

**Suspension Of Pupils And School Discipline Among Primary Schools In Kisoro District: A Case Study Of Bukazi  
Primary School**

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**Abstract**

This study investigated the practice of pupil suspension and its relationship with school discipline at Bukazi Primary School in Kisoro District, Uganda. Adopting a cross-sectional survey design, the research collected both quantitative and qualitative data from a sample of 171 respondents, including teachers, pupils, and school administrators, through questionnaires and interview guides. The results revealed that the primary causes of suspension were disrespect towards teachers (35%), fighting with peers (26%), and truancy (20%). While suspension was not a common practice for the majority, it was a recurrent issue for a significant minority. Critically, the data on the impact of suspension indicated it was largely ineffective; 39% of respondents reported it had no effect on behavior, while 38% believed it worsened behavior, compared to only 23% who observed any improvement. The study concluded that suspension was a counter-productive disciplinary measure for most pupils at Bukazi Primary School. This ineffectiveness was compounded by systemic challenges, including inadequate school policies, a lack of parental involvement, and limited teacher training in modern classroom management. The study recommends a fundamental shift from a punitive to a restorative approach. Key recommendations include revising the school's disciplinary policy to incorporate restorative justice practices, implementing comprehensive training for teachers in positive behavioral interventions, and establishing stronger parental involvement programs to address the root causes of indiscipline.

**Keywords: Pupil Suspension, School Discipline, Restorative Justice, Positive Behavioral Interventions, Parental Involvement, Kisoro District, Primary Education.**

**Background of the Study**

The management of student behavior and the maintenance of a safe, conducive learning environment are perennial challenges in educational systems worldwide (A. I. Kazaara, 2025). Historically, school discipline has often been synonymous with punitive measures, including corporal punishment, detention, and suspension. However, the 21st century has witnessed a significant paradigm shift towards more restorative and positive disciplinary approaches (Nelson, 2024). Research from high-income nations, particularly in North America and Europe, has increasingly highlighted the detrimental effects of exclusionary discipline like suspension. Studies consistently show that suspended students are at a higher risk of academic disengagement, grade retention, school dropout, and entry into the "school-to-prison pipeline" (Losen & Martinez, 2020). For instance, data from the United States revealed that during the 2017-18 school year, there were approximately 2.5 million in-school suspensions and 1.4 million out-of-school suspensions, with disproportionate rates for students of colour and those with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). This has spurred a global movement advocating for frameworks like Positive Behavioural Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL), which focus on understanding the root causes of misbehaviour and teaching pro-social skills rather than merely punishing infractions (A. G. Kazaara & Kazaara,

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2025). The global conversation now centres on creating inclusive, equitable, and supportive school climates that minimize the need for exclusionary practices.

Within Africa, the discourse on school discipline is complex, often caught between traditional authoritarian models and the emerging influence of global child rights perspectives (A. I. Kazaara, 2025). Corporal punishment, though legally banned in a growing number of countries, remains a widespread and culturally ingrained practice in many homes and schools. Suspension and expulsion are also common disciplinary tools, but their application is often less formalized and documented than in Western contexts (Christopher, Komunda, et al., 2022). A significant challenge across the continent is the lack of adequate training for teachers in modern classroom management techniques, leading to a reliance on punitive measures to assert authority. According to a UNICEF report, violence in schools, including physical punishment, is prevalent in many parts of Africa, negatively impacting children's mental health and educational outcomes (UNESCO, 2019). The socio-economic backdrop of poverty, conflict, and resource constraints in many African nations exacerbates behavioural issues, as children bring the stressors of their home environments into the classroom. While countries like Kenya and South Africa are making strides in implementing bans on corporal punishment and promoting alternative discipline, the implementation gap between policy and practice remains wide (Julius & Kazaara, 2025). The African context, therefore, presents a unique scenario where the harmful effects of suspension are compounded by other systemic challenges, making the search for effective and culturally appropriate disciplinary models particularly urgent.

