

Analysing Use of Corporal Punishment in Early Years Education in Nyeri and Kirinyaga Counties in Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to analyse the status of teachers' compliance with the ban on corporal punishment in early years education in Nyeri and Kirinyaga Counties in Kenya. This study is founded on the social learning theory and adopted an explanatory sequential mixed methods research design. The target population comprises 42,088 teachers, heads of institutions, learners in PP1 to Grade 3, and Education Officers from Nyeri and Kirinyaga Counties, Kenya. The research adopted a sample size of 191 respondents. A structured questionnaire was utilised to collect quantitative data, while qualitative data were generated through focus group discussions (FGDs) and semi-structured interviews (SSIs). Quantitative data analysis relied on descriptive statistics, while thematic analysis was undertaken to interpret and support the quantitative findings. The results indicated that corporal punishment remains moderately to highly prevalent in early years classrooms, where 73.9 per cent of teachers reported its continued and frequent use in schools. A good number of teachers (79.6%) acknowledged using it as a disciplinary measure or last resort, while 73.5 per cent reported having used it when alternative strategies failed. Learners in FGDs associated it with fear and reduced participation in class, while SSIs with education officers indicated that corporal punishment persisted, although a few isolated cases were reported. The study concluded that corporal punishment remains embedded in schools as disciplinary practices, recommending the need to strengthen compliance with the ban through profiling and surveillance in schools using CCTV cameras, coupled with continuous teacher professional development on positive disciplinary strategies and community sensitisation for adoption of cultural attitudes toward non-violent disciplinary approaches.

Key terms: Corporal punishment, early years education, learner performance, positive discipline.

INTRODUCTION

Corporal punishment continues to be a persistent challenge in Early Years Education in Kenya despite its legal prohibition and established policy frameworks promoting non-violent and child-friendly disciplinary practices (Republic of Kenya, 2013; Republic of Kenya, 2022). This has created uncertainty regarding compliance with national child protection standards and whether classroom disciplinary practices align with the expectations of positive, non-violent discipline promoted in international and national education frameworks (UNICEF, 2021; UNESCO, 2015). Studies suggest that discrepancies may exist between policy provisions and actual classroom practice where teachers face behavioural management challenges. However, the specific manifestations of these discrepancies, such as how discipline is administered, the extent to which prohibited practices persist, and the contextual factors that sustain them, remain under-examined in recent empirical studies (Heekes et al., 2020; Alampay et al., 2021). In Kenya, this knowledge gap is more pronounced due to the limited availability of up-to-date, localised evidence following the enactment and reinforcement of child protection legislation (UNICEF, 2021). As a result, the extent to which schools remain affected is still unclear, particularly in Kirinyaga and Nyeri counties, including the extent to which they comply with the prohibition of corporal punishment, the prevalence and forms it currently takes in Early Years Education, and the institutional, teacher-related, and contextual factors influencing its continued use (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016; Heilmann et al., 2021).

Early Years Education is faced with persistent challenges despite continuous efforts globally, regionally, and nationally aimed at promoting safe, inclusive, and child-friendly learning environments (UNICEF, 2021). A major concern is the continued use of corporal punishment in schools even in regions and countries where it is legally prohibited, as it is in Kenya. This practice raises serious implications for children's rights, well-being, and developmental outcomes, thereby undermining the objectives of holistic education. Corporal punishment refers to the deliberate use of physical force or causing physical discomfort to someone by an authority such as a caregiver, a teacher or law enforcers for the purpose of correcting or controlling an individual's behaviour.

Corporal punishment includes acts such as caning, pinching, slapping, forced physical exertion, or any other act intended to cause pain as a disciplinary measure (UNESCO, 2015). International child protection and education frameworks, including UNESCO (2015), classify corporal punishment as a violation of children's dignity, safety, and rights, and advocate for non-violent, learner-centred approaches to discipline. In contrast, positive discipline emphasises guidance, communication, empathy, and behavioural support that enables children to develop self-regulation, responsibility, and social competence without the use of fear or violence.

