THE NATURE AND CAUSES OF INDISCIPLINE CASES AMONG PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN THIKA SUB-COUNTY, KIAMBU COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT: *For a long time now, Kenya has continued to record increasingly disruptive cases of indiscipline among students in public schools. In response to this menace, the Kenya government has usually set up committees to investigate the root causes of and recommend concrete solutions to student indiscipline in schools. Despite many recommendations and subsequent actions by educational stakeholders, the problem of student indiscipline in, especially, Kenyan public secondary schools just seems unable to go away. Therefore, this paper attempts to understand how teachers, students and principals identify and deal with indiscipline cases in their schools so as to make recommendations that could work for every other public school. The paper is based on a case study that investigated the constraints to the development of an effective discipline culture among public secondary schools in Thika District of Kenya. The study employed a survey research design targeting a population of 144 secondary schools, all the accessible students enrolled in these schools, all the 1,753 teachers and all the 144 principals from the 144 schools. The author purposely selected 6 public secondary schools. Data for the study was collected using questionnaires administered to principals, teachers and students and the collected data was analysed descriptively. Based on the research findings, the common cases of indiscipline are: noise making, bullying, fighting, failing to complete assignments, drug abuse, sexual deviance, sneaking out of school, stealing other students' property and general defiance of school authority and rules. The principals, teachers and students all believe that indiscipline in school can be eradicated. According to them, schools can instil a discipline culture on students through guidance and counselling, involvement of parents in dealing with issues of student behaviour, teachers closely supervising assignments and helping learners to complete difficult tasks, strengthening of peer counselling and meting out punishment against unruly students. The study recommends the need to effectively use available means of communication in schools. Students should be encouraged to express themselves through the proper channels rather than resorting to indiscipline.*

KEYWORDS: Causes, Indiscipline Cases, Public Secondary Schools, Thika, Kenya

INTRODUCTION

All secondary schools in Kenya advocate for good discipline among students and staff alike. As such, every individual school has unique set of rules and regulations that govern interactions within the school system. It is the responsibility of the school management to ensure that all abide by these rules and regulations. Discipline is an indispensable component of instructional programmes in schools. Those who fail to conform to the rules and regulations are disciplined in a defined manner.

The Kenya Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) have set rules and regulations to govern school processes and procedures. For instance, the TSC

(2002) code of regulations clearly states that it is the function of the school Board of Governors (BOG) to discipline teachers. When the Board interdicts a teacher, TSC is informed immediately through a formal letter. Teachers are expected to be the role models to students when it comes to discipline. The secondary school thus operates within the framework of policies, rules, regulations and procedures. Effective discipline equals smooth running of the school.

Chanda, Songolo and Mutekenya (2015), citing Short (1988), argue that promoting student self-esteem and belongingness is more effective in reducing behaviour problems than punishment. The indicators of a disciplined school system are very salient. Good academic results constitute one of them. Serakwane (2007), citing Wayson and Lasley (1984), avers that in well-disciplined schools, "...rather than rely on power to enforce primitive models of behaviour control (staff) share decision making power widely and so maintain a school climate in which everyone wants to achieve."

Peters (as cited in Warren, 2014) believes that children are by definition uneducated; they are "barbarians" outside the gates and teachers' *raison d'être* is to remedy this. Consequently, children's choices can be overridden in the light of higher considerations known only to the teacher and adults generally. Kompf and Denicolo (2005) say that order must be established before any learning is possible, and as such this can be characterized independently from what is to be learnt. Achieving order and maintaining it requires 'teaching skills' and 'classroom management techniques' the effectiveness of which is verified empirically, and is the subject of many instruction manuals (ibid.).

Gutuza and Mapoliza (2015) posit that the alarming increase in secondary school indiscipline is caused by the external social environment; and that the education provided will not prevent indiscipline from recurring. Factors like drug abuse, laxity on the part of parents to nurture their children normally, influences of the mass media and peer pressure, among others, have been frequently cited as common causes of student indiscipline (Gutuza & Mapoliza, 2015). However, it appears that laxity among teachers and subsequent excessive use of punishment and prefects to manage social affairs at school is responsible for the rapid growth in the number of indiscipline cases.

