

Students' Opinions on School Rules and Regulations as a Governing Tool: A Case Study of a Peri-Urban Mixed Secondary School in North-Rift Kenya

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Abstract

The objective of the study was to investigate students' opinions on school rules and regulations about students' council-student relationships. The theoretical framework of the study was informed by Etzioni's Compliance Theory. The approach is qualitative while the research strategy is a case study. The philosophical orientation is relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology. Unstructured interviews were used in data collection followed by data transcription. Trustworthiness was achieved through "the member check" to check validity, while reliability was enhanced through cross-checking the transcripts for obvious mistakes. Piloting was carried out on form 4 students in a peri-urban mixed secondary school in South Rift, Kenya. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Data were analyzed thematically and the results were presented as reported by the participants with the aid of thematic networks. According to the study's findings, the global theme that emerged was that school rules and regulations were incongruent. The organizing themes that emerged were: school rules and regulations encouraged partisanship, and inequality, the way they were administered was unappealing and they encouraged intimate relationships. From the results, the study concluded that the student council ought to have applied school rules and regulations fairly. The study recommended that the deputy principals ensure that the students' council administers school rules and regulations in a non-partisan way, with equality to all, administration be appealing to all, and ought not to be used to attract intimate relationships.

Key words: *Students' Council, Students' Opinions, School Rules, Regulations, Incongruent*

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

School rules are principles governing school conduct while regulations are strategies meant to achieve orderliness. According to (Unicef, n.d), a child-friendly school ensures that every child has an environment that is physically safe, emotionally secure, and psychologically enabling. Adams (2003) argues that school rules and regulations are among the strategies designed to instill good conduct in students which implies self-control, orderliness, good behaviour and obedience to school authority.

Hargreaves, Hester, and Mellor (1985) argue that rules and regulations may be received well by those they are meant for, or fall out of favour with them. Adams (2003) also points out that on admission, schools especially at the secondary level, students are given prospectuses, which spell out some of the expectations which include compliance with rules and regulations.

School management believes that one way of achieving good governance in learning institutions is by ensuring that school rules are put in place to be followed by the learners. According to Okumbe (2008) schools set rules and regulations for the proper governing of the various lifestyles of students including the dos and don'ts.

However, there has been a continuous trend of students' unrest in Kenya irrespective of the presence of school rules which were believed to exert good governance among the students. Simatwa (2012) posits that in the past two decades, concerns have been raised about violent incidences of student unrest in secondary schools and tertiary institutions that resulted in the loss of property worth millions of shillings and lives in Kenya. Kabandize (2004) carried out a study on student control through rules and regulations set by individual schools in Uganda and observed that rules and regulations are enforced through prefect bodies and councils, disciplinary committees, teachers, and the involvement of parents.

Metz (1978) on the other hand asserts that when school rules are unpopular, students view life in school as unfavourable and this can result in students' alienation, low participation in school activities, and even students protest. Anderson (1982) posits that students continue to exhibit high levels of indiscipline despite the existence of rules and regulations implying that rules meant to phase out undesirable behavior among students have tended to be counterproductive at times.

This suggests that there are loopholes in the process of rule implementation, and Mbiti, (1974) warns that besides forceful means of punishment, strict rules and regulations should be avoided as much as possible for they make the offending student live with fear in school.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Bäckman and Trafford (2007) posit that democratic school governance is good for a school because it improves discipline, enhances productivity for both teachers and students, reduces conflict, and secures the future existence of democracy. They further suggest that the schools' entire behaviour code and rules should be devised through consultation and negotiation with the student body.

Ironically, despite the increasing interest in the key role that peer counseling plays in interpersonal relationships, little is known about its impact on the relationships between prefects and the student body in public secondary schools in Kenya (Machogu, 2012; Ajowi & Simatwa 2010). In Kenya, most students tend to have a negative attitude towards school rules and regulations (Kamau and Njenga, 2009). Discipline aims to educate and nurture values of tolerance, respect, and self-discipline in the learner rather than victimizing, belittling, and dominating those who are under the said rules and regulations (Gottfredson, 2009). Adams (2003) and Gottfredson (2009) share the same thoughts that school rules and regulations aim to plant and nurture the values of tolerance, respect, and self-discipline to the students. Besides, Okumbe (2008) argues that effective schools demonstrate sound inclusive practices, which include emphasizing school rules and regulations, collaborative leadership, and good practice. Gottfredson (2009) analyzed data from over 600 of the nation's secondary schools, and he found that the following school characteristics were associated with discipline problems: Rules were unclear or perceived as unfairly or inconsistently enforced. In support of these scholars, having a strict implementation of

school rules and regulations may not be productive in upholding discipline and promoting good academic performance.