Empirical evidence from educational psychology and child development research consistently demonstrates that corporal punishment is associated with adverse outcomes including increased aggression, anxiety, reduced self-esteem, weakened teacher-learner relationships, and poor school engagement (Hershoff, 2002; Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016). Longitudinal and cross-sectional studies further indicate that it does not improve academic performance or behaviour but instead hinders socio-emotional development and overall learning outcomes (Heilmann et al., 2021; Cuartas, 2021). Consequently, global education discourse strongly supports the adoption of non-violent disciplinary strategies that promote positive behaviour and supportive learning environments. Despite this global consensus, the gap between policy and practice remains significant, particularly in low- and middle-income contexts where corporal punishment continues to be used even after legal prohibition. Research indicates that entrenched cultural norms, institutional practices, and limited enforcement mechanisms contribute to the persistence of this practice, demonstrating that legal reforms alone are insufficient to eliminate it (Heekes et al., 2020; Alampay et al., 2021). This disconnect between policy intent and classroom reality is especially evident in many African education systems, including Kenya.

In Kenya, corporal punishment is prohibited under the Basic Education Act (2013) and reinforced by the Children's Act (2022), reflecting a strong legal and policy commitment to child protection and positive discipline (UNICEF, 2021). However, studies have indicated that the practice persists in some school

environments, especially in Early Years Education, where teachers often rely on traditional disciplinary approaches rooted in historical schooling norms and classroom management realities in low-resource settings (UNESCO, 2015; Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016; Heekes et al., 2020). This persistence is influenced by factors such as inadequate training in positive behaviour management, classroom management challenges, and cultural beliefs that associate strict physical discipline with academic discipline and improved performance (Alampay et al., 2021; Heilmann et al., 2021).

Despite these concerns, there remains limited recent empirical evidence on the current prevalence, forms, and drivers of corporal punishment in Early Years Education in specific Kenyan contexts, particularly in Nyeri and Kirinyaga counties. These counties are widely recognised for strong academic performance expectations, which may create additional pressure on teachers and influence disciplinary practices in ways that are not yet sufficiently documented in recent post-Children's Act (2022) scholarship (UNICEF, 2021; Heekes et al., 2020). Moreover, little is known about how the implementation and enforcement of the Children's Act (2022) has translated into actual classroom discipline practices in Early Years Education settings, highlighting a clear empirical and contextual research gap (UNESCO, 2015). Therefore, there is a compelling need to assess compliance with the legal prohibition of corporal punishment in Early Years Education, establish its current prevalence and forms in Nyeri and Kirinyaga counties, Kenya. Accordingly, this study sought to analyse the status of teachers' compliance in observing the ban on corporal punishment in Early Years Education in Nyeri and Kirinyaga counties in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section critically examines the literature on corporal punishment in early years education, drawing on evidence from international, regional, and Kenyan contexts. The review focuses on the study objective, which is to analyse the status of teachers' compliance with the ban on corporal punishment in Nyeri and Kirinyaga Counties in Kenya.

Concept of Corporal Punishment in Education

Corporal punishment refers to the use of physical force intended to cause pain or discomfort as a disciplinary measure to control learner behaviour. In school settings, it includes practices such as caning, slapping, pinching, and other forms of physical discipline (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016). Although it was historically accepted as a classroom management strategy, contemporary research consistently challenges its validity and appropriateness in promoting meaningful behavioural change and positive learning outcomes. Evidence indicates that while corporal punishment may result in immediate compliance, it does not support long-term behavioural development, particularly among early years learners who are still developing self-regulation and emotional control (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016). Contemporary literature further emphasises that non-violent disciplinary approaches such as positive reinforcement, restorative practices, and socio-emotional learning frameworks provide more sustainable behaviour change compared to punitive physical methods (UNESCO, 2015; UNICEF, 2021).

Psychology emphasises that the ultimate goal in behaviour modification should always be to inculcate holistic personality development of individuals anchored on acquisition and internalisation of values and intrinsic adherence to societal norms and dictates that regulate behaviour. Consequently, imparting autonomy and intrinsic motivation in individuals to uphold what is desirable in society should be the goal without having to enforce its compliance using painful disciplinary procedures such as corporal punishment. This position is strongly supported in behavioural psychology theories such as social learning theory and self-determination theory, which emphasise internal motivation and modelling over coercive control mechanisms (Bandura, 1977).

