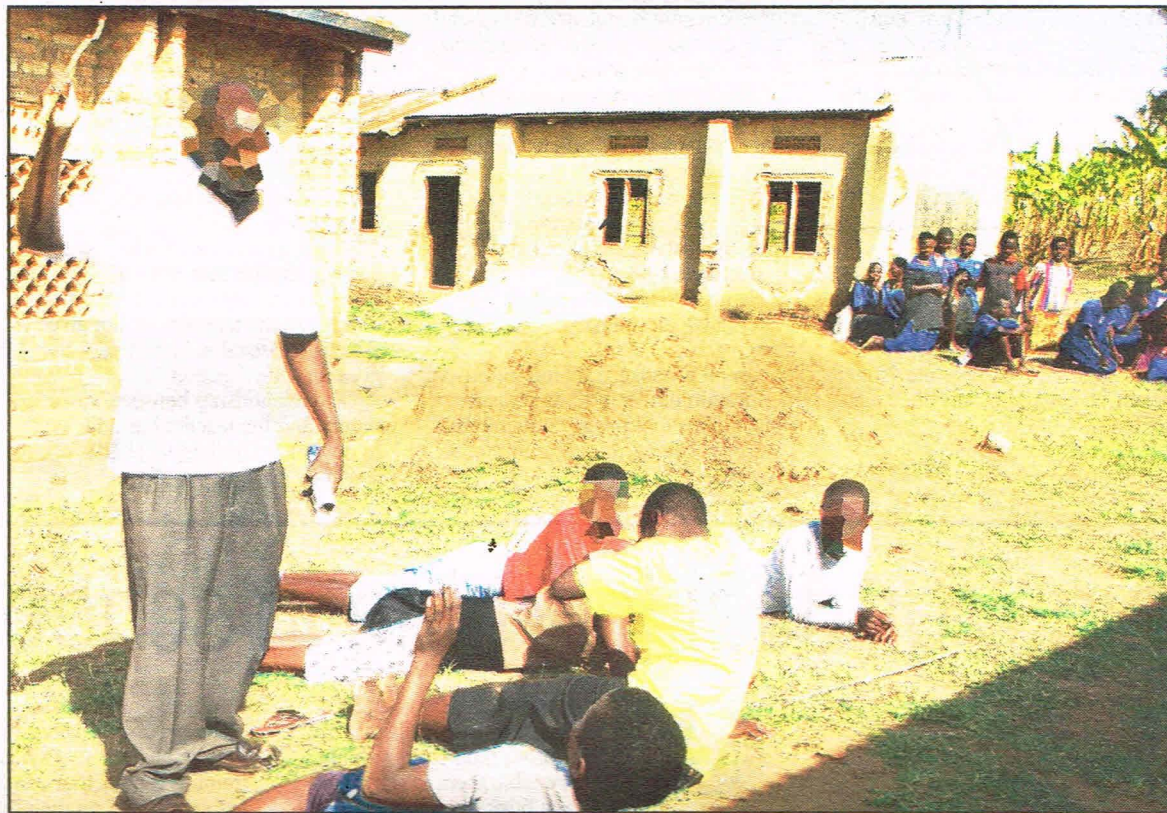
In March, a video of a man forcing a teacher to apologise to a student at Lubiri Secondary School in Kampala went viral. In the video, the man (later identified as an elder brother of a student) is seen barking orders as a teacher reads the apology to a student.

"Yogela, nja kukuba oluyi [I will slap you]. Speak louder," the parent is heard barking at the teacher as he continues to read the apology. As the teacher continued to read, the man further humiliated him by ordering, "Yanguwa (Hurry). You are not apologising to the headteacher, but to the person that you beat, the student."

When the teacher completed reading the statement, he mockingly told him, "Good boy!"

This all unfolded as the students watched and the man recorded the video, which went viral and caused uproar among teachers.

It was later established that the teacher, only identified as Mulugwe, had been forced to apologise to a female student he had caned for dodging class. The person who forced the teacher to apologise was the elder brother of the student.



Pupils being caned at a school in Masaka district. Caning is one of the sources of parent-teacher clashes

Although corporal punishment is illegal, many teachers said humiliating the teacher in front of students was wrong.

"It would have been better to report the matter to the Police rather than humiliating the teacher in front of the students. Humiliating the teacher in front of students makes the teacher lose respect. The teacher may have been wrong, but what the parent subjected him to was not necessary. I know that teacher; we always mark UNEB [Uganda National Examinations Board] exams with him. He is a good man. I don't know what could have made a parent subject him to such humiliation," a teacher from Iganga district, who sought anonymity, said, after watching the video.

She said the reactions among

teachers were the same in teachers' WhatsApp groups where the video was shared.

When *Mwalimu* contacted the affected teacher, Mulugwe, he declined to speak, saying the matter had been amicably resolved.

Rose Kagoya, a teacher in Bugweri district, said the video was a representation of what is happening in many schools.

"Many parents do not want teachers to punish their children. In case you do so, they threaten you. Teachers are now stuck on how to correct learners when they go wrong. To make matters worse, many of the children manipulate the situation to get away with many things," she says.

Kagoya says it is not only the parents who humiliate teachers. She says many teachers have suffered at the

hands of local politicians, who accuse teachers of charging illegal fees,

"Sometimes parents can agree to contribute a small feeding programme fee, but when a politician finds you charging it, they accuse you of sabotaging Universal Primary Education or Universal Secondary Education.

