The Influence of Principals' Student Disciplinary Practices on Student Retention in Public-Day Secondary Schools in Nakuru County, Kenya

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Abstract:
Low secondary school retention has long been a source of concern in Kenya. Existing literature emphasizes that the reasons for this low student retention are complex, multifaceted, and poorly understood. Furthermore, there is a lack of understanding about how students experience these reasons, particularly during their secondary school education. The goal of this study was to determine the impact of principals' student disciplinary practices on student retention in Nakuru County public day secondary schools. The concurrent triangulation research design was used in a mixed-methods research approach. The study involved 396 participants, including 90 principals, 363 teachers, 110 students, and 11 Sub-County Directors of Education. The study established that the regression coefficients (β) of peer counselling in helping to solve student disciplinary issues and the issuance of copies of school rules and regulations during admission were both negative and insignificant (β= -.128, = -.179, p > 05). The practices of involving learners in the setting of school rules and regulations, organizing guidance and counselling sessions for students with social problems, and invitation of parents and guardians to school to discuss amicable solutions for serious disciplinary issues had positive but insignificant regression coefficients (β= .114, = .283,= 0.238; p > 05). However, the practice of regularly informing parents and guardians of students' disciplinary issues had a statistically significant regression coefficient (β= .561; p < 05). The multiple regression model produced an adjusted R^2 = .190, p < 0.05, which implied that principals' disciplinary practices explained 19% of the variance in retention of students in public day secondary schools in Nakuru County, Kenya. From the findings of the study, it is evident that school principals should prioritize disciplinary measures that have an influence on the retention of students to create a favorable learning atmosphere for academic performance. These findings can assist educational administrators in developing effective student disciplinary and management techniques that will boost student retention in their schools.

Keywords: Student retention, discipline, public secondary schools, student management practices

1. Background of the Study

Improving student retention has been the focal point of higher education (HE) research for quite some time and the research and literature on retention internationally is voluminous. However, improving student retention and success remains a priority for Australian universities as the Commonwealth Government has included retention (along with progression rates and student experience data) on its list of indicators for funding higher education (DEEWR 2009). There exist some national studies that indicate the possible magnitude of the research and theory exploring the individual, social and institutional factors that impact student retention in Australian higher education (Adams et al., 2010; Krause, 2005; Maher & Macallister, 2013; Nelson & Creagh, 2013; Phillips et al., 2011). An initial step towards a more informed theorising of the student retention phenomenon is to define the term retention. Retention is the "ability of an institution to retain a student from admission through graduation or degree completion" (Seidman, 2005, pp. 14). To meet this goal, universities are collecting large volumes of data relating to their students and the educational process. These vast amounts of data are stored in the student information systems (SIS), including student interactions with various educational technologies such as learning/course management systems (LMS/CMS), and in various databases such as admissions files, library records and other systems (Tair & El-Halees, 2012). Moreover, the large volumes and the increasing complexity of different kinds of data sitting in different computational environments (LMS, social media tools, cloud-based storage, etc.) make it hard to collate them for analysis. To deal with complex and large volumes of data, analytics and technologies have to be introduced to effectively transform available "big data" into information and knowledge to support decision-making (EdFutures, 2013). Some examples of analytics in the academic domain include business analytics, educational data mining, academic analytics, learning analytics, predictive analytics, or action analytics. van Barneveld and colleagues have attributed the various definitions to these listed terms and the level where the analytics are focused (van Barneveld et al., 2012). Retention is the "ability of an institution to retain a student from admission through graduation or degree

completion" (Seidman, 2005, pp 14). Retention is the "ability of an institution to retain a student from admission through graduation or degree completion" (Seidman, 2005, pp 14). Kenya aims to become a newly industrialized, middle-income country with a high standard of living for all of its citizens by 2030. Across the country, education and training programs have been designed to provide students with the knowledge, abilities, and attitudes needed to realize this vision (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). The vision has identified the need for links between secondary school and higher education, training, and the labour market if secondary education is to become meaningful. To successfully guide a secondary school class from the beginning of the learning cycle to the end of the learning cycle, a comprehensive transitional procedure is required. Student retention is a problem in most developing countries, and the problem is often caused by school management practices that include the techniques, innovations, and efficacy of work systems, especially in the management of students (Siebers et al., 2008). Effective work systems include teacher empowerment and training, quality-improvement programs, the introduction of new technological advancements, and appropriate management styles used by school principals. These practices all have a greater impact on student learning outcomes than class size, competition, or teaching quality (Duarte et al., 2019). School factors, such as the provision of material and non-material facilities, also play a role in ensuring good education access and retention. Similarly, a high rate of student indiscipline combined with poor school management systems is likely to result in poor knowledge acquisition and high dropout rates among students (Muthaa et al., 2013).

