Mechanisms used by Schools in Addressing Issues that Contribute to Student Unrest in Secondary Schools in Kisii County, Kenya

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Abstract:- School unrest is a concern worldwide today. Kisii County has not been spared. Reports indicated that in 2017, students at Kisii high school went on rampage. In the year 2018, Kisii high school students and Botoro ELCK high school students went on strike thus damaging properties. Further reports indicated that in 2021, Kisii County had 7 cases of unrest compared to Migori County which had 2 cases, Bomet County 3 cases and Kericho County 5 cases. Despite these cases of student unrest, not much had been done in establishing mechanisms that schools used to address issues that contributed to student unrest. The objective of this study therefore was to establish mechanisms schools use to address issues that contribute to student unrest in secondary schools in Kisii County, Kenya. The study was based on Social Control Theory by Ivan Nye (1958), which put emphasis on the importance of the learning environment. When the learning environment is not conducive it will trigger chaos. Descriptive survey research design was used. The target population was 30,955 form two students and 350 class teachers. Yamane's formula was used to determine the sample size of 395 students while stratified random sampling was used to determine a sample size of 105 class teachers. Questionnaire and interview schedule were used to collect data. A pilot study was carried out among 40 students and 35 class teachers using test- retest method of reliability. Reliability coefficient index of the instruments was determined at .78. Face and content validity of the instruments were ascertained by experts. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics in form of frequencies and percentages while qualitative data was transcribed and reported in an ongoing process as themes and sub-themes emerged. Findings indicated that the key mechanism used by schools to address unrest was, ensuring students adhered to the school rules (96%), followed by sensitization of students on the importance of adhering to school rules and regulations (94.7%), ensuring that there is adequate safety at school (94.7%) and punishing students who violate the school rules (94.1%). The least mechanism used by schools in addressing unrest was, involving students in making school rules (0%). It was concluded that adhering to school rules by the students is the key mechanism used by schools in addressing issues contributing to student unrest. The study recommends that student be involved in making school rules. This finding is useful to the school administrators and the Ministry of Education in shedding light on the importance of involving students in making school rules.

Keywords:- Address, Mechanisms, Unrest.

I. INTRODUCTION

Approximately 48,400 (6.4%) of public schools in the U.S. have reported incidences of student unrest in schools such as protests, walkouts, or other disruptions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). According to the findings from a study conducted in the U.S by Kelli et al., (2016), promoting positive school climate (building relationships with students), creating a sense of belonging for students and proactively addressing discipline and behavior issues are effective methods of managing this unrest issues in schools. By building positive relationships with students, teachers can create a sense of trust and mutual respect that can help prevent conflicts and unrest in schools. This can be achieved by creating a good rapport with the students, listening to their grievances, providing opportunities for students to participate in activities that align with their interests. When students feel valued and supported in their school environment, they are more likely to have a positive attitude towards learning and be less likely to engage in disruptive behavior. Addressing discipline and behavior issues proactively is also an important strategy for managing unrest in schools. This involves setting clear expectations for behavior, providing consistent consequences for inappropriate behavior, and working with students and families to address underlying issues that may be contributing to negative behavior (Kelli et al. (2016). By addressing discipline and behavior issues in a proactive manner, educators can help prevent small problems from escalating into larger issues that can disrupt the learning environment.

A study conducted in Kuwait by Abdulhadi & Abdulhadi (2018), on the effects of strict school rules on student behavior showed that strict adherence to school rules had a positive impact on student behavior. Specifically, the findings indicated that students who perceived the school rules as strict reported lower levels of disruptive behavior and higher levels of academic performance while those who perceived the school rules as fair and just were more likely to adhere to the rules and exhibit positive behavior. The study concluded that strict adherence to school rules can be an effective mechanism to address student unrest issues by improving student behavior and academic performance. It however, noted that school rules had to be perceived as fair and just by students so as to encourage their adherence. Another study conducted by The Education Trust (2018) which looked at various strategies for promoting positive

behavior and discipline in schools, including enforcing school rules, revealed that schools with clear and consistent rules were more likely to have a positive school climate, with students feeling safe and supported. This in turn led to improved student behavior and academic performance. The study also emphasized the need to ensure that school rules and consequences of violating them were communicated to the students. Additionally, the study recommended that schools should involve students and parents in the development and enforcement of school rules so as to increase the rate of adherence.

Mabunda & Kgatle (2019), in their study on Exploring the management strategies used by school principals to curb learner unrest in secondary schools in Gauteng Province, South Africa, it was revealed that open communication, building positive relationships with students and stakeholders, and implementing restorative justice practices were effective strategies to managing unrest in schools. These practices involve holding students accountable for their actions while addressing the damage their behaviors cause. Instead of using punitive measures only like corporal punishment, restorative justice practices encourage the students to take full responsibility for their actions and work towards amending and repairing any harm cause. This approach fostered a sense of responsibility and accountability and thus effective in reducing incidents of unrest in schools.

