

FACTORS LEADING TO STRIKES AND GENERAL INDISCIPLINE IN HIGH SCHOOLS IN KENYA: CASE OF MURANG'A COUNTY

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the perennial problem of strikes and upheavals in high schools in Kenya, with specific focus on Murang'a County. The probe was to unravel what is bedeviling high schools to go on rampage, burn dormitories and cause destruction to school property in the country. In a workshop for teachers in charge of discipline in high schools in Murang'a County, questionnaires were administered and interviews conducted to find pertinent answers.

The research findings revealed several factors including the fact that discipline teacher's have a narrow view and understanding of discipline, that corporal punishment is still active and popular method of curbing indiscipline despite its banning, that school administrators and teachers are seen to be major indirect contributors to indiscipline and the role of student leaders and other stakeholders is rather hazy and incoherent.

Keywords: School, School discipline, School council, Systems theory.

Introduction

Indiscipline in high schools in Kenya has remained a phenomenon that baffles both the Ministry of Education and school administrations. The staggering cost to school property, wasted time, pain, injury and loss of tender lives makes the subject extremely important to study and understand. What are the causes of these uprisings in schools? Is it the society with its clashes and political thuggery or is the turbulent and challenging upbringing of children in the modern family? Are the factors contributing to strikes in educational institutions within or out of the schools? A school's disciplinary climate not only is the product of educators' beliefs and actions, students' beliefs and actions, and the interaction of these, but are also shaped by the legal and social context of the country Arum and Ford (2012).

According to Aydin (2011), actualizing alteration of behaviors, all the school personnel especially the teachers have great responsibilities. In an era where schools across the nation have rapidly and often completely overhauled school policies and procedures as a result of actual or feared school violence, the failure to consider teacher input is especially egregious Finley (2004).

Often, the student's perspective is ignored even though he is an important stakeholder in discipline in school. According to

the evidence presented by learners, the state of discipline at their school leaves much to be desired, since it adversely affects their school work Wolhuter and Louisa (2007).

When new teachers cite lack of administrative support as their reason for leaving the profession, they actually mean lack of administrative support in handling student misbehavior. When administrators complain to one another about teachers, they usually commiserate about those who struggle with classroom management and discipline. Seldom do teachers and administrators spend time together addressing an equally important task of developing a solid discipline system Boyd, L (2012).

Parents in Zimbabwe seem to be in favor of schools using corporal punishment to instill discipline among students, despite increasing amounts of research showing the negative impact of corporal punishment. Ametepee, L, Chitiyo, M and Abu, S (2009).

In our evolving world of education, one thing remains constant, our success hinges on our ability to build effective relationships with students. Sterrett, W (2012).

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Statement of the problem

The staggering cost of destruction to school property, loss of innocent tender lives, wasted time and interruption of the school routine, among other factors, make the subject of discipline in high schools in the country, extremely important. It is with this background that Murang'a County is selected for a research probe into the factors impacting on discipline in its high schools. Murang'a County, has had an unproportional share of strikes and upheavals in their schools over the years. In an effort to establish clues to the possible causes of the students' unrest in their schools, **Counseling Research Institute of Kenya** in collaboration with the Muranga County education office, organized a teachers' capacity building workshop on sustainable approaches to school discipline.

Objectives

- (i). To investigate the role of school stakeholders in indiscipline in high schools in Murang'a County.
- (ii). To find out the impact of banning cane in the high schools in Murang'a County.
- (iii). To probe discipline teachers' perceptions and opinions on challenges faced in handling school discipline in high schools in Murang'a County.
- (iv). To determine the common forms of students' indiscipline in Murang'a County.
- (v). To find out the causes of school strikes in Murang'a County according to discipline teachers.
- (vi). To rate the role of student leaders in enhancement of school discipline in high schools in Murang'a County.

