

**INFLUENCE OF PRINCIPALS' INVOLVEMENT OF STUDENT
COUNCIL IN DISCIPLINE MANAGEMENT ON ACADEMIC
PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN BUMULA
SUB-COUNTY, BUNGOMA COUNTY, KENYA**

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Publication Date: March 2023

ABSTRACT

Statement of the Problem: Management of students' discipline in secondary schools plays in the improvement of academic performance in examinations. However, in many public secondary schools in Bumula Sub-county, students register low grades in KCSE with cases of students' indiscipline being on the rise.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study was to assess the influence of involvement of student council in discipline management on students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Bumula Sub-county, Bungoma County, Kenya. The study was guided by the school management theory and academic achievement theory.

Methodology: The study applied mixed methodology and thus adopted concurrent triangulation design. The target population was 1, 290 respondents comprising 37 deputy principals, 513 teacher-counselors and 740 student leaders from which a sample of 306 respondents was determined using Yamane's Formula. This included 12 deputy principals, 60 teacher-counselors and 234 student leaders. Questionnaires were used to collect data from student leaders whereas interview guides from principals and teacher-counselors. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically along the objectives and presented in narrative forms. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively such as frequencies and percentages and inferentially using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis in Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS 23) and presented using tables and charts.

Findings: The study established that academic performance of students in KCSE has been on a decreasing trend for the last five years (2017-2021) despite the disciplinary strategies adopted by public secondary schools such as involvement of student council in school management.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: The study recommends that schools should design training programmes to equip student leaders with appropriate leadership skills. The Ministry of education should organize and offer seminars to ensure that school heads are well sensitized on the importance of involving students in school governance.

Keywords: *Involvement of student council, discipline management, academic performance, public secondary schools.*

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Success of students in academic activities in secondary schools depend on the levels of discipline which they exhibit. However, issues of indiscipline in schools have attracted growing attention of many worldwide. This problem manifests itself in a variety of ways which include vandalism, truancy, smoking, disobedience, intimidation, delinquency, murder, assault, rape, theft and general violence (Marais & Meier, 2010). School principals form a very important component of secondary school management and the extent to which students manifest desirable behavior patterns. Leithwood and Jantzi (2013) assert that a large part of any secondary school principal's job is to handle student behavior by adopting a multiplicity of management strategies such as involvement of student council. Student leadership is a major component of school management as it plays a key role in maintaining discipline among students. In keeping with these assertions, various stakeholders in secondary school education have increased their expectations of school leaders, demanding higher academic results and performance standards.

In the United Kingdom, David (2011) noted that meaningful student involvement is the process of engaging students as partners in every facet of school change for strengthening their commitment to education and democracy. Students' involvement in governance should be concentrated within elected student representatives or council (David, 2011). The student council is a representative body of students elected by their peers to give voice to the opinions and desires of the students in governance matters such as policy formulation, time tabling, teacher supervisions, subject selection, infrastructural planning and peer mentoring. Through this, secondary schools are in a position to enforce rules and regulations, reduced cases of indiscipline, few strikes, reduced violence and fights among students, improved completion and retention rates.

Hoy and Miskel (2012) indicate that, at present, in most public and private school systems across the United States, Canada, Australia and the Philippines, these bodies are alternatively entitled student council, student government, Associated Student Body, Student Activity Council, and Student Council Association. In keeping with these assertions, in a study carried

out in Cyprus, Kythreotis, Pashiardis and Kyriakides (2013) indicated that involvement of students in school management improves students' discipline which enhances behaviour change which, in turn, leads to improved academic performance. Kythreotis et al (2013) further state that involvement of students' leadership in school management assists them in being active and responsible participants of the whole learning process, from planning, resource mobilization, execution, evaluation and appraisal of the learning program, facilities and policies. This implies that the roles of the student councils include acting as role models for other pupils, promoting the ethos of the school, maintaining the standards of discipline, attending school events and student council meeting when required and to ensuring all students adhere to full school rules and regulations. Macky and Johnson (2013), while researching on students' views about children's rights in New Zealand, reported that where student councils were involved in school management, students were more likely to be involved in a range of discipline management issues, given a greater sense of school ownership as well as enhancing problem solving abilities and improving behaviour. In essence, each school is unique and has its own rules and regulations, which the student councils uphold as they enhance the other students to adhere to them.