Further a study done by Ojapinwa (2019) on school-based strategies for managing student unrest in Nigeria, indicated that implementing restorative justice practices, and involving students in decision-making and creating a positive culture were the best approaches in managing unrest in secondary schools. This was further supported by Ezati and Mukama (2019) in their study which showed that the best and effective mechanisms to manage student unrest were promoting positive school culture, applying restorative justice practices and involving students in decision-making processes in school. When students are given a voice in their school, they develop a sense of ownership and responsibility for their school environment and are more likely to come up with positive ideas and engage less in disruptive behavior which causes chaos. This can be achieved by creating opportunities for students to participate in roles such as school leadership and student councils/ committees. Involving students in decision-making processes can also help to improve school policies and practices, as students bring unique perspectives and insights to the table. By implementing these strategies, educators can create a safe and supportive learning environment that promotes positive student outcomes.

Guidance and counseling has been adopted as a way of minimizing and curbing unrest in secondary schools. It is designed to help students adjust to their environment and develop the ability to set realistic goals and inform decisions for them. A study conducted by Saina & Muchilwa (2017) on the effectiveness of guidance and counseling services in managing student discipline in secondary schools indicated that guidance and counseling services had a positive effect on regulating students' behavior in schools. Majority of the respondents reported that counseling had given them the knowledge and abilities to properly manage student discipline as well as to comprehend the factors that lead to student unrest. The research also established that schools with extensive guidance and counseling programs had lower levels of student unrest compared to schools that did not provide such services.

Findings from a study conducted by Muola (2018) on the challenges and opportunities associated with the provision of guidance and counselling services in secondary schools in Tanzania showed that there were several challenges related with the provision of guidance and counselling services in secondary schools in Tanzania. These included: limited resources, inadequate training for counselors, lack of awareness about the importance of guidance and counselling services, and cultural barriers. The study also established that the use of technology to deliver services and the involvement of community members in supporting the provision of these services would be helpful in improving the provision of guidance and counselling services in schools. Providing students with the necessary skills and support, schools will be able to create a positive learning environment that promotes both academic success and personal growth.

Implementation of a thorough curriculum is a strategy used to ensure that the syllabus approved for each subject and class is covered within the stipulated time frame. The school principals ought to ensure that they supervise syllabus coverage and that there is harmony and agreement between the schemes of work and records of work prepared by the teachers (Teachers Image, Vol.16, 2009). When a teacher has to be a way, a system of making up for lost time is put in place. Similarly, students are not allowed to idle around when the teacher is absent. This will help curb the issue of agitation due to academic pressure and anxiety which may result in unrest. A study conducted by Chai & Lim (2017), found that successful implementation of the curriculum depended on the teachers' ability to integrate inquiry-based learning and the use of technology into their teaching practices. Teachers who are committed to covering the syllabus and incorporate their schemes of work with the changing times would be successful in implementing the curriculum. The study however, established that challenges such as lack of teacher training and limited resources could impede the process.

Student unrest is a complex universal problem in many secondary schools around the world. It can take various forms with dire consequences such as protests, vandalism/ destruction of property, violence and sometimes loss of life (Republic of Kenya, 2019). The causes of these unrest have been identified to be issues like an overloaded curriculum, inadequate resources, failure to address students' grievances, poor infrastructure among many others. Approaches and mechanisms to address these issues are necessary and of great importance. Mechanisms are systems or processes that are designed to achieve particular outcomes. They can either be physical or constructs that are put in place to accomplish specific goals. Schools therefore have a crucial role to play in developing strategies and approaches can be used to

address the underlying causes of unrest, so as prevent or minimize student unrest from escalating (Republic of Kenya, 2019).

In Kenya, student unrest is not a new phenomenon. Unrest has been seen in various forms such as student protests, strikes, burning of classrooms/ dormitories, vandalism/destruction of property, violence and even loss of life. Various studies have been conducted on the causes of student unrest. A study conducted by Chege (2015) on the factors contributing to student unrest in Kenyan secondary schools and the mechanisms that schools use to address the problem. Results indicated that improved infrastructure, better disciplinary measures, student involvement in decision making, enhanced communication between the students and school administration, stronger school-community partnerships helped in addressing the issues that contributed to unrest. This was supported by a study conducted by the Ministry of Education (2018) which revealed that strengthening school-community partnerships, enhancing the capacity of school administrators and teachers to manage conflicts and promoting a culture of respect and tolerance among students helped in addressing the problem of unrest. In a study conducted by Kithinji (2019), it was indicated that positive discipline strategies such as counseling, community service, promoting accountability culture and mentor-ship were effective in reducing student unrest.

