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## **The Relationship between Principals' Managerial Approaches and Student Discipline in Secondary Schools in Kenya (Pp. 399-413)**

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### **Abstract**

*Students' discipline is critical to the attainment of positive school outcomes. This paper presents and discusses findings of a study on the relationship between principals' management approaches and the level of student discipline in selected public secondary schools in Kenya. The premise of the study was that the level of students' discipline depends on whether the principals' discipline management approach is inclusive or exclusive of teachers' and parents' involvement. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire from a sample of 211 teachers, 28 principals and 22 chairpersons of the Parent-Teachers Association. The raw data were analysed using frequency counts, the mean and standard deviation and hypotheses tested using the t-test and one way ANOVA at alpha level of 0.05. Key findings indicated that female principals applied more inclusive*

*discipline management approaches compared to male principals. In addition, the level of teachers and parental input and the level of student discipline were comparatively higher in female - headed schools. More experienced principals applied inclusive discipline management approaches compared to the less experienced ones. Headship experience was positively related to teacher and parental input while it was negatively correlated with the level of student discipline. The findings have important implications on determining policy guidelines on headship appointments and the strategies for upholding student discipline in secondary schools.*

**Key words:** Principal; Management approach; Student discipline.

### **Introduction**

Kenya's education has had phenomenal growth since 1963, with rapid expansion at all levels of education. At the secondary level for instance, enrolment rose from 30,000 in 1963 to 632,000 in 1995 representing a 2000% increase in about three decades (Republic of Kenya, 1997). By 2006, total enrolment in this sub sector had increased to 1,030,080 (Republic of Kenya, 2007). Such rapid expansion levels, whether planned or involuntary cause pressures on various aspects of education provisions, especially school resources, quality in classroom delivery and management of the curriculum and overall school administration. Ultimately, student discipline may be affected. This paper focuses on findings of a study to establish the relationship between the principals' management approaches and student discipline

Schools, as social organizations, have rules and regulations which govern the conduct and discipline of students in line with society's ethos. In addition, these rules and regulations are expected to enable schools achieve their social and cognitive goals. Whether viewed as action taken by adults to enhance the development of desired behaviour (Read, et al, 1993) or internally self driven initiative to adhere to prescribed society's behaviour standards (Docking, 1989), discipline plays the vital role of influencing and furthering learning goals in a school (Chiuri & Kiumi, 2005)

When viewed within the systems theory, learning is conceptualised as a linear process (Chiuri & Kiumi, 2005) comprising of three components - input, process and outcome. Input comprises of the learners' personalities, such as intellectual ability, socio-economic background, disposition and

aspects of parenting. The process covers all the activities and experiences the learner goes through in school, including teacher – learner interactivity, school administration and the school climate. This process influences output, which is discerned in the context of the gains the learner realises by the end of the schooling time in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Since learning cannot succeed in an unstable social environment, disciplined behaviour is an essential variable in enhancing school outcomes (Nasibi, 2003). Discipline of students safeguards the security of teachers and school property and promotes amicable learner – teacher interaction with a likely positive effect on the quality of learning. However, in spite of the vital role discipline plays in influencing education outcomes, irresponsible behaviour among learners in secondary schools is a common occurrence (Cotton, 2001; Nasibi, 2003). Documented causes of student indiscipline broadly include unfavourable students' personal characteristics, socio-economic background and the school environment (Nasibi, 2003).

Various studies, especially Griffin, (1996); Kariuki, (1998); James and Connolly, (2000); Mungai, (2001); Kilpatrick, et al (2002) and Copland (2003) have been done on the role of school Principals in the management of students' discipline. Generally, these studies established that student discipline is likely to be high in schools in which the Principal is inspirational, integrative, and collaborative, involves the community in managing school affairs and delegates responsibilities to other members of the wider school community. Such studies have led to the conclusion that managing students' behaviour requires a concerted effort of the parents, teachers and school principals as the key players (Hucznski & Buchanaan, 2001). The principal sets the environment for the parents and teachers to play their respective roles effectively (Chapman, 2003) and channel their efforts towards achieving school goals (Griffin, 1996).