Disruptive behavior is a common reason for student expulsion in countries such as the United Kingdom (Jenkins & Ueno, 2017). Distraction, noise, and disorder by students are viewed as challenges to not only classroom management but also student retention by school principals and teachers around the world (Haydn, 2014). Researchers have suggested that school Principals and teachers establish and maintain a positive disciplinary climate of zero tolerance based on their school rules and regulations to improve retention (Sammons et al., 2011). In contrast, some researchers have demonstrated the need for school administrators and teachers to be flexible rather than rigid when considering the potential risk of educational and psychological harm caused by aggressive reactions to misbehaving students (Riley et al., 2012).

Average scores on school disciplinary climate vary greatly across countries, owing to differences in cultural and administrative norms (Ning et al., 2015). The knowledge acquisition orientation in the school system, large class size, whole-group teaching, and the norm of respect for teachers in Eastern Asian countries such as China encourage school administrators and teachers to regulate every detail of school activities in a simple and uniform manner (Ning, 2014). In contrast, in Anglo-Saxon countries such as Australia and the United States, relatively small class sizes and differentiated instruction allow school administrators and teachers to give their students more "freedom and space" (Lau et al., 2018). Exclusionary interventions, such as time-outs, office referrals, suspension, and expulsion from school, are used to cool down or isolate rule-breakers from their classmates when dealing with student misbehavior (Pane, 2010).

Comparative studies of different secondary day schools could demonstrate the differential effects of school disciplinary climate on students in different areas of Kenya, including Nakuru County. By addressing the following research question, the current study aimed at generating new insights into effective disciplinary measures. Are the principals' disciplinary practices beneficial to student retention in Nakuru County's public day secondary schools? The hypothesis that was tested in this study was: H0: Principals' student disciplinary practices have no statistically significant influence on student retention in public-day secondary schools.

2. Theoretical Literature and Framework

Tinto's (1975, 1993) student integration theory guided this study. The theory proposes that academic and social integration are important dimensions of student retention and that student integration is influenced by various risk factors. The theory emphasizes that students enter school with various background characteristics related to family, social status, parental formal education, and parental expectations. Student integration is also related to individual characteristics of learners, such as gender, race, age, academic aptitude, and primary schooling experiences. These background characteristics combine to influence the student's initial goal and school commitments in the secondary school environment. According to Tinto (1993), institutional commitments represent the degree to which a student is motivated to graduate from a specific institution, and these commitments change during the student's time at school due to the student's level of integration into the school's academic and social systems. Based on this theory and in reference to the study variables, school principals can ensure that students are disciplined to achieve the desired levels of student integration into the school system. This can be done by communicating school rules and regulations, implementing fair disciplinary procedures, and providing guidance and counseling to the students.

3. Empirical Literature Review

Dimov et al. (2017) contend that discipline can be viewed positively or negatively. Discipline, from a negative standpoint, entails controlling, punishing, being submissive to rules and authority, suspending, and expelling students. The negative viewpoint mostly characterizes how principals and teachers handle disciplinary issues in our educational institutions today. However, this negative perspective of discipline has not been successful in dealing with indiscipline in educational institutions. Indeed, attempts by principals to discipline students in schools using negative perspectives have occasionally resulted in strong protests from both the students and the parents of the concerned students, to the point where most of these methods are now illegal in Kenyan schools. A case in point is the ban on corporal punishment in Kenyan schools by the government, as effected in the year 2001 (Najoli et al., 2019). This action now necessitates

Principals developing innovative mechanisms to ensure students are disciplined for a safe and secure school environment, including effective communication of school rules and regulations and a fair student disciplinary process.

Ilyasin (2019) contends that when developing mechanisms to improve student retention in their schools, principals should strike a balance between traditional and progressive perspectives on discipline. As a result, school principals' practices in Kenya today have shifted away from a negative view of discipline that may contradict government policy on student discipline to the use of more positive approaches such as the use of school rules and regulations, emphasis on school safety and security, and fair disciplinary processes.

