MANAGING STUDENT DISCIPLINE THROUGH STUDENT LEADERSHIP IN KENYAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Student leaders are supposed to act as a vital link between the school administration and fellow students in the managing school affairs. However, the exact role of student leaders in managing the discipline of their fellow students has remained unclear in most schools, especially in the Kenyan context. This study aimed at investigating the role of student leaders in managing student discipline in secondary schools in Kenya. The specific objectives of the study were: to examine the role of student leaders in the formulation of school rules and regulations, to examine the role of student leaders in meting out punishment for infringing on school rules and regulations, and to examine the role of student leaders in resolving disputes among students in secondary schools in Kenya. The study was based on the Progressive Education Theory by Dewey. The study adopted a mixed method research design whereby data that could be presented both qualitatively and quantitatively was collected using questionnaires and interview schedules. The study targeted secondary school head teachers, deputy head teachers and student leaders from public secondary schools in Nakuru County, Kenya. The total sample size was 339 respondents, comprising of 113 principals, 113 deputy principals and 113 student leaders who were from the schools that were randomly selected for the sample. The sample was selected using stratified and simple random sampling techniques. The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and themes developed from the qualitative data. The findings of the study showed that student leaders play a significant role in managing student discipline. These findings will be useful in helping secondary school administrators and managers, the Ministry of Education, and other key education stakeholders in coming up with ways of strengthening, re-defining and training student leaders in their role of managing student discipline in secondary schools in Kenya.

Keywords: Student discipline; Student leadership; Rules.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Education stakeholders have emphasized the need for effective school practices; and as a result, there has been a debate on how to create a culture that is composed of values and behaviors that are supportive of effective schools. Student discipline is seen as an important characteristic of an effective school. However, many secondary schools no longer function in safe and effective contexts because of lack of student discipline. As Birgen (2007) points out, moral depravity, drugs and violence have become major problems facing secondary schools in Kenya today. Consequently, schools are often faced with sporadic incidences of unrest that lead to destruction of school property and even loss of lives. Such incidences impact negatively on school infrastructure, teaching time and parents' financial ability to pay for the destruction.

Nyabisi (2012) points out that one of the major reasons for conflict and indiscipline in schools is misunderstanding, which is often caused by a lack of freedom by the students to express their views to the school administration. Such lack of some degree of freedom of expression of opinions may build up pressure and create situations where students may have no way of expressing their frustrations, thus leading to disruptive behaviour in schools. As Kimani et'al (2012) observe, school principals mainly focus on reactive and administrative methods of instilling discipline rather than giving appropriate leadership designed to inspire alternative and positive behaviour in students.

One of the alternative leadership approaches that can be used to inspire positive behaviour in students is the involvement of student leadership in managing student discipline. This is based on the observation by Shannon and Bylsma (2007) that school effectiveness should flow and draw on the entire school environment - including teachers, students and school leaders. According to Hargreaves & Fink (2006), effective school improvement projects should not always be initiated from the top leadership, such as the school principal, but should include all stakeholders, and build on non-hierarchical relationships in schools. This would be a strong and valid argument to involve students in initiatives to enhance school discipline through their student leadership. As Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) also observe, students can often "slip through the cracks" and go unnoticed, especially in larger schools, leading to an impersonal school environment. In such an impersonal school environment where there is little contact between teachers and students, student violence is likely to be higher. This is because students in such schools feel that they cannot influence what will happen to them; and that their future is dependent upon the actions of others, rather than on their own efforts.

Statement of the Problem
Research has shown that enhanced student discipline is a key factor that characterizes an effective school (Lezotte, 2010; Langer, 2004; Shannon & Bylsma, 2007; Kiprop, 2007). However, secondary schools in Kenya have continued to experience a crisis of student discipline which is mostly manifested through student unrest and violence (UNESCO, 2007; GOK, 2008; Kaluoch, 2010; Iravo, 2011; Tikoko & Kiprop, 2011). If this trend of declining standards of discipline is left unchecked, Kenyan secondary schools will continue to experience sporadic incidences of unrest which cause a decline in academic achievement in schools, and ultimately compromises school effectiveness. Most studies have emphasized school leadership as a key factor in enhancing student discipline. However, such studies have over - emphasized the role of the head teacher as the only major school leader, with very little empirical evidence on how student discipline can be effectively managed through student leadership.

