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Students' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of the Methods Used to Enhance Discipline in Public Secondary Schools in Nyahururu Division, Laikipia West District, Kenya

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Abstract

Many methods are used to enhance discipline in secondary schools. Among them are corporal punishment, guidance and counselling, psychological punishment and suspension from school. The use of corporal punishment was banned by the government and teachers were expected to use alternative methods. The opinion of the students on this matter was not sought. The main purpose of this study was to investigate students' perception of the effectiveness of the methods used to enhance discipline in public schools in Nyahururu division of Laikipia West District. The descriptive survey method was used. From a population of 2497 students, a sample of 333 was selected using the proportionate, stratified and simple random sampling methods. Data was collected using a self-administered student questionnaire developed by the researchers. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data. The results showed that students perceived guidance and counselling as more effective in enhancing discipline than other methods. The study also revealed that factors such as age, grade and type of school affected students' perception of the effectiveness of the various methods. From the study it was

recommended that a good student-teacher relationship be cultivated in schools and guidance and counselling be enhanced.

Key words: Perception, discipline, secondary school, grade

Introduction

Discipline of students is important in the attainment of the desired outcomes of education. Learners are more likely to benefit from the teaching and learning process if they are disciplined. Teachers, school administrators, parents and policy makers play a major role in students' discipline in schools. There are many methods used by teachers to enhance discipline in schools. Some of these include corporal punishment, guidance and counselling, suspension from school, psychological punishment among others. There has been controversy over the methods to use to enhance discipline in schools. Human rights activists argue that corporal punishment is dehumanizing and lacks the ability to help the punished to internalize moral values, perpetuates the culture of violence in the society and weakens the relationship between the student and the teacher. This impacts negatively on the learning process. For a long time, psychologists have demonstrated that the use of punishment, is less effective compared to other methods of behavior modifications such as rewarding, giving instruction, modeling, ignoring, explaining and listening (Linda, 1989; McDaniel & Kappan, 1986). The government of Kenya banned the use of corporal punishment in 2001 after realizing that it was being applied indiscriminately and was causing injuries and death among students. Kenya is also a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), Africa Charter on the Rights of the Child (ACRWC). Besides the government passed the Children's Act which *inter alia* requires the child to be protected and treated humanely (ANCPPAN, 2005). Teachers on the other hand felt that their power to instill discipline has been stripped off with the ban of corporal punishment.

According to Fortuante (2007), teachers still use corporal punishment and at the same time indiscipline still continue to be witnessed in Kenyan schools. The effectiveness of the methods used to enhance indiscipline will depend to a greater extent on the way they are accepted and perceived by the students. According to Lewis, Romi, Katz and Qui (2008), discussion of behavior and discipline with students relate to less distraction and greater belief that the intervention is necessary. Hinting and the involvement of students in

discipline decision making relate to a stronger belief that the disciplinary actions taken are warranted.

A number of public schools from the area selected for study have been experiencing cases of indiscipline among them vandalism, arson, theft among students, truancy, bullying and smoking as observed from the punishment books from the various schools. Thus, indiscipline is a challenge facing public secondary schools in Kenya. Therefore, there is need to seek learners' input on how the situation can be improved. This study on their perceptions on the effectiveness of various methods of instilling discipline was an attempt towards the improvement of discipline in schools.

Research questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- i. How do students perceive the effectiveness of the various methods of enhancing discipline?
- ii. Does the students' gender affect the way they perceive effectiveness of the methods used to enhance discipline?
- iii. Does the students' age affect the way they perceive effectiveness of the methods used to enhance discipline?
- iv. Does the students' grade affect the way they perceive effectiveness of the methods used to enhance discipline?
- v. Does the type of school affect the way they perceive effectiveness of the methods used to enhance discipline?

Literature Review

Generally, school discipline is defined as school policies and actions taken by school personnel to prevent students from unwanted behaviors, primarily focusing on school conduct codes (*Dergisi, 2009*). The use of discipline is necessary to provide obedience to school rules. However, the use of some methods of discipline might bring more harm than benefit.

Human beings perceive the world differently (Hucynski & Buchanan, 2001). Human behavior is a function of the way they perceive the world around them and how other people are perceived and the events in the world. Different social and physical backgrounds give different values, interests and expectations and therefore lead to different perceptions. Middlemist and Hitt (1998) argue that the perception process is influenced by a number of factors that have to do with the nature of the perceiver.

