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Effects of Principals' Leadership Styles on Students' Discipline in Public Secondary Schools in Nyeri Central Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract:
The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect the principals' leadership style had on students discipline in secondary schools in Nyeri central sub-county. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The target population was 16 school principals, 304 teachers and 1530 form three students from the public secondary schools in the sub-county. A simple stratified sampling technique was used to sample 10 schools out of the total 16 schools. All principals of 10 schools selected using purposive sampling were interviewed. A sample of 153 students was selected using a simple random technique from the selected schools and also 52 teachers. The researcher collected data from the principals using interview method while those from teachers and students were collected using questionnaires. A pilot study was carried out prior to main study in order to test the reliability and validity of the instruments. The crucial study findings were that discipline issues existed in schools and the most common were noise making, assignment incompletion and drug abuse. Also key in the findings was that most principals in the sub-county employed autocratic leadership style and totally disregarded other forms of leadership styles like democratic and transformational. The drawn conclusion was that autocratic leadership style had a negative effect on students' discipline management and could therefore be attributed to many discipline cases in schools. The study recommendations were that over reliance of the autocratic leadership style by principals in the sub-county should be avoided, guidance and counseling department should be strengthened and be actively involved in handling discipline issues in schools.

Keywords: Public secondary schools, leadership styles, students' discipline

1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the Study

There are several challenges that hinder the attainment of noble intentions the governments have in promoting education. Social, political and economic factors usually affect the provision of quality education. However there are institutional challenges that lead to disruption of school programmes affecting learning. The most common and rampant of the institutional challenges is students' discipline (Bosire&Kiumi, 2010). Chapman (2003) explains that the school principal is viewed as the primary decision maker, facilitator, problem solver or agent of social change. Coplan(2003) explains that management is one of major factors and sometimes the only factor that will determine whether an educational organization succeeds or fails. The success of an organization depends on the quality of its leadership (Huczynski, 2001). Huczynski observes that the school principal is the most influential individual in an education institution and that the good leadership is the key in holding efficient management together.

Shishila (2004) suggests that it is the duty of the head teacher to ensure discipline in school is maintained at all times in order to achieve its targeted goals. Betts (2000) identifies three basic leadership styles; the democratic, autocratic and leissez faire.

In democratic leadership style, the leader consults, encourages participation and uses power with employees instead of power over them. Maicibi(2005) noted that head teachers of best performing schools tend to be democratic. In autocratic leadership style the principal directs and expect compliance. Students confronted by this leadership style often result to violent protests.

There are two types of discipline, namely, preventive and corrective discipline. In order to encourage preventive discipline, head teachers should provide an enabling organizational climate in which expected standards are stated positively.

A research carried out in United States of America (USA), calculated that six middle schools in Charles town, South Carolina, students lost 7932 instructional days because of school suspensions in a single academic year due to misconduct in schools. Weeramunda (2008) also did a study in Sri Lanka on discipline in schools and noted that violence and students' misbehaviour is on the increase.

In Uganda, research shows that striking of secondary schools students as a means of seeking attention or protest was becoming rampant. Hardly a term passes without a school strike leading to wanton destructions of school property (Fiona, 2005).

In Botswana, discipline problems in schools manifests themselves in various ways such as bullying, alcohol and substance abuse, vandalism, truancy and unwillingness to do homework (Garage, 2007). Discipline is equally a problem in Kenya where discipline problems are manifested in form of drug and substance abuse; truancy, bullying, cheating in examinations, school riots among others (Ngotho, 2011). A research conducted by the United Methodist Church of Kenya (2009) indicates that drug and substance abuse in Kenyan schools is increasing at an alarming rate. Cheating in national examinations is another form of discipline problem among secondary school students. Bullying which manifests itself inform of violence and aggression in schools is prohibited, yet it remains wide spread in many secondary schools.

In Kenya, studies carried out to investigate causes of students' discipline problems in secondary schools point out that school leadership is a major contributor. Autocratic leadership has been identified as a major cause of students' discipline problems. Maicibi (2005) contends that without a proper leadership style, effective discipline cannot be realized in schools.