Despite widespread legal and policy prohibitions, corporal punishment continues to be practised in many educational contexts. Global evidence shows that the practice persists even in countries where it has been formally banned, largely due to cultural acceptance, limited enforcement of policies, and inadequate teacher preparation in alternative disciplinary approaches (Heekes et al., 2020). In low- and middle-income countries, exposure to violent

discipline remains significant, indicating that corporal punishment is deeply embedded in social and institutional norms rather than being merely a classroom practice (Cuartas, 2021). In Kenya, corporal punishment is prohibited under the Basic Education Act (2013) and the Children's Act (2022). However, empirical studies indicate that its use still occurs in schools, with some teachers justifying it as necessary for maintaining discipline, particularly in contexts of large class sizes and limited instructional resources (Mweru, 2010; Mwai et al., 2014). These findings suggest that legal prohibition alone has not fully eliminated the practice, as teacher beliefs and contextual pressures continue to influence disciplinary decisions. The persistence of corporal punishment across global, regional, and national contexts reflects a systemic implementation gap between legal frameworks and classroom practice (Alampay et al., 2021).

The literature shows that the persistent use of corporal punishment in schools is influenced by a combination of cultural beliefs, institutional practices, and classroom management challenges, despite growing evidence of its negative effects on learners' well-being and development (Heilmann et al., 2021; Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016). These findings reinforce and inspire urgency in devising appropriate mechanisms that can help promote adherence and compliance with the legal provisions established to eliminate the use of corporal punishment in education. However, there remains limited empirical synthesis on how these factors interact within early years education contexts, particularly in resource-constrained and high-performance schooling environments (Cuartas, 2021).

Status of Teachers' Compliance with the Ban on Corporal Punishment

The status of teachers' compliance with the ban on corporal punishment has been widely studied, with evidence consistently showing a gap between policy requirements and actual classroom practice. Although many countries, including Kenya, have enacted legal bans, compliance remains uneven, particularly in early years education where behaviour management demands are high (UNICEF, 2021). International evidence suggests that compliance is shaped by teachers' beliefs, institutional enforcement, and

access to alternative disciplinary strategies. Gershoff and Grogan-Kaylor (2016) note that despite strong evidence against corporal punishment, many teachers continue to adopt it due to the belief that it is effective in correcting behaviour. Similarly, Heilmann et al. (2021) found that weak enforcement mechanisms and limited monitoring contribute to continued covert use of corporal punishment even in contexts where it is formally prohibited. In low- and middle-income countries, Cuartas (2021) highlights additional barriers to compliance, including overcrowded classrooms, limited training in positive discipline, and normalisation and acceptance of infliction of pain in correcting behaviour within communities. These structural and cultural factors complicate full adherence to legal frameworks while sustaining partial or non-compliance at all. A notable weakness in the existing literature is the insufficient integration of teacher beliefs, institutional barriers, and socio-cultural influences when explaining compliance behaviour (UNICEF, 2021).

In Kenya, compliance is guided by the Basic Education Act (2013) and Teachers Service Commission regulations, which explicitly prohibit corporal punishment in all learning institutions (Republic of Kenya, 2022). However, studies show that non-compliance still exists in varying degrees. Teachers often cite classroom overcrowding, learner indiscipline, and lack of alternative disciplinary tools as reasons for continued use of physical punishment, particularly in early years settings. This indicates a persistent disconnect between policy expectations and classroom realities. Existing literature further shows that compliance is influenced by school-level factors such as leadership enforcement, teacher training, and availability of positive discipline alternatives. Schools with strong leadership and continuous professional development tend to demonstrate higher compliance, while those with weak supervision report higher incidences of non-compliance. Despite these findings, empirical evidence on teachers' compliance with the ban on corporal punishment in early years education remains limited, particularly in Nyeri and Kirinyaga Counties. Most available studies are either national or international in scope, leaving a contextual gap in understanding how compliance is manifested at the county levels among pupils in their early years of learning. Furthermore, there is a lack of recent post-Children Act (2022)

empirical studies examining compliance specifically in Nyeri and Kirinyaga Counties within Early Years Education contexts (Republic of Kenya, 2022; UNICEF, 2021).