When a student perceives a certain method of enhancing discipline as effective, they respond positively by changing their behavior when the method is applied as opposed to a method which may be perceived to be ineffective. The aim of punishing students is to help them attain self-discipline or self control; hence the need to apply the method that is likely to give the best results. Discipline is necessary for the cognitive, social and emotional development of the child (ANPPCAN, 2005).

Corporal punishment is an action intended to cause physical discomfort or pain to correct a child's behavior. The ban of corporal punishment was effected in 2001 in Kenya due to what the UN regarded as its abuse. This ban complied with article 29 of UNCRC on protection from physical and psychological neglect or pain. However, Ngwiri (2003) and Kamau (2003) reported that other than caning, other forms of punishment like slapping, kicking, kneeling and pinching are still being used. Corporal punishment impacts negatively on the students in many ways such as causing physical injuries, anger, insecurity and anxiety, which make the relationship between the student and the teacher poor.

Robinson, Funk, Beth, and Bush, (2005) question the effectiveness of corporal punishment and underline the side effects of corporal punishment such as running away, fear of the teacher, feelings of helplessness, humiliation, aggression and destruction at home and at school, abuse and criminal activities. Gershoff (2002) also attributes corporal punishment to increased aggression and lower levels of moral internalization and mental health and adds that adults who were corporally punished when children are more likely to be criminals, be violent with their sexual partner and spank their own children. Punitive methods of discipline have been shown to be ineffective and in some cases harmful to students (Cameroon, 2006).

There are quite a number of alternatives that can be used instead of corporal punishment to enhance students' discipline. A number of discipline methods that work have been documented such as directing, instruction, monitoring, modeling, non-verbal cuing, ignoring, rewarding, explaining and listening (Linda, 1989; McDaniel & Kappan, 1986). In a survey of dozens of teachers, Linda found a number of discipline methods that do not work such as yelling, using sarcasm, attacking the student's character, acting superior, using physical force, nagging and throwing a temper tantrum. Use of positive and acceptable methods of punishment has been shown to help students to develop self-control (Aydin, 2009).

Guidance and counselling has been strongly recommended (Republic of Kenya, 2001; Lutomia, 1999). Guidance and counselling in schools can be done in group or individual settings. Teachers as well as peers have been used in schools to counsel students.

Psychological punishment which involves denial and/or withdrawal of privileges has been used in schools. Privileges that students may be denied include outings, watching television, playing with others during break time, isolation from others and so on. According to Oyaró (2005), manual work like weeding flowerbeds, slashing, uprooting tree stumps, cleaning and collecting litter has been found to be effective. Teachers use sarcasm and ridicule in reprimanding students. This helps to squelch most students and force them to conform by making their behavior to appear ridiculous before their peers. This method may diminish the motive for learning self-discipline, that is, self-respect (Lester & Dyke, 1972).

Suspension from school is used when the school authorities believe that exclusion can help the student to re-examine his/her behavior before readmission. Appearing before a disciplinary committee with a parent may help a student to change. The application of good management skills such as keeping order, explaining things clearly, having interesting lessons, treating pupils with respect, being fair and friendly have been found to work (McManus, 1989). McManus adds that conflicts should be resolved through an accepting relationship in which students and teachers acknowledge each other.

Factors that were thought to influence the way students perceive the effectiveness of various methods of instilling discipline were examined in this study. The society maintains gender role stereotypes that influence the way girls and boys behave. Boys will likely behave aggressively towards teachers and fellow students, resist punishment and even gang up as compared to girls. These differences are likely to influence their thinking on the methods of discipline that are appropriate and work well with each gender. Collins (1998) and Wanyoike (2003) divide adolescence into three stages – preadolescence (10-15 years), middle adolescence (16-18 years) and late adolescence (19-20 years). According to Biehler and Snowman (1997), older adolescents are more realistic about life and less rebellious. Preadolescents have a strong urge of independence from parents while in middle adolescence, peers become of greater significance as they try to break from parental influences, values and controls.

Three types of school exist, namely; day, boarding and day and boarding schools. The three settings are expected to influence discipline and the way students perceive the effectiveness of the various modes of discipline differently.

