

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Beyond the Cane: Teachers' Perspectives on the Ban of Corporal Punishment in Ghanaian First-Cycle Schools

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ABSTRACT

Despite policy advancements, corporal punishment remains prevalent in Ghanaian first-cycle schools, with limited empirical data on caning practices and teacher attitudes toward the national ban. This study examines the prevalence of corporal punishment, educators' perspectives on its prohibition and influencing factors. Conducted across 10 administrative regions in Ghana, the research purposively sampled 60 first-cycle schoolteachers (68.3% female and 31.7% male) and gathered data through in-depth interviews, analysed thematically. Findings reveal an even split in attitudes toward the ban, with 50% supporting and 50% opposing it. Female teachers exhibited a higher inclination toward corporal punishment, reflecting pressures to assert authority in male-dominated classrooms. The results underscore the complexity of disciplinary practices and highlight the need for targeted interventions and policy reforms to promote non-violent methods, ensuring a safe learning environment for all students.

1 | Introduction

Over the past decade, significant global strides have been made to address the use of corporal punishment on children, particularly in educational settings. Countries such as Sweden, Finland and Norway have long abolished corporal punishment, setting a global standard for child rights and protection in schools (Heekes et al. 2022). Recent evidence suggests that school corporal punishment has been banned in 128 countries, whereas 69 countries still allow it, the majority of them being low- and middle-income countries (Gershoff 2017). The ban aims to promote child-friendly learning environments that uphold children's rights to dignity, safety and respect. Benefits of

implementing these policies include improved student–teacher relationships and reductions in school violence (UNICEF 2022).

Progress is not limited to the Global North. More recent legislative changes in Scotland (2020) and Wales (2022) have introduced outright bans on corporal punishment (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children 2023). However, the discourse around corporal punishment remains dynamic even within regions traditionally considered leaders in child rights advocacy. For instance, in England, parents are still legally permitted to employ 'reasonable chastisement' of their children, and discussions about a comprehensive ban continue to be contentious (Children's Commissioner for England 2024;

Key Practitioner Message

- Teachers hold diverse and often conflicting views on corporal punishment, influenced by factors such as gender and personal experience.
- A one-size-fits-all policy may not be effective; professional development should address varied beliefs and classroom realities.
- Training programmes must equip teachers with practical, non-violent alternatives to discipline.
- Policy reforms should be accompanied by ongoing support to foster safer, more inclusive school environments for all learners.

Rowland et al. 2025). This situation underscores that the eradication of corporal punishment is not a linear process but part of an evolving global dialogue on the rights and protection of children.

Despite these positive developments, challenges persist, particularly in enforcement and cultural acceptance (Gershoff 2002; Gershoff and Grogan-Kaylor 2016). Over 90% of students in several countries, such as Cameroon, Tanzania, Jamaica and the Republic of Korea, report experiencing corporal punishment (Gershoff 2017). Its use remains widespread in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, where evidence shows that over 80% of children aged 2–14 experience some form of violent discipline (UNICEF 2023). Empirical studies consistently highlight the harmful effects of corporal punishment on children, demonstrating its negative psychosocial, mental and academic impacts (Anwar et al. 2021; Font and Cage 2018; Maiti 2021; Twum-Danso Imoh 2013). Furthermore, corporal punishment has been linked to increased violent behaviour, reduced self-confidence and heightened anxiety among children (Bangash et al. 2024; Pan et al. 2024). In this context, even though there have been important changes in laws, completely getting rid of corporal punishment around the world needs not just new policies but also changes in culture, strong enforcement and broad education on other non-violent ways to discipline children.

Globally, many countries have enacted legislation to ban corporal punishment in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which they have ratified. Imoh (2012) emphasizes that the initiative to prohibit corporal punishment is not confined to European nations; it is also apparent in various regions of the Global South, including Central and Latin America, as well as African countries like Kenya and South Sudan. In Ghana, the government has made notable progress in protecting children from corporal punishment and other cruel or degrading disciplinary practices in schools (Ampofo 2021; Dennis and Emmanuel 2023). However, despite these policy advancements, corporal punishment remains deeply entrenched in pretertiary education. In the Ghanaian context, this study focuses on ‘first-cycle’ schools, which refer to basic education comprising kindergarten, primary and junior high school levels, typically involving children aged approximately 4 to 15 years (Ministry of Education, Ghana 2019; UNESCO 2022). This is broadly equivalent to early childhood, elementary and lower secondary education in

many international systems, thereby providing clarity for cross-country comparison.