Most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are not an exception and secondary schools have regularly experienced violent student disturbances (World Bank, 2014). Bukaliya and Rupande (2014) used evidence from Zimbabwe to argue that schools where students were not involved in decision-making or were never consulted whenever important decisions concerning students' discipline were being made, resorted to violence to vent their frustrations and disagreements. Bukaliya and Rupande (2014) found out that the students' council enabled the problems to be discussed before they got out of hand. In Tanzania, the role of student councils in governance of schools seemed to be entrenched and made provision for student participation and representation in committees involved in decision-making on matters discipline (Harper, 2015). According to Harper (2015), Nyerere who argued that only by practicing direct democracy, and learning by mistakes, can students become accountable in their responsibilities.

In line with the global practice, the government of Kenya introduced the children governance system in 2008 to facilitate an enabling process that will equip the children with knowledge, skills and attitudes that instil positive attributes such as hard work, honesty, accountability, innovativeness and respect for the rule of law. According to Koffi (2015), students would better

appreciate the country's resources if they were taught the importance of good governance at an early stage. In order to deliver quality Education, there has been a shift in schools towards devolving decision-making powers. The practice is informed by the view that people close to teaching and learning are in the best position to make decisions that affect their school as they have first-hand knowledge of relevant issues (Koffi, 2015). These initiatives included adoption of student council policy which implies involvement of students in school decision-making process on matters discipline, academic and managerial in nature. A study conducted in Kakamega East District, Abwere (2015) revealed that, in some schools, student councils are so efficient and effective that the role of teachers is limited to teaching and carrying out other academic duties. In view of the growing demand for more and better services at secondary education levels, Abwere (2015) has established that competencies of student councils should be addressed urgently. Abwere (2015) further noted that the student council works in partnership with the schools to achieve common goals of increased student engagement and student success. These viewpoints affirm the fact that the cardinal aim of student engagement is to enhance students' experience through a well-developed relationship. The first national secondary school student conference bringing together representatives from across the country's secondary schools was held in May 2008.

According to Kenya Secondary Schools Heads Association (KSSHA), the 2008 conference kick-started with a momentum to establish student governments at the classroom and school level in secondary schools across the country. The governments were hoped would create interactive forums between the students and school administrators where disciplinary issues affecting them would be discussed before they degenerated into full-blown school riots. During the first secondary school students' conference, the learners articulated their needs and grievances so clearly impressing the ministry of education top brass including the minister for education himself. In line with these assertions, Muthamia (2012) holds that, in order to foster inter-student discussion and develop a sense of community, an element of structure and organization is required within the student body. Despite these initiatives, students' indiscipline in secondary schools has been characterized as serious and pervasive, negatively affecting student learning and their academic performance.

In Bumula Sub-county, scenario is the same with students in many public secondary schools registering low academic grades in KCSE and cases of students' indiscipline having become a commonplace in secondary schools (MoE, 2022). For example, a report by the Ministry of

Education (2022) shows that Bumula Sub-county registered 53.1% in KCSE in 2015, 25.3% in 2016, 25.2% in 2017 and 24.4% in 2018 which paints a picture of declining academic performance in public secondary schools. On the other hand, a report by Ministry of Education (2017) shows that public secondary schools in Bumula Sub-county have witnessed 19.7% increase in cases of indiscipline among students. An assessment by Bwana (2015) also echoes similar sentiments that instances of students' indiscipline and indiscipline in public secondary schools in Bumula Sub-county have been on the rise up to 45.1%. According to Bwana (2015), Bumula Sub-county has witnessed 34.9% cases of drug and substance abuse among students, 56.1% instances of teenage pregnancy, 44.3% cases of bullying and violence among students and 54.3% cases of students' strikes in secondary schools. This points to an increasing trend of students' indiscipline. Despite this state of affairs, in Bumula Sub-county, the involvement of student council in the governance of schools has not been clearly defined (Obondo, 2013). This implies that students have not been adequately involved in planning, organizing, sourcing, leading or directing, and controlling the school activities. Yet, according to RoK (2012), it is a requirement that participation of learners in the school management be enhanced as a mitigant to increased number of students' strikes, violence and fights among students and above all dropout rates. According to RoK (2012), increasingly the role of management and governance is recognized as important for providing an environment where positive students' discipline is maintained and checked. However, much needs to be done since Rok (2012) as well as other empirical studies have noted demonstrated how involvement of student councils in school management influences students' academic performance; hence the study.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Involvement of student leadership in the management of students' discipline in secondary schools is key in improving academic performance. However, this is not the case in many public secondary schools in Bumula Sub-county. As noted earlier, many public secondary schools registering low grades in KCSE and cases of students' indiscipline having become a commonplace (MoE, 2022). According to the Ministry of Education (2022), Bumula Sub-county registered 53.1% in KCSE in 2015, 25.3% in 2016, 25.2% in 2017 and 24.4% in 2018 which paints a picture of declining academic performance. MoE (2017) shows that public secondary schools have witnessed 19.7% increase in cases of indiscipline among students. Bwana (2015) also echoes similar sentiments that instances of students' indiscipline in public secondary schools in Bumula Sub-county have been on the rise up to 45.1%. Bwana (2015) also notes that Bumula Sub-county has witnessed 34.9% cases of drug and substance abuse