This study therefore sought to find out students' opinions on school rules concerning students' council-student relationships.

1.3 Research objective

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to investigate students' opinions on school rules and regulations concerning students' council-student relationships.

1.4 Research question

This study sought to answer the following research question.

What are the students' opinions on school rules and regulations concerning students' council-student relationships?

1.5 Justification of the Study

As much as the relationship between prefects and the student body has been an area of potential conflict, Yambo and Tuitoek (2014) assert that a healthy relationship between prefects and the student body is important for the school to succeed in meeting its goals.

1.6 Significance of the study

It was hoped that the study would reveal students' opinions on school rules and regulations concerning students' council-student relationships for smooth running and understanding within schools. The findings of the study will be a guide to deputy principals on the need to be close to the students' council as they administer school rules to the students' body. The findings and recommendations of this study would also act as reference material for future readers and researchers.

2.0 Literature Review

This chapter focuses on the theoretical framework and the review of the literature on the contextual concern of the study which is students' opinions on school rules and regulations concerning students' council-student relationships.

2.1 Theoretical framework

This study was embedded in Etzioni's (1961) compliance theory. According to the compliance theory, schools fall in the category of normative organizations, controlling students normatively since their main aim is the preservation of culture, transmission of knowledge, and students' socio-economic development. Etzioni's compliance theory asserts that to consider students' behavior as a matter of compliance relationship is to emphasize reciprocity. Thus, this study sought to find out students' opinions on school rules and regulations.

2.2 School rules and regulations and students' council-student relationships

Ndakwa (2000) argues that the code of conduct should be drawn up to regulate and govern the conduct of every student and any student who does not adhere to this should be recommended by the Board of Governors for disciplinary action. Schools should not offer special treatment to prefects like wearing different uniforms, sleeping in different cubicles, and allowing them to

administer corporal punishment to their fellow students. He further adds that this situation invites hatred and animosity from fellow schoolmates.

Lutomia and sikolia (2006) posit that failure by teachers especially the deputy principal to inculcate discipline in prefects and stipulate proper roles and limitations causes problems among students. They need to be warned that intimidation, canning or bullying of any member of the students' community will lead to swift disciplinary action.

Furthermore, there should be proper communication between the student fraternity, on the one hand, and prefects or administration on the other hand to curb incidents that might arise and avoid problems happening simultaneously for a long time. Prefects should not force students to do unreasonable punishments but should instead leave punishment to teachers (Ndakwa, 2000). The hostile relationship between the students and the prefects has even led to the death of some prefects resulting from beatings or being dozed off by fire in their rooms by other students (Lutomia & Sikolia, 2006; Ajowi & Simatwa, 2010; Machogu, 2012).

Lutomia and sikolia (2006) reiterate that teachers ought to ensure that the roles and duties of prefects are well stipulated in school rules. Ndakwa (2000) asserts that the forbidden and repressed anger that stays in children who are given corporal punishments can be manifested as hatred towards self and others. One manifestation described by experts includes bullying others. Based on the literature review, there seems to be a need for educators to acknowledge that some aspects of school administration exist where the voices of the students really matter. Their contributions in social or educational situations, what they say on the subject of restrictions and freedoms in school ought to be appreciated.

The literature reviewed by the researcher showed that no in-depth study has investigated students' opinions on school rules and regulations concerning students' council-student relationships. This paved the way for this qualitative study.

3.0 Research Approach and Strategy

This chapter discusses the details of the research process where explanations on the research area, research approach, and philosophical orientation of the study are expounded on, followed by research methodology and methods.

3.1 Study area

The study was carried out in a peri-urban mixed secondary school in North Rift Kenya.

3.2 Research approach

According to (White, 2009, p.112), the research design connects the idea and the conclusions with the evidence; it sets out the 'chain of reasoning' and the warrants that link together these elements.