According to McManus (1989), top stream boys perceived their teachers to be less authoritative in their behaviour towards them than lower stream boys. This observation by McManus seems to apply in our schools whereby most cases of indiscipline are associated with pupils in senior classes.

The operant theory assumes that the consequences that follow behavior determine whether it will persist or not (Cobb, 2001). The use of reinforcement and other behavior modification methods are more effective than punishment according to this theory. The social learning theory by Bandura on the other hand emphasizes the importance of observing and modeling of behaviours, attitudes and emotional reactions of others.

Methodology

This was mainly a descriptive survey which sought to assess the perceptions of students on the effectiveness of the methods used in enhancing discipline in secondary schools.

All the six public schools (Njonjo girls' boarding, Nyahururu boys' boarding, Ndururumo mixed boarding, Munyaka and Igwamiti mixed day secondary schools) within Nyahururu division were used. Stratified and proportionate sampling methods were used to have a good representation from both gender and class levels. The simple random method was then applied to select the number of participants required in each stratum. The total sample of study comprised 333 students.

Data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire which was prepared by the researchers. The questionnaire sought information about students' background and their perception on the effectiveness of the various methods used to enhance discipline in schools. A reliability coefficient of 0.74 was obtained after a pilot study on 33 students from a neighboring division.

Results and Discussions

The first question sought to establish the effectiveness of the various methods used to enhance discipline in schools. The results showed that 25.2% considered the methods used effective, 27.1% ineffective while 47.7% were undecided. These results are presented in table 1.

The implications of the results are that, although very many methods are used to enhance discipline, the extent to which they achieve their purpose is limited from the students' point of view. An analysis of the students' perception of the effectiveness of each method showed that good teacher-pupil relationship (mean = 4.57) was the most effective method followed by individual counselling (mean = 4.14). Apparently, being denied food (mean = 1.74) and caning (mean = 1.92) were the least preferred methods. The indecision by majority of the students and perception of a number of the methods used to be ineffective seems to agree with a study by Oira (2006) on 138 teachers in Nairobi who prevalently applied corporal punishment and sparingly used other methods that could be more effective.

This results do not seem to support findings by Infantino and Little (2005) who in a study of 350 secondary schools, found deterrent methods such being sent to the principal's office, private praise and reprimands, detention and getting an unfavourable report sent home and use of incentives such as free time, a positive letter home, receiving a good mark, and getting a favourable academic report sent home to be perceived as effective in increasing appropriate behaviour.

The second research question sought to determine the way gender influence perceptions of the effectiveness of the methods used to enhance discipline. The results are shown in table 2.

The results showed that 25.1% of the male students and 26.0% of the female students considered the methods used ineffective. Those who considered the methods to be effective were 27.8% males and 26.0 females. The mean for male and female students were equal at 3.01. These findings led to the conclusion that gender had no influence on the perception of the effectiveness of the methods used to enhance discipline. This finding contradicts the argument by Biehler and Snowman(1997) that boys compared to girls resist punishment which imply that male students are expected to perceive the various methods as less effective than girls.

The third research question sought to find out whether students' age affect the way they perceive the effectiveness of the methods used to enhance discipline. The results are shown in figure1.

From figure 1 it is clear that as the students' age increases the perception of the effectiveness of the various methods used to enhance discipline decreases. This means that the early adolescents perceive the various

methods used as more effective as compared to the late adolescents. The results imply that the early adolescents have a high regard for teachers and authority which fades gradually as they grow older. This means that teachers should use different methods for students in different age levels for effective results.

A further analysis of the data revealed that good teacher-student relationship was perceived to be the most effective method by all the age categories followed by individual counselling and then peer counselling.

The fourth research question sought to find out whether students' grade affect the way they perceive the effectiveness of the methods used to enhance discipline. The results presented in figure 2 show that students' perception of the effectiveness of the methods used to enhance discipline decreases with class level.

The results in figure 2 imply that, form one students perceive the methods to be effective than form four students. From these results it was concluded that the grade affects the way students perceive the effectiveness of the various methods. These results agree with McManus (1989) observation that top stream students perceive their teachers as less authoritative in their behavior as compared to lower stream students. Form one students tend to perceive their teachers as figure with a lot of authority. These results support the findings reported in figure 1 which show that students' perception on the effectiveness of the various methods of discipline decreases with age. These findings indicate that for a school to maintain discipline it must pay attention to the students' perception on disciplining methods and use the ones that are likely to be more effective depending on the class level and age of pupils.