Some researchers argued that students discipline problems in schools is as a result of wrong method of administration by principals. According to Bosire and Kiumi(2010) the level of students discipline in schools depends on whether the principal seek the support of teachers and parents in management of students' discipline. Although extensive studies have been carried out on leadership style as a factor of performance, few have been carried out on the effect of leadership style on students' discipline.

The purpose of this study was to fill the gap by examining the effect of principals' leadership style on students discipline with reference to public secondary schools in Nyeri Central Sub-County in Kenya.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Leadership Concept

The concept of leadership has been interpreted differently by different scholars. According toNorthouse (2007), leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.

Steve Zeitchik (2012) defined leadership as a process of inspiring others to pursue ones vision within the parameters one set to the extent that it becomes a shared effort, a shared vision, and a shared success. Leadership will occur where there is some interpersonal relationship (KapenaSumbye, 2000). A leader is the person who commits other people to action and converts leaders into agents of change. According to Kruse (2013), leadership is a process of social influence which maximizes the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal.

Leadership is a vital element in the social relations of groups at work. Groups need leaders and leaders need followers. From the foregoing definitions, leadership has to do with providing direction to subordinates in an effort to achieve the organizational goals. From a more recent perspective, Sashkin and Sashkin (2003), define leadership as the art of transforming people and organizations with aim of improvement.

2.2. Discipline Cases in Schools

Onyechi and Okere (2007) identify the following as deviant behaviors exhibited frequently and persistently in classroom: noise making, sleeping in class, vandalism, aggression, truancy cheating, walking out on the teacher, pinching, lies, tardiness, immorality, alcoholism, use of drugs, cultism and examination malpractices. These undesirable forms of behavior in schools can be categorized into three groups. Firstgroupis the violation of the general standards of morality and integrity which includes behaviour such as lying, stealing, the second group includes transgression against authority, defiance and insubordination and lastly the violation of general school regulations which includes; cruelty, roughness, fighting in schools, truancy and irregularity in attendance.

Munyasya (2008) states that some of the problems encountered in most secondary schools are late coming, smoking, fighting among students, truancy, drinking alcohol, noise making in class, use of mobile phones in school, destruction of school property and refusal to do homework. In America, students indiscipline in schools includes, violence against teachers and fellow student, alcoholism, robbery, engaging in habitual profanity, vulgarity, committing assault to staff and making terrorist threats against school authority Clarke (2002).

Nyaga (2004) asserts that in Kenya maladjusted students exhibit numerous indiscipline symptoms like aggression, bullying, cruelty, cheating, truancy, lateness, stealing profanity boisterousness and all sorts of disorderliness.

Allthese types of indiscipline impact negatively on the achievement of the schools aim and objectives for they are detrimental to the conducive working environment for students and teachers.

2.3. Leadership Styles

A leadership style refers to a leader characteristic behaviour when directing, motivating, guiding and managing groups of people to accomplish some goals. The manner in which the leader performs these roles and directs the affairs of institution or an organization is referred to as the leadership style (Oyetunyi, 2006). Leadership style is therefore the way

the leader leads. Betts (2000) identifies three maintypes of leadership styles namely democratic, autocratic and leissez faire.

2.3.1. Autocratic Leadership and Students' Discipline

Power and authority are versed in management and individual workers are not part of the decision making body. Workers do their work for hours and hours and have no say.

In schools, such decisions affect innocent pupils and members of staff as a whole. Students are not free and the learning environment is tense and strikes can be the order of the day. Roles are made and obeyed without questions. Autocratic leaders supervise closely to ensure compliance (Mullins, 2002).Head teachers who use authority to get things done are too strict in the formality by which things are done. This does not allow creativity and discipline control and prevention only follow laid down rules enhancing indiscipline in schools. Nsubuga (2008) carried out a study on the influence of head teachers' leadership style and students' performance in Wakisio District and observed that schools whose head teacher use this leadership style showed a negative performance correlation coefficient of-0.65. This was attributed to the fact that the leaders were harsh attracting resistance from teachers and students.

Cheloti (2009) did a study on principals' management style and students' unrest in public secondary schools in Nairobi province. Her study indicated that 46.1% of the respondents blamed the autocratic leadership style.