The quality of student discipline is an important factor in determining the intellectual outcome of students and schools (Reynolds, 1989). This is because, discipline provides a sense of direction among learners and hence commitment to school values. Moreover, a disciplined student body has a likelihood of increasing teachers' job satisfaction, which is a critical correlate of commitment to institutional goals (Imber & Neidt, 1990).

Students' discipline in secondary schools has been a subject of debate in many forums. This is because instances of students' indiscipline lead to

various negative consequences, such as destruction of school property, assault, indecent behaviour such as rape and in extreme cases death of students (Republic of Kenya, 1991; Republic of Kenya, 2001). Such incidents tend to impact negatively on the gains made so far at this level of education. For example, death of students in the wake of school violence is a loss of valuable investment in human capital. On the other hand, destruction of physical infrastructure such as laboratories, dormitories and classrooms leads to loss of teaching time before new ones are built to replace the destroyed ones. Besides, putting up new infrastructure overburdens parents financially thereby possibly forcing those in the low-income bracket to withdraw their children from school. This has a high likelihood of increasing wastage at this level of education.

Although available data show that cases of student indiscipline have plummeted since 1999, there are significant incidences associated with specific regions that need examination. For instance, between 2000 and 2001, only 8% of secondary schools in the country experienced violent behaviour (Republic of Kenya, 2001; Nasibi, 2003). Documented factors related to student indiscipline in Kenya include drug abuse, poor parenting, peer pressure, negative influence from the mass media and politics. Some of these behaviours are caused by in-school factors, while others are attributed to factors outside the school.

One of the most significant in-school factors that influence student discipline is the schools social environment (McManus, 1989; Reynolds, 1989) or organizational climate. This refers to the way members of the school community; especially the teachers, students, and parents relate and interact with each other. If the social environment is favourable, the members are likely to increase their level of interaction, consequently enhance the school's scholastic and behavioural outcomes. The reverse is applicable. This is particularly so when the school is viewed as a social organization whose principal participants are teachers, students and parents. Therefore, the nature of the interaction between the three units would determine the development of students' behaviour and the subsequent intellectual outcomes.

However, the interaction between the three units is determined by the over all school principal, as the officer that is responsible for formulating and implementing policies for day to-day running of the school (Huczynski & Buchanan, 2001; Chapman, 2003). This implies that the extent to which

members direct their efforts towards organizational goals depend on the kind of environment created by the principal. The thrust of this observation is that in a coordinated system members tend to produce more than they could through their own individual efforts. This underscores the need for school heads to create democratic managerial environments so as to enhance teachers and parents' capacity to play their role expectation of shaping the behaviour of learners in the desired direction. Many factors may determine the extent to which the principal will involve teachers and parents in the school in managing student discipline. Some of these factors may be the principal's attitude, gender qualifications, and leadership experience (Green, 1999; Muchiri, 1998; Koeler, 1992).

The management of student discipline in schools is a corporate responsibility between the principal, the teachers and parents. However, as the chief executive of the school, the principal is expected to incorporate the teachers and parents in the process of school management, and particularly in managing the discipline aspects of students. It is therefore expected that principals who involve teachers and parents in discipline management are likely to benefit higher student discipline levels compared to those who do not.

### **Statement of the Problem:**

This study investigated the relationship between the principals discipline management approaches and the levels of student discipline. Specifically, the study sought to:

- ✚ Determine the extent to which principals' were inclusive in managing students' discipline
- ✚ Determine the relationship between the principals' sex, and years of headship experience and the discipline management approaches.
- ✚ Determine the relationship between the principals' management approaches and the level of students' discipline.