There is a significant lack of empirical research on the persistence of caning practices and teachers’ attitudes toward the ban, highlighting a critical knowledge gap in this area. Without understanding the current situation and the reasons behind teachers’ support or opposition to the ban, efforts to fully eliminate corporal punishment risk being ineffective. This paper seeks to fill this crucial gap by providing evidence that can inform more targeted interventions and policies. Specifically, the paper examines three objectives: (1) the prevalence of the use of the cane as a corrective method in schools, (2) the opinions of teachers regarding the ban on corporal punishment in school settings and (3) the reasons teachers either support or oppose the ban. By addressing these objectives, the study contributes to the growing body of knowledge needed to transform school discipline practices in Ghana toward more positive, child-centred approaches.

2 | Literature Review

The global movement to ban corporal punishment in schools has gained substantial momentum over the past few decades. Growing evidence highlights the negative consequences of corporal punishment on children’s physical, emotional and educational development, prompting reforms in many countries. However, the journey toward abolition has been neither uniform nor straightforward, as progress has varied across regions depending on legal, cultural and social factors. For conceptual clarity, it is important to distinguish between ‘punishment’ and ‘discipline’, terms that are often used interchangeably in educational discourse. Punishment generally refers to the imposition of penalties or negative consequences in response to undesirable behaviour, typically with an emphasis on control or deterrence. In contrast, discipline is a broader and more constructive concept that encompasses guidance, teaching and the development of self-regulation and positive behaviour (Gershoff 2017; UNESCO 2021). This distinction is particularly important for interpreting teachers’ perspectives, as references to discipline do not necessarily indicate support for punitive or harmful practices.

Sweden set a historic precedent in 1979 by becoming the first country to legally prohibit all forms of corporal punishment against children (Breger et al. 2020; Durrant 2017). This landmark move was grounded not only in a legal shift but also in a broader societal campaign that emphasized children’s rights and positive parenting. Following Sweden, other Nordic countries, notably Finland (1983) and Norway (1987), introduced similar bans (Bussmann et al. 2010). Longitudinal studies from these countries report a consistent decline in societal approval of corporal punishment and a corresponding reduction in child maltreatment cases (Durrant and Olsen 1997; Gershoff and Bitensky 2007). This paper illustrates those legislative reforms, when paired with public education and cultural change initiatives, are critical to achieving tangible outcomes.

Beyond the Nordic region, reforms have gained traction. Scotland, through the Children (Equal Protection from

Assault) (Scotland) Act 2020, and Wales, via the Children (Abolition of Defence of Reasonable Punishment) (Wales) Act 2022, extended protections against corporal punishment into the home environment (Parliament 2019; Jermin 2019; Lloyd-Jones 2020). Nonetheless, these legal reforms were met with resistance from some sections of the public, who argued that such laws infringed on parental autonomy (Saunders and Goddard 2009). These debates highlight the enduring tension between child protection imperatives and traditional views on parental rights. Despite the controversies, evaluations show that bans in Scotland and Wales are contributing to shifts in public attitudes toward non-violent forms of discipline (Children's Commissioner for Wales 2023).

Outside Europe, New Zealand's experience offers further insight into the complex interplay between law and societal attitudes. The Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act of 2007 eliminated the defence of 'reasonable force' for disciplining children (Dobbs 2007). Although the law triggered significant public opposition, culminating in a 2009 referendum, where a majority opposed the amendment, subsequent studies indicated that the ban neither criminalized large numbers of parents nor caused widespread disruptions in parenting practices (Durrant and Ensom 2012). Instead, it contributed to a gradual shift in societal norms, reinforcing the view that non-violent discipline is both effective and desirable. In Africa, the experience of South Africa provides valuable lessons. The South African Schools Act of 1996 prohibits corporal punishment in schools, a stance further entrenched by Constitutional Court rulings that declared all forms of corporal punishment unconstitutional (Maphosa and Shumba 2010; Bhana et al. 2010). Despite the robust legal framework, studies have consistently shown that corporal punishment remains prevalent in public schools (Mahlangu et al. 2021; Ngubane et al. 2019). This persistence is largely attributed to deep-rooted cultural beliefs that view corporal punishment as necessary for maintaining discipline, compounded by limited teacher training on positive alternatives. Thus, South Africa's experience underscores the critical importance of enforcement, ongoing teacher professional development and societal attitude change alongside legal reforms.