among students, 56.1% instances of teenage pregnancy, 44.3% cases of bullying and violence among students and 54.3% cases of students' strikes in secondary schools. Despite these statistics, what remains unclear is the extent to which involvement of student council in discipline management influence academic performance in public secondary schools.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- i. To assess the status of academic performance in public secondary schools in Bumula Sub-county.
- ii. To determine how involvement of student council in discipline management influence academic performance in public secondary schools in Bumula Sub-county;

2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was based on the school management theory which was postulated by Luhmann (2004). The school management theory is an approach to organizations which likens an organization to an organism with interdependent parts, each with its own specific function and interrelated responsibilities. The theory is applicable in a school set up as an organization in that the school as an open system receives inputs from the environment (Okumbe, 2001). Thus, the inputs include students from the external diverse environment. This implies that students from the larger societal environment go to school with a host of their own beliefs, goals and hopes but become changed individuals as a result of educational experiences in school which are acquired through interaction with the school administration, teachers and students which also include monitoring and correcting learner discipline issues. This depends on the nature and quality of students' discipline produced as a result of use of school management strategies used in schools hence the suitability of the theory in the study.

The study was also guided by Walberg's academic achievement theory. This theory posits that learners' psychological traits coupled with their immediate learning environments influence educational outcomes. Walberg (2012) proposed nine main aspects which impact on learners' educational outcomes. These include; learners' ability or prior achievement, motivation, age or developmental level, quantity of instruction, quality of instruction, classroom climate, parental involvement, home environment, peer group, and exposure to mass media outside of school. Thus, the relevance of this theory is that educational process goals are interpreted to include learner perceptions of the social environment, creativity, self-concept, participation in extra-curricular activities, and interest in subject matter. In other words, ignoring these perceptions

and experiences in favor of traditional goals measured by test scores would decrease motivation and ultimately lower educational achievement.

3.1 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study applied mixed methodology and thus adopted concurrent triangulation design. Target population was 1290 respondents comprising 37 deputy principals, 513 teacher-counselors and 740 student leaders from which a sample of 306 respondents was determined using Yamane’s Formula. Stratified sampling was applied to create six strata based on the number of zones in Bumula Sub-county. From each zone, two secondary school principals were selected using purposive sampling. However, from each zone, 10 teachers and 39 student leaders were selected using simple random sampling to avoid bias. This procedure realized a sample size of 12 deputy principals, 60 teacher-counselors and 234 student leaders. Questionnaires were used to collect data from student leaders whereas interview guides from principals and teacher-counsellors. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically along the objectives and presented in narrative forms. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively such as frequencies and percentages and inferentially using Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Analysis in Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS 23) and presented using tables and charts.

4.1 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the findings of the study based on the objective. It also outlines the methods of presentation of the study findings and discussions.

Response Rates

In this study, 234 questionnaires were administered to students and, in return, 230 questionnaires were filled and returned. The researcher also interviewed 10 Deputy Principals and 48 teacher-counsellors. This yielded response rates shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Response Rate

Respondents	Sampled Respondents	Those Who Participated	Achieved Return Rate (%)
Deputy Principals	12	10	83.3
Teacher-counsellors	60	48	80.0
Student Leaders	234	230	98.3
Total	306	288	94.1

Source: Field Data (2023)

Table 1 shows that Deputy Principals registered a response rate of 83.3%, teacher-counsellors registered 80.0% whereas student leaders registered a response rate of 98.3%. This yielded an average response rate of 94.1% which is consistent with the assertions of Creswell (2014) that a response rate above 75.0% is adequate. This information was important since it allowed the researcher to generalize the study outcomes to the target population.

