

INFLUENCE OF PRINCIPALS' COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES ON STUDENTS' DISCIPLINE IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KENYA

By

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to examine the influence of Principals' communication strategies on students' discipline in public secondary schools in Kisasi Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya. The study objective sought to establish the influence of principals' use of school assemblies as a communication strategy on students' discipline in public secondary schools in Kisasi Sub-County. The study established from majority of the respondents that their schools held school assemblies at least twice per week in order to address students' discipline issues which was said by 66.7% percent of the students, 59.3% percent of the teachers and 55.6% of the principals. Most of the issues addressed by principals, teachers and students during school assemblies included drug abuse and hard substance issues, absenteeism and lateness to attend school, failure to observe general school rules and regulations, violation of official language speaking policy, failure to do class assignments, inappropriate dressing, disobedience to school administration, teachers and student leaders.

Key words

Students discipline, management, communication strategy, school assemblies

Introduction

Communication is the means through which a message travels. It is any act by which one person gives to or receives from another person's information about that person's needs, desires, perceptions, knowledge or affective states (Robbin,2001). According to Daft and Lengel (2005), choosing the right strategy for communication is determined by many factors. One such influence is media richness. Media is rich if it has the capacity to carry large volumes of data and if it can convey meaning.

Daft and Lengel (2005), further argue that the richness of a communication strategy can be assessed by determining how it provides substantial understanding of the message and how it reduces message ambiguity. Generally, oral communication is considered richer than written communication due to its ability to carry larger loads of information and for its ability to allow

instant clarification of any message ambiguity. Heckman and Karim (2005), explain that principals typically select the most appropriate strategy that matches their message content, communication requirements and the perceived tasks of communication.

According to Little John and Peng (2001), the school's structure has a significant impact on the choice of communication strategy and implementation process. The structure may shape the type of formal communication strategies that an organization adopts to communicate students' discipline. The school's structure and its impact can facilitate communication or form a barrier to communication which can have a positive or negative influence on students' behaviour. Thus, it is observed that the principals' choice of a communication strategy is very important in determining the discipline of students for its choice may give or fail to give students a chance to participate in decision making endeavors in the school.

According to Katolo (2016), the desire for student participation in school administration has been supported by a variety of propositions by the proponents of the practice. Globally communication has been used to transmit information such as policies and rules, changes and developments from the principal to staff members and students and also used to give feedback to the departments, teachers and students on their performance. He states that communication is very important in school administration and everything a principal does involves communication. Communication contributes greatly to effective administration as many institutions have failed because of poor communication, misunderstood messages and unclear instructions. It is important that principals communicate frequently with staff members and students.

Balyejusa (2002) in Ogunsaju (2005), established that good student behavior in Nigeria was fostered through proper communication means implemented by the principal. Moral laxity was in Nigeria where means of communication could not be used to maintain students' discipline. According to Katolo (2016), participation of the Student Council in decision making process is recommended because individuals who participate are usually more satisfied with the decisions that they have collectively made.

According to Katolo (2016), principals are viewed as central in the creation of effective school administration in which student discipline is motivated to strive for continuous improvement in quality learning. Discipline is a rudimentary ingredient that plays a crucial role in school systems which insists on upholding the moral values of students. This is in spite of government and schools efforts to curb it through instituting proper means of communication, involvement of students in decision making process, use of notice boards, suggestion boxes and strengthening of guidance and counseling department in schools. Despite the efforts by the government, secondary schools continue to be confronted with problems arising from the inappropriate behavior of students which leads to strikes. However, it is noted that the success of a school depends on its principal for as a leader, the principal must set standards of good communication strategies for management of students' discipline hence easing the achievement of organizational goals

According to Nakkazi (2012), communication should produce the desired effect. It results in what the communicator wants. Communication generates the desired effect, maintains effect and

increases effect. Kimemia, Marundu, Mitei and Gekara (2007), argue that communication serves its purpose for which it was planned or designed. The purpose could generate action, inform, create understanding or communicate a certain idea or point. Communication in secondary schools would ensure that students' attitudes, values and beliefs are shaped. Communication remains a unique instrument that integrates management functions in an organization. In any organization, formal or informal, communication leads to good management which aids achievement of organizational goals (Thomas, 2009). According to Onyeiwu (2010), the realization of the goals of a secondary school as an educational organization in Nigeria hinges on communication among the various operating personnel. It involves two or more persons attempting to share their ideas, feelings, and attitudes.