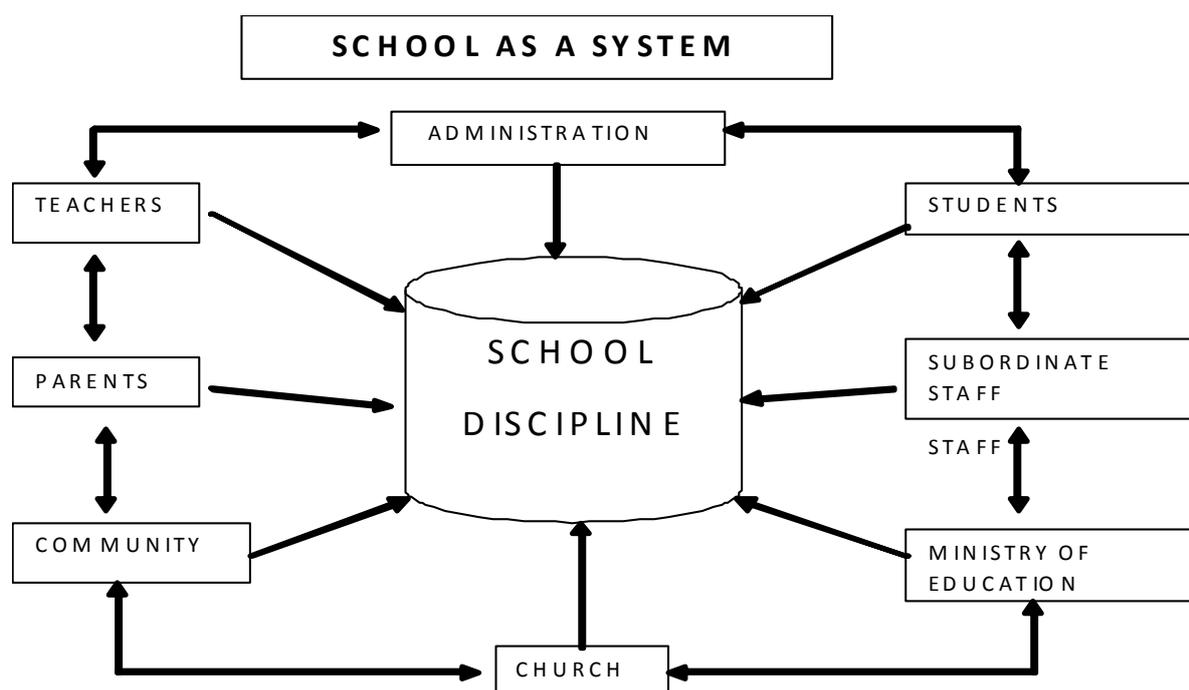
Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) define survey as an attempt to collect data from members of a population in order to determine the

current status of that population with respect to one or more variables. The study targeted Guidance and Counseling heads of department and Discipline masters in secondary schools in the Murang'a County. 235 teachers, representing 205 schools from various districts in the county made up the sample frame. The schools included all categories, Day mixed, Boarding Girls, Boarding Boys, Mixed Boarding and Mixed Day and Boarding. The location category of the schools included those in the urban, suburban and rural settings. 75 teachers in charge of discipline and 25 heads of Guidance and Counseling department representing a cross section of high schools in Murang'a county participated in the survey. Questionnaires were administered to these participants. The questionnaires included both open-ended and closed ended questions to probe deeper issues dealing with discipline in public schools. Interviews were conducted of the County Quality Assurance Standards Officer (CQUASO) and the County Director of Education from Murang'a County. Focused Group approach was also used in this research.