Similarly, Kenya banned corporal punishment in schools through a 2001 amendment to the Education Act (Mwai et al. 2014; Mweru 2010). The government supported this legal shift by introducing alternative disciplinary measures and promoting them through teacher training initiatives. However, as in South Africa, enforcement challenges remain significant. Teachers often continue using corporal punishment due to cultural acceptance of physical discipline, inadequate monitoring mechanisms and a lack of effective alternative strategies (Mweru 2010). These experiences from Kenya and South Africa suggest that legislative reform is essential but not sufficient on its own; a multipronged approach that includes education, public sensitisation, monitoring and consistent enforcement is necessary to effect real change.

Overall, the global literature shows that legal bans are a crucial starting point but must be accompanied by broader cultural transformation and sustained investment in positive discipline training for teachers and parents. Understanding these dynamics is vital for interpreting the Ghanaian context, where despite

progressive policy pronouncements, corporal punishment remains an enduring challenge in many school settings.

3 | Methods

3.1 | Study Setting

The study was conducted in Ghana in 2018, a period when the country was administratively divided into 10 regions. This research is a subset of a more extensive study that performed a situational analysis of children in Ghana, addressing various child rights issues such as household and living arrangements, parental guidance and responsibility, health, education and social welfare, as well as child protection concerns related to abuse, exploitation and justice. The comprehensive study surveyed a total of 5024 participants and included key informant interviews (KIIs) with children, parents, district assembly officials, including those from health, educational and social welfare sectors, and focus group discussions with both children and adults. The current study specifically focuses on the perspectives of 60 teachers who participated during the main exercise.

3.2 | Sampling and Participant Selection

In each of Ghana's 10 regions, six teachers were purposively selected, culminating in a total sample size of 60 teachers. This purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure a diverse representation of teachers across the country. The selection of schools was undertaken during the initial study by the respective District Assemblies in collaboration with the Department of Children, using a purposive approach to capture varied local contexts. Teachers were subsequently drawn from these selected schools, resulting in participants being sourced from different schools across districts rather than from a fixed or limited set of institutions. This approach enhanced the diversity of perspectives included in the study and is consistent with qualitative sampling strategies that prioritize information-rich cases and contextual variation (Patton 2015). The selection criteria mandated that participants be actively teaching in first-cycle institutions. Additionally, they were required to obtain permission from their respective headteachers to participate in the study and to willingly share their opinions on the ban of corporal punishment in schools. Teachers who did not receive permission from their headteachers or were unwilling to discuss the subject were excluded from the study.

3.3 | Data Collection

KIIs were conducted within the premises of the participants' schools to ensure a comfortable and familiar environment. Prior to each interview, formal permission was obtained from the headteachers, and informed consent was secured from the participating teachers. The interviews, conducted in English, lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour. A survey tool and an interview guide were utilized to ensure consistency across interviews. These instruments focused on eliciting teachers' opinions regarding the ban on corporal punishment, their personal experiences with disciplinary methods and their perceptions of

student behaviour in relation to disciplinary practices. Although caning was the primary focus of the interviews, participants were also encouraged to reflect on broader disciplinary practices. In the Ghanaian school context, caning is the most commonly reported and institutionally recognized form of corporal punishment; however, other forms, such as slapping, forcing students to kneel or assigning physically strenuous tasks, have been documented in prior studies (UNICEF 2023). The emphasis on caning in this study reflects its prominence in policy debates and school practice.

