

## **THE INFLUENCE OF DISCIPLINARY SUSPENSION ON STUDENTS' BEHAVIOUR IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN BOMET COUNTY, KENYA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Suspension has become the most commonly used student disciplinary mechanism in Kenyan schools after the banning of corporal punishment in 2001. However, there is still widespread indiscipline in schools despite its use. This paper, therefore, assesses the influence of disciplinary suspension on students' behaviour based on a study carried out in secondary schools in Bomet County. The study adopted descriptive survey design. A combination of stratified random, simple random and purposive sampling techniques was used to select the respondents for the study. From this, a sample of 24 public schools was selected and the respondents included 24 head teachers, 24 deputy head teachers, 24 heads of guidance and counselling departments, and 350 Form Three students from the selected schools. The instruments utilized for data collection were questionnaires and document analysis. The study established that the suspension policy has helped to improve the behaviour of most of the students. Therefore, it was recommended that secondary schools should continue using suspension to discipline misbehaving students.

**Keywords:** Suspension Policy, Students, Behaviour, Secondary, Schools, Bomet County, Kenya

### **INTRODUCTION**

Suspension is a disciplinary measure that is administered as a consequence of a student's inappropriate behaviour. It requires that a student absent himself or herself from the classroom for a period of not more than 14 days (Republic of Kenya, 1999). This suspension can be in form of an in-school or out-of-school nature at the discretion of the administration (Adams, 1992). In-school suspension (ISS) is a discipline model where a student is removed from the classroom and compelled to stay in an in-school suspension centre for a variable length of time, ranging from part of a day to several days in a row. The ISS centre is a specific staffed room where various behaviour

changing strategies, varying from punitive to rehabilitative actions, are used in an attempt to stop or modify a student's behaviour without having the student removed from the school environment (Taras *et al.*, 2003).

Out-of-school suspension (OSS) is the removal of a student from the school environment for a period not exceeding ten days, in the USA (Mendez, Knoff & Perron, 2002). Students misbehave for a number of reasons, including a history of abuse, depression or mental illness (Taras *et al.*, 2003). When such students are suspended, their behaviour tends to worsen since at home their parents or guardians may not be in a position to determine the motivating factors behind their misbehaviours. Students most at risk of suspension often have difficult home lives and are exposed to dangerous peer groups. The act of suspending such students outside the school could actually create more problems for them (Skiba *et al.*, 1997).

Therefore, ISS is designed to counteract many of the negative effects of OSS. With ISS, instructional time can continue without interruption and special academic help can be provided as needed. Under ISS counselling services for students experiencing personal, academic or behavioural difficulties can result in behavioural changes such as improved self-image and greater self-discipline (Gushee, 1984).

In school, students may be suspended more than once if they continue to demonstrate undesirable behaviour after suspension. This is termed as repeat suspension. On the other hand, if students demonstrate desirable behaviour after suspension, such students would not be suspended again, this phenomenon is termed as non-repeat suspension (Opuni *et al.*, 1990). In this respect, a high percentage of non-repeat suspension is an indication that suspension helped to change their behaviour to be desirable.

### **Effects of Out-of-School Suspension on Behaviour**

The perception of students on suspension policy influences their behaviours in school. Some students derive pleasure in being suspended since their peers would see them as heroes or heroines who have easily managed to accommodate the worst punishment a school can give (Slee, 1995). Such students are motivated to misbehave by the suspension policy because they perceive this disciplinary strategy as a reward and not a punishment, as intended by the school administration.

Research does not strongly support the effectiveness of OSS in reducing and eliminating student misbehaviour. Constenbader and Markson (1997) have examined the responses of 252 students who had been suspended during their school career. In this survey, 69% of the respondents felt that suspension was of little use and 32% predicted that they would be suspended again. The survey also found that 55% of the suspended students were angry with the person who had suspended them.

With a large majority of the students feeling that suspension is of little use, and with over half reporting a feeling of anger, instead of remorse, the study by Constenbader and Markson (1997) suggests that OSS may not meet the needs of the students with behaviour problems. Perhaps the most important issue related to OSS is that it tends to push away the very students who need the most support from school.

There is little research evidence to show that students learn from their behaviour and that students who are suspended avoid further misbehaviour (Morrison & Skiba, 2001). When students are suspended, at home, they find themselves in a typically unsupervised environment, which can create more problems for them (Skiba & Peterson, 1999). There has been no study in Kenya to determine the effects of suspension on the future behaviour of students.