Objectives of the Study
The objectives of this study were:
   (i)   To examine the role of student leaders in the formulation of school rules and regulations
   (ii)   To examine the role of student leaders in resolving disputes among students
   (iii)   To examine the role of student leaders in meting out punishment for infringing on school rules and regulations

Theoretical Framework
This study used as its theoretical basis the Progressive Education Theory (PET) by John Dewey. The PET argues that schools should serve the ideals of providing a moral education

dedicated to human development and democratic ideals. Dewey in Levin (1980) argues that by creating ideal social communities in the school, the eventual growth of youth into adulthood would transform adult society along similar principles. Dewey rejected the instrumentalist view of school in which an education was predicted upon only producing a special education output, that is, academic performance. In progressive education, each child is to be given a maximum opportunity to develop their talent through exposure to a wide range of experiences in which democratic participation and intrinsic satisfaction are the principle guidelines of the school.

The PET was used to derive the variables that were explored in this study. The independent variable of this study was participation of students in leadership, which is one of the democratic ideals proposed by the PET that should be encouraged in schools. There is the assumption that if students participate in school leadership, they will get the opportunity to influence key aspects of the school; such as student discipline. This is important since discipline is one of the ideal principles in any social community.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Concept of Student Leadership
Student leadership refers to the work of student representative bodies, through which the school has the perceived role of instilling leadership knowledge and practices in students (Huddleston, 2007). Therefore, student leaders are students who occupy positions of responsibility in coordinating the activities of the other students in the school. Hay and Dempster (2004) argue that having quality leadership experiences during their school years allows students to easily transition into the community and into the world of work and adult responsibility. Student participation in various aspects of school management is therefore an important concept with potential for positive impact in enhancing the effectiveness of schools and the overall development of the student.

Thus, discussion about how to involve the students in the decision making process, policies and structures of school management is critical to facilitate wider student participation for a more cohesive school community and a more conducive learning environment. To this end, the development of students as leaders remains a goal for most educational institutions. This is evidence in school mission statements and the increased presence of student leadership development programs in schools. In Kenya, the Ministry of Education in conjunction with the United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF) rolled out the student leadership programme in secondary schools in 2009, following the unprecedented student unrest in over 300 secondary schools in the second term of 2008 (KSSSC, 2009).

Discipline Context in Schools
Student discipline is a very vital element in all schools, and in real terms, it is the epicenter of success of a school as it ensures attainment of educational goals. Discipline is manifested when the school becomes a harmonious, respectable and secure place where the students are responsible for themselves and are also aware of their actions and the consequences of these actions. As emphasized by Squelch (2000), discipline is guidance and instruction that is meant to teach and enhance a social order where the rights and responsibilities of students in the school are balanced. This assertion is supported by Kiprop (2007) who points out that discipline in school is a function of the administration, and therefore the principal as a leader must have a clear discipline policy of what is required for the successful management of school discipline.

Student discipline in a school can be assessed from the degree of academic achievement or from students' behaviour. Academic discipline may mean handing in homework on time, being attentive in class, preparing fully for examinations and other activities related to academic pursuits (Sushila, 2004). Behavioral discipline, however, is different and should be dealt with differently. The school code of conduct normally spells out the ways a student is expected to behave while in school. Gamage et'al (2009) assert that school rules and regulations are among the key strategies designed to maintain discipline in schools. The school administration plays a critical role in designing and implementing the rules and reglations by which the school is governed. Such rules contain the dos and don'ts that prescribe and impact on students' patterns of behaviour. On admission to school, students are given these rules and regulations and must promise and bind themselves to adhere to these rules. However, as Sithole (2008) observes, the scenario in most counries in Sub – Saharan Africa is that students continue to break such rules and regulations, leading to widespread acts of indiscipline. Nakpodia (2010) confirms this by noting that it has become normal in many secondary schools for students to break school rules with impunity.