### **Methodology**

Data for this study were collected from a sample 261 respondents who comprised of 211 teachers, 28 principals and 22 chairpersons of the schools' Parents' and Teachers' Associations (PTA) from Laikipia and Nyandarua districts of Central Province, Kenya. This represented 74% of the expected total sample size of 306 respondents initially determined. A sampling fraction

of 20% was determined using the formula for determining sample sizes from given populations (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970). The sample elements were selected through simple random sampling.

Three questionnaires were used to collect data from principals, teachers and parents' representatives – Parent-Teacher Associations. The questionnaire for principals gathered data on gender and headship experience. The questionnaire for teachers had four sections labelled A, B, C, and D while that of the Parent-Teacher Associations' chairpersons had three sections: A, B, and C. Section A in the teachers' questionnaire and the one for the Parent Teacher Associations' (PTA) chairpersons elicited data on gender and age. Sections B and C in the two questionnaires collected data on the extent to which principals involved parents and teachers in the management of students' discipline. The teachers' questionnaire had an additional section D with items that measured the students' discipline on a five point likert scale.

Data were collected on three other variables, namely, the principals' Discipline Management Approach, Teachers and Parents' Input (TPI) and Level of Students' Discipline (LSD). Items that measured these perceptions were rated on a five-point scale. The principals' Discipline Management Approach (DMA) was measured by 13 items to produce a continuum of scores from a possible minimum of 13 points to a possible maximum of 65 points. This constituted the Discipline Management Approach index, which measured the extent of inclusiveness of teachers and parents in the management of students' discipline.

Perceptions on Parents and Teachers' Inputs on student discipline were measured by 20 items to produce a continuum of points ranging from a possible minimum of 20 to a possible maximum of 100. The Level of Students' Discipline was measured by 26 items to produce a continuum of points ranging from a possible minimum of 26 to a possible maximum of 130. These scores were grouped into four quotas respectively as very low, moderately low, moderately high and very high as shown in table 1. The raw data was analysed using frequency distributions, the mean and standard deviation, while hypotheses were tested using the independent samples t-test and One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) at alpha of 0.05.

### **Validity and Reliability of Instrument:**

One of the major problems in social science research is the measurement of human behaviour or behavioural attributes with accuracy (Bosire & Gamba, 2003). Yet, accuracy is a vital component in scientific research. An extensive literature review, especially on school management was done to identify the relevant content, which identified the indicators of management of student discipline. This was then built into developing the items for the various questionnaires. In addition, the instruments were piloted to ensure on the accuracy, relevance, appropriateness and technical aspects of the items.

A reliability analysis on the items that measured Discipline Management Approach, Teachers and Parents Input and Level of Students Discipline yielded a coefficient value of 0.82 using Spearman-Brown Prophecy formula. According to this formula, a reliability coefficient close to 1.00 is regarded as adequate, and that since these instruments gave a coefficient of 0.82, they were regarded as reliable in collecting the data required for this study (Marzcyk, et al, 2005).

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Sex Distribution***

Data were collected on the sex, age and headship experience of the respondents. The latter referred to the principals. The details of the results are shown in table 2, which, shows that male respondents were the majority in all categories of respondents, implying lack of gender parity in the general distribution of administrative responsibilities in secondary school management.

### ***Age***

Table 3 gives a summary of the age distribution (in years) of the various categories of respondents. It shows that most of the principals were in the middle ages of 36 to 40 years age category, which is also the modal age for the rest of the categories of respondents. Most of the respondents were below 45 years of age, which is an indication of relatively young personnel involved in teaching and managing school affairs. This is noteworthy, especially when observed that most (79%) of the principals had less than ten years of headship experience.

### **Principals' Discipline Management Approaches (DMA)**

Management of students' discipline was computed by summing scores on the thirteen questionnaire items that measured this attribute. The scores ranged from a possible minimum of 13 to a maximum of 65 on a continuum. These were categorized into four groups. The scores on this continuum were interpreted with respect to the extent to which principals involved other stakeholders, especially teachers and parents in the management of students' discipline. Low scores imply low involvement while higher scores imply higher involvement. Table 4 shows the distribution of respondents according to the score levels.