3.4 | Data Analysis

Descriptive analyses, including frequencies and percentages, were conducted to outline participants' sociodemographic characteristics, the prevalence of cane use as a corrective method by teachers and their opinions on the ban of corporal punishment in schools. All interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy in data capture. The recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim. A thematic analysis approach was adopted to analyse the qualitative data. This process involved multiple readings of the transcripts to achieve immersion and a comprehensive understanding of the content. Initial codes were generated based on significant statements related to the study's objectives. These codes were then organized into subthemes, which were further grouped into overarching themes that encapsulated the teachers' perspectives on the ban of corporal punishment in schools. To enhance the credibility of the analysis, peer debriefing sessions were conducted, and discrepancies in coding were resolved through consensus among the research team members.

3.5 | Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from (ANONYMIZED). The research adhered to the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki, ensuring respect, beneficence and justice for all participants. Participants were informed about the study's objectives, procedures, potential risks and benefits before obtaining their written consent. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing the data, and participants were assured that their responses would be used solely for research purposes. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without any repercussions. Additionally, permissions were secured from the Ghana Education Service (GES) and respective school authorities to conduct the study within school settings.

3.6 | Reflexivity

The research team acknowledged the potential influence of their own beliefs and experiences on the research process. To mitigate bias, reflexive journaling was practiced, and regular team meetings were held to reflect on how personal perspectives might affect data interpretation. This reflexive approach aimed to enhance the trustworthiness of the study findings. Although the purposive sampling method ensured diverse regional representation, it may limit the generalizability of the findings to all teachers in Ghana. Additionally, conducting interviews within

the school environment might have influenced participants' responses due to perceived power dynamics or concerns about confidentiality. However, efforts were made to create a safe and open environment for honest expression. All interviews were conducted in private locations. Managers and headteachers were not informed about which teachers participated in the study, thereby ensuring voluntary participation. By employing a rigorous methodological approach, this study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of teachers' opinions on the ban of corporal punishment in Ghanaian schools, contributing valuable insights to the discourse on educational disciplinary practices.

4 | Results

4.1 | Sociodemographic Characteristics

The study engaged 60 respondents in KIIs, revealing a notable gender disparity: 68.3% were female, whereas 31.7% were male. Age distribution varied among participants. The largest cohort, 45.0%, fell within the 28–32 years age range, which also represents the modal age group. This was followed by 25.0% aged 33–37 years and 18.3% aged 38–42. Smaller groups included those aged 43–52 years at 8.3% and 3.3% aged 23–27. Regarding educational attainment, 61.7% had a postgraduate diploma, 28.3% possessed a bachelor's degree and 10.0% had a master's degree, as shown in Table 1.

4.2 | Use of Cane as a Corrective Method in School

The study explored teachers' use of the cane during KIIs, revealing noteworthy variations based on sex. Overall, more (61.7%) teachers indicated that they refrained from using the cane as a disciplinary method compared to those who acknowledged using it (38.3%). Among those who admitted to using the cane, more female teachers ($n = 36$ of 41) than their male ($n = 5$ of 19)

TABLE 1 | Demographic characteristics of first-cycle teachers.

Sex	Frequency	Percent
Male	19	31.7
Female	41	68.3
Age		
23–27	2	3.3
28–32	27	45
33–37	15	25
38–42	11	18.3
43–52	5	8.3
Education		
Bachelor's degree	17	28.3
Master's degree	6	10.0
Postgraduate diploma	37	61.7
Total	60	100

counterparts reported its use. Although the analysis focuses specifically on caning, it is important to recognize that it represents only one form of corporal punishment within the broader disciplinary landscape of Ghanaian schools. Previous studies indicate that other practices, such as slapping or assigning physically strenuous punishments, also occur, although these were not the primary focus of this study.

This pattern is illustrated in the following participant account:

Sometimes the only way to get them to pay attention is with the cane. I try other methods, talking, warnings, but when they keep repeating the same behaviour, especially the boys, I feel I have no choice. It's not something I enjoy, but it's part of maintaining discipline in the classroom.

[KII 1, Female Teacher].

I used to use the cane, but now I avoid it. I've realized there are better ways to handle discipline, like engaging students in discussions or calling parents. The cane can create fear, and that's not the kind of relationship I want with my pupils.