Role of Students in Discipline

Students are the key custodians of a school; without them there is no school. Student discipline via student-centred approaches seeks to enhance peer counselling, students' awareness of school rules and regulations, enhancement of student welfare, level engagement with learning and co-curricula activities, increasing student involvement in decision-making among others. In Kenya, the Ministry of Education has banned corporal punishment of students and children in general. The government lays great emphasis on strengthening guidance and counselling in secondary schools.

According to Marland (1993), to say that children are disciplined is different from saying they are controlled. Controlled children believe in the external value of the directions of the controller at least sufficiently to follow them. Disciplined children, on the other hand, observe the internal values of the activities that they subscribe to. This explains the eagerness to substitute the term 'discipline' with the term 'control'. Mbiti (as cited in Redempta, 2010) defines discipline as a system of arranging conditions for healthy learning and living. Since life

is a continuous series of choices, the child must be trained to make choices reasonably and independently.

When handling students, teachers should develop a reasonable scheme of discipline. The teacher must consider factors such as the nature of the child, heredity factors and the child's 'equipment' for behaviour. Nature refers to the fact that a child is born innocent and with sufficient potential for goodness. Children's behaviour is largely determined by the social and cultural environment in which they grow. According to Mbiti (as cited in Redempta, 2010), society expects the child to grow and take social responsibilities, abide by moral standards and acceptable patterns of behaviour. Therefore, students' responsibility for their own behaviour should be reinforced consistently in a manner that enhances their understanding of responsible social behaviour.

Anderson and Prawat (as cited in Dunbar, 2004) argue that many students simply do not perceive a connection between their efforts and academic outcomes. Such students have what psychologists call "external locus of control" and do not believe in their own ability to influence events. They also lack skills to distinguish appropriate from inappropriate behaviour. According to Brophy (as cited in Marshall, 2010), contemporary behaviour modification approaches involve students more actively in planning and shaping their own behaviour. Students learn techniques of self-control, problem solving, setting and pursuing goals and self-motivation. New students must therefore be taught what constitutes appropriate behaviour in school, be informed about school rules and how to abide by them. As Brophy (ibid.) avers, "...effective management, especially in the early grades, is more an instructional than disciplinary enterprise. Effective managers socialize their students to the student role through instruction and modelling." Reiterating this, Sanford and Eventson (as cited in Cotton, 1990) conclude that "... more and longer attention to orienting students to classroom procedures may be more beneficial in low SES junior highs than in most junior highs."

The Role of Communication in Enhancing School Discipline Culture

Communication is the exchange of information and the transmission of meanings (Okumbe, 1998). Only when meanings are transmitted from one person to another and decoded by the recipient can it be said that communication has taken place. In a school context, communication influences the behaviour of teachers, students, school heads, parents, non-teaching staff, among others. It is largely the responsibility of the school principal to communicate the school rules and regulations to all and sundry within the school set up. The day to day running of a school involves meaningful interactions facilitated by effective communication systems. Student discipline is a product of these interactions.

Usually, students and teachers are informed and constantly reminded of their responsibilities through school assemblies, admission letters, notice boards, among other channels of communication. The consequences of misbehaviour are also spelt out through available communication channels. Bakhda (2004) says that a good manager must have effective communication skills. A number of communication channels can be used to enhance interactions and discipline culture in schools. These include making announcements at school assemblies, staff meetings, daily announcement in classrooms and staffrooms, person to person communication, telephones, e-mails, postal systems, memos, notice boards, newsletters, personalized letters, intercom telephony, among others.

Indiscipline can be alleviated in schools if available channels of communication are effectively employed. Students should be allowed to express their grievances to the school administration and teachers. Teachers and school managers should also use these channels to sensitize students on expected behaviour. Communication enhances attitudes towards teaching, learning and the whole educational processes and systems. Charles (as cited in Asare & Adzrolo, 2013) encourages head teachers to have dialogue with their students both formally and informally. Dialogue could motivate learners to behave better because they feel that the head teacher is concerned about them.