Research Gap

The reviewed literature demonstrates that corporal punishment remains a concern in many educational contexts globally and within Kenya (UNICEF, 2021; Heekes et al., 2020). However, most studies have primarily focused on its effects on learners and general disciplinary practices rather than on teachers' compliance with legal and policy provisions prohibiting its use, particularly in Early Years Education settings (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016; Heilmann et al., 2021). Furthermore, there is limited recent and context-specific empirical evidence on compliance with the ban on corporal punishment within Early

Years Education in Kenya, especially in the post-Children's Act (2022) period (Republic of Kenya, 2022). This limits the understanding of the extent to which legal frameworks are being implemented in classroom practice and the factors that influence adherence to these provisions. This study therefore seeks to address this gap by examining teachers' compliance with the prohibition of corporal punishment in Early Years Education in Nyeri and Kirinyaga counties, Kenya.

Conceptual Framework

This study was guided by a conceptual framework comprising the independent variable and the dependent variable of the study and how they relate. In this case, the framework illustrated the relationship between the prevalence of corporal punishment, which was the independent variable, and learner performance, which was the dependent variable.

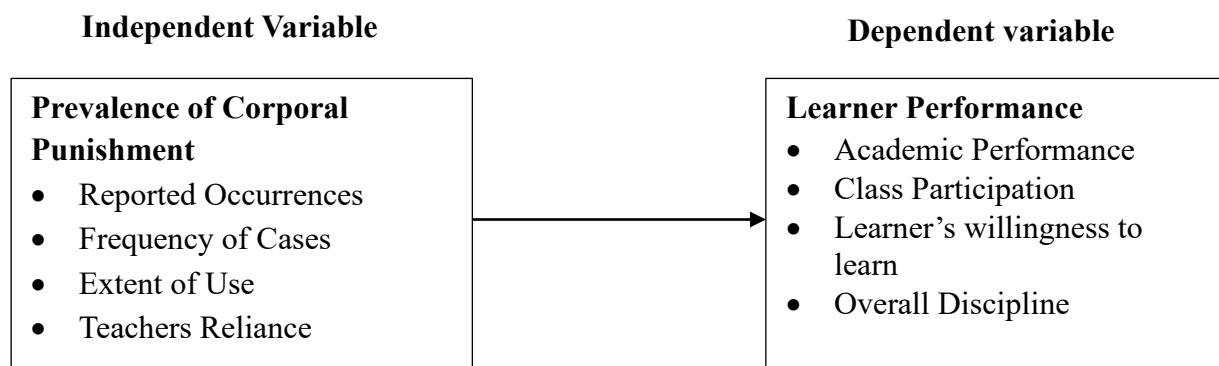


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

The study was anchored in the social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). This theory explains how learners acquire behaviours through observing and imitating the disciplinary measures adopted by the teachers and further shows how such reinforcement mechanisms influence the attitude of the learners and ultimately their class performance. The study employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design, collecting and analysing quantitative data first, followed by qualitative data to further explain and interpret the quantitative results (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

The target population for the study comprised 5,008 teachers, 630 Heads of Institutions, 36,446 learners,

and 4 Education officers, who comprised two Quality Assurance and Standards Officers and two Curriculum Support Officers. Quantitative data were collected from teachers and heads of institutions using a structured questionnaire. A total of 100 teachers and 63 head teachers were sampled, where the sample size determination was guided by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). The 163 respondents were proportionately divided across Nyeri and Kirinyaga Counties using a stratified sampling strategy, where each county represented a stratum. From there, each case was randomly selected and included in the study.

Qualitative data were collected from the learners in their early years of learning and the education officers, including quality assurance officers and curriculum

support officers. 24 learners and 4 Education Officers from Nyeri and Kirinyaga Counties were selected and included in the study purposively. This is after a saturation point was reached and no more new information could be obtained. For the learners, four focus group discussions were conducted, while semi-structured interviews were conducted with the County Education officers. The study analysed quantitative data using descriptive and inferential statistical procedures, whereas qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. The results were presented using descriptive text, tables, and graphical illustrations.

Ethical approval was obtained from the University research review board and NACOSTI. Informed consent was secured from the teachers and education officers, whereas parental consent and pupils' assent were obtained before involving the children in the study. Participation was voluntary, and the researcher assured confidentiality and anonymity to the respondents. The data were securely stored and used strictly for academic purposes. The study had minimal risk to the participants and allowed them to withdraw at any stage without any consequence.

