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# **Influence of Student Councils' Involvement as a Link of Communication between Students and Administration on Students Discipline in Public Secondary Schools in Kathonzwani Sub-County, Kenya**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of student councils' involvement as a link of communication between students and administration on students discipline in public secondary schools in Kathonzwani Sub-County, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The target population was 30 public secondary schools in Kathonzwani Sub-County. Stratified random sampling was used to select a sample size of 108 students, 162 teachers and 28 principals. Questionnaires and interview guides were used to collect primary data. The questionnaires were also subjected to pilot test to ensure that research instruments were reliable. The data collected were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences computer programme version 20.0. The results were presented in form of frequency tables and chi square tests. Chi square tests were used to show the relationship between the variables. The results of the study indicated that schools where a student council did not act as a link of communication was characterized by high levels of indiscipline than those where student council acted as a link to the administration. It is concluded that involving student council to act as a link between students and school administration influences students' discipline.

**Key words:** *Link of Communication, Students Discipline, Public Secondary Schools*

### **1.0 Introduction**

The persistent waves of students' strikes in secondary schools in Kenya since independence continued to be witnessed hence the need to allow students to be heard through their representatives (Wachira, 2010 in Mukit,i 2014). There are many reasons advanced supporting the need for student councils. The major argument advanced being the need to change attitude towards youngsters and the need to promote student involvement in school governance (Keogh & Whyte, 2005).

Most schools do not really use the Representative Council of Learners to promote democratic participation. The majorities of schools are still authoritarian and reinforces passive subordination amongst the learners (Duma, 2011). The policy maintains that the Representative Council of Learners acts as a link of communication between students and the school management (Hilda, 2004). Schools should build the necessary frameworks and communication avenues for developing student councils .Thus, school administration should put in place good communication systems in schools to ensure a smooth two-way flow of information to all prefects, students, and teachers and support staff (Muli, 2012).

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Student indiscipline has been on a rise over the years in Kathonzwani Sub-County compared with the neighbouring sub-counties; as indicated by frequent strikes, student unrest and poor school performance (Kenya Ministry of Education, 2016).From the Kathonzwani District Education office report (July 2016) five schools within the district were involved in strikes, destruction of property hence closed indefinitely with others requiring law enforcers to guard the schools.

Mwiria and Ngethe (2007) analyzed the reforms in school governance but focused more on students' representations in governance with less emphasis on decision making process in Kenyan universities; the same can be applied in the secondary schools within Kathonzwani Sub-county, Makueni County. A study by Cook-Sather (2002) and Fletcher (2005), Bukaliya (2012) and Vundi, Majanga and Odollo (2014) advocate for student participation in decision making. The study investigates the influence of student councils' involvement as a link of communication between students and administration on students discipline in public secondary schools in Kathonzwani Sub-County, Kenya.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The study is guided by the following objective;

To establish the influence of student councils' involvement as a link of communication between students and administration on student's discipline in public secondary schools in Kathonzweni Sub-County

### **2.0 Literature Review**

#### **2.1 Student Councils' Involvement as a Link of Communication between Students and Administration and Students Discipline**

The indiscipline cases reported in Kenya show evidence of a communication breakdown between the schools administration and the prefects. Ozigi (1971) says that the student councils, serves as a link to communicate to the school administration. Ozigi points out that the student councils is one of the means of involving students in school governance. Thus, the procedures of communication are a two-way flow of information from top to bottom and bottom-up involving prefects. This goes in line with Max Weber's Theory of Bureaucracy. The main task of the student councils normally is to help in running school on behalf of the teachers (Kimocho, 2012).

Student councils' are forums where complaints are raised and settled. Students' councils can be organized in a variety of ways, with some being 'safety valves' where the principals or teachers listen to students' problems and explain them away. Thus students' councils in a democratic structure are able to air the students' ideas, opinions, and grievances to the relevant authorities. A major argument against students' councils is that they can easily breed chaos in schools (Marwa, 2014).

In an attempt to improve communication and involve students more in decision making in Kenya, other structures such as students open forums 'barazas' and the suggestion boxes have been designed. Open forums were strongly proposed by some educationists through which students were required to raise any issues with the school principal and necessary reactions were given. The success of school governance is depended on communication among students, teachers and the school management (Lethoko *et al.*, 2001). Limited communication among students and the school management is the main course of indiscipline cases (Kiprop, 2012).

According to Having a Say at School (HASAS) Survey (2010), time allocated for SCs may be looked in terms of how often the council meets; how long each session lasts; planning or preparation time; implementation of decisions made ; and communication with both adult decision makers and fellow students (Bukaliya & Rupande, 2012). Lack of enough time to talk at meetings about all the issues was identified as an obstacle by 55% of both student councils and school staff.

