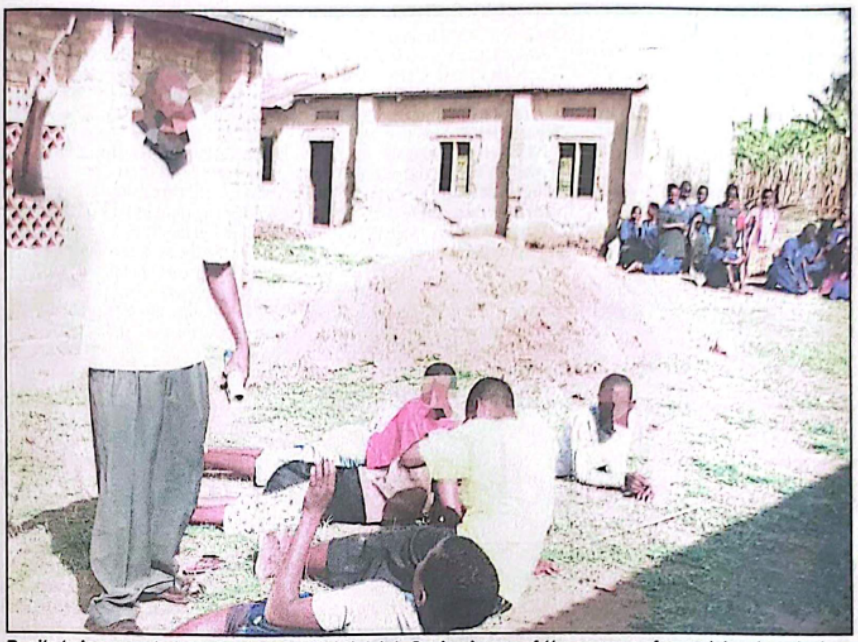
Public humiliation of teachers undermines learning in schools

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**



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

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, "*Yangurwa* (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.

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.

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.

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