

Influence of Student Council Decision-Making Skills on the Management of Discipline in Secondary Schools in Mbeere South Sub-County, Embu County, Kenya

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Accepted 24 October 2023

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the study is to examine the influence of student council's decision-making skills on discipline management in secondary schools in Kenya. The study adopted correlational research design. The number of the study's target population was 848 comprising deputy principals and student council leaders from 53 public secondary schools. Stratified and purposive sampling was used to select a sample of 272 respondents. Data were collected using questionnaires, which were piloted in four secondary schools selected purposively in Mbeere North Sub-County. The study establishes that: most schools train their student council leaders to acquire decision-making skills and also involve them in the decision-making process in their schools; involving leaders of student council in the decision-making process in their schools influences discipline management; the frequency at which school administration involves the leaders of student council in the decision-making process is low; majority of the student council leaders lack decision-making skills; and the decision-making skills of the leaders of student council significantly influence discipline management. The study recommends that: The Ministry of Education (MoE) should instruct all school boards of management to allocate some portion of their annual budget for the training and welfare of student council leaders, and school administrations should develop performance appraisal system for student council leaders, which would give them an opportunity to undertake self-evaluation and identify their gaps in leadership. The findings will be significant to school principals, teachers, student council leaders and educational policy makers to formulate strategies for managing students' discipline. The findings also provide literature on the management of students' discipline in secondary schools in Kenya.

Keywords: leadership skills, management of discipline, decision-making skills, student discipline, student council, discipline

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INTRODUCTION

Education is recognized worldwide as a fundamental human right. Achieving the educational goals of an institution might be influenced by disciplining the people in it. According to Grossnickle and Sesko (1990, as cited in Mwaura and Thinguri, 2015), discipline is a process of teaching the human mind and developing personality in an individual to enable him/her make right decisions in a practical manner, and live peacefully with members of the society. Discipline is regarded as a significant part of human behavior and its absence in an institution can hinder it from accomplishing its goals (Ouma et al., 2013,

as cited in Simba et al., 2016). In a school setting, a learner is considered to be disciplined if his/her behavior, actions and inactions are in accordance with the set rules and regulations of the school. Discipline is generally known to be important to create a conducive school environment favorable to sound academic performance. Indiscipline simply means lack of discipline. According to Ali et al. (2014, as cited in Simba et al., 2016), in a school, indiscipline is any form of misconduct which a learner shows in some ways, such as destruction of school property, disobedience, poor attitude towards

learning, immoral behavior and drug abuse. To curb indiscipline, it is necessary to manage discipline of persons in a school as a strategy.

Management of discipline is generally known as the implementation of actions to ensure compliance to organizational standards by a team of persons. It involves the act of preventing and suppressing undesirable behaviors as well as promoting and sustaining appropriate behaviors. According to Gaustard (2005, as cited in Kagoiya et al., 2017), the aim of management of students' discipline is to maintain or ensure the safety of staff and students as well as to foster a favorable learning environment, for achieving educational goals. Institutions of learning usually have challenges in managing learners' discipline, which has eventually made them unable to attain their aspired objectives. For instance, burning of physical facilities may lead to loss of life and property, and interruption of teaching and learning programs. These in turn would negatively affect academic achievements.

According to Leithwood et al. (2004, as cited in Muthui et al., 2018), student leadership is the exercise of authority by a small group of students over all other students in an institution. This is done by setting of objectives, providing guidance, influencing and inspiring the other students to achieve predetermined objectives for the good of the whole school. Leadership skills are the tools, behaviors and capabilities that an individual requires to be effective in leading and inspiring others. According to Nyaga (2018), the leaders of student council require the following leadership skills to enhance their competence: peer mentoring and counseling, decision-making, effective communication, problem-solving, time management, setting and strategizing to achieve goals, team management, mediation, negotiation, creative and critical thinking skills for effective performance of duties. These leadership competence skills are acquired through training and practice. Student council leaders are expected to have decision-making skills for them to function optimally in managing students' discipline in Kenyan secondary schools. Previous studies failed to address sufficiently leadership skills that student council leaders need to effectively control students' behaviour in secondary schools. This study seeks to fill this gap by establishing how decision-making skills impact the management of students' discipline.

Objective of the study

The objective of this work is to examine the influence of student council's decision-making skills on the management of discipline in public secondary schools in Mbeere South Sub-County, Embu County, Kenya.

Hypothesis of the Study

Student council's decision-making skills do not significantly influence the management of discipline in

public secondary schools in Mbeere South Sub- County, Embu County, Kenya.