Nasibi (2003), explains that indiscipline in public secondary schools in Kenya is high to the extent that every stakeholder refuses to take responsibility for students' indiscipline and as such each blames the other. They refuse to take time to think, reflect and take stock of their direct or indirect contribution to the problem through their acts of omission and commission. The police will blame the teachers for indiscipline yet some of the acts of indiscipline take place not in school but rather in the market where they are in charge. The church is also not helping much as they are overwhelmed. Any indiscipline among students while outside the school gate is the work of the parents, church, police and other stakeholders. This is where teachers and other stakeholders differ. To them matters to do with students is the work of teachers irrespective of where they are; holidays and weekends teachers are in-charge! This is where we lose it!

Pandey and Garnett (2006), posit that communication influences perceptions and opinions about persons, communities, organizations, governments, and even society. In educational institutions communication is usually key to the progress of many academic activities. It is through communication that the teachers are able to give instructions and even deliver lessons in classes. Communication is also important especially with regard to handling discipline in schools.

According to Muyiera (2002), the form and way of communication used in a given school will affect the way people interact, and it will have an impact on the general atmosphere of the school, which will affect the general quality of instructions that the students receive. Communication helps to control the behaviour of the teachers, students and non-teaching staff. According to Kabandize (2004), communication is a strategy of managing student discipline through sharing of views between students and administrators. Administration should let the students know the dangers of indiscipline through talking. Discipline is about ways in which students behave towards each other and to their teachers.

In the recent past, the education system in Kenya has experienced wide ranging cases of student indiscipline emanating from breakdown in communication. According to the Republic of Kenya, (2001), 250 schools were involved in various levels of serious unrests. Among other issues, the cause of students' unrests was lack of clear channels of communication, lack of freedom by the students to express themselves, developed mistrust, hence they resorted to riots and disruptive behaviour as a means of expressing themselves.

According to Kindiki (2009), the use of communication strategies that are not adequate to influence students' discipline by the teachers may contribute towards student misbehaviour. Students' behavior worldwide is controlled through the schools' code of conduct. However in spite of the use of schools' code of conduct to regulate students' behaviour most schools continue to experience

students' indiscipline. It is noted that control of students' behaviour requires the use of effective communication strategies if desired student discipline is to be realized.

School assemblies could be used as communication strategies by school principals for management of students discipline in schools. Brigman and Campbell (2003), noted that school assembly is a gathering of all or part of a school in order to communicate information to students. The use of school assemblies by the school administration, teachers on duty, teachers in general as well as student leaders should be a means of communicating effectively to the entire student fraternity to enhance school discipline issues by stipulating the school expectations.

Statement of the problem

Communication and student discipline is often viewed as a contemporary problem and may turn into a crisis if not checked (Kindiki, 2009). The basic function of education itself relies entirely on communication. A school manager cannot organize his staff, coordinate and control their activities as well as delegate responsibilities without communication (Ijaiya, 2010). Merihue (2008), states that communication helps education administrators to get feedback from all the stakeholders who represent an important source of ideas for improvement.

Kisasi Sub-County Director of Education (2016), reported that from 2013 to 2016, more than half of all public secondary schools in kisasi Sub County were involved in students' indiscipline issues in each year and the office of the Sub County Director was involved in handling students' indiscipline issues in those schools. It is noted that although most schools have put in place most of the known measures to curb student indiscipline such as suspension, punishment, guidance and counseling and principals' communication strategies, discipline of students is still wanting.

Objectives of the study

The study objective sought to establish the influence of principals' use of school assemblies as a communication strategy on students discipline in kisasi Sub County.

Literature review

School Assemblies as a Communication Strategy and Students' Discipline

Brigman and Campbell (2003), noted that in a school set up, communication influences the behaviour of teachers, students, non-teaching staff and parents among others. It is largely the responsibility of the school principal to communicate the school rules and regulations to all and students within the school set up. The day to day running of a school involves meaningful interactions facilitated by effective communication systems. Students' discipline is a product of these interactions. Brigman and Campbell (2003), further posit that during school assemblies students are informed and constantly reminded of their responsibilities. The consequences of misbehavior are also spelt out through available communication channels, mainly verbal by fellow students usually school prefects, the teachers on duty, senior teachers, deputy principals as well as the school principal. This enhances the culture of good discipline within the schools. The teachers and the school head sensitize the students on the expected behaviour and spell out school expectations and order of doing things on daily basis. This type of communication during assemblies enhances good attitudes towards teaching, learning and the whole educational processes and systems within the school.