3.3 Philosophical orientation of the study

Creswell (2009) suggests that individuals preparing a research proposal or plan make explicit the larger philosophical ideas they espouse. The study engaged relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology.

3.4 Research strategy

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) argue that a case study is a form of qualitative research methodology that carries out an intensive description and analysis. Besides, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) include a number of chapters on major “strategies of inquiry” (p. xi) such as, among others, case study, ethnography, grounded theory, and participatory action research. The strategy that this research adopted was case study.

3.5 Research Process

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) assert that research methods include description of data collection method, field testing of instruments, recording and safe-guarding of data and description of the steps taken to preserve confidentiality and anonymity of data.

3.5.1 Selection of participants

The target population for this study was Form 4 students in a peri-urban mixed secondary school in North-Rift Kenya. This was a purposive study and the researcher picked the first three girls and the first three boys from the class register (Ministry of Education (2012) assisted by the class teacher. Some qualitative researchers, such as LeCompte and Schensul (2010), also use the term criterion-based selection. In criterion-based selection, you first decide what attributes of your sample are crucial to your study and then find people or sites that meet those criteria.

3.5.2 Data collection instrument

The researcher used unstructured interviews. Patton (2015, p. 426) argues that the main purpose of an interview is to obtain a special kind of information. The researcher wants to find out what is “in and on someone else’s mind”

3.5.3 Piloting

A pilot study entails more than trying out your data collection methods to include what was learnt during piloting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Piloting was done in a peri-urban mixed secondary school in South Rift Kenya.

3.5.4 Data collection procedures

Permission was sought from relevant offices such as Kenya Association of Professional Counsellors, County Director of Education, principal of the study school, class teacher, and consent from the participants.

3.5.5 Ethical considerations

Research studies using qualitative and quantitative approaches must adhere to sound ethical principles as supported by (Ong’ondo, 2010). The data collection procedure was done ethically through seeking for permission from relevant authorities like the Kenya Association of Professional Counsellors, County Director of Education, the principal of the study school, the class teacher, and consent from the participants. To protect the identity of the participants the

researcher used pseudonyms as follows; John, Joshua, James, Jane, Janice and Joyce. The name of the school was also concealed.

3.5.6 Rigor/Trustworthiness of the study

Creswell (2009) asserts that proposal developers need to convey the steps they take in their studies to validate the accuracy and credibility of their findings. According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), in qualitative designs, rigor is evident in a study's credibility, confirmability, auditability and transferability.

3.5.6.1 Validity of the study

The researcher used 'the member check.' Merriam and Tisdell (2015, p.216) argue that of importance are the

responses from participants when you invite them to comment on your interpretation of their experiences.

3.5.6.2 Reliability of the study

The researcher achieved this by cross-checking the transcripts to ensure that they did not contain obvious mistakes made during transcription as advanced by (Gibbs, 2007).

4.0 Data Presentation, Analysis, Interpretation and Discussion

This chapter focused on the presentation, analysis, interpretation and discussion of the findings based on data obtained from the 6 participants. The data collected were analyzed thematically using modified (Attride-Stirling, 2001) thematic analysis. The research question was: What are the students' opinions on school rules and regulations concerning students' council-student relationships?

4.1 Analysis stage A: Reduction of the text about students' opinions on school rules and regulations concerning students' council-student relationships

The researcher began the analysis by reducing the collected data.

4.1.1 Step 1: Coding the collected data on students' opinions on school rules and regulations concerning students' council-student relationships

Data on students' opinions on school rules and regulations concerning students' council- student relationships was broken down with the aid of a coding framework based on the salient issues that arose in the study as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Presenting, dissecting codes, and identifying basic themes for students' opinions on school rules and regulations concerning students' council-student relationships