Limitations of the Study

The data of the study were collected from deputy principals and student council leaders in only public secondary schools, without involving private secondary schools. Further, other potential respondents, such as students, teachers, non-teaching staff, parents, and members of the Board of Management (BOM), who probably could have contributed significantly to the study findings, were not involved in the study. The study used questionnaires as tools for data collection due to limited resources, such as time and finances. The researcher could not collect verbal and non-verbal information that could have been easily accessed using interview schedules to enrich the study's findings. The researcher mitigated this by developing detailed questionnaires that met reasonable levels of validity and reliability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Decision-making is the process of drawing a conclusion after identifying a choice, collecting information, and evaluating possible opinions. In a school, inputs of students should be sought to ensure the decisions made by student council leaders are a reflection of the students' views and interests. To achieve this, student council leaders need to be equipped with decision-making skills. In Malaysia, Abdullah and Rahman (2020) carried out a study that revealed decision making-skills had significant relationship and were highly correlated with students' behavior management ($R=0.758$).

According to Muindi (2012), schools in Kenya have handled cases of students' unrest and discipline issues that have been associated to non- participatory approach to decision-making. For instance, in March 2001, some students in a school in Machakos County set a dormitory on fire, which resulted in the death of 58 students with several others sustaining severe injuries. After carrying out investigations on the incident, some allegations that led to it were: provision of low-quality food, administration's demand for unpaid school fees and cancelation of KCSE results by the MoE. The researcher aims to establish whether involving students in the decision-making processes and equipping student council leaders with decision-making skills would mitigate such incidences in schools in Kenya.

According to Kamau (2017), the main task of leaders of student council is to make sure that the rules and regulations of their school are adhered to. Kilonzo (2017) conducted a study that examined the involvement of leaders of student council in formulating and enforcing school rules and regulations. The result showed that it had positive impact on students' discipline. Children in Scotland and University of Edinburgh (2010, as cited in

Nekesa, 2018) noted that student council enhances discussion of important concerns regarding school management and students' well-being. According to Baker (2007, as cited in Mukiri, 2014), the participation of council leaders in decision-making process helps to develop leadership skills in leaders. This would make the leaders to make quality decisions that guarantee peaceful administration of the school. Sergiovanni (1995, as cited in Mukiti, 2014) observes that engaging students in the decision-making process in their school through student council leaders makes them feel their school belong to them and can thus do everything to promote and sustain their school's reputation

Aukot (2017) carried out a study in which students were not commonly involved in making decisions concerning their welfare issues, which negatively affected the behavior of the students. On the other hand, in the school where students were engaged, students' behavior was positively impacted. Kagendo (2018) conducted a study which deduced that involving students in making decisions about academic programmes in schools, students' discipline management, and students' affairs has positive effect on the behavior of the students. Kimotho (2012) conducted a study that revealed that involving leaders of student councils in making decisions about students' welfare instills a sense of responsibility in them and helps to prevent cases of indiscipline. Akech et al. (2022) revealed in their study that there is inadequate participation of students in formulating school rules and regulations. The formulated rules and regulations were explained to the students as well as the consequences of disobeying them.

Students have high confidence to do any school tasks if they are involved in the decision-making process in their school. While being interviewed by the Standard Newspaper, the principal of a secondary school in Embu County said: "for students to be disciplined in school, students, teachers, and parents should be involved in the decision-making process in school." The principal reported that in his school, views of the learners are considered whenever decisions are made. The principal noted an instance in his school where suggestions of his students were sought before their school bus was bought. The students unanimously supported the idea and the bus was finally bought. The principal admitted that students appreciate it when they are involved in the decision-making process and involving them makes them to own or be responsible for the decisions they make (Mukiti, 2014). The study sought to determine whether the leaders of the student councils are well equipped with decision-making skills, and if the skills can effectively be used to manage learners' behavior or instill discipline in them.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on system theory. Student council is a subsystem of the whole system of a school. The

decisions made by student council leaders may have effects on the other subsystems of the school, such as teachers, non-teaching staff and parents. This would ultimately affect the entire school system.

Research Design

The study adopted correlational research design to determine the influence of student council's decision-making skills on the management of students' discipline.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedures

Both probability and non probability sampling techniques were used in the study. The deputy principals were purposely sampled since majority of the sampled schools had only one deputy principal. Student council leaders were proportionately and randomly sampled, such that schools which had large populations of student council leaders gave more respondents. The sample size was obtained using Yamane finite sampling formula as follows:

Yamane formula $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$ applicable for a finite population, where n = sample size, N = Population and e = error (0.05) was used to determine the sample size. The study used a sample size of 272.

$$n = \frac{848}{1+848(.05)^2} = 272$$

Research Instruments

The study used semi-structured questionnaires to collect data from the respondents. The questionnaires for both the student council leaders and deputy principals had three sections namely: information on Bio Data, management of discipline, and decision-making skills. The followings are some of the questions the respondents were asked on decision making: Are student council leaders trained in decision-making skills? Are student council leaders involved in the decision-making process in your school and if yes how often? In your own opinion, does involvement of student council leaders in the decision-making process influence discipline management in your school, and if yes in which way? Do the student council leaders show competence in decision making skills in your school? To what extent do student council leaders apply decision-making skills in the management of discipline in your school?