Muriithi (2013), did a study to examine the influence of teachers' communication strategies on students' discipline in public secondary schools in Mukurweini district. Four objectives were formulated that sought to; establish the use of teachers' oral communication on students' discipline in public secondary schools in Mukurweini district; to establish the use of written communication by teachers on students' discipline in Mukurweini district; establish the use of nonverbal communication by teachers on student discipline in the same discipline, to determine the prevailing conditions that hinder effective communication towards student discipline. The study employed descriptive research design which is suitable in collecting both qualitative and quantitative data. The sample included 45 teachers and 540 students. Data were collected by the use of questionnaires administered personally through hand delivery. A pilot study was conducted in five schools which were not included in the final study. Reliability of the instruments was also done through the most common internal consistency measure known as Cronbach's alpha (α), which indicates the extent to which a set of test items can be treated as measuring a single latent variable. The recommended value of 0.7 was used as a cut off of reliabilities in the study. Findings indicated that holding of classroom meetings, use of school prefects, communication during assembly, use of guidance and counselling, use of rewards and incentives, holding of open forums, encouraging members to pass information among themselves are some of the communication strategies commonly used by teachers' in Mukurweini District on student's discipline. Majority of the teachers also indicated that they often used notice boards on student' discipline. However, facial expression was rarely used on students' discipline. Majority of the teachers 89% indicated that school category affects the way they communicate on the student discipline. The study results revealed that the category of the school for boys only, girls only and mixed for both boys and girls affect the way teachers' communicates on student discipline. The study also found that communication strategies with the least preferences for teachers on student discipline included the use of reward system, the use of eye contact and facial expression. According to the study, conditions which reduce effective communication ranged from distortion of information, language barrier to lack of proper mechanisms that ensures conducive environment for students to express themselves to their teachers.

Kindiki (2009), in his study on influence of principals' communication on students' discipline established that there were poor communication channels used by school administrators and undemocratic school administration which did not consider meetings and assemblies as important strategies of communication. The study advocated for the use of meetings and assemblies as strategies of communication as they improved interaction and relationship between the administration and students which led to unity within the school. This implies that improving on effective communication by use of school assemblies for important ideas could step up students' discipline in secondary schools.

According to Kiprop (2012), most principals adopt a master-servant or superior-inferior attitude in dealing with students. Believing that students have nothing to offer; principals rarely listen to students. This creates tension misunderstanding and stress eventually leading to frustrations and violence as manifested in strikes. The study by Kiprop (2012), recommended creation of opportunities for teachers, students and administrators to sit and discuss issues affecting them and their school freely. Effective management of discipline requires collaboration between the principal, staff, students, parents and the community. Denying students a chance to express themselves could lead to frustration, resulting in disruptive behaviour. Such incidences could be prevented by involvement of students in decision making during school assemblies.

Mulwa (2014), conducted a study to investigate the effects of principals' alternative disciplinary methods on students' discipline in public secondary schools in Kitui County, Kenya. The study objective sought to establish the use of class meetings with students for collaborative decision making on students' discipline. The study was based on the Systems theory. Ex post facto research design was adopted. The target population for the study was 333 public secondary schools consisting of 333 Principals, 333 Deputy Principals, 1665 HoDs Guidance and Counselling, Board of Management (BoM) chairpersons, the County Director of Education and Kitui law courts Resident Magistrate. Stratified proportionate sampling procedure, purposive sampling and simple random sampling were used to select the sample size. The total respondents for the study were 320. Instrument reliability was established by a test retest technique. The study established that class meetings for collaborative decision making were done within the school set up to enhance discipline. The principals reported that class meetings enhanced decision making and learners concerns were communicated during Class meetings. This implies that both the learners and the principals had an opportunity to converse together hence sharing concerns that were affecting learners at that particular moment.

Adlam (2003), who also noted that principals need to encourage open door policy where students are free to see the head of the institution to explain their problems, should encourage students to bring creative ideas, accept that he or she is capable of making mistakes, allow students to question his or her views, show no favorites and treat all students equally, encouraging democratic form of school organization in which students elect their own leaders. School principals should encourage open door policy where students are free to see the head of the institution to explain their problems, encourage students to bring new creative ideas, setting aside specific day(s) in a week for meetings between the principals and the students to discuss matters pertaining to the issues raised by the students. Thus, meaningful student involvement engages students as decision-makers who partner with educators to make decisions in their schools in areas that affect their individual learning as well as the entire school community. These include coordination of co-curricular activities, dealing with minor cases of discipline and taking responsibility of students' welfare.