On the same issue, Kolaci (2014) says that without proper interactions and appropriate use of channels of communication, an organization can only be a confused gathering of people and machines. The leader, the group and the situations influence one another. Conversely, a style of leadership that informs people what to do without seeking their opinions is considered autocratic and the outcome is anarchy and chaos.

The Teachers Service Commission (2002) mandates the secondary school principals to allow open air discussions in schools, hold formal meetings or install suggestion boxes to allow staff and students to 'let off steam' from the strain and stress of the educational process. According to Bell (as cited in Law, 2000), communication in a school set-up entails formal and informal interactions among the staff, students, parents and others involved in the school community.

The Role of School Culture and Effective Disciplinary Practices

A school is an institution where formal and organized learning takes place according to prescribed syllabi. Being a social institution, every school has a unique culture. Every school has a distinguishing motto, uniform, logo, colours and identity. Every school also has a unique history and traditions. A school is identified as a learning entity first by its name. This name is clearly designed and its location is clearly demarcated and explained. All these aspects of a school give teachers, students and other stakeholders a sense of unity of purpose, community and identity. This expression is important in enhancing a school culture. All must work hard to maintain and improve the culture of a school. If a school culture is broken a school will be tantamount to collapse.

The history, traditions and culture of a school set the tone for students' discipline. Wallace (as cited in Balzer, 1999) has formulated a model of the psychology of culture change that is considerably more complex. The scholar argues that when the equilibrium of a socio-cultural system is disrupted by forces internal or external to it, it becomes unable to meet the needs of parts, including their needs for orderliness and predictability in their social life. They become disillusioned and discontented which leads to an increase in deviant individual behaviour, crime and mental disorder, which are soon followed by institutionalized floating of conventions by groups of people seeking comfort in alcohol, violence, illicit sexual and economic practices, as social trust and security deteriorate further.

The culture of a school contributes to student discipline. The new members in a school adopt and fit into the culture of the school through various interactions and processes. School members also determine the culture of their institution. It is the responsibility of the school administration, principal, teachers and students to determine the type of culture to exhibit. New staff members and students are also inducted into the existing culture. Duke (as cited in Akomolafe, 2012) says that highly performing schools are characterized by commitment to appropriate student behaviour and set clear behaviour expectations for students. In such

schools, rules, sanctions and procedures are discussed, debated and frequently formalized into school discipline and classroom management plans (ibid.). The climate in such institutions reveals concern for students as individuals which manifests itself in a variety of ways, including efforts to involve students in school decision-making and de-emphasis on homogenous group (ibid.).

On the other hand, schools with bad cultures are characterized by ineffective disciplinary practices. These include vague or unenforceable rules, teachers ignoring student misconduct, ambiguous or inconsistent teacher responses to misbehaviour, punishment that is excessive or that is delivered without the express intention or encouragement to reform student behaviour, corporal punishment, among others. According to Docking (1982), there are many uncertainties with the use of corporal punishment in correcting student misbehaviour. The results of corporal punishment are unpredictable; even where it is successful in inhibiting inappropriate behaviour, it still does not foster appropriate behaviour. In most cases, corporal punishment creates resentment and hostility thus destroying working relationships in school (ibid.). Docking (1982) further reiterates that corporal punishment has also been related to undesirable outcomes such as increased vandalism and dropping out.

Sullivan, Johnson, Owens and Conway (2014), citing Slee (1995), posit that suspension as a means to reforming student behaviour does not help the student because the school staff simply get rid of the troublesome students rather than changing the school environment in such a way as to prevent or reduce discipline problems. Schools are places where it expected students will learn to live in unity and harmony. The Teachers Service Commission (2002) posits that indiscipline arises where idleness is rampant and teachers show little interest in students' academic welfare. Discipline as part of educational and life training must be carried out in the context of love, respect and acceptance.

