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## **Influence of Principals' Use of Collaborative Decision Making on Students' Discipline in Public Secondary Schools in Kenya**

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### **Abstract**

*The management of discipline has been and continues to be a thorny issue globally for educational managers. Collaborative decision making is one of the alternative disciplinary methods that governments have come up with for management of students' discipline in schools to replace corporal punishment. This paper sought to investigate the influence of principals' use of collaborative decision making as an alternative disciplinary on students' discipline in public secondary schools. The study objective sought to establish the extent to which principals' use of class meetings for collaborative decision making as an alternative disciplinary method influences students' discipline in public secondary schools. The study employed Ex post facto research design and targeted 333 public secondary schools in Kitui County, Kenya. Stratified proportionate sampling and purposive sampling were used to select the sample size. Questionnaires and interview guides were used for data collection. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse, tabulate and present data. The Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) test was used to determine the strength of association between holding class meetings for collaborative decision making and students' discipline and to test whether the observed relationship is significant or not. The study established that collaborative decision making was done within the school set up to enhance discipline. Of the principals contacted, 83.7 per cent indicated that there was use of class meetings as an alternative disciplinary method. Results of chi square had a P-value of 0.373. This indicates that there is no significant difference between class meetings for collaborative decision making and students' discipline. The study concluded that there is no significant difference between holding class meetings with students for collaborative decision making and students' discipline. The study recommends an improvement in implementing the resolutions arrived at during class meetings for this could lower tensions regarding areas that could be potentially divisive.*

**Key Words:** *School Management, Discipline, Alternative Disciplinary Methods, Collaborative Decision Making, Class Meetings*

### **1. Introduction**

The quality of students' discipline is an important factor in determining the achievement of students and schools (Reynolds, 1989). Research findings have established that students' discipline is a major concern in many parts of the world (Cotton, 1990; Blandford, 1998; Stewart, 2004; Kindiki, 2009; Kiprop, 2012; Simatwa 2012; Maphosa & Shumba, 2010; Nene, 2013). This has led to use of alternative disciplinary methods in handling students' discipline in public secondary schools.

Collaborative decision making is among the alternative disciplinary methods under use by secondary school principals to manage students' discipline. Collaborative method refers to involvement of students by teachers in decision making to achieve discipline related goals in public secondary schools. However, according to Wikipedia the free Encyclopaedia (2015) collaborative decision making refers to involvement of stakeholders in making a choice from the available alternatives. It is thus observed that stakeholders in public secondary schools could include parents, teachers and students among others. Hence, such stakeholders stand a better chance to be involved in matters affecting

the school. In such a situation, any decision made during collaborative decision making is no longer attributable to any single individual who is a member of the school community.

The need for students' involvement in secondary school administration began in 1960s in the United States of America (Powers & Powers, 1984). This is out of the perception that secondary school students are looked at as people who are mature enough to take responsibility of any administrative task assigned to them by the school administration (Gathenya, 1992). According to The Education Review office (2003) the Government of New Zealand allows learners to exercise some decision making over how they learn within the limits set by the Government and individual schools. This is agreeable because allowing students' participation in decision making could enhance ownership of decisions made and could also help students in the development of decision-making skills, hence, a promotion of critical thinking skills which are necessary for civic leadership preparation.

Students' indiscipline manifest themselves in different forms across the globe. Stewart (2004) observed that students' discipline problems in Australia do manifest themselves in form of bullying, failure to pay attention in class, disrespect for other learners and staff or their property, fragrant breaching of school rules and regulations like inappropriate clothing. De Wet (2003) noted that students' discipline problems manifest themselves in a variety of ways. These include vandalism, truancy, smoking, disobedience, intimidation, delinquency, murder, assault, rape, theft and general violence. Similarly, research findings have established that student discipline problems have been characterised as serious and pervasive, negatively affecting student learning (Kasiem, Du Plessis & Loock, 2007; Leigh, Chenhall & Saunders, 2009; Tozer, 2010 & Rizzolo, 2004). According to Cotton (1990), indiscipline in public secondary schools in the United States of America (USA) has been identified as the most serious problem facing the nation's educational system. The School discipline problems present themselves in form of drug usage, cheating, insubordination, truancy, intimidation which results into countless classroom disruptions.