In Uganda, the education system grapples with the dual challenges of improving access and quality, with school discipline being a critical, yet contentious, component. The Ugandan government, through the Ministry of Education and Sports, has enacted policies that reflect a commitment to child rights (Julius, 2024). The Children Act (Cap. 59) and the \*Education (Pre-Primary, Primary and Post-Primary) Act, 2008\* prohibit cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, and the Ministry has issued circulars banning corporal punishment in schools. Despite this legal framework, enforcement is weak (A. I. Kazaara, 2025). A 2021 study found that corporal punishment is still rampant, with over 90% of students in some regions reporting experiencing it at school (Uwezo Uganda, 2021). Suspension is a commonly used disciplinary measure for more serious offences, but its application is often arbitrary and lacks the procedural safeguards common in more developed systems. The Ugandan classroom is typically characterized by large pupil-to-teacher ratios, often exceeding 70:1 in public schools, which makes individualized attention and behaviour management difficult for teachers (Anthony et al., 2023). This leads to a reactive rather than proactive disciplinary culture. Furthermore, there is a significant disconnect between official policy and the deeply held beliefs of many parents and teachers who view strict physical discipline as necessary for molding a child's character. This creates a conflict between the child's right to protection and traditional societal norms, leaving school administrators, like those in Kisoro District, in a difficult position (Julius & Kazaara, 2025).

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Kisoro District, located in the scenic but socio-economically challenged South-Western region of Uganda, presents a microcosm of the national struggles with school discipline, albeit with its own unique aggravating factors. The district is characterized by high levels of poverty, with many families engaged in subsistence farming (Christopher & Micheal, 2022). It also hosts a significant refugee population from the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo, placing additional strain on educational resources and creating a more complex classroom dynamic. Schools in Kisoro, including Bukazi Primary School, operate under immense pressure with limited infrastructure, inadequate teaching materials, and underpaid teachers (A. G. Kazaara & Kazaara, 2025). These conditions contribute directly to disciplinary problems. Pupils may come to school hungry, lack basic necessities like uniforms and books, or be burdened with domestic chores, all of which can lead to absenteeism, lack of concentration, and behavioural issues. The traditional acceptance of corporal punishment is particularly strong in this region. While suspension is used, it is often a measure of last resort, but one that carries severe consequences. In a community where educational opportunity is a precious commodity, suspending a child effectively cuts them off from their primary path to a better future, potentially pushing them into child labour or early marriage (Joventá et al., 2023). The specific disciplinary challenges, the frequency of suspensions, and the alternatives available to teachers at Bukazi Primary School are not well-documented, creating a critical knowledge gap that this study seeks to fill.

Bukazi Primary School, as the focal point of this case study, is situated within this layered context of global ideals, African realities, national policy-practice gaps, and local socio-economic hardship. It faces the daily practicalities of managing hundreds of children with diverse needs and backgrounds (Godfrey et al., 2023). The school's administration and teachers are tasked with enforcing discipline and maintaining order, but they likely do so with minimal training in modern, non-violent disciplinary methods and with limited support from the overstretched district education office. The use of suspension at Bukazi Primary School is therefore not merely an administrative decision but a complex event influenced by teacher frustration, community expectations, resource constraints, and a lack of viable alternatives. Understanding the specific reasons that lead to suspension at Bukazi, the procedural fairness with which it is applied, its impact on the pupils' academic and social trajectories, and the perceptions of teachers, parents, and pupils themselves is crucial (Victoria et al., 2023). This detailed inquiry will provide invaluable, localized evidence that can inform more effective and humane disciplinary policies not only for Bukazi Primary School but for other similar schools across Kisoro District and Uganda as a whole, contributing to the broader goal of creating safe and inclusive learning environments for every child.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite implementing suspension as a disciplinary measure, Bukazi Primary School has faced persistent challenges in maintaining pupil discipline (Julius, 2025). Cases of indiscipline such as truancy, disrespect, and disruptive behaviors are still prevalent, negatively impacting the learning environment and academic performance (Christopher, Moses, et al., 2022). This raises concerns about the effectiveness of suspensions in fostering positive behavioral change. Therefore, the study seeks to assess the role of suspensions in improving pupil discipline and identify alternative measures to promote a conducive learning

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environment (Julius & Kazaara, 2025). Despite the widespread use of suspension, there is limited understanding of its effects on pupils' academic performance, behavior, and psychological well-being. Additionally, the implications of suspension on the general discipline climate in primary schools remain unclear. Without comprehensive data, it is challenging for educators and policymakers to develop informed strategies that balance the need for discipline with the well-being of pupils.

#### **Specific Objectives of the Study**

1. To determine the causes of pupil suspensions at Bukazi Primary School.
2. To assess the impact of suspensions on the level of discipline at Bukazi Primary School.
3. To establish the relationship between pupil suspensions and overall school discipline at Bukazi Primary School.