Emekako (2016) investigated how teachers administer disciplinary measures as a means of sustaining a peaceful and disciplined learning environment when studying disciplinary measures used by secondary school teachers. Participants for the study were chosen using stratified random, convenience, and purposeful sampling techniques. The findings of this study were informed empirically by descriptive and inferential statistics, as well as content analysis. This study found that, despite the variety of disciplinary measures available to teachers following the abolition of corporal punishment, teachers still used only a few of them, which had an effect on student retention. The study also discovered that the majority of these measures were ineffective or unsuitable as compared to corporal punishment.

Uzoechina et al. (2015) investigated teachers' awareness and use of non-violent discipline strategies in Nigerian secondary schools. Out of 996 teachers, 200 were chosen for the descriptive survey. Stratified random sampling was used, with schools stratified into co-educational and single-sex schools, and 10 teachers were chosen from each randomly selected school. The study discovered significant differences in teachers' awareness and use of non-violent discipline strategies in single-sex and co-educational secondary schools. Students had to notice teachers' empathy, even when they were wrong, and possibly be warned about the consequences of repeating such wrongdoing in situations where they had not been warned. The study also found out that corporal punishment left scars, maimed, and sometimes killed students and was banned in Nigerian schools because it encouraged dropouts.

Nthiga (2014) investigated strategies used to improve learner retention in public secondary schools in Kenya's Embakasi district. Using regression analysis, the study found that discipline predicted student retention in schools. The study identified behavior problems, absenteeism, and a lack of parental support for student disciplinary programs as the disciplinary issues that the school Principals had to deal with. However, the study did not conclusively identify the positive disciplinary practices that school principals could use to deal with these issues.

Despite the numerous strategies put in place to manage the phenomenon, the literature reviewed shows that student discipline is still a global issue of concern. Thus, School Principals should constantly be concerned about instilling discipline in their students, and developing mechanisms to involve students in maintaining discipline would be ideal. According to the literature, principals have devised innovative disciplinary practices such as developing clear communication of rules and regulations, involving students in managing discipline through student leaders, and ensuring the security and safety of students in schools. However, research into how these disciplinary practices affect student retention, particularly in day secondary schools, has been inconclusive.

4. Research Methodology

The study used a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods research approach, which allowed both qualitative and quantitative approaches to be integrated within the same study, as recommended by Creswell and Clark (2013). The quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed independently but concurrently, and the results were triangulated to provide a comprehensive picture of the impact of principals' disciplinary management practices on student retention. The specific research design used was the descriptive survey. The study included a sample of 90 principals, representing 30% of the principals' target population. The sample size of 30% is the recommended population proportion for survey studies (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2019). The sample population chosen represented the 11 sub-counties in Nakuru County that were considered as sampling clusters. Using proportionate sampling technique, the number of schools chosen from each cluster (sub-county) was determined. A total of 11 Sub-County Directors of Education (SCDEs) were also chosen as key informants for the study. Ten (10) students from one school per sub-county were also purposefully chosen for the study, resulting in a sample of 110 students from across the County.

5. Research Findings

From the findings of this study, it was evident that students were involved in developing school disciplinary policies as well as school rules and regulations in the majority of the schools. During admission, the principal also ensured students were given copies of the school rules and regulations. In addition, the principals organized guidance and counseling sessions for students who had social problems, and the majority of principals agreed that setting up guidance and counseling sessions for students experiencing social problems was a good idea. The findings agree with those of Prasetyarini et al. (2020) and Ilyasin (2019), who discovered that school principals are heavily involved in counseling students with social problems. Further, it was found that the Principals always support peer counseling in resolving student issues, which has been found to be beneficial in resolving indiscipline cases. This finding was similar to that of Uzoechina et al. (2015), who highlighted the importance of empathy and peer support in maintaining discipline in schools. A further finding was that the Principals reported and informed parents of students who had disciplinary issues on a regular basis, which was found to be beneficial in resolving cases of indiscipline. This finding was consistent with the findings of Nthiga (2014), who emphasized the importance of parental involvement in disciplinary issues. The principals acknowledged that they invited parents and guardians to meet and work out solutions for students who had serious disciplinary issues. All of the respondents agreed that bringing parents and guardians into the school to discuss a serious

disciplinary issue with a student was a good and beneficial idea. This finding is consistent with the findings of Dimovet et al. (2017), who emphasized the importance of parent and school cooperation in dealing with disciplinary issues and found it to be beneficial.