Naong (2007) describes indiscipline problems in South African schools as disproportionate and an intractable part of every teacher's experience of teaching. Corporal punishment according to the South African Schools Act (1996) was banned in South African schools since 1996. Although Tungata (2006) noted that, corporal punishment in South Africa was replaced by a discipline strategy called Alternatives to Corporal Punishment (ATCP) South African Schools Act (1996), studies in South Africa reveal that majority of learners still receive corporal punishment 14 years later after the ban of corporal punishment (Olivier, 2010). This could perhaps be attributed to what was observed by Nene (2013) that alternative measures to corporal punishment were not very effective in curbing students' discipline in schools for it is difficult to choose and implement the correct alternatives to corporal punishment. This could be attributed to a number of factors which include; teachers' perceptions regarding corporal punishment owing to the fact that corporal punishment is easy to administer and appears effective. It could also be attributed to teachers' resistance to change.

According to Yaghambe and Tshabangu, (2013) schools in Tanzania experience a wide range of disciplinary problems on a daily basis. The most common misbehaviors among students that teachers face, are work avoidance, lack of punctuality, unnecessary noise, physical abuse of other students, rowdiness which includes bullying, vandalism, alcohol consumption, substance abuse, truancy, lack of willingness to study at home and theft (Lloyd & Judith, 1997; Kiggundu, 2009). Yaghambe and Tshabangu (2013) observed that the minor disciplinary problems that were experienced were, not attending church, lying, disobedience, improper school uniforms, use of cellular phones at school, use of alcohol and cigarette smoking. On the other hand, the major offences are seen as truancy, drugs and drug abuse, lack of punctuality and absenteeism and involvement in sexual affairs. The forms of punishment meted out by teachers to students as part of managing the above stated misdemeanors varied from, striking students, suspension, counseling, manual work like watering gardens, cleaning toilets, mopping schools, corridors, expulsion, pushups, and psychological harassment (Llyod and Judith, 1997). Yaghambe and Tshabangu (2013) noted that physical and corporal punishments are much more frequent compared to counseling. Yang (2009) argues that this raises the issue of disproportionate application of punishments where teachers find comfort in prescribing same treatment for dissimilar offenses.

Ouma, Simatwa and Serem (2014) observed that pupil discipline problems experienced in primary schools included; noise making which was rated as 3.7 per cent, failure to complete assignment 3.8 per cent, truancy 4.0 per cent, lateness 4.0 per cent, theft 3.5 per cent, and sneaking 3.5 per cent. Cotton (1990) argues that such discipline problems are responsible for a significant portion of loss of instructional time in United States of America (USA) for half of the classroom time is taken up by activities other than instruction. This implies that students spend much of their time servicing punishment hence compromising academic achievement.

According to Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children (2014), governments are increasingly enacting laws to prohibit corporal punishment against children. As at October 2014, 41 states had achieved prohibition in all settings, including the home; governments of at least 45 others had expressed a commitment to enacting full prohibition. However, in some jurisdictions, corporal punishment is still used in Australia (Stewart, 2004). It is noted that the ban of use of corporal punishment in many states is a wakeup call for utilization of other alternative disciplinary approaches in management of students' discipline in schools.

Corporal punishment is regarded as lawful in Tanzania under the National corporal Punishment regulation of 1979; pursuant to article 60 of the National Education Act of 1978 (UNICEF, 2010). The Tanzania Education Act number 25 of 1978 gave powers to the Minister of Education to develop policies that enable management of discipline in schools. The legalized use of corporal punishment in managing student's disciplinary problems emerged from the corporal punishment's regulations of 1979 under article 60 of the Education Act. This regulation was moderated in 2000 to enable oversight, but still retained corporal punishment as a method of dealing with major offences in schools. The new regulation engendered moderation, putting into consideration students' health status and the girl child. However, In 1991 the Tanzania government ratified the Convention on the Rights of the child (CRC) and the Human and People's Rights charter but such ratification has not trickled down to effect positive changes on children's rights, particularly in view of sadistic beatings by teachers or adults who act ultra vires in applying physical and corporal punishments (Simatwa, 2002) cited in Yaghambe and Tshabangu (2013). In Zanzibar, the Ministry of Education has adopted a policy against corporal punishment in schools, but it remains lawful under the 1982 Education Act.

Kenya is a signatory of International instrument on the right of the child. These include the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) of 1990 and the United Nations convention on the Rights of the child (UNCRC) of 1979. Corporal punishment in Kenya is also prohibited by the local laws on Children's Rights (Republic of Kenya, 2001) and the Basic Education Act (Republic of Kenya, 2013). Therefore, the ban of corporal punishment implied an automatic switch to use of alternative disciplinary methods; collaborative decision making being one of them in the management of students' discipline in schools (Republic of Kenya, 2001). This implies that as a member, Kenya has to keep with international trends of recognising the rights of the child and the Kenyan laws on rights of the child.