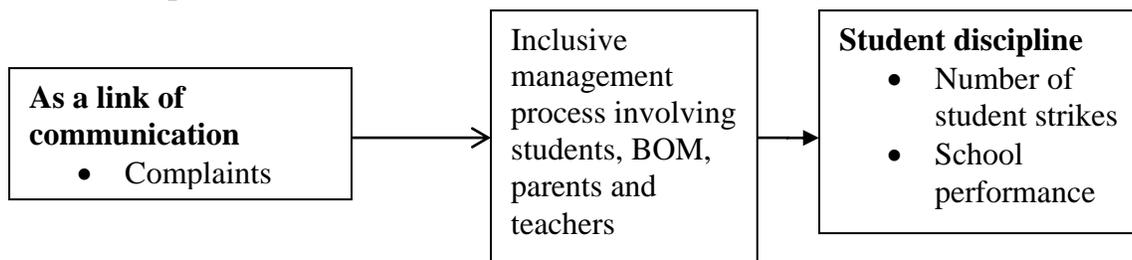
Wambulwa (2004) raised a number of advantages of learner representation in school governing body. The first one is that there is a link between learners and school governing body therefore contribution by learners can influence decisions. Secondly it contributes to the improvement and maintenance of discipline. Learners can offer their opinions regarding students’ discipline as a result adults are made aware of learner thinking regarding school governance. This suggests that if given the opportunity to serve on committees and exercise their right to vote consequently learners and educators get a chance to solve problems together.

Indimuli (2012) says that transforming students’ leadership from the prefect to more representative body was a voice in their leadership while changing the role of prefect from being master to being a bridge of communication between the students and school administration. Most of the times, decisions that teachers impose on students were the same that students themselves could gladly owned if they were given an opportunity to participate in their deliberations. The true reward to student council members was to give chance to give service to the school (Griffin, 2000).

**2.2 Theoretical background**

This study is anchored on the Social Systems Theory. Social Systems theory elucidates key principles that can be employed at different disciplines of life. School system is a live and always changing institution. A school is comprised of other social institutions which include departments, committees and students’ council experiencing continued interaction and interdependency amongst themselves. A learning institution is thus a system. This Theory was suitable the school was viewed to comprise other sub units like student councils, departments and the administrative unit interacting at different levels to bring about harmonious school management.

**2.3 Conceptual framework**



**Figure 1: Student councils’ involvement as a link of communication between students and administration and discipline**

**3.0 Research Methodology**

A descriptive survey design was employed. The target population was 30 public secondary schools in Kathonzweni Sub-County, Makueni County. The study

targeted a population of 1000 student representatives, 800 teachers and 30 principals. Stratification method was used to choose a sample size 108 student representatives, 162 teachers and 28 principals. Questionnaires and interviews were used to gather primary data. The researcher administered the questionnaires in person and the respondents given enough time to respond. The filled questionnaires were collected. Interview questions were read to the principals. Collected data (quantitative) was keyed in into SPSS software version 20.0. The results generated included average and deviations from the mean. The results were presented in frequency tables. The chi square tests checked the relationship of research variables. The chi square test was meant to compare the students' level of discipline between the schools which involved student councils' involvement as a link of communication between students and administration and schools that did not involve student councils' involvement as a link of communication between students and administration and schools. Qualitative data gathered by use of interview guide was analyzed through content analysis and presented in prose form.

#### **4.0 Data Analysis, Presentation and Interpretation**

##### **4.1 Instruments' Response Rate**

The return rate provides a profile of study units that participated. The respondents of the study were teachers, student councils and school principals. The return rate is indicated in Table 1.

**Table 1: Response rate**

<b>Respondents category</b>	<b>Administered</b>	<b>Returned</b>	<b>Unreturned</b>	<b>Percentage returned</b>
Teachers	162	134	28	82.7
Student representatives	108	104	4	96.3
Principals	28	28	-	100

The response rate for teachers was 82.7 percent; the response rate for student representatives was 96.3percent while the participation rate for principals was 100 percent. According Kothari (2004), a return rate of more than 50 percent is sufficient. Therefore, a response rate achieved for this study was adequate for analysis.

##### **4.2 Student Councils' as a Link of Communication to the Administration and Student's Discipline**

Ozigi (1971) says that the students' council serves as a communication router to the school administration. The respondents were asked to establish the influence of student councils' involvement as a link of communication between students

and administration on student’s discipline in public secondary schools. The responses were rated on a five Likert scale and presented in Table 2. The choices were presented as (5= never, 4= rarely, 3= can’t tell, 2 = frequently and 1= all the time.