Statement of the Problem

It has been observed that over the last few years, there have been numerous indiscipline cases registered among students in Kenya's public secondary schools. A number of researches have been conducted and commissions set to try and unravel the root causes of and propose concrete solutions to these problems. The most extreme cases of indiscipline ever registered in Kenya is the murder of fellow students, especially by torching of school property. This happened, for example, in July 1991 at St. Kizito Mixed Secondary School in Meru when male students invaded the dormitories of and raped their female counterparts. A number of the boys were injured and some girls died as a result. In a similar case, four prefects in Nyeri High School died at the hands of student arsonists (*Sunday Nation,* 1999, May 25, p. 1-2). In March 1998, twenty-six girls in Bombolulu Girls' High School were also burnt to death. Moreover, in 2001, fifty-one Kyanguli High School students perished in an arson attack by fellow students.

The issue of student indiscipline in Kenya, therefore, remains a current issue for ongoing studies. For instance, in June 2007, three high schools were all closed down in separate riots and damage of school property by students (Amadala, Muchiri & Munene, 2007). Similar scenarios of students going on rampage and destroying property or even maiming and killing fellow students have persisted to date in Kenya. Therefore, the study was designed to investigate how schools could come up with effective discipline cultures. The study tried to understand the root causes, the approaches taken by various education stakeholders in tackling indiscipline cases in selected public secondary schools in Thika District.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed a survey research design targeting a population of 144 secondary schools of which 120 were public and 24 were private schools. The total number of students enrolled in these schools was 32,030. Of these, 16,302 were boys and 15,628 were girls. The study also targeted 1,753 teachers from the 144 schools. Of these teachers, 923 were male and 830 were female. All the 144 principals were also targeted by the study. The author purposely selected 6 public secondary schools. Data for the study was collected using questionnaires administered to principals, teachers and students and the collected data was analysed descriptively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cases of Indiscipline

The study sought to establish the types of indiscipline cases that are common among students in the selected secondary schools. A total of 109 teachers responded to this item. The responses of teachers to this item were as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Teachers' Responses on Cases of Indiscipline

Cases of Indiscipline	Frequency	%
Failure to do homework	30	27.5
Noise making	14	12.8
Poor response to bells	13	11.9
Stealing from colleagues	11	10.1
Rudeness towards teachers	11	10.1
Poor grooming	11	10.1
Disobeying schools rules	5	4.6
Sneaking and bullying	4	3.7
Failure to do assignments	4	3.7
Drug abuse, e.g. Alcohol, bhang	4	3.7
Feigning sickness	2	1.8
Total	**109**	**100.0**

The results in the table above show that a majority, 30(26.8%), of the teachers identified failure to do homework as the most common case of indiscipline. Other cases of indiscipline identified included noise making, 14(12.8%), poor response to bells, 13(11.9%), stealing from colleagues, 11(10.1%), rudeness towards teachers, 11(10.1%), poor grooming, 11(10.1%), disobeying school rules, 5(4.6%), sneaking and bullying, 4(3.7%), failure to do assignments, 4(3.7%), drug abuse, 4(3.7%) and feigning sickness, 2(1.8%). The teachers' responses generally indicated that all types of indiscipline cases had occurred in their schools. Most teachers indicated that at least all of their students had been involved in one form of indiscipline or another.

The study also sought students' views on the types of indiscipline cases that were common in their schools. A total of 98 students responded to this item. Their responses were as presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Students' Views on Cases of Indiscipline

Cases of Indiscipline	Frequency	%
Noise making	40	40.8
Drug abuse/missing classes	31	31.6
Sneaking, not doing assignments, bullying	25	25.5
Rudeness, possessing electronic devices	22	22.4
Homosexuality/lesbianism	11	11.2
Total	**98**	**100.0**

From the findings in the table above, according to students, noise making was the most common form of indiscipline, 40(40.8%), followed by drug abuse or missing classes, 31(31.6%), sneaking, not doing assignments and bullying, 25(25.5%), rudeness, being in possession of forbidden electronics like radios and mobile phones, 22(22.4%), and homosexuality or lesbianism, 11(11.2%). The prevalence of noise making shows that students have low concentration levels. Drug abuse is associated with missing classes because students who abuse drugs may not have the time to stay in class, nay even in school, as they have to go seeking the drugs or money to purchase the drugs.

The school principals were also asked to indicate the types of indiscipline cases they had witnessed in their schools. Twenty-three principals responded to this item. Their responses were as indicated in the table below.