[KII 2, Female Teacher]

4.3 | Opinion on Ban of Corporal Punishment in School

In our analysis of teachers' views on the ban of corporal punishment, a clear divide emerged during the KIIs. Responses were evenly split, 50% of teachers supported the ban, whereas the other 50% opposed it. The KIIs further revealed nuanced gender-based differences, with slightly more male ($n = 15$ of 19) teachers than female ($n = 26$ of 41) teachers in favour of the ban.

I don't know why some teachers are still reluctant to accept the ban on the application of corporal punishment in school. This is an issue I find it difficult to comprehend.

[KII 3, Male Teacher]

I support the ban on non-use of corporal punishment on children, and I think government should impose stricter sanctions on teachers who are flouting the rules on the application of corporal punishment in school settings.

[KII 4, Male Teacher]

4.4 | Reasons in Support or Opposed to Ban Corporal Punishment in School

During the KIIs, two distinct perspectives emerged regarding corporal punishment in schools. The first view was one of total endorsement, where participants expressed full support for corporal punishment, believing it to be an effective disciplinary

method for managing student behaviour. Advocates of this stance argued that it serves as a deterrent and maintains order within the classroom. The second view encompassed opposition, which included individuals who completely opposed corporal punishment due to concerns about its impact on children's rights and well-being. Additionally, some participants suggested a moderated approach, proposing that corporal punishment could be effective when applied judiciously and in specific situations. These respondents emphasized the importance of context, arguing that when used sparingly and thoughtfully, physical discipline might be acceptable as part of a broader disciplinary strategy that includes other methods of correction.

4.4.1 | Total Endorsement

The first group consisted of those who endorsed corporal punishment completely. These participants believed that corporal punishment is an effective disciplinary method that instils respect and deters misbehaviour among students. During the KIIs, many participants ($n = 40$ of 60) expressed the belief that caning enforces discipline, deters misbehaviour and instils respect for authority, advocating for its controlled use in schools. The following quotes reflect a strong belief among some teachers in the effectiveness of corporal punishment in disciplining children:

I genuinely believe that the use of the cane is the best method to discipline (*punish*) children, as it ensures they learn from their mistakes immediately. The cane leaves a lasting pain that serves as a reminder to behave properly.

[KII 5, Female Teacher]

No, I don't think corporal punishment should be abolished because it helps bring discipline into schools, making students more respectful and obedient. We seem to be becoming too soft on children due to modern legal conventions.

[KII 6, Female Teacher]

I teach close to 40 children, and verbal warnings do not work on them. The only thing they truly fear is the cane, which instils discipline. Even just seeing it in the classroom brings a sense of discipline and alertness among them.

[KII 7, Male Teacher]

Some teachers cited Biblical principles, such as 'spare the rod, spoil the child', framing corporal punishment as a righteous disciplinary approach, which should be maintained. It is important to note that interpretations of this phrase are contested. Some scholars argue that the term 'rod' in biblical contexts may symbolize guidance or authority rather than a literal instrument of physical punishment. Nonetheless, its use by participants highlights the influence of religious and broader societal narratives in shaping teachers' attitudes toward discipline and corporal punishment in schools.

It is clearly stated in the Bible that parents and teachers should not spare the rod when correcting children, as it guides them towards the right path. This principle has stood the test of time, and I believe it still holds relevance in today's world.

[KII 8, Female Teacher]

The Bible says, 'spare the rod, spoil the child,' which I interpret as a divine endorsement of using corporal punishment to maintain discipline among children. For many, this is not just a guideline but a moral obligation.

[KII 9, Male Teacher]

I believe that you ultimately spoil the child by sparing the rod. Discipline, even if through caning, is necessary to shape a child's behaviour, as it teaches them about consequences and accountability.

[KII 10, Female Teacher]

4.4.2 | Opposition to Corporal Punishment

Critics highlighted the negative effects of caning, including fear, physical harm, strained teacher–student relationships, its ineffectiveness in correcting behaviour and advocating for its abolition.

Inflicting physical pain on a child as a form of discipline does not solve or correct the behaviour at hand but rather instils fear and resentment. This kind of punishment leads to a culture of fear, where students are more concerned about avoiding pain than learning.