Recurring indiscipline episodes in schools may perpetuate a culture of conflict amongst the students themselves, between students and the school administration, and between the school and the community. Consequently, there has been a variety of reactions on how to handle disputes that escalate into conflict so as to give students an opportunity to work on their issues and concerns without fear and intimidation. To this end, the school administration should try and promote more adaptive behaviour in students and make them better able to solve future problems more independently and effectively. This will call for positive discipline strategies that support effective discipline practices that transform student behaviour to be explored by school administrators. Studies have indicated that such strategies may entail the use of positive reinforcement, modeling, supportive teacher-student relations and stakeholders' support (Kiprop, 2007; Nyabisi, 2012; Simatwa, 2012; Kibet et'al 2012; Joubert and Serakwa, 2009).

Involving Student Leaders in Management of student Discipline
One other crucial strategy that can support effective discipline practices in schools is the involvement of student leaders in achieving, maintaining and restoring of student discipline (Kibet et'al, 2012). Student leaders should be instrumental in inspiring and mentoring other students in the school to respect the school rules and regulations. It is always a good idea for the school administration to explain the school rules and why they are written, so that students are made to realize that breaking the rules will result in reprimand or some form of punishment. However, establishing a common set of rules that govern student discipline in a school is not easy because the school administration and students may have conflicting values. This can only be done through dialogue between the school administration and the students, through their student leaders. Thus, the recommendation is the inclusion of student leaders at various levels of decision making, including in the formulation of discipline policies. This would give the students a feeling of ownership since they will view them as their own creation and thus strive to obey them (Nyabisi, 2012).

In both developed and developing countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom and South Africa, studies have shown that where there is participation in management of the school, there is greater enjoyment, efficiency and more effectiveness, especially in relation to issues of specific concern to the students (Ghanem, 2012; Sayeed 2002). However, there is still very little empirical literature that oulines the specific role of student leadership, as key stakeholders in the management of student discipline.

METHODOLOGY
Research Design and Instruments
This study adopted a pragmatic world view as its philosophical paradigm, which allowed for the choice of a mixed methods design, applying both the quantitative and qualitative approaches. The data collection instruments comprised of questionnaires and interviews. Two questionnaires were developed for this study, one for the deputy principals and one for a student leader from each of the targeted schools. An interview schedule was drawn up to be administered in face-to-face interviews with the sampled principals. To validate the research instruments, experts in the fields of education and research were consulted. The reliability of the research instruments was tested through a pilot study using the test-retest technique. The results of the two tests were subjected to a Pearson Correlation, and a correlation coefficient (r) value of 0.79 was obtained after the two tests. The analysis of data collected was done using descriptive statistics and presented in the form of tables of frequencies and percentages. The qualitative aspect of the collected data was analyzed by drawing out the key themes from the responses given for each question.

Sample and Sampling Procedures
This study adopted a multi – stage sampling approach, where both stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used. In the first stage of sampling, all the 281 secondary schools in Nakuru County were stratified into three categories; Boys, Girls and Mixed school. Schools were then randomly selected from each stratum to proportionately make up the 113 schools required for the study; as per the recommended sample size by Krejcie & Morgan (1970). The 113 principals and 113 deputy principals from the sampled schools constituted the respondents for the study. One student leader from each of the 113 schools was also included in the study for purposes of triangulation. This gave a total sample size of 339 respondents.

RESULTS
Statements were generated based on the objectives of the study; so as to examine the extent to which the respondents agreed or disagreed on the role of student leaders in managing student discipline in schools.
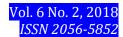
Involvement of Student Leaders in Formulation of School Rules and Regulations
A majority of the respondents (76.5%) agreed that student leaders should be involved in coming up with the rules and regulations that govern their schools. On the other hand, 15.5% of the respondents disagreed. These findings are an indication that student leaders should play a role in coming up with the rules and regulations that govern their schools so as to enhance student discipline.