Table 3: Principals' Views on Cases of Indiscipline in their Schools

Cases of Indiscipline	Frequency	%
Noise making	6	26.1
Lateness	6	26.1
Stealing of other students' items	4	17.4
Failure to complete assignments	4	17.4
Defiance	3	13.0
Total	**23**	**100.0**

As indicated in the table above, most of the head teachers identified noise making, 6(26.1%), and lateness, 6(26.1%), as the most common forms of indiscipline in their schools. Other forms of indiscipline mentioned by the principals include stealing, 4(17.4%), failure to complete assignments, 4(17.4%), and defiance, 3(13.0%).

Ways of Handling Indiscipline

The teachers were asked to indicate ways in which they handled indiscipline cases whenever they occurred. A total of 102 teachers responded to this item. Their responses were as shown in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Teachers' Views on Handling Indiscipline Cases

Technique	Frequency	%
Guidance and counselling	32	31.4
Punishment	37	36.3
Expulsion/suspension	9	8.8
Inviting the parents to school	9	8.8
Supervising them to complete work	6	5.9
Report to administration	4	3.9
Close monitoring	2	2.0
Isolate and ignore students	1	1.0
Peer counselling	1	1.0
Finding the cause for the problem	1	1.0
Total	**102**	**100.0**

The research results in Table 4 above show that teachers used different ways to tackle indiscipline cases in their schools. Most, 37(36.3%), of the teachers used punishment while a good number, 32(31.4%), of the teachers emphasized the use of guidance and counselling strategies. Other techniques used included expulsion of students from school, 9(8.8%), inviting parents to school to discuss the student's behaviour, 9(8.8%), closely supervising those who fail to complete assignments, 6(5.9%), reporting undisciplined students to the school administration, 4(3.9), closely monitoring student behaviour, 2(2.0%), isolating and ignoring unruly students, 1(1.0%), using peer counselling groups, 1(1.0%) and trying to find the root cause of student indiscipline, 1(10%).

Methods of Handling Suspended Students

Whenever students become too unruly to concentrate in their students, it is the practice in Kenya's educational system to suspend or expel such students if no other recourse is available. Expulsion is the ultimate punishment followed by suspension. Suspension usually lasts two weeks and the suspended student is normally asked to report back to school accompanied by the parents. Based on this, the study sought views from teachers on how they dealt with students who have been identified for suspension. A total of 48 teachers responded to this item. The results were as shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Methods of Handling Students deemed fit for Suspension

Technique	Frequency	%
Parent/teacher counselling	17	35.4
Punishment	13	27.1
Involvement of the deputy principal/disciplinary master	8	16.7
Principal decides what to do	7	14.6
Suspension	2	4.2
Buying chain link	1	2.1
Total	48	100.0

The findings in Table 5 above show that most, 17(35.4%), of the teachers frequently used parent/teacher counselling as a way of handling students being suspended. This meant that if a student was deemed fit for suspension, they were asked to go home and bring the parent to school and then the teachers sit down to address the issue in question. A number of teachers,

13(27.1%), said they used punishment to deal with suspended students. This punishment usually takes the form of caning or subjecting a student to manual labour within the school compound. Other methods that teachers used to deal with suspension-worthy students included involving the deputy principal or the disciplinary master/mistress, 8(16.7%), leaving the decision to the school principal, 7(14.6%), going through with the suspension, 2(4.2%), and asking the student to purchase a new chain link, especially for those who sneak out of school through the school fence, 1(2.1%).

The students were asked to give what they considered as the best practical approaches to dealing with indiscipline cases in their schools. A total of 130 students responded to this item. Their responses were as presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Students' Practical Suggestions for Improving Student Discipline

Approach	Frequency	%
Punishment	40	30.1
Guidance and counselling	18	13.8
Suspension	18	13.8
Giving students listening ear	10	7.7
Obedience to school rules	10	7.7
Stop favouritism, especially among students	8	6.2
Involvement of parents	6	4.6
Roll-calls and check up	5	3.8
Reward disciplined students	4	3.1
Some teachers should avoid being sentimental	3	2.3
Students be given talks	3	2.3
Involve students in decisions	2	1.5
Enhance good communication	2	1.5
Teaching moral values to students	1	0.7
Total	**130**	**100.0**