Status of Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools

The study sought to assess the trends of academic performance in public secondary schools in Bumula Sub-county. This was done by taking records of students’ performance in KCSE for the last five years (2017-2021). Descriptive data were collected and results are shown in Table 2:

Table 2: KCSE Performance in Public Secondary Schools in Bumula Sub-county between 2017 and 2021

KCSE Results in Mean Score (Points)	Years of Examination				
	2017 %	2018 %	2019 %	2020 %	2021 %
1-3 points (Poor)	40.2	43.5	44.2	47.3	48.9
3-5 points (Below Average)	36.9	35.1	34.9	33.5	32.5
5-7 points (Fair)	15.4	15.1	14.8	13.7	13.4
7-9 points (Good)	5.3	4.4	4.3	3.8	3.6
9-12 points (Excellent)	2.2	1.9	1.8	1.7	1.6

Table 2 shows that, on average, academic performance of students in national examinations (KCSE) has been on a decreasing trend ranging between 1 to 5 mean grades for the last five years (2017-2021). These findings corroborate the findings of a report by MoE (2022) that the performance of students in Bumula Sub-county in KCSE has been on a downward trend. Academic performance constitutes a key component of quality education offered in secondary schools and outcome indicators can be defined based on the extent to which outcome measures are connected to learning content. In other words, classroom evaluation through academic performance plays an important role in shaping views of educational quality in secondary schools. This further implies that academic performance is the outcome of quality education and the extent to which a student or secondary school has achieved their educational goals.

According to Rubin et al (2010), students’ academic performance represents one of the essential building blocks for transparent secondary education systems and qualifications. Smith

et al (2011) also noted that academic performance forms an important part of quality assurance approaches to secondary education and the reconsideration of such vital questions as to what, who, how, where and when to teach and assess. This affirms the fact that academic performance is a crucial tool for clarifying the results of learning for the students and teachers. It is evident that academic performance has been progressively decreasing in public secondary schools.

Involvement of Student Council in Discipline Management and Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools

The study sought to examine the influence of principals' involvement of student council on academic performance in public secondary schools. Results are shown in Table 3:

Table 3: Views of Student Leaders on the Influence of Principals' Involvement of Student Council on Academic Performance in Public Secondary Schools

Test Items	Ratings				
	SA %	A %	U %	D %	SD %
Public secondary schools usually involve student council in modeling behavior which has improved academic performance	53.3	14.6	7.5	11.1	13.6
Public secondary schools usually involve student council in management of peer pressure as a way of improving academic performance	68.3	25.6	2.0	2.0	2.0
In public secondary schools, student councils are tasked with conflict resolution among students as a way of improving their academic performance	54.8	18.5	7.4	20.4	9.3
In public secondary schools, academic performance has improved since the involvement of student council in academic activities	60.3	16.6	5.5	9.5	8.0

Table 3 shows that slightly more than half (53.3%) of the student leaders strongly agreed that public secondary schools usually involve student council in modeling behavior which has improved academic performance whereas 14.6% agreed. However, only a paltry 7.5% were undecided, 11.1% disagreed whereas 13.6% strongly disagreed. The study revealed that 68.3% of them agreed that public secondary schools usually involve student council in management of peer pressure as a way of improving academic performance whereas 25.6% agreed. However, 2.0% were undecided, 2.0% of the teacher-counsellors disagreed whereas 2.0% strongly disagreed. The study also revealed that 54.8% of them strongly agreed that, in public secondary schools, student councils are tasked with conflict resolution among students as a

way of improving their academic performance while 18.6% were in agreement. However, 7.5% were undecided, 14.1% disagreed whereas 5.0% strongly disagreed. Majority (60.3%) of the student leaders strongly agreed with the view that, in public secondary schools, academic performance has improved since the involvement of student council in academic activities while 16.6% agreed. On the same breath, 5.5% were undecided, 9.5% disagreed whereas 8.0% strongly disagreed. These findings lend credence to the findings of a study carried out in New Zealand in which Macky and Johnson (2013) established that where student councils were involved in school management, students were more likely to be involved in a range of discipline management issues, given a greater sense of school ownership as well as enhancing problem solving abilities and improving behaviour. In essence, each school is unique and has its own rules and regulations, which the student councils uphold as they enhance the other students to adhere to them.

This implies that students have not been adequately involved in planning, organizing, sourcing, leading or directing, and controlling the school activities. These findings also support the assertions of RoK (2012) that participation of learners in the school management be enhanced as a mitigant to increased number of students' strikes, violence and fights among students and above all dropout rates. These findings point to the significant role of student leadership in the management of discipline in secondary schools. In secondary schools where student leadership is frequently involved in decision-making, cases of indiscipline tend to go down.