### **Effects of In-School Suspension on Student Behaviour**

ISS came into being because many educators were frustrated with the discipline strategy of OSS. Often, it was felt that a more rehabilitative model of discipline, which offered positive support for students who cause problems, could be more effective than the exclusionary model of OSS. Since ISS keeps students in the classroom environment, it is possible for school officials to both punish inappropriate behaviour and intervene in a positive manner with students (Morrison & Skiba, 2001).

In a study conducted by Turpin and Hardin (1997) on a detailed case study of a rural high school's ISS room, it was found that both students and teachers agree that ISS is a real punishment, and that it also functions in making sure students do not get a "vacation" because of an OSS. All of the teachers surveyed felt that the room helped with classroom discipline. Some students, however, had mixed views on its effects. Several commented that ISS was not just a punishment, but also viewed it as place to catch up on a sleep. This view shows that some students like being suspended and are, therefore, more likely to misbehave in school.

Guindon (1992) observes that OSS is counterproductive and alternatives like ISS work best. He notes that ISS is effective if: counselling to improve self-esteem is provided with a qualified counsellor; parents are involved; a philosophy is established through shared decision-making, and continued academics are part of the programme. In his study on ISS in a New England elementary school (UK), Skiba and Peterson (1999) found that 74% of the 19 students suspended in ISS returned to the regular classroom with little or no behavioural problems.

A study to determine the effectiveness of ISS in Des Moines, Iowa (USA), has found that OSS suspensions have severely reduced (Prior & Tuller, 1991). However, it is suggested by this finding that ISS succeeds only in reducing the severity of the misbehaviour of the suspended students but may not completely eliminate misbehaviours. In the Des Moines' study, one vice principal was had this to say:

Obviously in-school suspension is a productive alternative to OSS.... I know it has an impact on students. When I hear students talk about their ISS experience, they often mention something about the counsel they received (Prior & Tuller, 1991, p. 117-118).

Another study carried out in the Houston Public School District in the USA to examine the effectiveness of ISS has also found that the programme has a positive impact on the attitudes of the teachers, who felt that they have another discipline option available to them as they try to control their students (Mendez *et al.*, 2002). One critical statistic that the Houston study measured was the percentage of non-repeats suspensions. A high percentage of non-repeat suspensions in an ISS programme suggests that the programme helps to correct students' misbehaviour. In the Houston study, the top ISS centre had a non-repeat suspension rate of 85% and the lowest ISS centre had a non-repeat suspension rate of 55% (Mendez *et al.*, 2002). In Kenya, there has been no study to determine non-repeat suspension and repeat suspension.

Leapley (1997) has carried out a study in the state of Michigan (US) to determine the effect that an ISS programme would have on the rate of violent acts committed by students. He concluded that the interventions offered by a trained teacher in ISS helps to reduce the number of violent acts when compared to control schools. Leapley's (1997) study, therefore, offers potential evidence for the power that a rehabilitative model of ISS can provide to schools.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The overall research problem addressed in the study was that despite the use of suspension to manage student discipline, there was still widespread indiscipline in schools. In the month of June 2008 alone there were over 300 reported cases of strikes and students unrest in Kenya. At the time, there were on average 10 cases of unrest reported daily compared to about the average of 2 the previous year (Kodalo, 2008). Rift Valley Province had the second largest proportion (21.64%) of schools that experienced student unrest and strikes in Kenya as at June 2008 (Edwin, 2008). Out of the 55 schools that experienced student unrest in Rift Valley Province, 4.2% were from Bomet district (DEO, 2008). The low performance (KCSE mean score was 4.8 in 2007) was partly attributed to indiscipline among students. This scenario prompted the author to conduct a research in an attempt to find out the effects of suspension policy on student discipline in Bomet District of Rift Valley Province.

The cases of indiscipline in schools have been attributed to the implementation of the suspension policy and the behaviour modification strategies that schools have put in place. Adams (1999) notes that research on student discipline indicates that suspension policy may result in unintended outcomes such as an increase in indiscipline among students especially where there are inadequate behaviour modification mechanisms at the end of suspension. Mendez *et al.* (2002) have pointed out that suspension succeeds in its short-term objective of removing a problematic student from school but does not prevent any future onset of serious student misbehaviours. If the issue of student indiscipline is not curbed, learning in schools will be hampered, more properties will be destroyed and lives could be lost. This paper, therefore, assesses the influence of disciplinary suspension on students' behaviour.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study adopted descriptive survey design. Survey research was chosen because it enabled the researcher to collect data from a wide population using questionnaires. Survey research was also appropriate since it allowed the researcher to use a sample from the population and make generalizations to the entire population with respect to the problem under study. The study was both quantitative and qualitative in nature. It was carried out in the then Bomet District, Rift Valley Province of Kenya. Bomet District is currently located in Bomet County. It borders Narok District to the northeast, Bureti District to the north, Sotik District to the west and Transmara to the south

west. The District had 4 administrative divisions and 72 public secondary schools at the time of the study. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people with mixed farming being widely practiced (District Development Plan, 2006).