Table 4 shows that most (78.1%) of the principals were perceived as involving stakeholders in the management of students' discipline at least to a moderately high level. This implies that most of these principals were democratic in the way they handled students' discipline matters.

### **The Relationship between Gender, Headship Experience and the Principals' Discipline Management Approaches**

The study analysed the relationship between the principals' sex, and headship experience and the discipline management approaches adopted in managing students' discipline. Chi-square, the independent samples t-test and ANOVA were used to analyse this relationship and test hypotheses at alpha of 0.05. The summary of the results is presented in table 5.

The chi-square result shows a significant relationship between the principals' sex and discipline management approaches ( $\chi^2 = 9.035$ ,  $df = 9$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) This implied that female principals applied a relatively more inclusive approach in discipline management. Although this finding is consistent with that by Herndon (2002), it differs with earlier studies, especially Green (1999). However, as Alimo-Metcalfe, (1995) observed, female principals are more likely to be relatively more consultative because they are nurturant, and affiliative. Nonetheless, the differences were not significant ( $t = 0.105$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

On the other hand, although the average scores on DMA show a generally increasing trend with headship experience up to a maximum at 15 years, but the differences were not significant ( $F = 1.029$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). The general implication is that though not significant, principals with 10-15 years of headship experience were more likely to be inclusive in dealing with

students' disciplinary issues compared to those below or above this age group. This finding is consistent with studies by Koehler (1992) and Muchiri, (1998).

### **The Relationship between Principals' Sex, Headship Experience and Discipline Management Approach on the Level of Student Discipline**

Twenty six questionnaire items measured the level of students' discipline and yielded a score that ranged between a minimum of 26 and a maximum of 130 points. The distribution of the scores is given in table 6 which shows that most (60%) of the students were perceived to have moderately high level of discipline. A significant majority (90%) of the students would be described as having low to moderate level of discipline, with a very small proportion in the very low and very high discipline levels respectively.

The level of students' discipline (LSD) was tabulated with headship experience and sex to analyse the likely relationships. The basic premise was that students' level of discipline was a function of the principals' sex and headship experience. The results as summarised in table 7 show that headship experience and sex are not significantly related to the students' level of discipline. This implies that students' discipline in schools is not a function of the principals' sex and headship experience. However, the distribution of scores on LSD indicates a relatively bigger proportion of students with moderate to high discipline levels (75%) in female headed schools compared to 64% in male headed schools. The relationship was however weak ( $\Phi = 0.16$ ) and not significant ( $\text{Chi-square} = 5.288$ ,  $\text{df} = 3$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ). Similarly, it was found that the differences in level of students' discipline in male compared to female headed schools was not significant ( $t = 1.022$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

### **The Relationship between Principals' Management Approaches and Level of Students' Discipline**

This study analysed the relationship between the principals' discipline management approaches (DMA) and level of students' discipline (LSD). Data were analysed and the relationship tested using chi-square and One Way ANOVA at alpha level of 0.05. The results as summarised in table 8 indicate a positive and significant relationship between the principals' management approaches and the students' level of discipline ( $\chi^2 = 17.325$ ,  $\text{df} = 9$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ;  $F\text{-value} = 9.204$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This implies that principals who are more inclusive in their management approaches have a higher likelihood of yielding higher and perhaps better levels of discipline among their students.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Students' discipline management is an important function in school management as it affects the school climate and the ultimate outcomes of school learning. It is in this respect that the role and characteristics of the principal are vital. Although there are many attributes of the principal and more other variables that determine students' discipline, this paper focused and analysed the relationship between the principals' management approach, sex and administrative experience and students' discipline. The study has revealed that sex and headship experience have a bearing on the extent to which a principal will involve teachers and parents in the management of students' behaviour. Thus, the study found that female principals and those that had more years of headship experience were more likely to be inclusive by involving teachers and parents managing students' discipline matters.

Similarly, although not significant, the study found a weak relationship between the principals' sex and headship experience and level of students' discipline. Students in female-headed schools and in schools with principals of longer administrative experience scored relatively higher points on level of discipline.