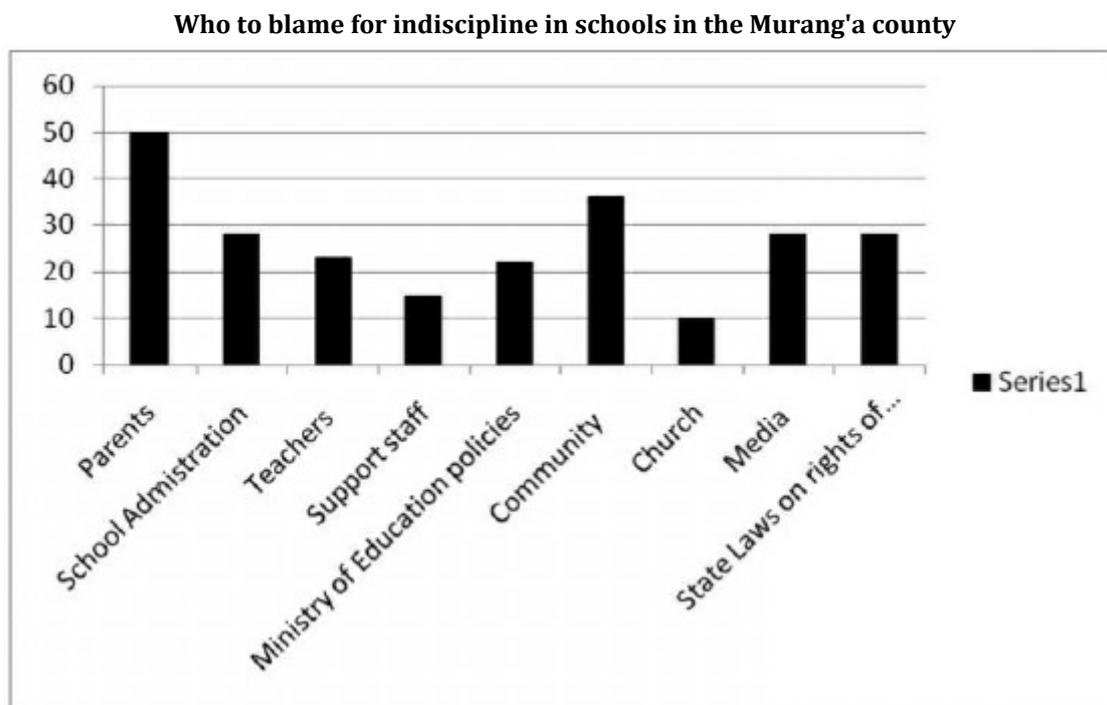
Systems Theory

This research is based on the systems theory. Systems theory is the interdisciplinary study of systems in general, with the goal of elucidating principles that can be applied to all types of the systems at all nesting level in all fields of research (En.wikipedia.org/wiki/systems_theory) In its broadest conception, Alexander L & Stanley K (1998), define a system as a complex of interacting components together with the relationships among them that permit the identification of a boundary maintaining entity or process. Von Bertalanffy L (1968) describes viable systems approach as a theory in which the observed entities and their environment are interpreted through a systemic viewpoint, starting with the analysis of the fundamental elements and finally considering more complex related systems. School discipline is a complex issue that is often not understood because it involves many stakeholders and complicated circumstances.



Result and Discussion

Asked who is to blame for indiscipline in schools in Murang'a county the respondents answered as demonstrated by the table below.



It was noted that the respondents thought that the parents, followed by the community, school administration, media and others were to blame. It is noteworthy that the participants blamed the issues of indiscipline in schools to forces outside the school, namely, parents and community. The media and the state laws on the rights of the child are fairly prominent on the blame table. The School administration has a slight edge over the teachers as major contributors to indiscipline in schools. Teachers blame the Administration for not supporting them enough while the administration sees teachers as being rather incompetent in addressing discipline in school. It is important to note the role of the support staff and the church. What is interesting is the fact that the students are not seen as stakeholders and their contribution is not listed and noted.

Asked about the use of the cane in instilling discipline in schools, a whopping 56% of the respondents were convinced that the use of the cane was necessary despite the government outlawing it. 36% believed it is indispensable and only 8% thought it was unnecessary. Discipline teachers blamed the government for banning the use of cane in schools without putting in place alternative approaches to deal with indiscipline. The implied role by the department of Guidance and Counseling lacks adequate funding and support policies to make it an effective and alternative approach to the cane.

Teachers' perceptions and opinions were sought on challenges they faced in handling school discipline. They identified lack of effective G/C programs on school discipline as a major problem. The perception of the discipline teachers is that G/C department is supposed to play a much more visible role. Often teachers see the role of this department as

'spoiling' students, being too lenient. Discipline teachers also thought that school discipline was negatively affected due to lack of parental support. Although the nature of support was not clearly detailed, parents were seen as important stakeholders in the school discipline. The teachers' third opinion focused on lack of adequate training on school discipline. The implication here seems to show that teachers feel inadequate and would want to be exposed to ways and alternatives of dealing with discipline issues. Other issues teachers had had perceptions and opinions included conflicting government policies on school discipline, influence from local community, lack of cooperation among the teachers, unclear school rules and poor support from support staff.

The following were identified as the common forms of students' indiscipline in the county, in the order of prevalence:

- (i). Destruction of school property
- (ii). Academic indiscipline
- (iii). Use of vernacular
- (iv). Breaking school uniform rules
- (v). Defiance to authority
- (vi). Theft
- (vii). Drugs and substance abuse
- (viii). Sexual immorality
- (ix). Sneaking out of school
- (x). Bullying
- (xi). Truancy

According to the discipline teachers' hierarchy, use of vernacular and academic indiscipline is paradoxically more serious cases of indiscipline than drugs and substance abuse,

bullying and truancy. Sexual immorality here means homosexuality and lesbianism among students.