Codes	Dissected	Basic Themes Identified
1. Kings	1. Small gods	1. Prefects are served like kings
2. Favor girls	2. Gender inequality	2. Prefects do not promote affirmative action by giving girls light punishment as opposed to boys
3. Intimate	3. Skip lovers	3. The prefects perpetuate sidelining when they are punishing students as they do not punish friends, especially of the opposite sex
4. Test	4. Assignment	4. when you surrender an assignment late with a prefect you are the only one reported to the teacher
5. Good meal	5. Special dish	5. Prefects apportion more appetizing food among themselves and their friends
6. Past time	6. Late	6. You are punished when not, on time with a prefect
7. Take cover	7. Avoid reported	7. Sex with prefects is given so long as you are not reported to teachers.
8. Harmony	8. Peace	8. When you enter into a relationship with a prefect, you are assured of relaxing.
9. Runaway	9. Escape	9. Students have resorted to immorality with prefects to avoid punishment
10. Biased	10. unjust	10. Prefects are unfair by not punishing their friends.
11. left out	11. Exemptions	11. When punished alone I feel bad
12. Powerless	12. Weak	12. Rules are meant for the voiceless to follow.

4.1.2 Step 2: Identification of themes for students' council-student relationships

The identification was done by abstracting themes from the coded text to get basic themes, organizing themes and, finally a global theme as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Theme Extraction and Systemization for students' council- student relationships

<i>Basic themes</i>	<i>Organizing themes</i>	<i>Global theme</i>
1. Prefects are served like small gods	1. Partisanship	1. Incongruent
2. Prefects promote gender inequality by giving girls light punishment as opposed to boys	2. Partisanship	2. Incongruent
3. The prefects perpetuate sidelining when they are punishing students as they skip lovers	3. Partisanship	3. Incongruent
4. When you surrender an assignment late with a prefect, you are the only one reported to the teacher	4. Inequality	4. Incongruent
5. Prefects apportion more of a special dish among themselves and their friends		5. Incongruent
6. You are punished alone when late with a prefect	5. Inequality	
7. Sex with prefects is given so long as you avoid teachers		6. Incongruent
8. When you enter into a relationship with a prefect, you are assured of peace.	6. Inequality	7. Incongruent
9. Students have resorted to immorality with prefects to escape punishment	7. Relationships	8. Incongruent
10. Prefects are unjust when it comes to punishments in that they do not punish their friends.	8. Relationships	9. Incongruent
11. When the prefect's friends are exempted from punishment, I feel bad	9. Relationships	10. Incongruent
12. Rules are meant for the weak to follow	10. Administration	11. Incongruent
	11. Administration	12. Incongruent
	12. Administration	

4.1.3 Step 3: Construction of Thematic Networks for Students' Council- Student Relationships

The researcher went through the codes to identify themes. These themes were arranged from basic, organizing and finally, a global theme was obtained. This culminated into web-like networks referred to as thematic networks as shown in Figure 1.