Data Analysis

The data were coded, and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26 program. Simple linear regression was used to test the

null hypothesis.

Ethical Considerations

The respondents' privacy and confidentiality were preserved by keeping the information provided confidential. The respondents were urged to participate voluntarily and were told that the data were being gathered purely for academic purposes. Participants' free and informed consent served as the foundation for the study. All respondents were promised this and given an explanation. The use of numbers during data collection protected the use of individual names. Anonymity was achieved by withholding the identities of each school's respondents. The concept of voluntary consent was also applied by the researcher while asking the respondents to fill the questionnaires. Sensitive matters like disregarding Ministry of Education (MoE)'s directives, such as not having functional student councils were treated confidentially. This was done to prevent any potential conflict of interest or fears of victimization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results showed that 177 leaders of the student council (82.3%) agreed that they are trained to have decision-making skills, while 38 of them (17.7%) disagreed. Eight student council leaders did not respond to the statement. Thirteen deputy principals (59.1%) agreed with the statement, while nine of them (40.9%) disagreed. The results suggest that most of the schools train their student council leaders to have decision-making skills. The results also indicate that 163 leaders of the student council (76.2%) agreed that they are involved in the decision-making process in their school, while 51 of them (23.8%) disagreed. Nine of them did not respond to the statement. Fourteen deputy principals (63.6%) agreed with the statement, while eight of them (36.4%) disagreed. The findings suggest that a considerable percentage of the study schools involve the leaders of student councils in the decision-making process in their schools. The results show that 168 leaders of the student council (78.5%) agreed that involving them in the decision-making process influences discipline management, while 46 of them (21.5%) disagreed. Nine of them did not respond to the statement. Seventeen deputy principals (77.3%) agreed with the statement, while five of them (22.7%) disagreed. The results indicate that a reasonable proportion of the respondents agreed that involving the leaders of student council in the decision-making process in their schools influences the management of discipline. Training student council leaders to have decision-making skills enable them to make decisions effectively, which consequently improves the management of discipline. The results also showed the extent to which the leaders of student council are involved in the decision-making

process in their schools: 26 respondents (13%) said always; thirty-five of them (17%) said often; 97 of them (48%) said sometimes; 27 of them (14%) said rarely, while 15 of them (8%) said never. The results indicate that 70% of the respondents are not certain of whether the student council leaders are involved in the decision-making process in their schools. This shows that there is a gap that should be filled by increasing the frequency of incorporating leaders of the student council in the decision-making process in order to better manage discipline in schools.

The results indicated that 95.5% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that timely decision-making by student council leaders enhances management of discipline. A mean of 4.34, which is within the range of strongly agree in the key provided, supports the observation. This indicates that timely decision-making is an effective skill that positively impacts management of discipline. The results indicate that 93.3% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the ability of student council leaders to objectively make decisions enhances discipline management. A mean of 4.23, which is within the interval of strongly agree as per the key given, reinforces the observation. This suggests that objectivity in making decisions is an important skill which promotes discipline management. The results show that 93.3% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that if leaders of student councils seek the views of students, teachers and school administration, it can lead to them making quality decisions, for the enhancement of discipline management. A mean of 4.43, which is within the range of strongly agree in the key given, supports the opinion. This indicates that making consultations before arriving at the final decision is a critical skill in managing discipline. The results indicate that 80.2% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the ability of the student council leaders to allow consensus in decision-making enhances discipline management. A mean of 4.03, which is within the interval of agree in the key provided, strengthens the opinion. This suggests that the ability to allow consensus in decision-making is a relatively significant skill in managing discipline. The results show that 80.7% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that the ability of leaders of student councils to own their decisions promotes discipline management. A mean of 4.03, which is within the range of agree in the key given, supports the observation. This suggests that the ability of leaders to own the decisions they make is an important decision-making skill in managing discipline. An average mean of 4.212 for the skills considered implies that the respondents strongly agreed that student council's decision-making skills influence management of discipline.