Table 1: Target Population, Sample size and Data Collection Instruments

Participant Category	Population	Sample Size (n)	Data Collection Tool
Teachers	5,008	100	Questionnaires
Heads of Institutions	630	63	Questionnaires
Learners (PP1 - Grade 3)	36,446	24	FGD Guide
Education Officers	4	4	Interview Schedule
Total Sample Size	42,088	191	

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the study findings. The results are organised according to the respondents' demographic characteristics and the analysis of teachers' compliance with the ban on corporal punishment, in line with the study objective.

Response Rate

The study targeted 191 respondents who included headteachers, teachers, learners, and county education officers. Of all the respondents, 170 of them fully participated in the study, resulting in a response

rate of 89.0 per cent. This is considered adequate and sufficient for analysis and generalisation of findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The study analysed the respondents' demographic characteristics, including gender, age, years of professional experience, and educational attainment among teachers/heads of institutions (HOIs), learners, and education officers. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Group of the respondents	Key Profile	Main Findings (in f (%))
Teachers/Head of Institutions	Gender: Majority female	86 (61.00%)
	Age: Mostly 31–50 years	106 (75.30%)
	Years of experience: Experienced (>10 yrs)	102 (71.90 %)
	Education level: Certificate/Diploma	101 (71.10%)
Learners	Gender: Balanced gender	13 (54.0%) boys, 11 (46.0%) girls
Education Officers	Education: Highly qualified	3 (75.0 %) Master's
	Years of experience: Experienced	3 (75.0%) >10 yrs

The majority of the teachers and heads of institutions who participated in this study were of female gender,

constituting 61.0 per cent. This predominance of female teachers reflects the gendered nature of early

childhood education in Kenya, aligning with global patterns where early years education is largely staffed by female educators (UNESCO, 2019). Gender is an important aspect, as teacher attitudes toward discipline may be influenced by care-giving orientations, which can affect the likelihood of using or avoiding corporal punishment (Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016). The study also found that the majority of the teachers and HOIs were aged between 31 and 50 years (75.3%), implying a mature workforce with substantial professional exposure. Experienced teachers are often more familiar with classroom management challenges and institutional disciplinary norms. However, exposure to traditional disciplinary practices during their training or early career socialisation may also increase the likelihood of normalising and unconsciously accepting the use of corporal punishment as the most appropriate disciplinary option (Bandura, 2023). In terms of education level, the majority of teachers/HOIs (71.1%) held certificate or diploma qualifications. Lower levels of formal education may limit exposure to modern, child-friendly disciplinary approaches. Studies have shown that higher teacher qualifications are associated with greater adoption of positive discipline strategies and reduced reliance on punitive methods (UNESCO IIEP, 2021). There was also a high level of teaching experience among teachers, with 71.9 per cent of them having over 10 years of teaching experience, indicating a workforce with strong classroom exposure.

For the learners, all of them were in their early learning levels starting from PP1 to grade 3 (100%), and their gender distribution was relatively balanced (54.2% boys and 45.8% girls), ensuring that perspectives on corporal punishment reflect diverse early learning stages. Exposure to corporal punishment may vary by age and developmental level, with younger learners often being more vulnerable to physical disciplinary methods (Cuartas, 2021). Children's early developmental stages are critical for acquiring appropriate and holistic personality development.

Finally, the four sampled education officers from Kirinyaga and Nyeri counties, who included Quality Assurance and Standards Officers (QASOs) and Curriculum Support Officers (CSOs), were found to be highly qualified (75% with master's degrees) and experienced (75% with over 10 years in service). This strengthens the validity of institutional perspectives on policy implementation. Their professional background is instrumental in assessing whether the legal ban on corporal punishment is being enforced effectively in schools. Reviewed literature shows that despite strong policy frameworks, enforcement gaps often sustain the persistence of corporal punishment in educational institutions (Alampay et al., 2021). Therefore, enforcement is an area that requires a paradigm shift regarding the adoption of innovative and sustainable strategies that entrenches it in the psyche and mind of teachers.

The results of demographic analysis suggest that while the target population for the study was sufficiently experienced and institutionally grounded, there remain structural and professional factors such as training levels, institutional norms, and enforcement capacity that may complicate compliance with the ban on corporal punishment. These contextual realities are essential in interpreting and interrogating the findings of this study.

Status of Teachers' Compliance with Ban on Corporal Punishment

The study sought to establish the status of compliance among teachers with the ban on the use of corporal punishment. The analysis was based on the respondents' perceptions of various statements relating to the use, justification, and effects of corporal punishment in schools. The statements were assessed using a five-point Likert scale, and the responses were summarised through frequency distributions, mean scores, and standard deviations to determine both the level and consistency of respondents' agreement. The findings reflect the extent to which corporal punishment remains embedded in school disciplinary practices.

