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Influence of students' council decision-making skills on management of discipline in Secondary Schools in Mbeere South sub-county, Embu County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to establish the influence of students' council decision-making skills on management of students' discipline. The study adopted correlational research design. The target population was 848 comprising deputy principals and students council leaders from 53 public secondary schools. Stratified and purposive sampling were used to select a sample of 272 respondents. Data was collected using questionnaires and were piloted in four secondary schools purposively selected in Mbeere North Sub-County. The reliability of questionnaires was determined using Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient method. The researcher ascertained validity of the questionnaires by presenting them to experts in the Department of Education. Quantitative data gathered was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26. Descriptive data analysis was presented in form of mean, standard deviation, percentage and frequencies. The hypothesis was tested at $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance using linear regression model. The study established that students' council decision-making skills influence management of students' discipline in public secondary schools. The study recommended allocation of funds to students' council activities in schools' annual budget and monitoring of students' council activities by Ministry of Education (MoE). It is hoped that the findings will be significant to school principals, teachers, students' council leaders and educational policy makers in coming up with strategies to manage students' discipline. The findings also provide additional 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

INTRODUCTION

Education is recognized worldwide as fundamental human right. Achievement of goals in education might be influenced by the discipline of the people in a learning institution. According to Grossnickle and Sesko (1990, as cited in Mwaura & Thinguri, 2015) discipline is a process of teaching the mind and developing personality in an individual to enable such a person to make right decisions in a practical manner, living peacefully with members of society. Discipline is regarded as a significant part of human behavior and its absence in an institution hinders operations towards accomplishment of its goals (Ouma et al., 2013, as cited in Simba, Agak, & Kabuka, 2016). In a school setting, a learner is considered disciplined if that learner's behavior, actions and inactions are in accordance with the set school rules and regulations (Ali et al., 2014, as cited in Simba et al., 2016). Discipline is generally acknowledged to be critical in creating a conducive school environment favorable to sound academic performance (Njoroge & Nyabuto, 2014, as cited in Simba et al., 2016). Indiscipline is 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 are actions to enforce compliance to organizational standards by a team of persons. It deals with prevention and suppression of undesirable behaviors as well as promotion and sustenance of appropriate behaviors. According to Gaustard (2005, as cited in Kagoiya et al., 2017) the aim of management of students' discipline is to safeguard the safety of staff and students as well as to foster a favourable learning environment which promotes accomplishment of educational goals. Institutions of learning have continued to face challenges of management of learners' discipline, which has eventually led to failure to attain the aspired objectives. For instance, burning of physical facilities may results to loss of life and property, and interruption of teaching and learning programs, which negatively affects 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 through the setting of objectives, providing guidance, influencing other students, and inspiring others 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) students' council leaders 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 to be effective in performance of duties. These leadership competence skills are acquired through training and practice. The students' council leaders are expected to have the decision-making skills to optimally function in the management of students' discipline in Kenyan secondary schools. Previous studies failed to address sufficiently leadership skills that student's council leaders needs to effectively control student behaviour in secondary school. This study seeks to fill this gap by establishing influence of decision-making skills on management of students' discipline.

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 students' council leaders are a reflection of students' views and interests. To achieve this, students' council leaders require 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 highly correlated with students behaviour 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 that resulted in loss of life of 58 students and several others sustained severe injuries. After investigations some allegations that led to the incident were: provision of low quality food, administration's demand for unpaid school fees and cancelation of KCSE results by the MoE. The researcher was curious to establish whether involving students in decision-making processes and equipping students' council leaders with decision-making skills would mitigate such incidences.

According to Kamau (2017) the main task of leaders of students' councils is to make sure school rules and regulations are adhered to. Kilonzo (2017) conducted a study that established involvement of leaders of students' council in formulating and enforcing school rules and regulations has 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 Baker (2007, as cited in Mukiri, 2014) participation of council leaders in decision-making process enhances development of leadership abilities of the leaders. Consequently, the leaders make quality decisions that guarantees peaceful administration of the school. Sergiovanni (1995, as cited in Mukiti, 2014) observes that students' participation in decision-making process by engaging students' council leaders promotes students feeling of ownership of their school and can do everything to promote and sustain the school's reputation

Aukot (2017) carried out a study that revealed students were not commonly involved in making decisions concerning their welfare issues and where students were engaged there was significant impact on discipline of the students. 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 discipline of students. Kimotho (2012) conducted a study that revealed involving leaders of students' councils in making decisions about students' welfare instil a sense of responsibility in them and helps in preventing cases of indiscipline. Akech, Ngwacho, and Nyatuka (2022) carried out a study that established there was inadequate participation of students in formulating school rules and regulations. The formulated rules and regulations, and the consequences of disobeying were explained to the students.