The fifth research question sought to find out whether school type affect the way students perceive the effectiveness of the methods used to enhance discipline. Table 3 shows the mean score on the perceptions of students on the effectiveness of the various methods used.

The means of various types of schools varied. Mixed boys' day and girls' boarding school had the highest mean (3.56) followed by mixed boys' and girls' day (3.20), mixed boys' and girls' boarding ranked third with a mean of 2.82. Overall, the schools with an element of day ranked highest on the way the students perceive the effectiveness of the methods used to enhance discipline. According to Waihenya (2001), it is easier for discipline to be maintained in day schools than in boarding schools because of being able to

involve parents. Being constantly in contact with the general public could contribute to these findings. Students who respond positively to discipline methods will be disciplined than those who do not.

Conclusion

The following conclusions were made from the study:

- i. Guidance and counselling should be emphasized in secondary schools since it was ranked very highly as one of the most effective methods of enhancing discipline. The same applies to good teacher-student relationship.
- ii. Gender does not affect students' perception on the effectiveness of the various methods used to enhance discipline. Therefore, the various methods should be applied equally to both the male and female students.
- iii. As the age of students advance teachers should consider using methods that are more effective with older students such as good teacher-student relationships. Similarly, methods that are relationship oriented are more effective with students in higher classes.
- iv. Day scholars are more likely to respond positively to the various methods used to enhance discipline.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

- i. A lot of effort should be made to strengthen student-teacher relationship.
- ii. Strong and effective guidance and counselling departments should be put in place in all public secondary schools.
- iii. Discipline methods should be applied with a consideration of factors such as age and class level among others.
- iv. Teachers should explore on disciplinary methods that are more effective and use them more often.

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Table 1: Effectiveness of the various methods used to enhance discipline

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Ineffective	84	25.2
Undecided	159	47.7
Effective	90	27.1
Total	333	100

Table 2: Gender differences on the perception of the effectiveness of the various methods used to enhance discipline

Gender	N	Ineffective (%)	Undecided(%)	Effective(%)	Mean
Male	187	25.1	47.1	27.8	3.01
Female	146	26.0	48	26.0	3.01

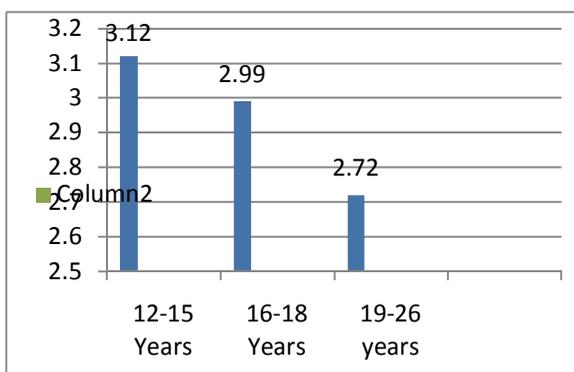


Fig. 1: Age differences on the perception of the effectiveness of the various methods used to enhance discipline

Fig. 2: Class level and perception of the effectiveness of the methods used to enhance discipline.

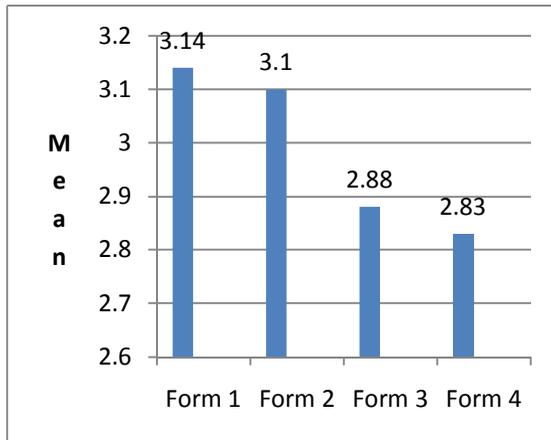


Table 3

Type of school and perception

Type of school	N	Mean
Girls' boarding	57	2.82
Boys' boarding	96	2.85
Mixed boys' and girls' boarding	81	2.92
Mixed boys' and girls' day	65	3.20
Mixed boys' day and girls' boarding	34	3.56