Cheloti findings attributed this to lack of dialogue between the school administration and students. Her study adopted the survey research design and used questionnaires as the instrument of data collection. Her study sample comprised of teachers and students and failed to include principals as key respondents. This study has incorporated them. Her findings are also confirmed by Kasinga (2010) in his study on the influence of principals' leadership style on public secondary school teachers' level of job satisfaction in Nairobi province. His findings indicated that only 36.5% of the teachers were satisfied with the use of the leadership style. He adopted survey design in his study and used interview schedule for principal and questionnaires for teachers and students as instruments. However, Nairobi was large for a single study on a district which is relatively a smaller geographical area.

Kiruma (2004) study on factors contributing to students' strike in Mukurwe-ini division, Nyeri district observed that 94.1% of teachers who took part in the study blamed autocratic leadership as a major factor. This was attributed to absence of communication channels between head teachers and students whenever major changes the school rules took place. Kiruma's study also attributed poor parenting,mass media and drug abuse as other causes of students strike. Kiruma's study dealt with a single issue of discipline whereas this study not only intend to establish various discipline cases but also explore the effect leadership styles have on them. Autocratic leadership in management of students' discipline is characterized by arbitrary advances, arbitrary disciplinary measures and expulsion of students from school whose effects have always been dissatisfaction.

2.3.2. Democratic Leadership Style and Students' Discipline

The main focus of this style is sharing. It first considers needs, interests, rights and freedom of workers. Subordinates are involved in decision making.

The management influences the workers but not dominating or intimidating them. The manager seeks discussion and agreement with all the stake holders before a decision is taken.

The principles of democratic leadership are flexibly applied to create a climate in which all stake holders are able to express themselves freely and hence feel that they are a part of decision making process.

The students, teachers and parents need to feel that they are able to have an influence over what should happen at school. David and Gamage (2007) observed that effective democratic school administration affect the trust level of students, teachers and parents. Their study focused on the survey of the effectiveness of democratic school administration and management in one school division in Philippines. The implication of this study is that like in Philippines school heads in Kenya who favour the use of democratic style of leadership attach the same level of trust to their students, teachers and parents in the management of the schools.

Kouznes and Posner(2003) argues that democratic leadership can be effectively be utilized to extract the best from people and the most effective and efficient educational climate can be created in a school where democracy is employed. Their observations are collaborated by Nsubuga (2008) study on the influence of leadership styles on students' performance in Wakisio district. Nsubuga's findings noted a positive relationship with coefficient of 0.48 where democratic leadership was used attributing it to team building between teachers, students and parents by the head teacher.

Kasinga (2010) study on the influence of principals' leadership style on public secondary schools teachers' level of job satisfaction in Nairobi County showed that 39.9% of teachers were satisfied with the use of democratic leadership.

3. Research Design

A research design is a presentation of the plan of investigation aimed at answering set of research questions (Shuttleworth 2008; Lesage, 2009). It is a detailed plan on how research will be conducted, the glue that holds the elements of the research project together (Donald, 2006).The research adopted descriptive survey design. The main purpose of descriptive research is to describe the state of affairs of a population as it exists (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). According to Mugenda A. and Mugenda O. (2003), descriptive survey helps to obtain information that describes existing phenomena by asking individuals about their perceptions, attitude, behaviour and values. In this study, the researcher was

interested in getting facts about the effect of principals' leadership styles on students' discipline by asking respondents about individual perceptions, attitudes, behaviours and values.

4. Data Analysis and Presentation

4.1. Discipline Cases in Schools

The respondents were asked to list the discipline cases in their schools.