However, the ban of corporal punishment in Kenya has never improved the state of students' discipline in secondary schools either. According to Kindiki (2009), the level of discipline in secondary schools in Kenya is very low. Similarly, the issue of student discipline in secondary schools in Kenya is not just a fleeting concern of the last few months but the subject has long been debated and has featured repeatedly on schools as well as national agendas both in Kenya and in other countries across the world. This study was necessitated by the growing concern by education stakeholders in Kenya over the rising reports of student indiscipline in secondary schools. Between 2000 and 2001, at least 250 schools had experienced unrests of students. Between June and July in 2008, violent strikes affected more than 300 secondary schools in the country (Opondo, 2008). It is noted that this happened barely about seven years after the ban of corporal punishment implying that corporal punishment was only among the disciplinary methods that were used to manage students' discipline in schools in the past.

However, investigations in this paper were based on influence of Principals' use of Collaborative decision making as an Alternative Disciplinary method in Kenya. The study objective sought to establish the extent to which principals' use of class meetings as an alternative disciplinary method influences students' discipline in public secondary schools. The study sought to respond to the following research question: To what extent does the principals' use of class meetings for collaborative decision making as an alternative disciplinary method influence students' discipline in public secondary schools?

Collaborative decision making is an alternative disciplinary method that could be used to manage students' discipline in schools. The ban of corporal punishment in South African schools was replaced by ATCP (Tungata, 2006). Cicognani (2004) argues that alternative disciplinary methods like in-school suspension, more counsellors, psychologists, support groups and parental involvement were preferred by teachers as alternative discipline procedures; a position that is consistent with Tungata (2006) who observed that teachers preferred positive alternatives to corporal punishment like parental involvement, manual work, application of school rules, enforcement of school code of conduct and educational counselling.

According to Khewu (2012), disciplinary measures to instil discipline, even though they were said to be based on alternatives to corporal punishment placed heavy emphasis on inflicting pain and relied on extrinsic control. According

to Nene (2013), alternative measures to corporal punishment were not very effective in curbing learner discipline in schools. This concurs with Ajowi and Simatwa (2010) who argue that administrators are not thoroughly prepared to deal with indiscipline in the absence of corporal punishment. Teachers could look at corporal punishment as easy to administer; effective as their resistance to change.

The situation of school discipline in Kenyan schools may not be very different from the rest of the world. Simatwa (2012), observed that many infractions were experienced in secondary schools and head teachers used a wide range of methods to manage students' discipline. These included expulsion, suspension, caning, physical punishment, detention, and reprimanding, kneeling, guidance and counselling, fining, rewards, wearing school uniform at all times, self-commitment in writing to maintain good conduct, pinching, slapping and smacking. Similarly, Muchiri (1998) observed that the most frequently suggested methods of enhancing discipline were guidance and counselling, dialogue, and parental involvement. Muchiri (1998) recommended that head teachers should be encouraged to use alternative methods of behaviour modification such as dialogue with students, parental involvement and student involvement in the administration of the school which have a positive impact on student behaviour instead of using punishment.

However, Ajowi and Simatwa (2010) argue that administrators are not thoroughly prepared to deal with indiscipline in the absence of corporal punishment even when teachers had a range of alternatives that they used. These included guidance and counselling, manual work, extra class work, having a set of school rules, withdrawal of privileges, kneeling down, dialogue and suspension which was used at times (Mutua, 2004). Mutua (2004) recommended that teachers should use alternative methods of behaviour modification which have a positive impact on students' behaviour instead of using punishment which only suppressed behaviour.

A study by Ouma, Simatwa and Serem (2014) established that effective methods of dealing with indiscipline included; involving parents which was rated 4.2, Guidance and counselling 4.2, manual work 4.0, caning 3.3 suspensions 2.5 and reprimanding 2.4. The study recommended that appropriate pupil discipline management methods be used in schools to create peace and harmony. Muchiri (1998) noted that the most frequently applied method of dealing with indiscipline was punishment which was interspersed with guidance and counselling and parental involvement. About 97.1 per cent of the head teachers involved other members of their schools in solving discipline problems. Disciplinary methods applied in secondary schools were seen to have various shortcomings of which the major ones were excessive use of punishment coupled with leniency and laxity in handling students' discipline. Research has established that physical punishment is an ineffective form of managing discipline and that it rarely motivates students to act differently (UNICEF 2010; Curwin, Mendler & Mendler, 2008). Such a violent pattern of disciplining students may unconsciously cause teachers to perceive themselves as enforcers of discipline rather than modelers of good behavior, thereby lose opportunity for self-introspection (Yaghambe & Tshabangu, 2013). Therefore, it is noted that principals as school administrators should be in the forefront in enforcing role modeling of positive behavior practices among the members of teaching staff by use of alternative disciplinary methods in their schools as opposed to use of force for this could effectively manage school discipline.