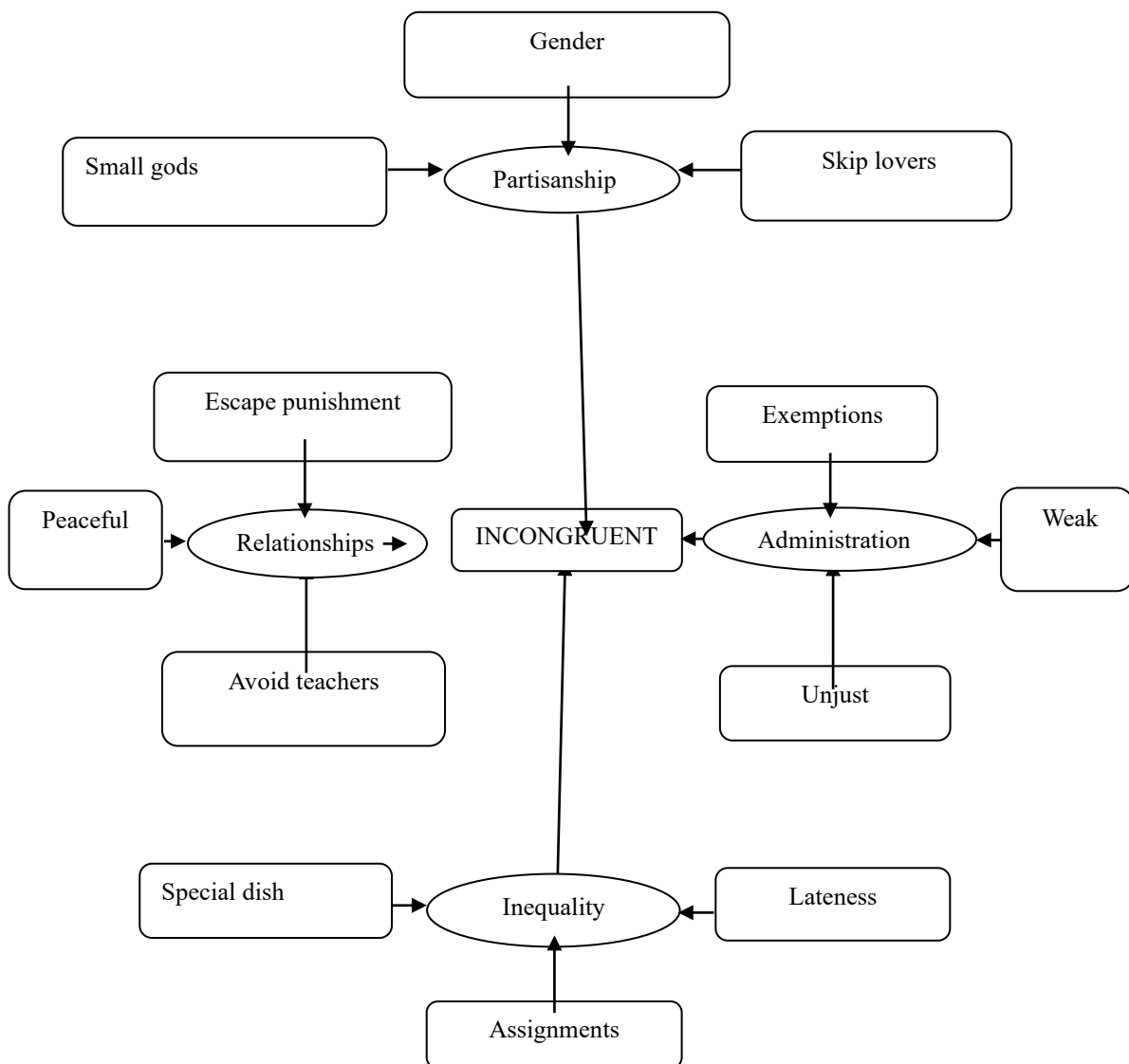


Figure 1: Structure of thematic networks for students' opinions on school rules and regulations with Regard to students' council-student Relationships

4.2 Analysis stage B: Exploration of the text for students' opinions on school rules and regulations concerning students' council-student relationships.

The interviews obtained information about students' opinions on school rules and regulations concerning students' council-student relationships. The exploration of the text by the researcher was done through interpreting and discussing thematic networks.

4.2.1 Step 4: Interpretation and discussion of thematic networks for students' opinions on school rules and regulations concerning students' council- student relationships as in Figure 1.

The participants were asked to give their views on students' opinions on school rules and regulations concerning students' council- student relationships and the following global theme emerged- school rules and regulations were incongruent. The organizing themes that emerged were that school rules and regulations were incongruent since they encouraged partisanship, and inequality, the way it was administered was unappealing, and that it encouraged intimate relationships between the students' council and the student body.

4.2.1.1 Organizing theme for school rules and regulations encouraging partisanship

According to the participants, school rules and regulations encouraged partisanship in the following ways: members of the student body did not punish their lovers, female students were given light punishment, and members of the student council were treated like small gods. When students were asked if school rules and regulations were encouraging partisanship, the respondents asserted as follows:

"When prefects break school rules and regulations, teachers do not punish them. They are treated like kings in school and this becomes a source of resentment among the students."

(Jane)

"You discuss in class and sooner when a prefect takes the names of noise makers to the teacher, it is disturbing when you discover that the name of the student you were conversing with is not in the list. I became a victim of a similar circumstance and it left me wondering whether I was talking to myself."

(Janice)

Ndakwa (2000) laments that prefects enforce unpopular rules which even the teachers or Principals would find hard to implement themselves. This shows that the students' council ought to be guided in the governance of the student body so that they may shun from using force on the students in their leadership.

"The prefects perpetuate sidelining when they are punishing students as they do not punish friends especially those of the opposite sex."

(Joshua)

"Prefect omit circumcised friends from punishments unlike other students when they break school rules and regulations, yet they need to be given more punishment since they are mature and supposed to serve as role models."