Students' confidence in all undertakings is promoted by engaging them in decision-making process. The principal of secondary school in Embu County in discussion with the Standard Newspaper said: "for students in a school to be disciplined; students, teachers, and parents should be involved in decision-making." 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 buying the school bus and unanimously students supported the idea and the bus was finally bought. The principal admits that involving learners in making decisions creates a perception of appreciation as well as ownership of decisions made, among the students (Mukiti, 2014). The study sought to determine whether the leaders of the students' councils are well equipped with decision-making skills, and if the skills have effect on managing discipline of the learners.

The objective of the study is to establish the influence of students' council decision-making skills on management of discipline in public secondary schools in Mbeere South Sub-County, Embu County, Kenya.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

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

Sample Size and Sampling Procedures

Stratified random sampling was used to create strata of targeted schools. This is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Type of Schools in Mbeere South Sub - County

Type of school	Number of schools	Sampled schools
Boys boarding	3	2
Girls boarding	5	3
Mixed boarding	15	6
Mixed day	30	7
Total	53	18

The deputy principals were purposely sampled while student council leaders were proportionately and randomly sampled. The information is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2: Sample Size

Description	Population	Sample Size	Sampling Procedure
Deputy Principals	53	22	Purposive
Students council leaders	795	250	Proportionate random sampling
Total	848	272	

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 sample size. The study used a sample size of 272.

$$n = \frac{848}{1+848(0.05)^2} = 272$$

Data Analysis

The data was coded, put through an analysis using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 26 program, and then interpreted to test the null hypothesis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 3 presents the opinions of the respondents on influence of students' council decision-making skills on management of discipline.

Table 3: Opinions on the Influence of Students' Council Decision-Making Skills on Management of Discipline

Decision-making skill	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean	Std Dev.
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)		
Timely decision-making	98 (43.9)	115 (51.6)	3 (1.3)	2 (0.9)	5 (2.2)	4.34	0.760
Objective decision-making	76 (34.1)	132 (59.2)	8 (3.6)	4 (1.8)	3 (1.3)	4.23	0.721
Consultation in decision-making	119 (53.4)	89 (39.9)	8 (3.6)	6 (2.7)	1 (0.4)	4.43	0.731
Not allowing consensus in decision-making	96 (43.0)	83 (37.2)	9 (4.0)	25 (11.2)	10 (4.5)	4.03	1.152
Ownership of decisions made	83 (37.2)	97 (43.5)	18 (8.1)	17 (7.6)	8 (3.6)	4.03	1.041

Average

4.212

Key for mean: 1.00-1.80 strongly disagree (SD), 1.81-2.60 disagree (D), 2.61-3.40 undecided (UD), 3.41-4.20 Agree (A), 4.21-5.00 strongly agree (SA)

The results in Table 3 indicate that 95.5% of the respondents either agree or strongly agree that timely decision-making by students' 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 impact on management of discipline. The results indicate that 93.3% of the respondents either agree or strongly agree that ability of students' council leaders to objectively make decisions enhances management of discipline. 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 agree or strongly agree that seeking views of students, teachers and school administration by leaders of students' councils leads to making quality decisions, which enhances management of discipline. 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 agree or strongly agree that ability of students' council leaders not to allow consensus in decision-making enhances management of discipline. A mean of 4.03 which is within the interval of agree in the key provided strengthens the opinion. This suggests that ability not to allow consensus in decision-making is a relatively significant skill in managing discipline. The results show that 80.7% of the respondents either agree or strongly agree that ability of leaders of students' councils to own their decisions promotes management of discipline. A mean of 4.03 which is in the range of agree in the key given supports the observation. This suggests that 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 respondents strongly agree that student council decision-making skills influence management of discipline.

Table 4 presents opinions of the respondents on the extent of application of decision-making skills by student council leaders in managing discipline in schools.

Table 4: The Extent of Application of Decision-Making Skills in Management of Discipline in Schools

Statement	VGE N (%)	GE N (%)	NE N (%)	SE N (%)	VSE N (%)
Timely decision-making by students' council leaders helps in time management.	102 (45.7)	82 (36.8)	34 (15.2)	1 (0.4)	4 (1.8)
When students' council leaders base decision-making on some set objectives, adherence to school rules and regulations by students gets achieved.	85 (31.8)	119 (53.4)	7 (3.1)	5 (2.2)	7 (3.1)
Seeking of inputs from students, teachers and school administration by students' council leaders before making the final decision helps in management of conflicts.	130 (58.3)	72 (32.3)	14 (6.3)	7 (3.1)	0
Students' council leaders ability not to allow consensus in decision-making ensures quality decisions are made and there is improved time management.	78 (35.0)	114 (51.1)	12 (5.4)	13 (5.8)	6 (2.7)

When students' council leaders take responsibility and owns the decisions they make management of conflicts improves.	86 (38.6)	93 (41.7)	16 (7.2)	18 (8.1)	10 (4.5)
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Key: very great extent – VGE; great extent – GE; no extent – NE; small extent – SE; and very small extent – VSE