These findings were corroborated by the responses from the qualitative data collected using student interviews to investigate discipline management practices in secondary schools. The student representative agreed that they were given written copies of the rules and regulations, which were also displayed throughout the school, including classrooms and noticeboards. To recognize and reward exemplary performers, track individual performance, and encourage those who performed poorly, the school used a reward system. The student representatives also agreed that Principals collaborated with parents on discipline issues, and CCTV cameras had been installed in some schools to prevent theft and bullying among students. Additionally, the existing disciplinary committees in most schools were considered to be effective, and student-family meetings were held on a regular basis. The schools also rely on the use of suggestion boxes, where complaints and suggestions are posted. School prefects and peer counselors were also considered critical in the management of student discipline in schools.

6. Correlations between Principals' Disciplinary Practices and Student Retention

The results for the Pearson Correlations between principals' disciplinary practices and student retention are provided in table 1.

		Principals Disciplinary Practices	Average Student Retention
Principals Disciplinary Practices	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	87	
Student Retention	Pearson Correlation	.432**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	87	87

Table 1: Correlations between Principals Disciplinary Practices and Student Retention
. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)
. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

A Pearson product-moment correlation was used to analyze the connection between principals' disciplinary practices and student retention. Student retention and principals' disciplinary practices had a moderate, positive correlation that was statistically significant ($r = 0.432$, $n = 87$, $p = 0.000$). The above results show a significant moderate positive correlation between the two variables ($r= 0.432$, $p < 0.01$). The correlation coefficient of 0.432 indicates a moderately positive relationship between the two variables, implying that as the effectiveness of disciplinary practices improves, so does the student retention rate. This finding was consistent with the findings of Kaluku et al. (2020), who found that effective disciplinary practices are critical for promoting a positive school culture and lowering student dropout rates in Kenya. As a result, school principals must prioritize effective disciplinary practices to promote student retention and academic success. Furthermore, as established by Phiri (2022), Prasetyarini et al. (2020), Njangi (2019), Poolos (2019), and Awuor (2018), Principals can use a variety of strategies to improve disciplinary practices and promote student retention.

7. Hypothesis Test

The regression analysis was carried out to establish the predictive capacity of disciplinary practices on student retention. The predictive capacity of principals' disciplinary management practices on student retention in public day secondary schools in Nakuru County, Kenya, was given by calculating the coefficient of determination (R^2). The coefficient of determination shows the proportion of variation in the dependent variable as a result of the changes in the independent variables. The summary of the regression model is shown in table 2 below.

Model Summaryb										
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					Durbin-Watson
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	
1	.497a	.247	.190	.88407	.247	4.363	6	80	.001	.472
a. Predictors: (Constant) Parents and guardians are always invited to school to discuss amicable solutions when a student is involved in a serious disciplinary issue, Learners are always involved in the setting of school rules and regulations, The School always organizes guidance and counselling sessions for students with social problems. The School regularly reports and informs parents and guardians of students' disciplinary issues. During admission, students are always given copies of school rules and regulations. The School supports peer counselling in helping to solve student issues all the time.										
b. Dependent Variable: Student Retention										

Table 2: Regression Analysis

The multiple regression model produced adjusted R^2 = .190, p<0.05. The results of the regression analysis (Table 2) showed that principals' disciplinary practices explained 19% of the variance in retention of students in public day

Secondary Schools in Nakuru County, Kenya (Adjusted R^2 =0.190). The other remaining percentage of 81% is explained by other factors. Therefore, the overall regression model showed a statistically significant relationship (p<0.05) between principals' disciplinary practices and retention of students in Public Day Secondary Schools in Nakuru County, Kenya. Since the regression model showed a statistically significant relationship between principals' disciplinary practices and retention of students in public day secondary schools in Nakuru County, Kenya, it was necessary to establish the predictive capacity of each of the principals' disciplinary practices on student retention.

