



The use of alternative discipline methods in Tanzania secondary schools: A focus on PITA Project Schools

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ABSTRACT: This study examined the use of alternative discipline methods in secondary schools participating in the PITA Project in Meru District, focusing on the types and frequency of these methods and the perceptions of teachers, school leaders, and students regarding their effectiveness. This is because Corporal punishment has historically been a dominant method for managing student behaviour, despite its well-documented negative effects on learners' psychological well-being and academic performance. In Tanzania, increasing advocacy for child rights and holistic education has prompted schools to adopt alternative, non-punitive discipline strategies. A mixed-methods design was employed, involving 180 participants (20 teachers and 160 students) from four systematically selected schools. Quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed descriptively using SPSS, while qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions were analyzed thematically. Findings revealed that non-punitive strategies such as explaining the importance of good behaviour (Mean = 4.22), reminding students of school rules (Mean = 4.02), issuing warnings (Mean = 3.84), providing counselling (Mean = 3.84), and explaining consequences of indiscipline (Mean = 3.81) were frequently applied. Teachers also acted as behavioural role models (Mean = 3.54), whereas peer counselling (Mean = 3.21) and rewards for good behaviour (Mean = 3.03) were less common. Suspension and expulsion were rarely used (Mean = 2.75 and 2.22, respectively), indicating a shift toward restorative and supportive approaches. The study concludes that PITA Project schools are progressively embracing non-violent disciplinary practices that emphasize communication, guidance, and positive reinforcement, in line with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) and Resource-Based Theory (RBT). These approaches promote moral development, self-discipline, and emotional well-being among students. The study recommends strengthening teacher training, institutionalizing counselling services, promoting ethical role modeling and peer support systems, and integrating reward programs. Policymakers should develop national frameworks, embed positive discipline into teacher education curricula, enhance monitoring, and encourage parental and community engagement. Future research should investigate long-term impacts, urban-rural variations, and gender-specific outcomes to support equitable and sustainable implementation.

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INTRODUCTION

Corporal punishment, defined as the "infliction of pain intended to change a person's behavior" (Kalaivani, 2016, p. 31), is a practice with deep historical roots, dating back to ancient civilizations like Greece and Rome, where practices such as flogging, whipping, and stoning were commonly used. The underlying belief supporting corporal punishment, both in the past and present, is that inflicting pain can be an effective means of changing undesirable behaviors to more desirable ones (Alaggia & Vine, 2006;

Rosivach, 1987). While the severity of corporal punishment has generally diminished in modern times due to the influence of human rights advocacy, the fundamental belief behind it remains prevalent across many countries (Gershoff, 2017; Kalaivani, 2016). Due to its deep cultural entrenchment, efforts to ban corporal punishment, especially through legal reforms, have been slow and difficult in certain nations (McCormick, 1992). This section first offers a broad overview of the use of corporal punishment in families and schools globally, before focusing specifically on the justifications, use, and consequences of corporal punishment in Tanzanian schools.

Corporal punishment in families exists along a continuum of beliefs and practices. At one end of this continuum are countries that have been relatively successful in eliminating corporal punishment within families. Finland serves as a notable example, where corporal punishment was legally banned in 1984 (Central Union for Child Welfare, 2017). While in 1984, 47% of Finns viewed physical punishment as an acceptable method of disciplining children, by 2017, only 13% held this belief (Central Union for Child Welfare, 2017). Despite some remaining forms of corporal punishment, such as hair-pulling or threats, the overall trend suggests a significant decline in both the practice and the belief supporting it. This trend is similarly observed in countries like Denmark, Norway, and Sweden (End Violence against Children, 2020).

Moving along the continuum, there are countries where corporal punishment in families is legally banned, but the practice and belief persist. Japan, for instance, passed a law in 1947 prohibiting corporal punishment, and in 2020, it introduced guidelines explicitly banning all forms of corporal punishment (End Violence against Children, 2020). However, despite legal bans, many Japanese adults continue to support and practice corporal punishment, with a 2020 survey revealing that 70% of Japanese adults believed corporal punishment was necessary for shaping children's behavior (Japan Today, 2020).