These findings have important implications and lessons on school management with respect to managing students' discipline. One significant observation is that of inclusiveness in the management of student affairs – that all stakeholders, especially teachers and parents should be involved at all times. Involvement is by way of information and active participation in guiding and counselling students so as to influence and control behaviour towards the desirable direction. In addition, school principals need to have continuous induction courses to up date their skills on managing emerging and unfamiliar student behaviours and expectations.

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**Table 1: Perception scores by perception types**

<i>Perception type</i>	<i>Very low</i>	<i>Moderately low</i>	<i>Moderately high</i>	<b>Very high</b>
DMA	13-25	26-38	39-51	52-65
TPI	20-39	40-59	60-79	80-100
LSD	26-51	52-77	78-103	104-130

Key: DMA – Discipline Management Approach  
 TPI - Teachers' and Parents' Input  
 LSD – Level of Students' Discipline

**Table 2: Distribution of respondents by sex**

<i>Sex</i>	<i>Principals</i>	<i>Class teachers</i>	<i>PTA chairs</i>	<b>Total</b>
Male	22 (79)	149 (70)	20 (91)	189 (72)
Female	6 (21)	64 (30)	2 (9)	72 (28)
Total	28 (100)	211 (100)	22 (100)	261 (100)

*Notes: Figure in parenthesis represent percentages*

**Table 3: Age distribution of respondents**

<i>Age (Years)</i>	<i>Principals</i>	<i>Class teachers</i>	<i>PTA Chairs</i>	<b>Total</b>
25 – 30	-	34 (16)	-	34 (13)
31 – 35	-	57 (27)	1 (5)	58 (22)
36 – 40	12 (43)	72 (34)	3 (14)	40 (16)
41 – 45	5 (18)	32 (15)	3 (14)	40 (16)
46 – 50	8 (28)	8 (4)	8 (36)	24 (9)
51 – 55	3 (11)	8 (4)	3 (14)	14 (5)
56 – 60	-	-	4 (18)	4 (2)
Total	28 (100)	211 (100)	22 (100)	261 (100)

*Notes: Figures in parenthesis are in percentages*

**Table 4: Distribution of respondents by DMA scores**

<i>DMA score</i>	<i>N</i>	<b>Percentage</b>
13 – 26	8	3.4
27 – 39	43	18.5
40 – 52	120	51.5
53 – 65	62	26.6
Total	233	100.0

*Source: Research data*

**Table 5: Statistical results on Discipline Management Approaches as a function of principals' sex, and headship experience**

<i>DMA criterion</i>	<i>Chi-square</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<i>F-value</i>
Principals' sex	9.559*	0.015	-
Headship experience	9.035	-	1.029

\* *Significant at  $p < 0.05$*

**Table 6: Distribution of respondents by scores on level of students' discipline**

<i>LSD score</i>	<i>N</i>	<b>%</b>
26 – 52	3	1.5
53 – 78	64	30.0
79 -104	126	60.0
105 - 130	18	8.5
Total	211	100.0

**Table 7: Relationship between principals sex, headship experience and Level of Students' discipline**

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Chi-square</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<b>F-value</b>
Headship experience	6.745	-	0.099
Sex	5.288	1.022	-

Table 8: Relationship between principals' management approaches and level of students' discipline

<i>DMA Scores</i>	<b>Scores on level of students' discipline (LSD)</b>				
	26-52	53-78	79-104	105-130	Total
13-26	-	2 (67)	1 (33)	-	3 (1)
27-39	-	-	6 (40)	9 (60)	15 (7)
40-52	1 (1)	11 (14)	54 (62)	20 (23)	86 (41)
53-65	-	5 (5)	52 (50)	49 (45)	107 (51)
Total	1	18	114	78	211

Notes: Figures in parenthesis are in percentages.  $\chi^2 = 17.325$ ,  $df = 9$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ;  $F$ -value = 9.204,  $p < 0.05$