Ngugi (2017), in his study found that mediation and dialogue were effective in preventing and resolving conflicts between students and school authorities. The study further highlighted on the need for capacity building for school administrators and teachers in conflict management and resolution. Conflict management skills and capacity building programs are essential for teachers/administrators as they are often in a position to mediate and resolve conflicts between students. With this knowledge the school managers will be able to resolve conflict thus reducing the chances of unrest in schools to occur. In another study titled "Managing Student Unrest in Public Secondary Schools in Kenya: A Case of Bomet County" by Kiget and Langat (2020). It was indicated that positive reinforcement, counseling and guidance, student involvement in decision-making, and community involvement in the school's management are effective strategies if used can be able to address the issue of unrest in secondary schools.

Reports indicate that in 2017 students at Kisii High school were arrested with Jerry cans of petrol intending to burn down the school. In 2018, 5 students in Botoro ELCK Secondary School sustained minor injuries when 2 dormitories caught fire after students demonstrated due to bad diet. In the same year, Kisii High School students went on strike destroying the administration block and setting ablaze property belonging to 198 students and baying for the principals` blood. Further reports indicate that in 2021 Kisii County had 7 cases of unrest compared to Migori County which had 2 cases, Bomet County which had 3 cases and Kericho County which had 5 case. A report from Kisii County Educational Directorate indicated that a form three student in Kisii School attacked two teachers while being punished for missing evening studies. Before the attack, the student had been asked to kneel down as part of the disciplinary process.This is a case of school climate as a factor contributing to unrest.

Based on the aforementioned studies, no study has been carried out to establish mechanisms used by schools in Kisii County to address factors contributing to unrest, yet from the various statistical reports from the Directorate of Education (2021) in Kisii County, it was clear that the County was the worst hit with cases of unrest in secondary schools. It was on this ground that the researchers set out to establish mechanisms used by schools to address factors contributing to unrest in secondary schools in Kisii County, Kenya.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was anchored on the Social Control theory by Ivan Nye (1958) which emphasizes on the importance of the learning environment. The theory explains that when the learning environment is not conducive, chaos will be triggered. Descriptive survey research design was adopted. Mugenda (2008) asserts that descriptive survey allows for facts to be gathered as they exist without being manipulated. Thus, the basis for selecting the design.

Population of the study included 30,955 form two students and 350 class teachers from public secondary schools in Kisii County, Kenya. Form two students were targeted because they are adolescents who are experiencing significant changes in their emotional, cognitive and physical development. These changes can trigger instability such as irritation which may cause unrest. The class teachers were selected because they are in constant contact with the students. By studying the mechanism used by schools to address unrest, one can gain understanding on how to handle and alleviate issues of unrest in schools. Stratified sampling technique was used. According to Sekeran (2009) stratified random sampling technique involves a process of stratification followed by random selection of subjects from each stratum.

In the study, schools were stratified into purely boys boarding schools, girls boarding schools and mixed boarding and mixed day schools. From the 350 secondary schools, 105 schools representing 30% schools in Kisii County were proportionately selected for the study as follows: 24 boys boarding schools, 24 girls boarding schools, 23 mixed boarding and 34 mixed day schools thus having a ratio of 24:24:23:34. Yamane's formula was used to sample 395 form two students. Purposive sampling was used to select the class teachers from the 105 schools in Kisii County, Kenya. Data was collected using a questionnaire and an interview schedule. Piloting of the instruments was carried out in 35 schools involving 40 students and 35 class teachers using test-retest method of reliability and its reliability coefficient index was determined at .78. Face and content validity of the data collection instruments were ascertained by experts. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics in the form of frequencies and percentages while qualitative

data was transcribed and reported in an ongoing process as themes and sub-themes emerged.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers set out to establish the mechanisms used by schools in addressing factors that contribute to student unrest in secondary schools in Kisii County, Kenya. To achieve this, a questionnaire in the form of Likert 4 points scale was used where the respondents were required to respond by indicating their responses based on their level of agreement or disagreement as follows: strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2) strongly disagree (1) on the mechanism used by their schools. An interview schedule was also used to collect data from the class teachers on their opinion of the mechanisms that schools used to address unrest issues in their schools. Responses of the students were analyzed using descriptive statistics in the form of frequency counts and percentages, while that of the class teachers responses were reported in an ongoing process as themes and sub-themes emerged. Results of the analysis are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Mechanisms schools use to manage school unrest

Mechanism used to address unrest		Agree		Disagree	
	N	n	%	n	%
Offering counseling services	395	76	19.2	319	80.7
Holding meetings and talking to students	395	219	55.4	176	44.6
Monitoring on the number of assignments given to students	395	219	55.4	176	44.6
Allowing students to watch the T.V.	395	90	22.8	305	77.2
Ensuring that school rules are adhered to the letter	395	379	96	16	4.01
Punishing students who violate school rules	395	372	94.1	23	5.8
Addressing students' grievances regularly	395	51	12.9	344	87.0
Involving students in making school rules	395	00	00	395	100
Rewarding students who do well	395	374	94.7	21	5.3
Ensuring that there is adequate safety in school	395	374	94.7	21	5.1
Sensitizing students on the importance of adhering to school rules and regulations	395	374	94.7	21	5.3