Coefficients[a]								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.070	.933		.075	.940		
	Learners are involved in setting school rules and regulations	.114	.100	.117	1.135	.260	.888	1.127
	During admission, students are always given copies of school rules and regulations	-.128	.224	-.073	-.571	.569	.580	1.725
	The school organizes guidance and counselling sessions for students with social problems.	.283	.186	.212	1.520	.132	.485	2.062
	The school supports peer counselling in helping to solve student issues	-.179	.190	-.137	-.941	.350	.443	2.258
	The school regularly reports and informs parents and guardians of students' disciplinary issues	.561	.204	.345	2.747	.007	.599	1.670
	Parents and guardians are invited to the school to discuss amicable solutions when a student is involved in a serious disciplinary issue.	.238	.231	.145	1.029	.306	.476	2.102
a. Dependent Variable: Student Retention								

Table 3: Principal Discipline Management Practices and Student Retention

The role of peer counselling in helping to solve student issues and the issuance of copies of school rules and regulations during admission regression coefficients (β) were both negative and insignificant (β= -.128, = -.179, p > 05). Table 3 further shows that involving learners in the setting of school rules and regulations, organizing guidance and counselling sessions for students with social problems, and invitation of parents and guardians to school to discuss amicable solutions when involved in a serious disciplinary issue had a positive but statistically insignificant relationship since the regression coefficients (β) were positive but insignificant (β= .114, = .283, = 0.238; p > 05). Based on the data, there was no statistically significant link between the issuance of school rules and regulations to students on admission use of peer counselors which was negative and insignificant (p >.05). There was no statistically significant link between involving students in setting school rules and regulations and organizing guidance and counselling sessions for students which was positive and insignificant (p >.05). However, regularly informing parents and guardians on students' disciplinary issues had a statistically significant relationship (β= .561; p < 05).

The results of the analysis of variance (ANOVA), as presented in table 4 (F-value of 25.513 and the p-value of 0.000, which is less than 0.05), demonstrated that the overall model was significant in predicting variations in student retention rates in public day secondary schools in Nakuru County.

ANOVA[a]						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	19.159	1	19.159	25.513	.000[b]
	Residual	63.830	85	.751		
	Total	82.989	86			
a. Dependent Variable: Student Retention						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Principals Disciplinary Practices						

Table 4: Analysis of Variance

The study, therefore, rejected the null hypothesis that principals' disciplinary practices had no statistically significant influence on student retention rates in public day secondary schools in Nakuru County and accepted the alternative hypothesis that principals' disciplinary practices had a statistically significant positive influence on student retention rates. This finding was consistent with that of Owan and Agunwa (2019), who found that principals' supervisory, leadership and communication competencies significantly influenced teachers' work performance in terms of instructional delivery, attendance at classes, note-taking, and record-keeping and also suggested that effective school management practices, including disciplinary practices, were critical for promoting student retention. This was also consistent with the findings of Arop et al. (2020), who discovered that principals' disciplinary practices, as well as leadership techniques, conflict management, teacher motivation, teacher discipline, school supervision, student records management, and effective communication, were significantly related to students' mathematical academic achievement.

Overall, the study's findings on principals' student disciplinary practices and their influence on student retention in Nakuru County public-day secondary schools were consistent with previous research on the importance of effective school management and disciplinary practices for promoting positive academic outcomes and preventing negative behavior in schools. Consequently, school leaders should create a safe and orderly learning environment that supports student success and retention by implementing effective disciplinary practices that promote positive behavior and prevent negative behavior by students.

8. Conclusion

The findings of this study suggested that effective disciplinary practices were critical for promoting student retention in schools. Schools should, therefore, strive to create a positive learning environment that encourages students to stay in school and succeed academically by implementing fair and consistent policies that prioritize student support and positive reinforcement. School principals should prioritize effective disciplinary practices as a means of promoting student retention and academic success and collaborate closely with teachers, parents, and other stakeholders to develop effective strategies for dealing with disruptive behavior.

9. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that student disciplinary practices should be emphasized by involving students in the development of school rules and regulations, organizing guidance and counseling sessions for students experiencing social problems, and offering peer counseling to assist students in resolving issues. Regular communication with and involvement of parents and guardians in their children's disciplinary issues should also be prioritized.

10. Limitations of the Study

The study was hampered by a lack of local literature on the impact of principals' student disciplinary management practices on student retention, as most studies have focused on the effects of discipline on student performance. As a result, this study was limited to four principals' student management practices adapted from Tinto's (1975, 1993) student integration theory.

11. Suggestions for Further Studies

More research is needed to investigate the role of other factors in improving student retention in Nakuru County's public day secondary schools. A more in-depth investigation of the impact of the quality of teaching and learning on student retention could be conducted, considering factors such as teacher training, classroom management, and instructional resources in schools.

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