It is clear from the research results in the table above that according to most, 40(30.1%), of the students punishment should be meted out on those who exhibit unruly behaviour in school. This shows that students believe in punishment as a proper response to indiscipline. In addition, an equal number of students, 18(13.8%) in each case, identified guidance and counselling and suspension as appropriate approaches to mitigating student indiscipline in their schools. Usually, students who are suspended are subjected to guidance and counselling programmes to reinforce their reform. This may explain why the same numbers of students identified these two approaches as the best ways to tackle students' unruly behaviour.

Other approaches identified by students to tackle indiscipline in school included giving students a listening ear, 10(7.7%), reinforcing obedience to school rules, 10(7.7%), eradicating bias treatment of some students as opposed to others, especially by school prefects, 8(6.2%), involving parents in issues on students' behaviour, 6(4.6%), and taking regular roll-calls and check up of students, 5(3.8%). Students also felt that sometimes learners misbehaved because teachers were too sentimental or soft on them. Some, 3(2.3%), learners, therefore, suggested that teachers should avoid being sympathetic to undisciplined students. A similar number, 3(2.3%), of students also felt that the best way to deal with undisciplined students is by talking to them about their issues. Other students felt that involving learners in decision-making, 2(1.5%), improving communication among the various stakeholders within the school

environment, 2(1.5%), and teaching moral values to students, 1(0.7%) could help improve student discipline in their schools.

Channels of Communication

Good channels of communication in schools help enhance a discipline culture among both students and staff. The students were asked to indicate the channels of communication found in their schools that could help them express their dissatisfaction or grievances in school and help them avoid undisciplined behaviour. Their views were as presented in the table below.

Table 7: Channels of Communication available to Students in School

Channels	Yes F (N=639)	%	No F (N=174)	%
Assembly	190	29.7	2	1.1
Newsletters	175	27.3	8	4.6
Notice boards	100	15.5	18	10.3
Suggestion boxes	98	15.3	20	11.5
Barazas	70	11.0	110	63.2
Telephone	6	0.9	16	9.2
Total	**639**	**100.0**	**174**	**100**

From the results in the table above, a total of 639 students affirmed that channels of communication were available in school whole 174 disagreed. As shown in the table, all channels of communication were at least used to enhance a discipline culture in schools. Most, 190(29.7%), of the students observed that school assemblies were the most commonly used channel of communication in their school. Other channels of communication identified by students include newspapers, 175(27.3%), notice boards, 100(15.5%), suggestion boxes, 98(15.3%), *barazas*, 70(11.0%) and the telephone, 6(0.9%). Effective use of available channels of communication can greatly enhance discipline in schools.

The head teachers were also suggest ways to deal with indiscipline in their schools. In total, 18 of the head teachers responded to this item. Out of these, 6(33.3%) of the head teachers indentified guidance and counselling, another 6(33.3%) suggested involving parents in issues pertaining to student behaviour and another 6(33.3%) proposed subjecting undisciplined students to punishment.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings, it is clear that schools in Thika District of Kenya are affected by different forms of student indiscipline. The common cases of indiscipline are: noise making, bullying, fighting, failing to complete assignments, drug abuse, sexual deviance, sneaking out of school, stealing other students' property and general defiance of school authority and rules.

The principals, teachers and students all believe that indiscipline in school can be eradicated. According to them, schools can instil a discipline culture on students through guidance and counselling, involvement of parents in dealing with issues of student behaviour, teachers closely supervising assignments and helping learners to complete difficult tasks, strengthening of peer counselling and meting out punishment against unruly students. There is also a need to

effectively use available means of communication in schools. Students should be encouraged to express themselves through the proper channels rather than resorting to indiscipline.

This paper recommends the need to strengthen guidance and counselling in Kenya's public secondary schools to stem out the problem of student indiscipline. In addition, the curriculum should be reviewed to include the teaching of moral values in schools as an independent subject. Schools should also develop clear reward and punishment systems for students' behaviour to encourage students to make choices to stay disciplined.

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