Research methodology

This study employed descriptive survey research design. The target population for the study was 20 principals, 140 teachers who consisted of 20 deputy principals, 20 heads of departments, guidance and counseling, 20 form four class teachers and 20 students who consisted of presidents of the students' council from which a sample of 18 principals, 54 teachers, and 18 students were picked making a total of 90 respondents. Questionnaires were used as tools for data collection. Instrument validity was established by expert judgment and pilot study in schools which were excluded from the main study. Instrument reliability was established by a test re-test technique. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics with the help of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Qualitative data generated from open ended items was organized into themes and reported based on common responses as per the study objectives. Analyzed data was presented using frequency distribution and cross tabulation tables.

Research findings

This study sought to establish the influence of principals' communication strategies on students' discipline in public secondary schools in Kenya. The study objective sought to establish the influence of principals' use of school assemblies as a communication strategy on students

discipline. The respondents were requested to state the frequency at which school assemblies as a communication strategy were held in their schools. The responses were as presented in Table 1.1

Table 1.1 : Results from respondents on frequency of holding school assemblies

| Frequency of school assemblies | Principals | Teachers | Students |
|--------------------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| | F (%) | F (%) | F (%) |
| Once per week | 2 (11.1%) | 6 (11.1%) | 2(11.1%) |
| Twice per week | 10 (55.6%) | 32 (59.3%) | 12(66.7%) |
| Thrice per week | 6 (33.3%) | 16 (29.6%) | 4(22.2%) |
| | 18 (100%) | 54 (100%) | 18(100%) |

Table 1.1 shows that, majority of the respondents who included 66.7% percent of the students , 59.3% percent of the teachers and 55.6% percent of the principals said that their schools held assemblies twice per week. The study further sought to establish the principal responses on main issues addressed during assemblies. The results are as shown in table 1.2

Table 1.2 Principals responses on the main indiscipline issues addressed during assemblies

| S.NO. | Main indiscipline issues | S.A | A | D | S.D |
|-------|--|---------|----------|---------|---------|
| | | F % | F % | F % | F % |
| 1 | Drug abuse and hard substance issues | 3 16.7% | 11 61.1% | 2 11.1% | 1 5.6% |
| 2 | Absenteeism and lateness to attend school | 2 11.1% | 3 16.7% | 8 44.4% | 5 27.8 |
| 3 | Disobedience of general school rules and regulations | 9 50% | 4 22.2% | 3 16.7% | 2 11.1% |
| 4 | Boy-girl relationships | 6 30% | 7 38.9% | 3 16.7% | 2 11.1% |
| 5 | Official language speaking policy violation | 4 22.2% | 10 55.6% | 2 11.1% | 2 11.1% |
| 6 | Fail doing assignments | 4 22.2% | 5 27.7% | 7 38.9% | 2 11.1% |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|---|-------|---|-------|---|-------|---|-------|
| 7 | Class noise-making and disorder | 7 | 38.9% | 7 | 38.9% | 2 | 11.1% | 2 | 11.1% |
| 8 | Inappropriate dressing and grooming | 6 | 30% | 5 | 27.7% | 4 | 22.2% | 3 | 16.7% |
| 9 | Disobedience to school administration teachers and student leaders | 5 | 27.7% | 4 | 22.2% | 7 | 38.9% | 2 | 11.1% |

Table 1.2 revealed that majority of the principals 61.1% percent agreed that the main indiscipline issues addressed during school assemblies was drug abuse and hard substance issues. This was followed by 50% percent of the respondents who strongly agreed that the main issue was disobedience of general school rules and regulations. It was also revealed by 27.8% percent of the respondents who strongly disagreed that, the main issue was absenteeism and lateness to attend school. These results agree with Brigman and Campbell (2003), who argued that during school assemblies the principals and deputy principals constantly reminded the students of their responsibilities. The consequences of misbehavior are also spelt out as well as sensitizing the students on the expected behaviour. This type of communication during assemblies enhances good attitudes towards teaching, learning and the whole educational processes and systems within the school.

Conclusions

Based on the findings the study concluded that most schools held school assemblies at least twice per week and one major area of discussion was students' discipline. This had a lot of influence on student's discipline in most schools. Most of the issues addressed by principals, teachers and students during school assemblies touched on major causes of indiscipline in most schools which included drug abuse and hard substance issues, absenteeism and lateness to attend school, disobedience of general school rules and regulations, boy-girl relationships, official language speaking policy violation, failing to do class assignments, inappropriate dressing and grooming and disobedience to school administration, teachers and student leaders.

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