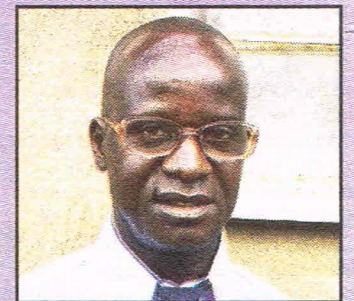
"A resident district commissioner once came to our school and attempted to handcuff our headteacher as learners watched. This is not right," Kagoya says.

Education experts say publicly humiliating teachers in front of learners has far-reaching consequences that extend well beyond a single confrontation. They say it negatively impacts discipline, teacher morale and learners' academic and emotional development.

AMBITION

Obote returns to A'level at 43

Page 21



PARENTING

WHY CHILDREN MUST EMBRACE POSITIVE THINKING

Page 22

Stanley Mugume, the headteacher of Kyambogo College School, describes school discipline as a delicate balance, noting that when that balance is disrupted through public confrontations, the effects ripple across the entire learning environment.

"When a teacher administers corporal punishment to a learner and a parent storms into the compound to humiliate the teacher publicly, shouting insults or questioning the teacher's competence in front of the entire class, the damage goes far beyond that single incident," he says.

Mugume says such incidents immediately erode the authority of teachers in the eyes of learners.

"A teacher's authority is undermined in seconds. Children who witness their teacher being reduced to tears or defensive silence quickly lose respect for all educators," he explains.

Mugume adds that learners begin to adopt confrontational attitudes toward discipline.

Continued on page 20

HUMILIATING TEACHERS DESTROYS LEARNING

From page 19

"They begin to believe that any form of correction can be challenged through public confrontation rather than dialogue."

The long-term consequences, he notes, include deteriorating classroom order and student behaviour.

"Fear of further humiliation makes some teachers avoid disciplining learners, resulting in noisy, unruly classrooms."

"I have seen bright learners turn rebellious after such scenes, believing 'even teachers can be shamed' and this shifts the school environment from a place of order and excellence to one of tension and defiance."

For teachers, Mugume notes, the psychological toll can be severe.

"Public humiliation breaks even the most dedicated professionals," he elaborates.

"A teacher who is shouted at in front of learners loses confidence and many become hesitant to correct misconduct, fearing another scene."

"Some withdraw emotionally, delivering half-hearted lessons while others sink into stress or depression."

He warns that the broader education system ultimately suffers as good teachers leave, and the quality of education declines.

Mugume emphasises the need for respectful engagement between parents and school authorities.

"Our values of responsibility, fairness and humility demand that parents and leaders address concerns



Children being taught at a school in eastern Uganda. In teaching, respect for teachers by learners is crucial for impactful learning

privately with the administration."

"Public shaming only destroys the very authority needed to nurture diligent, skilled and socially responsible citizens.

Echoing similar concerns, Jackson Katusiime, headteacher at Kabalega Secondary School in Masindi, says such confrontations not only demotivate teachers but also create unintended consequences for learners. "Such behaviour demotivates the teacher from handling other cases," he says.

Katusiime says learners may suffer socially and academically after such incidents.

"Even learners can start discriminating against that child,

whose parent humiliated a teacher. It may prevent them from participating in co-curricular activities."

However, Katusiime also raises concern about the root cause of such conflicts, particularly the use of corporal punishment.

"Why do teachers involve themselves in such scenarios? They were abolished, are illegal and punishable by courts of law."

He urges teachers to adopt alternative disciplinary approaches.

Joseph Musoke, a retired municipal education officer in Kamuli district, also points to the legal and cultural complexities surrounding discipline in schools.

"One issue is clear, that in the current legal provisions it is wrong for the teacher to beat a child," he said.

However, he notes that both teachers and learners are shaped by longstanding norms that normalise corporal punishment.

"Teachers have stuck to the claim that the cane is an answer to everything. However, most Ugandan children are also raised by the cane at home.

"They cannot listen unless they are caned. So they begin arguing with the teachers, to the extent that the teachers end up beating them."

He cautions that parents who react aggressively worsen the situation.

"When the parent reacts even more primitively than he ought to do, he is preparing the child to be neglected by the teachers."

He calls for greater awareness and better grievance-handling mechanisms.

"There is a need for sensitisation of the teacher and the community on how to handle grievances. That issue is now grievance management, which is fading at all levels."

On the impact on learners, he is unequivocal.

"When a parent comes to harass a teacher, the learners now overlook the teacher and they can no longer listen to him. So the teacher will not give what is expected of him, unless he goes for self-reflection."

"The relationship between the parent and the teacher has a lot to do with an individual child's learning."

CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

On many occasions, Ugandan teachers have clashed with parents for administering corporal punishments on children.

In 2023, Uganda lost 11-year-old Dan Gasore, a pupil at Mutolere Primary School in Kisoro, who was hit with a stick on the head and back by a teacher, resulting in his death. His crime? Failing homework.

However, experts say teachers can avoid this by using other forms of punishment.

Joyce Atimango, the executive director of Trailblazers Mentoring Foundation, implores schools to train teachers to employ positive disciplinary methods.

"For example, asking the learner to reflect on their misbehaviour such that they learn from it. Teachers can also counsel and guide, use verbal warning or ask a wrong doer to apologize in front of their peers. You can also withdraw privileges and gifts."