Discipline teachers from Murang'a County asked to point out what they considered to be causes of school strikes put the following, although not in any order:

- (a). Refusal to do mock exams
- (b). Harsh school administrative policies that don't go well with the students
- (c). Change or transfer of popular principals or teachers
- (d). Negative attitude towards academic and education in general
- (e). Laxity among the teachers
- (f). Poor administration of the school
- (g). Peer pressure from other students in the county
- (h). Students abusing drugs and other substances
- (i). Poor parenting of children
- (j). Being lured into illegal gangs
- (k). Lack of forums for students to express their grievances in schools
- (l). Lack of academic discipline
- (m). Influence of the media
- (n). Influence of the neighboring community
- (o). School administrators and teachers overstaying in one school
- (p). Communication breakdown in school systems
- (q). Conflict between school policies and ministry of education policies
- (r). Lack of intensive guidance and counseling programs in schools
- (s). Conservative outdated school rules and regulations
- (t). Incitement from some of the stakeholders (teachers, parents)
- (u). Many parents do not attach great value to education in the county
- (v). Lack of commitment by the teachers
- (w). Lack of clear mechanism to deal with discipline issues in schools
- (x). Unlawful gangs
- (y). Emergency of cults
- (z). Inadequate syllabus coverage.

The respondents were needed to handle questions in the questionnaire pertaining to the role and part played by student leaders in discipline in schools. Asked to rate the role of the students' leaders in enhancement of school discipline, 77% said they were fairly effective, 11% thought they were ineffective, 4% said they were excellent and 8% believed student leaders were very good. Ways of motivating students' council leaders included the following in a descending order:

- Trips out of the school
- Various awards
- Special privileges
- Training

Respondents tabled methods of choosing students' council leaders as follows: 44% Nominated by students' body and appointed by teachers; 35% elected entirely by students; 15% Elected by students and vetted by teachers and 6%, appointed by teachers.

Discipline teachers considered the following qualities of potential student leaders going to the council, in their order of preference:

- General discipline
- Character
- Academic performance
- Popularity
- Religious convictions
- Age was not an issue

According to the respondents, the challenges facing students' council leaders included the following, not in any order of preference:

- Negative peer pressure
- Lack of cooperation from the teachers
- Defiance from their fellow students to their authority
- Isolation by other students
- Lack of leadership capabilities
- Absenteeism due to non payment of fees
- Failing to understand their role
- Balancing leadership and academic responsibilities
- Low self esteem and
- Lack of teamwork among student council leaders.

Respondents suggested ways that would make the students' council leaders more effective. Set clear school discipline policies and have regular meetings with teachers and the administration. Support and motivate students' council leaders. Develop council leaders' Responsibility Manual and empower the leaders with a thorough, detailed and appropriate training.

Conclusions

The research found out that there are many stakeholders who contribute in varying degrees towards discipline in the schools. It would be inadequate to deal with one aspect of the school without considering the others. The school is a complex interwoven system that requires an intricate understanding.

It is important to emphasize the impact of indiscipline to the outcomes of the students' performance, success, retention, and graduations. These are central themes for the ministry of education and the government of Kenya.

The use of the cane is still widely used in schools despite its outlawing. This reveals disconnect between policy and its implementation. Discipline teachers hardly understand and appreciate the role of Guidance and Counseling in enforcement of school discipline.

Lesbianism and homosexual behaviour is considered common and prevalent yet it is not covered in the school rules. Discipline teachers seemed unclear in prioritizing major causes of strikes in schools. The use of vernacular is seen as more serious than bullying and other misconducts.

The school students' council system is yet to take root in enhancement of discipline in many schools.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of this research:

1. Discipline teachers, other teachers and the administration of schools need to be sensitized to look at a school as a system that involves many players and actors.
2. Since parents have been identified as major contributors to school discipline, they should be involved more closely in the dispensation of discipline at the school level, preferably under the auspices of PTA (Parents Teachers Association).
3. The school rules and regulations should be made simple, clear and comprehensive to cover all kinds of misconducts and possibly include students in the process.
4. As the school council leadership takes root in schools, it is important that students' leaders are encouraged to participate in elective competitions that strengthen their leadership skills and democracy. Such elections should be open where each would provide a platform to run on.
5. Guidance and Counseling departments have to be adequately funded and recognized to play its role in school discipline.
6. Since the role of the school is to educate students so they can learn, academically perform, succeed and graduate, the school learning environment has to be conducive for achievement of these aspirations.
7. Further research in specific aspects of discipline, eg. role of the church or the surrounding communities, is needed to come up with more creative and innovative approaches to arresting upheavals in our high schools.

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