Table 3: Status of Compliance with Ban of Corporal Punishment

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total %	$\bar{X}$	SD
	%	%	%	%	%			
Teachers widely use corporal punishment in this school	2.8	4.2	19.0	49.3	24.6	100%	3.89	.923
Teachers believe corporal punishment is necessary for maintaining discipline	2.1	2.8	21.8	49.3	23.9	100%	3.90	.870
There are frequent cases of corporal punishment reported in this school	1.4	2.1	17.6	50.7	28.2	100%	4.02	.821
Alternative discipline methods are rarely used in this school	4.2	44.4	46.5	3.5	1.4	100%	2.54	.701
Corporal punishment affects pupils' performance negatively	2.1	3.5	16.9	49.3	28.2	100%	3.98	.887
Some teachers openly admit using corporal punishment regularly	2.1	.7	17.6	49.3	30.3	100%	4.05	.836
Parents expect teachers to use corporal punishment	2.1	.7	35.9	47.2	14.1	100%	3.70	.797
Learners are often fearful of teachers due to corporal punishment	0.7	4.9	16.2	49.3	28.9	100%	4.01	.846
Teachers do report using corporal punishment when other methods fail	4.9	3.5	14.1	48.6	28.9	100%	3.93	1.008
School leadership does not fully enforce the ban on corporal punishment	2.1	44.4	48.6	2.8	2.1	100%	2.58	.687
Aggregate Score							3.66	0.600

Key: SD=Standard deviation, =Mean score. Mean scores () were interpreted using a 5-point Likert scale as follows: 1.00–1.80 = Very Low (Strongly Disagree), 1.81–2.60 = Low (Disagree), 2.61–3.40 = Moderate (Neutral), 3.41–4.20 = High (Agree), and 4.21–5.00 = Very High (Strongly Agree).

The study established that corporal punishment remains prevalent in early years education in Nyeri and Kirinyaga Counties. A majority of teachers and Heads of Institutions reported that corporal punishment was still widely used in schools (73.9%; $\bar{X}$ = 3.89, SD = 0.923), indicating low compliance with the ban. The findings were strongly supported by focus group discussions from learners, who suggested that direct exposure to corporal punishment in classrooms was common. One learner explained:

“Sometimes when we make noise in class or fail to finish our homework, the teacher beats us in front of the class.” (Grade 3 Learner, Kirinyaga)

This demonstrates that corporal punishment is not only perceived but experienced by learners, indicating its continued presence in school practice. Similar evidence has been documented by UNICEF (2017) and UNESCO (2019), who note that legal bans do not

automatically translate into behavioural change in classrooms where enforcement is weak. Gershoff and Grogan-Kaylor (2016) further argue that teacher beliefs about discipline effectiveness sustain continued use despite policy restrictions.

The study further found that corporal punishment incidents were frequently reported in schools (78.9%; $\bar{X}$ = 4.02, SD = 0.821), suggesting that non-compliance is recurrent rather than isolated. Education officers reinforced this finding during interviews, noting that cases still emerge during their quality assurance and standards visits:

“During school regular quality assurance and standards visits we occasionally receive complaints from parents regarding corporal punishment.” (Education Officer, Nyeri)

This indicates that non-compliance is observable at the institutional oversight level. Consistent with Heilmann et al. (2021), such persistence is often associated with weak enforcement systems, while Cuartas (2021) attributes it to structural constraints such as overcrowded classrooms and limited teacher support systems.

Data analysis also indicated that many teachers still believe corporal punishment is necessary for maintaining discipline (73.2%; $\bar{X} = 3.90$, $SD = 0.870$), showing that disciplinary beliefs strongly influence compliance. This was reflected in qualitative responses from education officers, who noted that some teachers continue to justify its use:

“Some teachers still rely on physical punishment when they feel learners are not responding to other forms of discipline.” (Education Officer, Kirinyaga)

This demonstrates that corporal punishment is often rationalised as a disciplinary necessity rather than a violation of policy. Gershoff and Grogan-Kaylor (2016) note that such beliefs are a major predictor of continued use, while Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (2023) explains the practice as an outcome of learned behaviour copied and/or imitated from prior schooling experiences from authority figures and significant others. During teacher professional socialisation, they saw other teachers using it and unconsciously or consciously acquired the behaviour as appropriate and acceptable.