Further along the continuum, some countries permit corporal punishment as long as it does not cause harm or injury. The United States is one such example, where physical punishment by parents is legal in all 50 states as long as it does not result in injury (Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 2018). Similarly, in England and Northern Ireland, parents are legally permitted to administer "reasonable" physical punishment, although this is not allowed in Scotland and Wales (Roland, Geny, & Stanton, 2017). Other countries where corporal punishment is legally permitted under certain conditions include Australia, Kenya, and Tanzania (Kimani, Kara, & Ogetange, 2012; Roland, Geny, & Stanton, 2017). At the extreme end of the continuum are countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Saudi Arabia, where corporal punishment is upheld as a legitimate and preferred method for disciplining children (End Violence against Children, 2020). In Afghanistan, for example, corporal punishment is commonly used and legally accepted as part of parenting (End Violence against Children, 2020).

Corporal punishment in schools is similarly widespread, despite being prohibited by law in some countries. For example, in India, while corporal punishment is banned, it continues to be widely practiced in both schools and homes (Kalaivani, 2016). This phenomenon is also evident in countries like South Korea, China, South Africa, Kenya, and Tanzania.

Historically, corporal punishment in schools has been seen as an effective means of maintaining discipline. In many cultures, it is believed that corporal punishment is necessary for promoting good behavior in students, and this belief is shared by parents, teachers, and students alike (Lema & Gwando, 2018). Research has identified two main categories of corporal punishment: physical and emotional (Kalaivani, 2016; Kimani, Kara, & Ogetange, 2012), as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Corporal Punishment: Physical and Emotional

Physical punishment	Emotional punishment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Caning -Standing as a wall chair for a long time -Standing in the sun the whole day -Kneeling down for hours -Kneeling down and putting up hands for hours while holding heavy stones -Holding ears with hands passed under legs -Slapping, pushing up, leapfrogging -Having ears twisted -Sitting and standing many times -Being kicked by a teacher -Forced manual work -Pinching -Being shaken or thrown around -Pulling hair, pulling ears 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Letting a girl from a lower class slap a boy from a higher class -Scolding -Humiliating -Labelling a child according to his/her behaviour -Pinning a paper on a child labelled "I'm a fool" or "I'm a monkey" -Walking with legs and arms like a four-legged animal -Insulting

Both the physical and emotional punishment has immediate and long-term adverse consequences. Immediate consequences include: physical injury, retaliation, and death. Long-term consequences include: lowered self-esteem, violent behaviour,

rebellion, dislike of school, and likelihood of using corporal punishment when children become parents or teachers (Kalavani, 2016).

Statement of the Problem:

In Tanzania, traditional disciplinary methods in secondary schools, such as corporal punishment, have been increasingly criticized for their adverse effects on students' mental health and academic outcomes. This has prompted a shift towards alternative discipline methods that are perceived to be more effective and supportive of students' overall development. However, despite the growing interest in these alternative approaches, there is a lack of comprehensive research on their implementation and effectiveness in Tanzania, particularly in Meru District. Recent studies highlight that while some schools have begun to adopt these alternative methods, the extent of their use, the types of methods employed, and the perceptions of both educators and students remain under-explored (Mkumbo, 2021; Komba, 2020). This research aims to address this gap by investigating the use of alternative disciplinary methods in Meru District secondary schools, with a focus on understanding the types of methods used, their frequency, and the perspectives of school leaders, teachers, and students. The absence of comprehensive data presents a gap in understanding how these approaches affect school culture, student behavior, and overall academic performance in PITA Project Schools. This study seeks to fill the existing gap by exploring the application of alternative disciplinary methods in secondary schools in Meru District. It aims to examine the types of methods employed, their frequency, and the views of school leaders, teachers, and students. The lack of detailed data hinders understanding of how these methods influence school culture, student behavior, and overall academic performance in PITA Project Schools. The study objectives are as follows: to identify the types of alternative disciplinary methods used, to assess the frequency of their use, to investigate the perspectives of school heads and teachers on the effectiveness and appropriateness of these methods, and to evaluate students' opinions on the alternative disciplinary approaches implemented in PITA Project Schools in Meru District.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Meru District, focusing on secondary schools participating in the PITA Project. The target population comprised both teachers and students within these institutions. A systematic sampling technique was used to select four schools from the project area. Within each school, heterogeneous sampling (maximum variation) was applied to ensure diversity among teacher respondents in terms of gender, teaching experience, and position. The total sample size consisted of 180 participants: 4 discipline teachers, 16 class teachers (4 per school), and 160 students (10 from each class level across the four schools). Data collection involved mixed methods to allow triangulation of findings: A structured questionnaire with a frequency scale was used to capture the prevalence and types of alternative disciplinary methods. Open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews provided qualitative insights into teachers' and students' experiences and perceptions. Data analysis combined quantitative and qualitative approaches. Descriptive statistics (mean and frequency distributions) were generated using SPSS to determine dominant disciplinary practices, while content and thematic analysis were employed to interpret qualitative narratives, revealing underlying themes related to teachers' and students' attitudes toward alternative discipline. This integrative approach ensured a holistic understanding of how alternative discipline methods are practiced and perceived within Tanzanian secondary schools.

RESULTS

The study focused on the use of alternative discipline methods in Tanzania secondary schools in managing students' behaviours. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussion. The study adopted thematic and descriptive data analysis techniques.

Alternative Discipline Methods in Managing Students' Behaviours in Secondary Schools

Table 2: Methods of managing students' discipline in secondary schools

N=160(Students)			
Descriptive Statistics			
Question Item	N	Mean	Responses
Teachers explain the importance of good behaviour to students	145	4.22	Very frequently used
Students are reminded of the school's rules and regulations on discipline	140	4.02	Frequently used
Teachers give warnings to help students develop good behaviour	135	3.84	Frequently used
Teachers provide counselling to students with disciplinary problems	135	3.84	Frequently used
Teachers talk to students about the consequences of indiscipline	144	3.81	Frequently used
Teachers act as role models by demonstrating good behaviour	135	3.54	Frequently used

students provide peer counselling to fellow students with disciplinary problems	135	3.21	Rarely used
Students are rewarded for good behaviour	135	3.03	Rarely used
Students are suspended from school due to indiscipline	137	2.75	Rarely used
Students are expelled from school due to indiscipline	139	2.22	Very rarely used
Overall mean		3.448	Frequently used

Source: Field data, 2025

Emphasizing the Importance of Good Behavior

Table 2 indicates that teachers very frequently explain the importance of good behavior to students (Mean = 4.22). This suggests that teachers are highly aware of the advantages of disciplined conduct and strive to inculcate these values among learners. When students understand the significance of good behaviour in achieving both personal and academic goals, they are more likely to internalize positive habits. One head of school affirmed this, stating that “*students' attendance has increased due to the emphases which are done by teachers to students daily which enable them to form friendship with students with good academic progress*” (Interview with HoS1). Another head of school added, “*Students are encouraged to wear school uniforms when travelling which will enable them to be identified easily and get assistance when they encounter a challenge*” (Interview with HoS2).

Focus group discussions further confirmed that consistent moral instruction and motivation from teachers have reduced lateness and truancy. For instance, a participant from School A observed that “*speeches which are being provided by the head of school resulted to decrease in truancy and lateness among students*” (Focus Group Discussion, School A). Similarly, a participant from School C added that “*efforts which are done to shape students' behavior enable them to achieve their goals*” (Focus Group Discussion, School C). These findings align with Mwakyusa and Mkumbo (2022), who reported that proactive communication of school expectations enhances students' self-regulation and accountability. Moreover, Gershoff (2020) emphasizes that behaviour education fosters intrinsic motivation and discipline rooted in self-awareness rather than fear of punishment.