Majority of the respondents (93.7%) also agreed that student leaders should ensure that the other students obey the school rules and regulations. Only a small percentage of 2.6% disagreed.

Involvement of student Leaders in Solving Disputes
On student leaders solving disputes among students, majority of the respondents (88.7%) agreed that student leaders can solve disputes that arise among the students. Only 2.7 % of the respondents disagreed. These findings indicate that student leaders can be instrumental in solving disputes among other students.

Involvement of Student Leaders in Meting Punishment

With regard to meting out punishment to other students for breaking school rules and regulations, a majority of 56.2% of the respondents agreed that student leaders should mete out punishment to other students. However, a total of 35.7% of the respondents disagreed that student leaders should mete out punishment on other students; while 8% were undecided. Although it is evident from these findings that student leaders can be allowed to mete out punishment to other students, the percentage majority of the respondents that agreed to this (56.2%) is significantly lower than for the other statements on student discipline.

DISCUSSION

4The findings of this study reflect the argument that students, through their leaders, should be involved in drawing up expectations, rules, rewards and sanctions that the schools operate on since school rules and regulations are among the key strategies designed to maintain discipline in schools (Gamage et'al, 2009). Additionally, students will be more bound to obey and adhere to school rules that they have helped to formulate. Additionally, the findings also indicate that overly, student leaders in secondary schools can be instrumental in ensuring that other students obey school rules and regulations. The significance of this finding is as emphasized by Marzano, Waters and McNulty (2005) and Dugan (2006) who hypothesize that students who hold positions of responsibility are more likely to identify with the educational values of the school and ensure that the other students respect such values as reflected in the rules and regulations of the school.
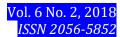
The study findings also indicate that student leaders can be instrumental in solving disputes among other students; thus bringing down the level of conflict and disruptive behaviour in the school system. As Kombo (2006) asserts, the school administration should try and promote more adaptive behaviour in students and make them better able to solve their problems more independently and effectively. Involving student leaders in solving disputes amongst students is one sure way of promoting such adaptive behaviour in students

However, meting out of punishment by student leaders did not receive an equivalent majority support as the other aspects of student discipline. This is an indication that there should be caution in the kind of punishment student leaders are allowed to mete out to other students. As Bates (2006) observes, too frequent use of punishment and some forms of punishments meted out by the student leaders can create a tense and negative atmosphere between the student leaders and other students with counterproductive effects on behavior and the school environment.

In supporting the overall roleof student leadership in managing student discipline in schools, one of the interviewees noted that:

> *...it is actually easier to get a student to see where they have gone wrong and even the need to be punished if it comes from their fellow students. Actually in most cases, the student leaders are very capable of solving disputes and minor discipline cases within the student body. In most cases, what should reach us (administration) should be the serious issues that the students are unable to resolve on their own.*

(Source: School principals' Interview)

CONCLUSION
Summary of Findings
From the discussion of results, the following conclusions were made:
    i. Student leaders should play a significant role in coming up with the rules and regulations that govern student discipline in schools.
    ii. Student leaders can have the authority to mete out punishment to other students; though this was not largely supported by the respondents and should therefore be controlled by the school administration.
    iii. Student leaders should play a crucial role in resolving disputes that arise among the students and this enables students to resolve their conflicts independently.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends the following to school administrators and other education stakeholders:
    (i) Existing policies and practices on students participation in coming up with school rules and regulations, and ensuring that other students obey the set rules and regulations, should be strengthened.
    (ii) The role played by student leaders in meting out punishment to other students should be checked and controlled by the school administration; so as to avoid excesses by the student leaders.
    (iii) Student leaders should be trained in peer mentorship and counselling to better equip them in solving disputes among their fellow students.
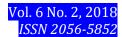
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