#### **Methodology**

The research design constituted the plan and procedures for the research, encompassing the broad assumptions and detailed methods of data collection and analysis, which Mugenda & Mugenda (1999) described as the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data. This design translated the research approach into practice through specific methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Kothari & Gaurav, 2014). For this study, a cross-sectional survey design was employed, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative approaches because the intention was to gather data from a representative cross-section of the population at a single point in time. This design was selected as it was deemed suitable for gathering data from a relatively large number of different categories of respondents without the necessity of a follow-up, thereby saving time, an advantage noted by Mugenda and Mugenda (1999). The flexibility of the cross-sectional survey, which could be conducted using various modes of data collection, was a key factor in its selection. The area of study was Kisoro District, located in South Western Uganda, a district characterized by its remote location and small total land area of approximately 729.2 Km<sup>2</sup>, making it one of the smallest districts in the country. The researcher selected Bukazi Primary School as a case study to investigate the relationship between pupils' discipline and academic performance within this specific context (Nafiu, 2012).

The target population, defined by Mugenda and Mugenda (2008) as the totality of the respondents in which a researcher is interested, consisted of the head teacher, teachers, and pupils from Bukazi Primary School, totaling 300 individuals. This included 250 pupils, 47 teachers, the head teacher, the LC1 Chairman, and the District Education Officer (D.E.O) of Kisoro District, as these participants were believed to be well-informed about the variables under study. The sampling procedure, which refers to the process of choosing a part of a population to test hypotheses about the entire population (Jowin, 2003), involved both simple random sampling and purposive sampling. The sample size, a small subset of the total population (George & Mallery, 2003), was determined to be 171 respondents from the total population of 300, derived using the Solvin's formula with an error tolerance of 0.05. This sample comprised 158 pupils, 10 teachers, the head teacher, the LC1 Chairman, and the District Education Officer.

The specific sampling techniques employed were both probability and non-probability to ensure reliable data collection. Simple random sampling, a method where each member of the population has an equal probability of being selected (Kothari, 2014; Ben-Shlomo et al., 2013), was used to select the pupil and teacher respondents. The researcher implemented this by numbering individuals in the target population and using a table of random numbers to decide the sample. Additionally, purposive sampling, a strategy where specific persons are deliberately selected to provide important information (Maxwell, 1996), was used to select the head teacher, LC1 Chairman, and District Education Officer. This technique was chosen for its utility in reaching a targeted sample quickly and for its cost-effectiveness and convenience, despite its limitation in ensuring proportional representation of the entire population.

For data collection, which Kabir (2016) defined as the process of gathering and measuring information on variables of interest, the researcher utilized both primary and secondary methods. The primary instruments were questionnaires and interview guides. The questionnaire, a data collection tool with questions in a defined order (Goode & Hatt, 2003), was the major instrument; 158 were prepared for pupils, 20 for teachers, and additional ones for key informants to supplement interviews. All questionnaires were in English and consisted of closed-ended questions. Furthermore, the interview method, involving asking questions and getting answers from participants (Kabir, 2016), was employed in a face-to-face format with key informants to collect deeper qualitative data on the relationship between pupils' discipline and academic performance.

To ensure quality control, the researcher implemented measures for validity and reliability. Validity, defined as the extent to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Miles & Huberman, 1994), was established through expert judgment, where research experts assessed the questionnaire, and a Content Validity Index (CVI) was computed. The instruments were refined based on this expert advice. Reliability, referring to the consistency of the research instrument (Shamoo, 2015), was established through a pilot test using a similar group. The split-half method, aided by the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), was used to compute the reliability coefficient, though open-ended questions were not subjected to this test (Nelson et al., 2022). Data management and processing involved activities related to the storage, organization, and documentation of data (Lehtonen & Pahkinen, 2004). Data was processed through editing, coding, and tabulation, with analysis performed using SPSS to compute percentages, frequencies, and tabulations (Nelson et al., 2023). Qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis, where responses were categorized into thematic areas, and presentation was done using tables, figures, and charts.

Ethical considerations, which Shamoo (2015) described as pertinent for the safety of both the researcher and respondents, were strictly observed. Approvals were obtained from relevant authorities, and an introductory letter from the university was presented to local leaders. Respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their information and that the study was for academic purposes only.