Reminding Students of School Rules and Regulations

The study found that teachers frequently remind students of school rules and regulations (Mean = 4.02). This indicates that most students are well informed about acceptable and unacceptable behaviours within the school setting. Interviews reinforced that rules are essential tools in maintaining discipline. One head of school stated, “*When a student commits wrong action, he/she is reminded with the rule which restricts the committed action before punishment. This prevents students from committing similar misconducts*” (Interview with HoS2). Another added, “*in our school each class contain school rules and regulation where students remind themselves daily*” (Interview with HoS3).

A focus group participant mentioned that “*school rules and regulations are documented in the joining instruction in order to make students aware of them before joining the school*” (Focus Group Discussion, School D). Others noted creative reinforcement strategies such as composing songs about discipline to be sung during ceremonies (School C). This is consistent with Muro and Katola (2021), who found that clear, consistent reminders of behavioural expectations significantly reduce disciplinary cases. Such approaches promote a structured and self-regulated learning environment.

Use of Warnings to Shape Student Behaviour

Warnings were also found to be a common strategy for maintaining discipline (Mean = 3.84). Teachers employ both verbal and non-verbal warnings to address emerging misbehaviours before they escalate. One head of school stated, “*warnings are used especially when the students' misbehaviours are at early stage, for example, when students have started to show the indicators of truancy or sexual relationships*” (Interview with HoS2). Similarly, the teacher on duty often provides weekly warnings about emerging misconducts (Interview with HoS4). Another head observed that “*due to warnings which are being provided, students have stopped to use mobile phones in school environment*” (Interview with HoS3). Warnings, as a preventive strategy, were also discussed in focus groups, where one participant explained that “*written warnings are attached on noticeboard where majority of students can read and understand of the warned behaviour*” (School A). Furthermore, parents are sometimes cautioned to reinforce discipline at home (School D). These findings support Mnyanyi (2023), who found that non-punitive verbal warnings, when consistently applied, improve behaviour while maintaining student motivation. The approach reflects restorative rather than retributive discipline.

Provision of Counselling Services

Counselling was another commonly applied strategy (Mean = 3.84). The findings suggest that teachers possess basic counselling skills and provide emotional and behavioural guidance to students. One head of school explained, “*there is a special teacher who is responsible for provision of guidance and counselling to students who encounter challenges in academic and behavioural issues*” (Interview with HoS1). Another added, “*most students encounter adolescent challenges in form three; we always invite special counsellor to provide instructions on how to cope with physiological changes*” (Interview with HoS3). Focus group data confirmed that students receive counselling on the dangers of substance abuse, bad peer influence, and early sexual relationships.

(School A). Group counselling sessions were also reported, especially before school holidays (School D). These results are consistent with Kaaya and Mnyanyi (2023), who found that counselling enhances emotional resilience and reduces disciplinary incidents among adolescents. Similarly, Chilume and Nyirenda (2022) report that schools implementing structured counselling programs experience a decline in behavioural problems.

Explaining Consequences of Indiscipline

Talking to students about the consequences of indiscipline was another frequent practice (Mean = 3.81). Teachers emphasize the dangers of immorality, drug abuse, and truancy. The discipline teacher from School C stated, "*I always prohibit students to attend night clubs, alcoholism and use of drug abuse which draw concentration in academic activities*" (Interview with DT1). However, some teachers noted that "*even if the consequences on having improper behaviour are being explained, some students repeat to practice similar misconducts*" (Interview with HoS4).

Focus groups revealed that open discussions on indiscipline enable peer reflection and problem-solving (School A, B). Such preventive conversations are consistent with Ndunguru and Mcharo (2022), who argue that moral education and consequence awareness are central to sustainable discipline reform.