[KII 11, Male Teacher]

Using the cane in schools causes fear and lack of confidence in children, making them anxious and unable to express themselves freely in the learning environment. When students are scared, it stifles their creativity and willingness to participate.

[KII 12, Female Teacher]

Caning students might seem effective in the short term, but it can cause lasting psychological and physical damage, impacting their overall well-being and development. The long-term consequences can hinder their ability to form healthy relationships and trust figures of authority.

[KII 13, Male Teacher]

Some participants advocated for the limited use of caning, emphasizing moderation and situational appropriateness. They argued that although corporal punishment may have a role, it should not serve as the primary or first-line response to student misbehaviour. Instead, these participants highlighted the need

for non-violent methods that prioritize the well-being of students. This balanced approach seeks to harmonize discipline with minimizing harm, aiming to create an environment conducive to effective behaviour change. Participants stressed that discipline should not only correct misbehaviour but also support the overall development of students. By focusing on moderation and the careful application of disciplinary measures, they believe educators can foster a more positive and productive learning atmosphere.

A moderate use of the cane can be effective as a corrective measure, particularly when other approaches have not worked and may increase the teacher's workload. However, it is important to use it selectively and to rely on alternative methods where appropriate.

[KII 14, Male Teacher]

With the right disciplinary measures in place, I strongly believe that caning can be eliminated, promoting a more positive and nurturing school environment. Positive reinforcement can often yield better results.

[KII 15, Female Teacher]

I think it's important to explore other means of discipline rather than using canes on students, as there are more effective and less harmful approaches. Techniques like restorative justice can help students understand the impact of their actions.

[KII 16, Male Teacher]

The cane might bring immediate obedience, but it does not solve the underlying problem. We need to focus on addressing the root causes of misbehaviour, which often stem from unmet emotional needs or external stressors.

[KII 17, Female Teacher]

5 | Discussion

This study examined teachers' opinions on the ban of corporal punishment in schools, their use of the cane as a corrective method and the sociodemographic factors influencing these perspectives. The findings provide valuable insights into the complexities of disciplinary practices in educational settings. Teachers were evenly divided on the issue, with 50% supporting the ban and 50% opposing it. This split mirrors earlier studies where many teachers expressed negative perceptions of the ban, citing increased difficulty in managing student behaviour (Laurence Lwo and Yuan 2011; Twumasi 2023). The fact that half of the teachers supported the ban may reflect growing awareness of the harmful effects of corporal punishment on students' mental health and behaviour (Laurence Lwo and Yuan 2011). At the same time, the equal opposition suggests lingering doubts about the effectiveness of alternative

disciplinary strategies, underscoring a complex relationship between teachers' educational backgrounds and their disciplinary attitudes (Laurence Lwo and Yuan 2011). Importantly, these patterns also point to the limited influence of institutional policies and structured teacher training in shaping disciplinary attitudes. Although the ban represents a formal policy directive, the persistence of divided views suggests gaps in policy dissemination, enforcement and alignment with classroom realities. In particular, insufficient preservice and in-service training on alternative disciplinary approaches may contribute to teachers' continued reliance on corporal punishment. This highlights the need to situate teachers' attitudes within broader institutional frameworks, including policy implementation processes and professional development systems.

The findings suggest that sex has minimal influence on teachers' views regarding the ban on corporal punishment. Although male teachers appeared somewhat more likely to express support for the ban during the KIIs, female teachers also articulated similar perspectives, indicating that views were largely shared across both groups. Overall, the results reveal no clear or consistent pattern of difference between male and female teachers, but rather a convergence of perspectives across participants. This observation is consistent with Yeboah (2020), who found no statistically significant sex-based differences in teachers' attitudes toward the abolition of caning in Ghanaian schools. However, the current findings diverge from earlier studies (Garg 2017; Muhammad et al. 2018; Proctor 2015), which suggested that female teachers were more likely to endorse corporal punishment than their male counterparts. These studies argued that male teachers often commanded respect by virtue of their sex and thus relied less on physical discipline, whereas some female teachers felt compelled to use corporal punishment to establish authority and maintain classroom control, particularly with male students (Proctor 2015). Conversely, Makewa et al. (2017) presented an opposing view, suggesting that male teachers were more inclined to employ corporal punishment, perceiving it as a necessary tool for discipline, whereas female teachers preferred non-violent, dialogic methods. These contrasting perspectives underscore the complexity of gender dynamics in disciplinary practices and highlight the need for further research into the sociocultural and institutional factors, beyond gender, that influence teachers' disciplinary preferences in Ghanaian schools.