According to McIntire (1996), acts of physical punishment are seen as childish and tend to belittle the significance of power of the person being punished. According to Bandura (1963), teachers are social variables that influence and model behavior within schools and the classroom. However, in a Report of the Task Force on Students Discipline and unrest in secondary schools in Kenya established that there was lack of clear channels of communication in schools and where the freedom to express opinions was curtailed, mistrust between students and administration is created. It breeds a situation where students have no way of expressing their grievances leading to frustrations and resulting to disruptive behaviours (Republic of Kenya, 2001). It is noted that collaborative decision-making forums could provide the best opportunity for teachers to practice modeling students' behaviour positively and this could effectively enhance achievement of organizational goals.

According to Kiprop (2012), most principals adopt master or servant superior or inferior attitude in dealing with students. They rarely listened to students' grievances because they believed that they have nothing to offer. This creates a lot of tension, stress and misunderstanding and eventually leads to frustrations and violence as manifested in strikes. However, it was recommended that opportunities could be created to enable teachers, students and administrators to sit down and discuss issues affecting their schools freely without inhibition, intimidation or victimization. Hence, for effective management of school discipline the concerted effort between the principal, staff, students, parents and the community are a prerequisite. It is observed that where students are denied a chance to express their views and vent out frustrations, it breeds a situation which could result into disruptive behaviours hence such incidences could be prevented by involvement of students in collaborative decision making.

Kimani, Kara and Ogetange (2013) recommended that teachers should be trained on alternative strategies to deal with discipline problems other than use of corporal punishment. According to Ajowi and Simatwa (2010), teachers are not thoroughly prepared to deal with indiscipline in the absence of corporal punishment. Khewu (2012) observed that principals' roles in instilling discipline were focused mainly on reactive administrative and management functions rather than on giving leadership designed to inspire alternative ways of behaving. The principals and teachers' belief in the use of alternatives to corporal punishment revealed ambivalence and lack of understanding. This contradicts the expectation of a school principal to fully implement ATCP in schools.

However, investigations in this study to establish the extent to which principals' use of class meetings for collaborative decision making as an alternative disciplinary method influences students' discipline in public secondary

schools. According to Muchelle (1996), the amount of participation in school administration allowed in the school was not sufficient to give students a chance to practice democratic skills; head teachers had a negative attitude towards involvement of students in the areas of school curriculum, electoral processes due to fear of uncertainties; there was lack of commitment among the head teachers towards participatory administration which was manifest through double standards by the head teachers. Head teachers who had suggestion boxes felt that criticism deemed harsh to the school administration should be punished. Muchiri (1998) concurs by observing that students' involvement was only minimal. This was consistent with Waweru (2008) who observed that students' involvement in school governance was inadequate and was visibly below average except in co-curricular activities and maintenance of school plant.

According to Republic of Kenya (2001) and Kindiki (2009) there were poor channels of communication used by school administrators. Undemocratic school administration did not consider meetings as important channels of communication. This concurs with Kiprop (2012), who observed that principal adopt master/servant superior/inferior attitude in dealing with students. However, this is inconsistent with Kibet, Kindiki, Sang & Kitilit (2012) who established that principals frequently or sometimes involve students in their schools. However, they communicate clearly to students but frequently retained the final authority over most issues. This study sought to establish the extent to which principals' use of class meetings for collaborative decision making as an alternative disciplinary method influences students' discipline in public secondary schools in order to fill the knowledge gap.

## **2. Research Methodology**

This study sought to investigate the influence of principals' use of collaborative decision making as an alternative disciplinary method in Kenya. The study objective sought to establish the extent to which principals' use of class meetings for collaborative decision making as an alternative disciplinary method influences students' discipline in public secondary schools. The study adopted ex-post-facto research design. The study had a target population of 333 public secondary schools. Stratified proportionate sampling and purposive sampling were used to obtain a sample of 101 public secondary schools representing different school types where purposive sampling was particularly used to pick one boys' day school, one boys' day and boarding, one girls' day and boarding and girls' day schools. The study used questionnaires and interview schedules as tools for data collection. Validity of research instruments was established through a pilot study. Instrument reliability was established by a test re test technique. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse quantitative and qualitative data. The results of quantitative data gathered from closed ended questions were tabulated and presented using frequency distribution tables, cross tabulation tables and percentages. Qualitative data generated from open ended questions was categorised in themes based on the research questions and reported in a narrative form. The Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) test was used to determine the strength of association between holding class meetings for collaborative decision making and students' discipline and to test whether the observed relationship is significant or not. The level of significance was set at  $\alpha$  0.05.