The findings in table 1 indicate that 379 (96%) of the students felt that adhering to the school rules was the key mechanisms schools use to address unrest issues, followed by sensitization of students on the importance of adhering to school rules and regulations, rewarding students who do well as well as ensuring adequate safety in schools, all the three falling at 374 (94.7%), punishing students who violated school rules 372 (94.1%). Offering counseling services to students came at a distance 76 (19.2%).

Involvement of students in making school rules was the least mechanism used in addressing unrest (0%).

On interviewing teachers to establish mechanisms used by schools to address unrest issues, it emerged that open communication between the school administration and the students was the ideal strategy. It also emerged that most schools did not have counseling services. This is what the teachers had to say;

Teacher Z said that:
"Schools do not have active counselling services, not even guidance and counselling offices. The teachers who are tasked with counselling the students mostly are those who teach religious subjects. We need to have trained counselors."

Teacher Y stated that:
"schools should have counselors who are separate from teachers. Students find it difficult to approach a teacher when they have an issue after being punished by the same teacher in class."

Teacher X said that:
"There is no open communication between the students and school administration. Students find their own way of dealing with their problems and that is why sometimes they strike because they are not being heard, and that's their way of communicating". It is important therefore to establish clear and open communication between the school administration and the students so as to enable the learners to communicate their feelings and dissatisfaction if any instead of resorting to violence and unrest.

The suggestion by Teacher Z to have schools hire professional counselors as a measure to curb student unrest is also echoed by other teachers. The assertion by Teacher Y that students find it difficult to approach teachers whenever they have an issue is, however, inconsistent with students' own perspective.

The current study findings concur with the findings of a study done by Abdulhadi & Abdulhadi (2018), on the effects of strict school rules on student behavior which indicated that adherence to school rules had a positive impact on student behavior. This means that students portray less disruptive behaviors when they perceive the school rules as being strict. Further, this is supported by The Education Trust (2018), study which indicated that enforcing school rules promoted positive behavior and that schools that had clear and consistent rules were more likely to have a positive school climate, with students feeling safe and supported.

Table 1 shows that students were punished for violating school rules (94.1%). From this result it can be inferred that students are often forced to follow the school rules which have already been set. This is however not in agreement with a study conducted by Mabunda & Kgatle (2019) which indicated that punitive measures like corporal punishment should not be used instead restorative justice practices should be encouraged to help students take full responsibility for their actions and work towards amending and repairing any harm they caused.

According to Ezati and Mukama (2019), involving students in decision making helps them develop a sense of ownership and responsibility for their school environment and are more likely to come up with positive ideas and engage less in disruptive behavior which triggers chaos. This however shows a divergent view from the findings from this study which indicate that students are not involved at all in any decision- making process in school (0%).

Findings from the current study indicated that counselling services were among the least used mechanisms in schools as reported by the students (19.2 %). this is however different from the study conducted by Kithinji (2019) which indicated that counselling was an effective mechanism schools use to address unrest in schools. This is further supported by Saina & Muchilwa (2017) who found out in their study that guidance and counseling services had a positive effect on regulating students' behavior in school.

Ngugi (2017), in his study found that mediation and dialogue were effective in preventing and resolving conflicts between students and school authorities. His study further highlighted the need for capacity building for school administrators and teachers in conflict management and resolution. Open communication is essential for teachers/administrator as they are often in a position to mediate and resolve conflicts between students.

Reports obtained from teachers through interviews on dealing with student unrest shows inconsistencies between teacher reports and school practices. Whereas teachers suggest that having independent school counselors will help curb unrest issues (21.90%), establish open communication between students and school administration (20.0%), and listen to students (20.0%), students indicate that school rule enforcement, punishment, and rewards are the methods popularly used by teachers to address unrest. While advocating for counseling instead of punishment, one teachers said that:

"this generation of students are very sensitive emotionally and have a low tolerance to hard life. They need to be handled with care. Most of them react quickly especially when punished. It is important therefore for schools to learn alternative ways of administering punishment. For example, sending learners for guidance and counselling instead suspending them" (Teacher Y).

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the study's findings, it can be concluded that schools prefer enhancing strict rules on the students so as to avoid disruptive behaviors. This is what could be contributing to unrest in schools. Further, it is concluded that students are not allowed to participate in decision making especially when making school rules.

The study therefore, recommends to the Schools and the Ministry of Education to involve students in the making of school rules and regulations. Further, the need to improve on the counseling services offered in schools.

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