The results from the KIIs indicated that 38.3% of teachers reported using the cane as a disciplinary measure. Within this group, a higher number of female teachers (36 of 41) than male teachers (5 of 19) reported using the cane. However, this pattern should be interpreted cautiously, as it reflects the distribution within the sample rather than a confirmed sex-based difference. Given the qualitative nature of the study and the absence of statistical testing, the findings do not provide sufficient evidence to conclude that female teachers are more likely than male teachers to use corporal punishment. Instead, they suggest variation in practices across participants, with both male and female teachers reporting the use and non-use of caning. These findings align with previous studies that highlight the complexity of disciplinary practices and the influence of contextual factors beyond sex alone (Kyei-Gyamfi 2011; Lansford et al. 2014; Muhammad et al. 2018; Proctor 2015).

The results show three distinct perspectives among teachers regarding corporal punishment. One group argued for its total endorsement, viewing it as an effective disciplinary tool that instils respect, ensures classroom control and deters misbehaviour. This stance aligns with traditional disciplinary views still prevalent in many educational contexts, particularly where alternative behavioural management strategies are limited or poorly implemented. Another group opposed corporal punishment entirely, citing its negative consequences, such as instilling fear, causing physical harm and damaging teacher–student relationships. This perspective is consistent with global research highlighting the detrimental impact of corporal punishment on students' mental health, well-being and academic performance (Greydanus 2010; Lansford et al. 2014; Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection [MoGCSP] 2022). A third group adopted a moderate stance, advocating for its use only in specific situations and with restraint. These teachers acknowledged its perceived immediate effects on behaviour correction but emphasized the importance of context, fairness and proportionality. This middle-ground view reflects a transitional phase in educational practices, where there is recognition of the need for discipline but also growing caution about the method of its application (UNESCO 2021).

Taken together, these findings suggest that teachers' disciplinary attitudes are not shaped solely by individual or demographic factors but are also embedded within broader institutional environments. In particular, the persistence of corporal punishment practices despite formal prohibition underscores the need to strengthen the linkage between policy directives and teacher training. Without adequate institutional support, including practical training on alternative discipline and consistent policy enforcement, teachers may continue to rely on familiar but discouraged practices. This reinforces the importance of aligning educational policies with classroom-level capacities and realities.

6 | Limitations and Strengths

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, although the purposive sampling strategy was effective in capturing a range of perspectives, it limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of teachers in Ghana. The sample size of 60, although adequate for qualitative analysis, may not fully represent the spectrum of opinions and practices across urban–rural divides or between public and private schools and thus reduced the generalizability of the study's findings. Therefore, care must be taken in interpreting the findings since the context in the urban and rural areas in relation to aspects such as views on corporal punishment may differ based on the geographical location of the teachers. Additionally, conducting interviews within school premises may have influenced participants' responses due to perceived institutional oversight or concerns about confidentiality, despite efforts to foster openness. The cross-sectional nature of the study also restricts the ability to assess changes in teacher attitudes over time. Moreover, the study did not comprehensively explore how teacher training curricula or school-level policies might shape disciplinary preferences. Furthermore, the study did not include quantitative contextual data on the proportion of the school

population within first-cycle education, which could have provided additional background for interpreting the findings at a national level. This limitation reflects the nature of the secondary qualitative dataset used, which did not capture population-level indicators.

Despite these limitations, the study offers notable strengths. Purposive sampling across all 10 administrative regions ensured broad regional representation, offering a well-rounded view of teacher perspectives nationwide. The use of in-depth interviews generated rich qualitative data, capturing the nuances of teachers' beliefs, motivations and contextual challenges related to the ban on corporal punishment. Additionally, the application of rigorous thematic analysis, supported by reflexivity practices and peer debriefing, enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. Overall, this research provides a critical baseline for understanding teacher attitudes toward corporal punishment and underscores the importance of continued dialogue and longitudinal inquiry in this area.