Inferential Analysis

To determine the influence of involvement of student council on academic performance in public secondary schools, data were collected on how often the 10 sampled public secondary schools involve student council in school decision-making (Very Often = 5, Often = 4, Sometimes = 3, Rarely = 2 and Never = 1) and the average KCSE performance for the last five years (2017-2021). The results are shown in Table 4:

Table 4: Frequency of Involvement of Student Council and KCSE Performance in Public Secondary Schools

Frequency of Involvement of Student Council	KCSE Performance (Meanpoints) (2017-2021)
3	4.57
1	3.81
2	5.50
2	4.27
1	4.05
2	3.76
2	4.37
2	4.15
1	3.57
4	5.03

Source: Field Data (2023)

Table 4 shows that, in public secondary schools, where student leadership is frequently involved in decision-making with regard to students’ affairs, there are few reported cases of indiscipline and improved academic performance. This implies that the frequency with which school managers engage student councils in management is important in improving students’ academic performance. These results were further subjected to Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Analysis and the results are shown in Table 5:

Table 5: Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the Relationship between Involvement of Student Council and KCSE Performance in Public Secondary Schools

		Frequency of Involvement of Student Council	Academic Performance in KCSE
Frequency of Involvement of Student Council	Pearson Correlation	1	.632*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.050
	N	10	10
Academic Performance in KCSE	Pearson Correlation	.632*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.050	
	N	10	10

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 shows a Pearson Product Moment correlation test analysis which generated correlation coefficients of $r = 0.632$ with corresponding significant level (p-value) of 0.050 which was less than the predetermined level of significance, 0.05, that is, $p\text{-value} = 0.050 < 0.05$.

This shows that there is a strong correlation between involvement of student council and students' academic performance in public secondary schools. That is, the higher the frequency of involvement of student leadership in discipline management in secondary schools, the higher the academic performance. This indicates that the role of student council in the management of academic performance cannot be ignored as a mitigant to decreasing academic performance in public secondary schools.

Thematic Analysis

During the interviews, Deputy Principals also noted that student council is part and parcel of school management and plays an important in reducing cases of indiscipline. Deputy Principal, DP1, noted;

In my secondary school, I engage the student leaders in handling daily issues which affect their colleagues and resolve minor issues which may not have to reach school managers. This has helped me reduce cases of conflicts thus improving students' academic performance.

On their part, the teacher-counsellors also echoed similar sentiments as teacher-counsellors and Deputy Principals that they are often involved in management of students' affairs. They stated that they are often involved in handling matters affecting their colleagues. Teacher-counsellor, TC1, noted;

Student leaders are often involved in dealing with matters of discipline among their peers. They always advise, counsel and orient new and younger students on how to behave and adhere to rules and regulations.

Just like quantitative findings, these views further lend credence to the views expressed Macky and Johnson (2013) established that where student councils were involved in school management, students were more likely to be involved in a range of discipline management issues, given a greater sense of school ownership as well as enhancing problem solving abilities and improving behaviour. In essence, each school is unique and has its own rules and regulations, which the student councils uphold as they enhance the other students to adhere to them. This implies that students have not been adequately involved in planning, organizing, sourcing, leading or directing, and controlling the school activities. These mixed findings attest to the fact that student leadership plays an important role in the management of discipline in secondary schools. In other words, in secondary schools where student leadership is frequently involved in decision-making, cases of indiscipline tend to go down.

5.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

From the study findings, it is evident that academic performance of students in national examinations (KCSE) has been on a decreasing trend ranging between 1 to 5 mean grades for the last five years (2017-2021). This is occasioned by numerous cases of indiscipline among students. The study established that principals involve student council in the management of students' daily affairs. Student leaders are involved in resolving minor issues which may not have to reach school managers. This has helped us reduce cases of conflicts thus minimizing instances of indiscipline in the school. They also advise, counsel and orient new students on how to behave and adhere to rules and regulations. This implies that student leadership occupies a significant place in academic performance management in schools.

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that, as a practice, school administration should design training and development programmes meant to equip the student council leaders with appropriate leadership skills and specifically on ways of addressing student discipline. As a policy, the study recommends that the Ministry of education should organize and offer seminars to ensure that school heads are well sensitized on the importance of involving students in school governance.

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