The results in Table 4 show that 82.5% of the respondents agree either to great extent or very great extent that timely decision-making by leaders of students' council help in time management. This suggests that a very large percentage of leaders of students' councils use timely decision-making strategy to enhance time management. The results indicate that 85.2% of the respondents concur either to great extent or very great extent that adherence to school rules and regulations by students gets achieved when decisions are objectively made. This suggests that a large proportion of leaders of students' 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 agree either to great extent or very great extent that seeking inputs from students, teachers and school administration by students' council leaders before making the final decision helps in management of conflicts. This indicates that an extremely large proportion of students' council leaders use collaborative decision-making to manage conflicts among students. The results indicate that 86.1% of the respondents concur either to great extent or very great extent that ability not to allow consensus in decision-making ensures there is efficiency in making decisions. This shows that a large percentage of leaders of students' council do not allow consensus in decision-making as a technique to promote efficiency in decision-making. The results indicate that 80.3% of the respondents agree either to great extent or very great extent that ability of leaders of students' councils to own and take responsibility for their decisions enhances conflict management. This shows that a great proportion of students' council leaders own and take responsibility for their decisions as a strategy to manage conflicts.

Table 5 indicate opinions of deputy principals on the extent students' council leaders show competence in decision-making in their schools.

Table 5: Deputy Principals' Opinions on the Extent Students' Council Leaders Show Competence in Decision-Making Skills in their Schools

Decision-making skill	VGE N (%)	GE N (%)	NE N (%)	SE N (%)	VSE N (%)
Making decisions in good time.	0	10 (45.5)	3 (13.6)	7 (31.8)	2 (9.1)
Making decisions objectively.	0	11 (50.0)	0	8 (36.4)	3 (13.6)
Seek input from other people.	2 (9.1)	8 (36.4)	3 (13.6)	8 (36.4)	1 (4.5)
Discourage consensus decision-making.	0	10 (45.5)	2 (9.1)	9 (40.9)	1 (4.5)
Ownership of decisions.	0	11 (50.0)	4 (18.2)	6 (27.3)	1 (4.5)

Key: very great extent – VGE; great extent – GE; no extent – NE; small extent – SE; and very small extent – VSE

The results in Table 5 show that 45.5% of the respondents agree to great extent that timely decision-making by students' council leaders helps in time management. This suggests that most of leaders of students' council do not show competence in timely decision-making. The results indicate that 50.0% of the respondents concur to great extent that students' adherence to school rules and regulations improves when decisions are objectively made. This suggest that there is an average practice of objective decision-making in schools. The results show that 45.5% of the respondents concur either to great extent or very great extent that collaborative decision-making improves quality of decisions made and assists in conflict management. This indicate majority of leaders of students' council do not display competence in collaborative decision-making. The results indicate that 45.5% of the respondents agree to great extent that ability not to allow consensus in decision-making enhances quality of decisions made and time management. This indicate that most of students' council leaders do not show competence in not allowing consensus in decision-making. The results show that 50.0% of the respondents agree either to great extent or very great extent that ability of leaders of students' council to own and take responsibility for their decisions improves conflict management. This suggests that practice of owning decisions and taking responsibility for those decisions is displayed at an average level.

Testing the Null Hypothesis

The null hypothesis (H₀) which stated that students' council decision-making skills do not significantly influence management of discipline in public secondary schools in Mbeere South Sub-County, Embu County, Kenya was tested at 0.05 significance level. The analysis of the findings is shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Model Summary of Decision-Making Skills on Management of Discipline

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	0.653a	0.427	0.424	0.44716	1.998

a. Predictors: (Constant), decision-making skills

The findings in Table 6 show that R is 0.653. This indicates a strong correlation between decision-making skills and management of students' discipline. Table 7 displays the model regression coefficients.

Table 7: Regression Coefficients of Decision-Making Skills on Management of Discipline

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.362	0.224		6.094	0.000
Decision making skills	0.675	0.053	0.653	12.832	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Management of discipline

The results in Table 38 show Sig. value is 0.000 which is less than 0.05. This gives a strong evidence against the null hypothesis which implies that decision-making skills have a significant influence on management of discipline. The regression equation to estimate prediction of management of discipline 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 $Y = 0.675 * X + 1.362$

Majority student council leaders apply decision-making skills in management of discipline in Schools. Most student council leaders show a gap in competence in decision-making skills in their Schools which suggest a training need. The null hypothesis that stated students' council decision-making skills do not significantly influence management of discipline in public secondary schools in Mbeere South Sub-County, Embu County, Kenya, was tested at 0.05 significance level and the regression results revealed a considerable influence.

CONCLUSION

There is need to conduct regular training of student council leaders in decision-making skills as a way to empower them to manage students' discipline. Student council leaders decision-making skills influence management of students' discipline in public secondary schools in Mbeere South Sub County.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study made the following recommendations:

- i) The Ministry of Education should instruct all school boards of management to allocate some funds in the annual budget to cater for training and welfare of students' council leaders.
- ii) The Ministry of Education should develop policy guidelines to assist Quality Assurance and Standards Officer (QASO) in monitoring the activities of students' council leaders.

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