Teachers as Role Models

Teachers acting as role models was reported to occur frequently (Mean = 3.54). Most teachers demonstrate professional behaviour through punctuality, respectful communication, and appropriate dress. A head of school explained, "*I always emphasize teachers to lead by example which enables students to adopt the insisted behaviours easily*" (Interview with HoS2). Another added that "*teachers are guided by code of ethics which shows responsibilities and corresponding punishment, enabling them to be role models*" (Interview with HoS3).

This finding supports Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977), which asserts that individuals learn behaviours by observing models. When teachers exemplify positive behaviour, students are likely to emulate them. Similar conclusions were reached by Komba (2020), who noted that teacher conduct directly shapes student discipline and moral values.

Limited Use of Peer Counselling and Rewards

Peer counselling (Mean = 3.21) and rewards (Mean = 3.03) were rarely used strategies. Students often lack training in counselling their peers, and rewards are limited due to financial constraints. One head of school observed that "*some students do not respect the guidance and counselling provided by their fellow students*" (Interview with HoS1). However, some schools allow high-performing students to share success strategies, which have shown modest behavioural benefits (Interview with DT2).

Similarly, one head noted that "*during graduation, two students who demonstrated good behaviours are rewarded with a certificate of recognition... motivating others to avoid immoral behaviours*" (Interview with HoS3).

These findings correspond with Mcharo (2021), who found that peer mentoring enhances cooperation and behavioural self-regulation. Additionally, Chilume and Nyirenda (2022) demonstrated that recognition-based rewards reinforce positive behaviour and improve school climate.

Decline in Punitive Measures

Suspension (Mean = 2.75) and expulsion (Mean = 2.22) were the least used disciplinary measures. Teachers preferred corrective over punitive approaches. As one discipline teacher stated, "*in 2024, two students were suspended for 21 days as they were using telephones in classrooms*" (Interview with DT1). Another noted that "*not all mistakes require suspension; the nature of the offense determines the kind of punishment*" (Interview with HoS2).

Focus group discussions confirmed that suspension is used only in severe cases, such as theft or sexual misconduct. Expulsion, meanwhile, was very rare, with one head reporting, "*most of students adhere to school rules and regulations; thus, while they are not engaging in severe cases*" (Interview with DT2).

These findings align with UNESCO (2023), which advocates for "inclusive and rehabilitative discipline" that aligns with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on quality education. Similarly, Tanzania's Education Sector Development Plan (2020) encourages restorative discipline to promote retention and holistic growth.

Generally, the overall mean score of 3.45 demonstrates that teachers frequently use non-punitive methods to maintain discipline. These include communication, counselling, and behavioural modelling. The findings reveal a positive transition away from corporal punishment towards restorative and motivational approaches. However, successful implementation depends on continuous teacher training, parental engagement, and school-based support structures. This is supported by Mkumbo (2021), who emphasizes that the success of discipline reform relies on schools' internal capacities teacher competencies, counselling units, and peer support systems consistent with the Resource-Based Theory (RBT).

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that there is a significant paradigm shift from punitive to alternative discipline methods in Tanzanian secondary schools, particularly within the PITA Project schools in Meru District. Teachers are increasingly embracing positive approaches such as counselling, explanation, modelling, and peer support to manage student behaviour. These methods foster a

more respectful and supportive learning environment that promotes moral development, self-discipline, and emotional well-being among students. The findings affirm the importance of teacher training, policy guidance, and community collaboration in sustaining non-violent discipline practices aligned with child rights and inclusive education principles.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Ministry of Education and school management strengthen teacher training on positive discipline, counselling, and classroom management, while also institutionalizing counselling services within schools. Teachers should serve as ethical role models and promote peer-led support systems, complemented by reward programs that encourage good behaviour. Policymakers should develop national frameworks on positive discipline, integrate these approaches into teacher education curricula, and enhance monitoring mechanisms to ensure policy compliance. Furthermore, parent and community engagement should be prioritized to harmonize discipline practices between home and school. Future research should examine the long-term impact of alternative discipline on academic and emotional outcomes, explore urban rural variations, and assess gender-specific perspectives to promote equity in implementation.

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