7 | Conclusion

The study highlights a complex landscape of teachers' opinions and practices regarding corporal punishment in schools. Although there is an even split in support and opposition to the ban, factors such as gender influence these perspectives and the use of the cane as a corrective method. The qualitative insights reveal a spectrum of beliefs, from full endorsement to complete opposition, with some advocating for a balanced approach. These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions, including professional development and policy reforms, to promote non-violent disciplinary methods that ensure a safe and conducive learning environment. Crucially, the persistence of divided views and continued use of corporal punishment despite an existing ban suggests that institutional policies alone are insufficient to drive behavioural change. This points to gaps in policy implementation, monitoring and enforcement, as well as limitations in teacher preparation and ongoing professional training. Addressing these structural and institutional constraints is essential for aligning teachers' practices with policy expectations and child protection standards.

7.1 | Implications for Policy and Practice

Based on the findings, there are several policy and practice implications of the study. The evidence from the teachers highlights a ban on the use of corporal punishment is not enough as the teachers' opinions on its use are split hinting that it is not securing the anticipated behavioural change. Thus, GES must put in place structures that support teachers to use more appropriate disciplinary measures, including continuous professional development through regular workshops and coaching sessions. This finding further underscores the need to strengthen institutional mechanisms that translate policy into practice. In particular, greater attention should be paid to how disciplinary policies are communicated, implemented and monitored at the school level, as well as how teachers are prepared to adopt alternative approaches through structured training programmes. Since the teachers' opposition to corporal punishment centres

on how they can control the classroom without it, since they think the alternatives are not as effective, the teachers should get training on classroom management, conflict resolution and child psychology. Embedding these competencies within both preservice teacher education and continuous in-service training is critical to ensuring that teachers are not only aware of policy directives but are also equipped with practical skills to implement them effectively.

A practice-related implication emerging from the study is that, as some teachers report feeling unsupported, schools should provide support systems for them. Support systems can include assistance from other teachers, GES counselling units and referral pathways for serious cases. For female teachers, especially, who the study's findings indicate may be more prone to using corporal punishment to assert their authority, support systems in schools must address managing disrespect, gendered authority challenges and confidence-building in behaviour management. In addition, institutional support structures should be formalized and integrated into school systems, ensuring that teachers have consistent access to guidance, mentoring and accountability mechanisms that reinforce non-violent disciplinary practices.

The diverse perspectives on corporal punishment among teachers underscore the need for comprehensive policies that address disciplinary practices in schools. Given the split opinions, policymakers should engage educators in developing guidelines that reflect contemporary educational values and empirical evidence on effective discipline. Professional development programmes should be implemented to equip teachers with skills in alternative disciplinary methods, such as restorative practices and positive behavioural interventions. These approaches have been shown to improve student behaviour and academic outcomes without resorting to corporal punishment. Equally important is the alignment between policy frameworks and teacher training systems, ensuring that reforms are supported by adequate resources, clear implementation guidelines and continuous capacity-building initiatives.

Furthermore, culturally sensitive dialogues are essential to address deeply rooted beliefs supporting corporal punishment. Engaging communities in conversations about the impact of corporal punishment can facilitate a shift toward non-violent disciplinary practices. Finally, continuous monitoring and evaluation of disciplinary practices are crucial to ensure the safety and well-being of students. Establishing clear reporting mechanisms and support systems can help identify and address inappropriate disciplinary actions promptly. Strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems, alongside accountability mechanisms, will be critical in ensuring that institutional policies are not only symbolic but are effectively translated into everyday classroom practice. By addressing these implications, educational stakeholders can work toward creating a safer and more supportive learning environment that promotes positive student behaviour and academic success.

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Ethics Statement

This study was a secondary analysis of a comprehensive study, so no additional ethical approval is needed. However, the comprehensive study sought ethical approval from the National Child Protection Committee of the Department of Children.

Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the study adhered to the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data used to support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

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