Out of the 72 public secondary schools, seven were boys' schools, five girls' schools and 60 mixed (boarding and day) schools. The target population of the study was from the 72 public secondary schools. This comprised head teachers, deputy head teachers, heads of guidance and counselling departments and Form Three students. The Form Three students were targeted because they had been in school for a relatively longer time and may have directly or indirectly experienced the use of suspension. The Form Four students did not participate in this study since they were doing their national examinations when the study was carried out.

In selecting the sample schools for the study, 30% of the total population of public secondary schools in the District participated. These totalled 24 public secondary schools. Therefore, two boys' schools, two girls' schools and 20 mixed schools were sampled. To get the sample size for the Form Three students, Yamane (1967) table of determining the size of a random sample was used. The estimated population of Form 3 students in the District was 3,000 (DEO, 2008). The respondents in the study were thus 24 head teachers, 24 deputy head teachers, 24 heads of guidance and counselling departments and 350 Form Three students, giving a total of 422 respondents.

Stratified random sampling procedure was used to group schools into strata. The schools were categorized into boys' schools, girls' schools and mixed schools. Simple random sampling technique was employed to select schools from each stratum. Purposive sampling technique was used to select head teachers and deputy head teachers, heads of guidance and counselling departments in the selected schools. Furthermore, purposive sampling was used to select Form 3 students. Head teachers, deputy head teachers and heads of guidance and counselling departments are mainly concerned with the management of student discipline in school. Form 3 students were selected purposively because it has been observed that students in upper classes tend to misbehave than those in lower classes.

In the study, questionnaires and document analysis were used to collect data. The two research instruments were used together in order to supplement each other. Descriptive and inferential statistical procedures were used to analyse the collected data. Data was grouped into tables and

reported in descriptive form according to the responses of various respondents. These tables and descriptions were for four categories of respondents, namely head teachers, deputy head teachers, heads of guidance and counselling departments and students.

The responses of these respondents were analysed with respect to the study variables. The independent variable in this study was the suspension policy. The dependent variables were occurrence of drug and substance abuse, bullying and fighting, sneaking and breaking bounds. In each table, the number of responses per item indicated the frequencies and percentages. Percentages were computed and then used in the detailed analysis in chapter four alongside description of the responses from the open ended items in the questionnaires. Chi square test was used to test the stated null hypothesis.

## RESULTS

### Effect of Suspension on Students' Behaviour

The study sought to find out the misbehaviours for which students can be suspended. The researcher thus asked the head teachers to indicate the prevalent misbehaviours in their schools. The head teachers identified the following misbehaviours: absenteeism, boy-girl relationship, drugs and substance abuse, fighting, cheating in exams, rudeness to teachers and prefects, incitement, bullying, indecent dressing, vandalism, pregnancy, theft and participating in strikes.

The research also sought to ascertain whether or not students' behaviour changed after suspension. The deputy head teachers were, therefore, asked to give their opinion on a five-point Likert scale on how they perceived the behaviour of students after their suspension. Their responses were as shown on the table below.

**Table 1: Students who Get Suspended Demonstrate Desirable Behaviour**

	Frequency	Percentage
Disagree	1	4.20
Undecided	1	4.20
Agree	18	75.00
Strongly Agree	4	16.70
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100.00</b>

This study revealed that 4.2% of the deputy head teachers disagreed with the view that students who were once suspended demonstrated desirable behaviour afterwards, 4.2% others were undecided, 75% agreed and 16.7% strongly agreed with the statement. From these findings, it can be deduced that a larger proportion of the DHTs felt that suspension helped to change students' behaviour to desirable state. This implies that suspension in itself served as a punishment for misbehaviour and as such the students who had misbehaved endeavoured to show discipline in school so as to avoid further punishment.

The study also sought to find out whether or not the suspension of misbehaving students deterred other students from misbehaving in school. To achieve this, the deputy head teachers were asked to indicate their views on a five-point Likert scale regarding this statement. The responses of the deputy head teachers were as shown in the table below.