**Table 2: Student councils’ as a link of communication to the administration and student’s discipline**

<b>Role</b>	<b>all the time</b>	<b>frequently</b>	<b>Can’t tell</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
Presentation of students problems	5.2%	6.0%	5.2%	35.8%	47.8%	4.1	1.1
Presentation of students views regarding welfare programmes	4.5%	11.9%	9.0%	48.5%	26.1%	3.8	1.1
Passing students views regarding school management	4.5%	12.7%	9.7%	23.1%	50.0%	4.0	1.2
Evaluating student-teacher relation	6.7%	8.2%	2.2%	31.3%	51.5%	4.1	1.2
Holding regular meetings with school administration	11.9%	10.4%	20.1%	29.9%	27.6%	3.5	1.3
Discussing mode of punishment	6.7%	10.4%	5.2%	43.3%	34.3%	3.9	1.2
Overall state of the school	20.9%	2.2%	8.2%	35.8%	32.8%	3.6	1.5
Average						3.9	1.2

Table 2 showed that majority of the respondents (83.6%) indicated that student councils were not involved in the presentation of students’ problems. The results also showed that majority of the respondents (74.6%) indicated that student’s councils were not involved in presenting of students views regarding welfare programs. Further, majority of the respondents (73.1%) percent of the respondents indicated that student council is not involved passing students’ views regarding school management. The results also show that (82.6%) of the respondents indicated that student council is not involved in evaluating student-teacher relation.

This is in agreement with Kyungu (2009) emphasizes the need for clear duties for students councils. Communication between students and school administration is one of the duties. Effective communication must be enhanced. This will enable effective day to day management of schools. Thus, school administration should put in place good communication systems in schools to ensure a smooth two-way

flow of information to all prefects, students, and teachers and support staff (Muli, 2012).

On a likert scale, the mean of the responses was 3.9 indicating that majority of the respondents were not agreeing to the statements in the questionnaire. The deviation from the mean was 1.2 meaning that the responses were clustered around the mean response. The average mean of 3.9 and standard deviation of 1.2 indicated that there was a high variation in the responses from the respondents with regard to student councils’ involvement as a link of communication and students’ discipline.

A Chi square test for independence between student councils’ involvement as a link of communication and student’s discipline was presented. Student councils’ involvement as a link of communication was categorized into those schools where student council act as a link of communication and those schools where student council do not act as a link to the administration. This was tabulated against students’ level of discipline that was categorized into high indiscipline cases and low indiscipline cases. Table 3 shows how student level of discipline was evaluated against student council involvement as a link of communication of communication to the school administration.

**Table 3: Chi square test for independence between students council as a channel of communication and student’s discipline**

		Students discipline		Chi-square (p value)
		High indiscipline cases	Low indiscipline cases	
Channel of communication	Students council not involved as a channel of communication	104	1	111.127 (0.000)
	Students council involved as a channel of communication	3	26	

A school where student council does not act as a link of communication was characterized by high levels of indiscipline than those where student council acted as a link to the administration. Result findings indicated that, there were high indiscipline cases when student council did not act as a link of communication as shown by 104 respondents as compared to 4 respondents who indicated that student councils act as a link of communication. Further, student indiscipline cases were low when student council acted as a link of communication as shown by 26 respondents as compared to only 1 who indicated that student council act as a link of communication. The study findings were statistically significant supported by a chi square of ( $\lambda =111.127, p=0.000$ ). These findings therefore imply that involving student council to act as a link between students and school administration influences students’ discipline.

An interview session was conducted with school principals. The school principals indicated that, student council is helpful in acting as a link between students and school administration. This ensures that information lapses that are common in learning institutions are mitigated.

## **5.0 Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Summary of the study**

The study sought to investigate the influence of student councils' involvement as a link of communication between students and administration on students discipline in public secondary schools in Kathonzi Sub-County, Kenya. Chi square test for independence results ( $\lambda=111.127$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) indicated that schools where a student council did not act as a link of communication was characterized by high levels of indiscipline than those where student council acted as a link to the administration. The study findings were statistically. These findings therefore imply that involving student council to act as a link between students and school administration influences students' discipline

### **5.2 Conclusions**

It is also concluded that involving student council to act as a link between students and school administration influences students' discipline. Representative Council of Learners acts as an important instrument for liaison and communication and must meet at fairly regular intervals, with educators and other school stakeholders to consider ideas, suggestions, comments and even complaints from the students. Schools should build the necessary frameworks and communication avenues for developing student councils. Thus, school administration should put in place good communication systems in schools to ensure a smooth two-way flow of information to all prefects, students, and teachers and support staff.

### **5.3 Recommendations for the Study**

It is recommended that the sustainable communication link between students council and school administration. This will take care of information lapses that are common in learning institutions.

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