Response	Principals (N=10)		Teachers (N=45)		Students (N=140)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Noise Making	10	100	41	91.1	135	96.4
Assignment Incompletion	10	100	39	86.7	133	95.0
Drug Abuse	8	80	37	82.2	134	95.7
Theft	7	70	35	77.8	131	93.6
Defiance	7	70	34	75.6	130	92.9
Vernacular speaking	6	60	33	73.3	126	90.0
Bullying	6	60	10	22.2	128	91.4
Coupling	6	60	32	71.1	120	85.7
Truancy	5	50	30	66.7	110	78.6
Sleeping in class	5	50	15	33.3	112	80.0
Exam cheating	4	40	20	44.4	102	72.9
Mobile phone use	4	40	20	44.4	96	68.6
Personal hygiene	3	30	15	33.3	92	65.7

Table 1: Discipline Problems in Schools

The above data shows that noise making, drug abuse and students failure to complete assignments were the most common discipline problems as indicated by most of the respondents. All the respondents, principals, teachers and students indicated the existence of the discipline issues at above three quarters in their respective schools. This calls for a concerted effort between all the stake holders, teachers, parents and students. This can only happen if the principals are willing to involve them.

4.2. Autocratic Style of Leadership

The respondents that included principals, teachers and students were asked various questions to establish the type of leadership style applied by the schools management. The following response pointed out to an autocratic leadership style.

Response	Principals'		Teachers'	
	Frequency (F)	%	Frequency (F)	%
Yes	6	60.0	15	33.3
No	4	40.0	30	66.7
Total	10	100.0	45	100.0

Table 2: Students' Involvement in Writing of School Rules and Regulations

The non-involvement of students as pointed out by the teachers shows that most of the principals are autocratic in their leadership. This makes students to view these rules and regulations as imposed and tend to resist and disobey them. This leads to conflicts between students and administration and in some cases indiscipline issues such as violence. This explains occurrence of discipline cases in NyeriCentral sub-county.

4.3. Democratic Style of Leadership

To establish the extent to which the school principals applies democratic leadership style principals, teachers and students were asked various questions and the following responses were obtained.

Students'		
Response	Frequency (F)	%
Strongly disagree	70	50.0
Disagree	49	35.0
Agree	14	10.0
Strongly agree	7	5.0
Total	140	100.0

Table 3: Openness and Honesty in communication

The above data implies that leaders in most of the schools do not believe in open and honest communication. This is shown by half of the students indicating that they strongly disagree with the statement that their school believes in open and honest communication and a third of them disagreeing with the statement.

The non existence of open and honest communication in most schools implies that leadership in those schools is undemocratic. Lack of open and honest communication in schools hinder free transmission of information between the students and the school administration. This makes it difficult for the school administration to curb various discipline cases and hence negative effect in students' discipline.

Where principles of democratic leadership do not exist stakeholders more so the students feel that they are not part of the decision-making process and hence shy away from expressing themselves freely. This lead to lack of crucial information that can make the administrators to curb discipline issues leading to the rise of discipline cases.

5. Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

5.1. Summary

The research study found out that the most common discipline cases were noise making, incompletion of assignment and drug abuse. Noise making had a response rate of 100%, 91.1% and 96.4% from principals, teachers and students respectively. Incompletion of assignment 100%, 86.7% and 95.0% from principals, teachers and students respectively. Drug abuse had a response of 80.0%, 82.2% and 95.7% from the respondents respectively.

The study established that most of the principals in Nyeri Central sub-county were autocratic. This is due to the fact that they do not involve students while writing school rules and regulation, election of their representatives and rarely involve all stake holders that comprise parents, teachers and students in key decision making.

It was also noted that most of the principals were undemocratic in that they rarely held students barazas, had poor communication system that was not open and honest and rarely involved parents and teachers in upholding students discipline. This seemed to have negative effect in promoting students discipline and may be one of the main contributing factors to many discipline cases in the sub-county.

5.2. Conclusions

This study has resulted in two main conclusions;

Firstly, based on findings the result showed that most of the principals in public secondary schools in Nyeri Central sub-county used autocratic leadership style in their institutional managements. Secondly the study showed that most of the principals were undemocratic and also do not embrace transformational leadership style and this could be attributed to many discipline cases in the Sub-County.

5.3. Recommendations

Based on the findings the findings the study recommends that guidance and counseling department in schools should be strengthened and be involved in handling discipline issues. Each school should have a trained counselor who should not be given other responsibilities particularly in major schools.

Secondly principals of public secondary schools in Nyeri central sub-county should embrace leadership styles like democratic and transformational that has positive effect on students' discipline. Autocratic and Leissez faire style of leadership should be avoided.

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