**Table 2: Suspending Misbehaving Students Deter Others from Misbehaving**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Disagree	4	16.70
Undecided	0	0.00
Agree	10	41.70
Strongly Agree	10	41.70
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The study established that 16.7% of the deputy head teachers disagreed with the view that the suspension of misbehaving students deterred others from behaving in the same way, 41.7% agreed, 41.7% strongly agreed with the statement. From these findings, it can be inferred that majority of the deputy head teachers felt that suspension of misbehaving students made other students to demonstrate desirable behaviour. This finding indicates that students learn from the suspension of their colleagues. In addition, these findings suggest that, possibly, when a suspended student is readmitted in school, he or she would share the bad experiences they encountered under suspension with their peers. This means that other students would strive to demonstrate desirable behaviour since they do not want to face similar experiences.

The research further sought to find out from the students who had been suspended whether they would misbehave again in future. Therefore, the students were asked to indicate their opinions on a five-point Likert scale. The responses of the students were as shown in the table below.



**Table 3: I will never Misbehave again**

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Disagree	3	5.50
Disagree	2	3.60
Undecided	1	1.80
Agree	10	18.20
Strongly Agree	39	70.90
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The study established that 5.5% of the students strongly disagreed with the opinion that they would never be indiscipline again in future, 3.6% disagreed, 1.8% were undecided, 18.2% agreed and 70.9% strongly agreed with the opinion. From these findings, it can be deduced that a larger proportion of the students who had been suspended before had committed themselves to demonstrate desirable behaviour to avoid another suspension. These findings suggest that students feel that the surest way to avoid a suspension is by demonstrating a desirable behaviour. The findings were in contrast with those of Constenbarder and Markson (1997), who observe that 69% of the students who have been suspended regard suspension as of little use and 32% believe that they will be suspended again. The above findings further indicate that the suspension policy has had a positive effect on the students' behaviour.

The research also sought to find out the number of students who had been suspended once and those who had been suspended more than once between the years 2007 and 2008. The deputy head teachers were thus asked to provide this information. The responses of the deputy head teachers were as shown in the table below.

**Table 4: Number of Suspended Students between the Years 2007 and 2008**

Students	Frequency	Percentage
Non-Repeat suspension (suspended once)	208	81.90
Repeat suspension (suspended more than once)	46	18.10
<b>Total</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The study found that a total of 254 students had been suspended in the District between the years 2007 and 2008. A total of 81.9% of the students had been suspended only once, 18.1% had been suspended more than once in a span of two years. The finding on non-repeat suspension of 81.9% is

closer to the finding of the Houston study (USA) which found a non-repeat suspension of 85% (Mendez *et al.*, 2002).

From these findings, it can be inferred that a larger proportion of those students who had been suspended in the two years changed their behaviour to be desirable, which is why they were not suspended for the subsequent time. These findings suggest that suspension and the accompanying rehabilitative strategies were effective in changing the behaviour of the students to be desirable. These findings further indicate that there was a reduction in indiscipline cases in schools as a result of the use of suspension.

The researcher was also interested in establishing the effective type of suspension. The researcher thus asked the head teachers to state their opinion on the type of suspension which they thought was effective in changing the behaviour of the students to be desirable. The responses of the head teachers were as shown in the table below.

**Table 5: The Most Effective Type of Suspension**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
In-school suspension	5	20.80
Out-of-school suspension	19	79.20
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The study revealed that 20.8% of the head teachers perceived that in-school suspension (ISS) was an effective strategy for disciplining students while 79.2% thought that out-of-school suspension (OSS) was effective. These findings indicate that most of the head teachers in the district made use of the out of-school-suspension. These findings are in contrast to the findings of Guindon (1992), who reports that out-of-school suspension is counter-productive and that an alternative like in-school suspension works best. This difference in findings could be attributed to the fact that most schools in Bomet District are day schools. As such, the use of ISS would not help much in modifying students' behaviour as opposed to the use of OSS. In day schools, students are always at home after school; therefore, to most of them, OSS is a more unpleasant consequence for misbehaviour. OSS is, therefore, a punisher or an unpleasant stimulus which most students in the district strive to avoid by being disciplined in school. This implies that schools' administration chose

to use OSS instead of ISS because most students do not like it, thus schools are able to instil discipline through it.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In view of the foregoing findings, it was concluded that suspension helps to modify students' behaviour. Most of the suspended students adopted desirable behaviour after suspension. In addition, there are very few cases of repeat suspension, meaning that the first suspension mostly achieves its intended purpose of instilling discipline in students. Based on the findings and conclusion, it is recommended that school administrators should continue using suspension to discipline misbehaving students. They should also use suspension with other punitive disciplinary mechanisms.

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