The results illustrated that 82.5% of the respondents agreed either to great extent or very great extent that timely decision-making by leaders of student council

helps in time management. This suggests that a very large percentage of the leaders of student council use timely decision-making strategy to enhance time management. The results indicate that 85.2% of the respondents concurred either to great extent or very great extent that students adhere to school rules and regulations when decisions are objectively made. This suggests that a large proportion of leaders of the student council apply objectivity in decision-making as a strategy to promote students' adherence to school rules and regulations. The results show that 90.6% of the respondents agreed either to great extent or very great extent that student council leaders seeking inputs from students, teachers and school administration before making the final decision helps in the management of conflicts. This indicates that an extremely large proportion of the student council leaders use collaborative decision-making to manage conflicts among students. The results indicate that 86.1% of the respondents concurred either to great extent or very great extent that the ability to allow consensus in decision-making ensures there is efficiency in making decisions. This shows that a large percentage of the student council leaders do allow consensus in decision-making as a technique to promote efficiency in decision-making. The results indicate that 80.3% of the respondents agreed either to great extent or very great extent that the ability of the student council's leaders to own and take responsibility for their decisions enhances conflict management. This shows that a great proportion of the student council leaders own and take responsibility for their decisions as a strategy to manage conflicts. The findings revealed that 45.5% of the respondents agreed to great extent that student council leaders show competence in timely decision-making. This suggests that most of the student council leaders do not show competence in timely decision-making. The results indicate that 50.0% of the respondents concurred to great extent that student council leaders show competence in objective decision-making, which promotes students' adherence to school rules and regulations. This suggest that the leaders of student council make objective decisions averagely in school. The results show that 45.5% of the respondents concurred either to great extent or very great extent that the student council leaders portray competence in collaborative decision-making, which improves the quality of decisions made and assists in conflict management. This suggests that majority of the student' council leaders do not display competence in collaborative decision-making. The results indicate that 45.5% of the respondents agreed to a great extent that student council leaders do not allow consensus in decision-making. This indicates that most of the student council leaders do not allow consensus in decision-making. The results show that 50.0% of the respondents agreed either to a great extent or very great extent that leaders of student council portray competence in owning

and taking responsibility for the decisions they make, which improves conflict management. This suggests that the practice of owning decisions and taking responsibility for decisions made is displayed at an average level by the leaders of student council. The overall observation is that the leaders of the student council need to be trained to acquire decision-making skills.

Testing the Null Hypothesis

The null hypothesis (H_0), which stated that student council's decision-making skills do not significantly influence discipline management in public secondary schools in Mbeere South Sub- County, Embu County, Kenya, was tested at 0.05 significance level. The simple linear regression model provided that R was 0.653. This indicates a strong correlation between decision-making skills and students' discipline management. The model regression coefficients. Provided a Sig. value is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This gives strong evidence against the null hypothesis, which implies that decision-making skills have a significant influence on the management of discipline. The t-value of 12.832, which is greater than the critical t-value of 2.0, also suggests a rejection of the null hypothesis. This further confirms that decision-making skills have significant influence on discipline management. The value of coefficient B is 0.675, which means that one percent increase in decision-making skills would increase management of students' discipline by 67.5%. The regression equation used to estimate the prediction of discipline management by decision-making skills is as follows:

$$Y = AX + D$$

Where Y= management of discipline, A= 0.675
X = decision making skills, D = 1.362

Thus, the regression equation is $Y = 0.675 * X + 1.362$

SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Most schools in Mbeere South Sub-County train their student council leaders to acquire decision-making skills and involve them in the decision-making process. Involving student council leaders in the decision-making process in their schools influences discipline management. The frequency at which school administration involves student council leaders in decision-making process is low. Majority of student council leaders lack competence in decision-making skills, suggesting they need training. There is a strong correlation between decision-making skills and management of students' discipline. Decision-making skills, timely decision-making, objective decision-making, not allowing consensus in decision-making, and

ownership of decisions made by student council leaders significantly influence discipline management.

CONCLUSION

Student council leaders need to be trained to acquire decision-making skills as a way to empower them to manage students' discipline. The leaders of student council are not adequately involved in the decision-making process on matters that affect the welfare of the students, which is a way of managing discipline. There is a strong correlation between decision-making skills and management of students' discipline. Student council leaders' decision-making skills influence students' discipline management in public secondary schools in Mbeere South Sub County, Embu County, Kenya.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study made the following recommendations:

- i) The Ministry of Education should instruct all school boards of management to allocate some portion of their annual budget for the training and welfare of student council leaders.
- ii) Quality Assurance and Standards Officers (QASOs) should be involved in monitoring and evaluating the activities of student council leaders.
- iii) The school administrations should develop performance appraisal system for student council leaders, which will give them an opportunity to undertake self-evaluation and identify their gaps in leadership.

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