## **3. Findings of the Study**

This study sought to establish principals' response towards use of class meetings for collaborative decision making as an alternative disciplinary method on students' discipline in schools. The results are as shown in table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Principals' Responses on Holding Class Meetings and Students' discipline**

		Class meetings for collaborative decision making				Total
		Class meetings		No Class meetings		Total
		F	%	F	%	%
School holds class meetings with students for collaborative decision making		82	83.7	16	16.3	100.0
	No	1	100.0	0	0	100.0
	No response	0	0	1	100	100.0
	Total	83	83.0	17	17.0	100.0
School discipline policies are communicated during class meetings	Yes	79	82.3	7	17.7	100.0
	No	4	100	0	0	100.0
	Total	83	83.0	7	17.0	100.0
	Learners' concerns are communicated during class meetings/Barbara	Yes	82	82.8	7	17.2
	No	0	0	2	100	100.0
	Total	84	83.2	7	17.0	100.0
Class meetings with students enhances dialogue	Yes	82	83.0	6	16.3	100.0
	No	1	50.0	1	50.0	100.0
	Total	83	83.0	7	17.0	100.0
Class meetings with students enhances decision making	Yes	83	83.0	6	16.2	100.0
	No	0	0	1	100	100.0
	No response	1(100.0)	100	0	0	100.0
	Total	84(83.2)	83.2	7	17.0	100.0

Key : F = Frequency; % = Per cent

From table 1 majority of the principals 83.7% agreed that they held class meetings with students for collaborative decision making. The principals reported that class meetings for collaborative decision-making enhanced decision making and learners concerns were communicated during class meetings. The findings imply that both the learners and the principals had an opportunity to interact and converse together hence sharing concerns that were affecting learners at that particular moment. These findings are consistent with Kibet, Kindiki, Sang and Kitilit (2012) and Cranston (2001) who found that principals frequently or sometimes involve other stakeholders, particularly teachers, students and to some extent parents, in the management of their schools. They communicate clearly to students but frequently retain the final authority over most issues. However, the findings are inconsistent with Muchelle (1996); Kindiki (2009) and Kiprop (2012) who noted minimal involvement of students in governance of secondary schools.

However, Kindiki (2009) recommended use of meetings and assemblies as main channels of communication because they improved the interaction and relationship between the administration and the students hence leading to unity and peace in the school. This implies that during class meetings with students for collaborative decision making, the school administrators would have a close contact with the individual students hence this would enable a bonding that would help all the concerned parties to trust and open up on issues that were of concern to them. Hence, this could enable the students to take responsibility of their actions. This is because during class meetings with students for collaborative decision making, students enhance dialogue with the school administration. On the other hand, class meetings helped the principal to communicate to the class on school discipline policies.

**Collaborative decision making and students’ discipline**

A chi-square test was done to determine the significance of association between principals’ use of class meetings for collaborative decision making and students’ discipline in schools. The results are as shown in table 2.

**Table 2**  
**Chi-square test on use of class meetings with students and students’ discipline**

			P-value
Class meetings with students enhances decision making	1.792	2	0.075
Class meetings with students enhances dialogue	1.575	1	0.209
School holds class meetings with students for collaborative decision making	5.175	2	0.408
Learners' concerns are communicated during class meetings/barazas	.853	2	0.520
School discipline policies are communicated during class meetings	.413	1	0.653

From the Chi-square table, the p-value 0.075, 0.209, 0.408, 0.520 and 0.653 > 0.5 has an average P-value of 0.373. This indicates that there is no significant difference between class meetings for collaborative decision making and students’ discipline. The lowest attribute under investigation was that class meetings with students enhances decision making with a p-value of 0.075 which is not significant, while the highest attribute on school discipline policies are communicated during class meetings has a p-value of 0.653 which is not significant but shows a very strong relationship between collaborative decision making and students’ discipline.

**4. Conclusion**

The study concluded that there is no significant difference between holding class meetings with students for collaborative decision making and students’ discipline. This however does not render class meetings valueless. It calls for improvement in implementing what is arrived at during such meetings to serve as a useful alternative disciplinary approach. Although students may bring about unrealistic demands during class meetings, this remains a thorny issue that principals have to navigate with a lot of caution. However, implementation of agreed upon decisions could lead to enhanced trust and thereby lower tensions regarding areas that could be potentially divisive and lead to unrest.

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