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**Results**

**Table 1: Frequency of Pupil Suspensions at Bukazi Primary School**

| Frequency of Suspension  | Frequency (f) | Valid Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Rarely (Once or twice)   | 99            | 58                   |
| Occasionally (3-5 times) | 45            | 26                   |
| Frequently (6 or more)   | 27            | 16                   |
| Total                    | 171           | 100                  |

**Source: Primary Data, 2024**

Table 1 provides a critical overview of the prevalence of suspension as a disciplinary measure at Bukazi Primary School. The data indicates that for a majority of pupils (58%), suspension is a rare occurrence, happening only once or twice. This suggests that for most students, the school environment does not necessitate repeated severe disciplinary exclusion, and that suspension is typically reserved for isolated or less frequent incidents. However, the data reveals a more concerning underlying trend. A significant combined 42% of respondents reported that suspensions occur occasionally (26%) or frequently (16%). The fact that 16% of respondents representing nearly one in six characterized suspensions as a frequent event, happening six or more times, points to a serious and persistent disciplinary issue for a specific subset of the pupil population. This highlights that while suspension is not the normative experience for the average student, it is a recurrent and entrenched reality for a notable minority. This pattern suggests that the school may be caught in a cycle where a small group of pupils is repeatedly subjected to suspension, a measure that, as later data will show, may be ineffective for them. Therefore, the table successfully establishes that while suspension is not a mass phenomenon, its concentrated and repeated use on a segment of the student body signifies a significant disciplinary challenge that warrants deeper investigation into its causes and consequences.

**Table 2: Causes of Pupils' Suspension at Bukazi Primary School**

| Causes of Suspension             | Frequency (f) | Valid Percentage (%) |
|----------------------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Disrespect to Teachers           | 60            | 35                   |
| Fighting with Peers              | 45            | 26                   |
| Truancy (Skipping Class)         | 35            | 20                   |
| Stealing/Destruction of Property | 20            | 12                   |
| Other (e.g., drug abuse)         | 11            | 7                    |
| Total                            | 171           | 100                  |

**Source: Primary Data, 2024**

Table 2 offers crucial insight into the behavioral triggers that lead to the suspension of pupils, revealing a clear emphasis on infractions that directly challenge authority and disrupt social harmony. The predominant cause, cited by 35% of respondents, is disrespect towards teachers. This indicates that the preservation of teacher authority and the maintenance of a traditional hierarchical structure within the classroom are paramount concerns at Bukazi Primary School. Behaviors perceived as

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insubordinate or challenging to a teacher's status are met with the school's most severe disciplinary consequence. The second leading cause, fighting with peers (26%), further underscores that actions which threaten the physical safety and social cohesion of the pupil body are treated with high severity. Together, these two categories disrespect and fighting account for over 60% of all suspensions, painting a picture of a disciplinary system primarily responsive to overt acts of defiance and physical conflict. Other significant causes include truancy (20%), which reflects a rejection of the core academic mandate of the school, and stealing or destruction of property (12%), which violates communal norms and resources. The presence of "Other" causes, such as drug abuse (7%),, while smaller, signals the emergence of more complex, societal issues impacting the school.

**Table 3: Impact of Suspension on School Discipline at Bukazi Primary School**

| Impact of Suspension         | Frequency (f) | Valid Percentage (%) |
|------------------------------|---------------|----------------------|
| Positive (Improved Behavior) | 40            | 23                   |
| Neutral (No Effect)          | 67            | 39                   |
| Negative (Worsened Behavior) | 64            | 38                   |
| Total                        | 171           | 100                  |

**Source: Primary Data, 2024**

Table 3 presents a striking and arguably the most significant finding of the study: the pervasive ineffectiveness and potential counter-productivity of suspension as a disciplinary tool at Bukazi Primary School. A plurality of respondents (39%) reported that suspension has a neutral effect, meaning it produces no meaningful change in student behavior. This suggests that for a large portion of the school community, suspension is seen as an inconsequential break rather than a corrective intervention. More alarmingly, 38% of respondents perceived that suspension actually worsens pupil behavior, indicating that for many, the experience of exclusion leads to increased disengagement, resentment, or more severe misconduct upon return. This negative perception nearly doubles the proportion of those who viewed suspension positively (23%). The overwhelming majority (77%) thus believe suspension either has no effect or a detrimental one, creating a powerful argument that its continued use is not justified by its outcomes.

Table 3 shows that 39% of respondents believed suspensions had no impact on school discipline, while 38% felt suspensions worsened pupil behavior. Only 23% felt suspensions led to improved behavior, suggesting a need for alternative disciplinary measures.