The study further revealed that some teachers openly admitted using corporal punishment regularly (79.6%; $\bar{X} = 4.05$, $SD = 0.836$), while others indicated it was used when alternative methods failed (73.5%; $\bar{X} = 3.93$, $SD = 1.008$). This suggests that corporal punishment is sometimes viewed as a last resort. This was echoed from learner accounts, which showed that corporal punishment influenced classroom participation:

“Because of punishment, some learners do not like answering questions even if they know the answer.” (Grade 2 Learner, Nyeri)

These results illustrate that corporal punishment affects learner confidence and participation. Heilmann et al. (2021) similarly found that punitive environments reduce engagement and increase anxiety among learners, particularly in early childhood settings.

The study also established that learners frequently experienced fear in classrooms due to corporal punishment (78.2%; $\bar{X} = 4.01$, $SD = 0.846$), indicating an emotionally unsafe learning environment. This aligns with learner narratives indicating avoidance behaviour in class due to fear of punishment. UNICEF (2017) notes that fear-based discipline undermines emotional safety and learning participation, while Heilmann et al. (2021) link it to increased anxiety and reduced academic engagement.

Parental expectations were also identified as a contributing factor, with 61.3% of respondents agreeing that parents expect teachers to use corporal punishment ($\bar{X} = 3.70$, $SD = 0.797$). Education officers suggested that this cultural influence:

“Parents in this region believe that strict discipline, including physical punishment, helps maintain order in schools.” (Education Officer, Kirinyaga)

This finding demonstrates that community norms reinforce school practices. Cuartas (2021) emphasises that cultural acceptance of violence in child-rearing sustains corporal punishment in both home and school environments. UNESCO (2019) notes that school discipline is often shaped by societal expectations even where policies prohibit it.

However, lower agreement was recorded on the absence of alternative disciplinary approaches ($\bar{X} = 2.54$, $SD = 0.701$) and weak leadership enforcement ($\bar{X} = 2.58$, $SD = 0.687$), suggesting partial implementation of positive discipline policies. Education officers also indicated that schools are gradually adopting alternative approaches:

“Many schools are trying to implement alternative disciplinary approaches, although some teachers still revert to physical punishment.” (Education Officer, Nyeri)

These findings suggest a transitional phase in disciplinary practice rather than total non-compliance. UNESCO IIEP (2021) notes that schools with strong leadership and teacher support systems are more likely to shift toward positive discipline, even in contexts where traditional practices persist.

Finally, the respondents agreed that corporal punishment negatively affects academic performance

(77.5%; $\bar{X}$ = 3.98, SD = 0.887), reflecting awareness of its consequences. This aligns with Gershoff and Grogan-Kaylor (2016), who link corporal punishment to poorer learning outcomes, and Heilmann et al. (2021), who associate it with increased stress and reduced academic engagement.

In summary, the study established that corporal punishment remains present in early years education in Nyeri and Kirinyaga Counties. The quantitative and qualitative analysis indicate low to moderate compliance with the ban on corporal punishment. However, emerging institutional efforts toward alternative disciplinary approaches suggest a gradual shift toward improved compliance rather than absolute non-adherence to the regulatory requirements. Going forward, there is a lot of hope in progressively moving towards internalisation of the use of non-violent approaches to discipline.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: From the results of data analysis, the study concludes that corporal punishment remains

moderately prevalent in early years education in Nyeri and Kirinyaga counties largely due to entrenched teacher beliefs, cultural acceptance, parental expectations, and inconsistent enforcement of policy guidelines. The findings further indicate that corporal punishment negatively affects learners' participation, emotional well-being, and classroom engagement, which may ultimately undermine their academic performance.

Recommendations: Based on the findings, the study recommends strengthened enforcement of existing policies through profiling, effective reporting mechanisms and surveillance using CCTV cameras in classrooms to monitor daily use by teachers. There is also a need for continuous teacher professional development to equip and empower teachers with positive and child-friendly disciplinary approaches. There is a need to provide community awareness and sensitisation programmes designed to shift cultural attitudes to embrace non-violent and positive approaches to correction and discipline.

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