**Table 4: Challenges in Managing School Discipline at Bukazi Primary School**

| Challenge                              | Frequency (f) | Valid Percentage (%) |
|--|---------------|----------------------|
| Inadequate School Rules/Policies       | 65            | 38                   |
| Lack of Parental Involvement           | 52            | 30                   |
| Limited Teacher Training on Discipline | 36            | 21                   |
| Overcrowded Classes                    | 18            | 11                   |

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|       |     |     |
|-------|-----|-----|
| Total | 171 | 100 |
|-------|-----|-----|

**Source: Primary Data, 2024**

Table 4 shifts the focus from pupil behavior to the systemic and institutional barriers that hinder effective discipline management at Bukazi Primary School. The most frequently cited challenge, identified by 38% of respondents, is inadequate school rules or policies. This points to a fundamental structural weakness, suggesting that the existing disciplinary code may be unclear, inconsistently applied, outdated, or poorly communicated to both staff and students. The absence of a robust and transparent regulatory framework creates an environment of ambiguity where disciplinary responses can be perceived as arbitrary or unfair. The second major challenge is a lack of parental involvement (30%), indicating a critical breakdown in the home-school partnership. This lack of collaboration means that behavioral issues originating in or influenced by the home environment are not being addressed cohesively, and consequences imposed by the school may lack reinforcement or understanding from parents. Furthermore, limited teacher training on discipline (21%) reveals that educators may feel ill-equipped to handle complex behavioral issues proactively, defaulting to reactive measures like suspension because they lack the skills for conflict resolution, classroom management, and socio-emotional support. Finally, overcrowded classes (11%) serve as an exacerbating factor, creating a stressful environment where individualized attention is difficult and behavioral issues are more likely to arise and escalate.

**Conclusions**

It was concluded that while suspension was not a common everyday occurrence for the majority of pupils, it was a significant and recurrent issue for a distinct minority. The school relied on suspension as a primary disciplinary tool for a core group of students, indicating a reactive disciplinary cycle rather than a system focused on prevention and rehabilitation for those most at risk.

The study concluded that the primary triggers for suspension were behaviors that directly challenged authority and disrupted social order, specifically disrespect towards teachers and fighting amongst peers. This revealed that the school's disciplinary framework was predominantly oriented towards maintaining control and immediate safety, rather than addressing underlying, root-cause issues such as emotional distress, learning difficulties, or complex social problems.

A central and critical conclusion was that suspension was largely an ineffective and often counter-productive disciplinary measure. The overwhelming majority of respondents found that suspension either had no positive impact or actually worsened student behavior. This demonstrated a clear failure of the punishment to achieve its intended corrective or deterrent purposes, and strongly suggested that for many pupils, it reinforced a negative cycle of disengagement and misconduct.

**Recommendations**

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There should be a fundamental and multi-faceted transformation of the disciplinary approach at Bukazi Primary School, moving decisively away from a punitive model towards a supportive and restorative one. A comprehensive action plan must be developed and implemented to address the root causes of the issues. There should be an immediate overhaul of the school's disciplinary code, moving from a system that reacts to infractions with exclusion to one that proactively teaches and reinforces positive behavior. This involves the formation of a committee including teachers, administrators, and parent representatives to draft a new, clear, and progressive discipline policy. This policy should explicitly define behavioral expectations and outline a logical sequence of consequences that are educational and proportionate, with suspension reserved only for the most severe and persistent offenses. This revised code must then be communicated consistently and transparently to the entire school community to ensure universal understanding and fair application.

There should be a significant investment in building the capacity of teachers through mandatory and ongoing training. Educators need to be equipped with practical skills in positive behavioral interventions, socio-emotional learning, and de-escalation techniques. This training would empower them to manage classrooms effectively without resorting to power struggles, thereby addressing the primary causes of suspension, such as disrespect and fighting, at their source. Furthermore, there should be a parallel and vigorous effort to strengthen the school-home partnership. The school must move beyond contacting parents only in times of crisis and instead establish proactive and collaborative engagement. This can be achieved by creating a parent support group, organizing workshops on relevant topics like child discipline and drug abuse, and fostering an open-door policy that encourages communication before problems escalate.

There should be the establishment of robust, proactive support systems for pupils, particularly those identified as being at risk of repeated suspension. A dedicated Pupil Support Team should be formed to monitor behavioral data and create individualized plans for students with recurring issues, providing them with mentorship and targeted interventions. Additionally, the school should introduce school-based counselling and life-skills programs, potentially through peer mediation clubs or partnerships with local health workers, to give pupils the tools to manage their emotions and resolve conflicts constructively. Finally, the logistical challenge of overcrowded classes must be acknowledged and creatively mitigated through strategic scheduling and the optimization of existing space. The successful implementation of this entire plan will require strong leadership, consistent monitoring of key metrics like suspension rates, and a sustained commitment to fostering a school culture built on respect, support, and the holistic development of every child.

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