(John)

Prefects do not practice affirmative action; they give girls light punishment as opposed to boys. Girls are treated as tender, but when it comes to boys, you can easily be told to crash a stone with your bear hand.

(James)

Lutomia and sikolia (2006) points out that prefects should act as Communication-Bridge between the institutional administration and students.

“Some members of students’ council cannot put down names of some students when they make a mistake with others for some hidden reasons especially.”

(Joyce)

Yambo and Mudis (2015) argue that the relationship between the prefects and the student body is so strained. This could only be improved when better governing styles are employed other than resorting to the use of force which is not sustainable.

4.2.1.2 Organizing theme for school rules and regulations perpetuating inequality

According to the participants, school rules and regulations perpetuated inequality in the following ways: members of the student council were not punished when late, they served more of a special dish, and they submitted their assignments late with no problem.

When students were asked if school rules and regulations were perpetuating inequality, the respondents asserted as follows:

“I was found sleeping in class and my desk mate was also asleep. I woke up earlier than her but her name was not captured just because she is in a relationship with the class prefect.”

(Joshua)

“When you surrender an assignment late with a prefect you are the only one reported to the teacher, so whenever you realize that you are delaying, do not rely on a prefect who has not submitted it since the class prefect will wait for him/her to submit but you are reported.”

(Jane)

Ndakwa (2000) laments that prefects should be treated on the same level as other students. *Prefects apportion more of appetizing food among themselves and their friends.*

(Joyce)

Besides, why should I be punished by a fellow student, before the rest of the class for failure to sweep the classroom, I mean the list is long.

(James)

Prefects treat us with a lot of impunity for others, as such we pretend to be good in their presence but when they are out of sight, we do our things.

(Janice)

You are punished alone even by way of corporal punishment when not on time with a prefect. Another prefect will ask a prefect who is late to assist him/her in stopping latecomers for their names to be put down for punishment. Yet you were late with a prefect putting down your name. “Since there is favoritism in the treatment of students and prefects, there is disharmony in school.”

(John)

Lutomia and Sikolia (2006) posit that prefects in some schools are allowed to give corporal punishment to fellow students. This is a show of poor governance from the administrators especially the deputy principals who are supposed to give better direction to the student council. According to Byarugaba (2001), students realize that punishments are an effective method of remediating individual misbehaviour and therefore improving school order. However, Herbert (2009) postulates that students understand that punishment can be an effective way of controlling misbehaviour when it is fair and consistent.

4.2.1.3 Organizing theme for school rules and regulations promoting intimate relationships

According to the participants, school rules and regulations promoted intimate relationships in the following ways: students enter into intimate relationships with members of the student body to have peace, to escape punishments, and avoid teachers.

When students were asked if school rules and regulations were promoting intimate relationships, the respondents asserted as follows:

“The issue of punishments has impacted negatively on students’ moral values in that some students have resorted to immorality with prefects to avoid punishment.”

(Joyce)

“Sex with prefects is given so long as you are not reported to teachers.”

(Jane)

“Sexual relationships that prefects encourage bring a challenge in the fight against HIV/AIDS and STIs.”

(James)

“When a prefect approaches you for a relationship but you turn him down, your name will never be missed in all lists of punishments even when you were absent from school.”

(Janice)

“When you enter into a relationship with a prefect, you are assured of relaxing.”

(Joshua)

“In our school, boy-girl relationships are common and prefects do not punish those they are in relationships with.”

(John)

Ndakwa (2000) asserts that students also feel humiliated and degraded; they become angry and resentful towards those who punish them by not socially accepting and giving them a chance to express their feelings. Good leaders always give opportunity to others to express themselves.

Organizing theme for school rules and regulations being administered unfairly

According to the participants, school rules and regulations are administered unfairly in the following ways: Some students are exempted from punishment, prefects are unjust, and those rules are meant for the weak to follow.

When students were asked if school rules and regulations were administered unfairly, the respondents argued as follows:

“If you complain to the teachers about the unfairness of the student council, you are punished for being rude to the members of the student council.”

(James)

“Prefects take sides when it comes to punishment in that they do not punish their friends.”

(Joyce)

“Teachers believe in students’ council and you have no case before them even if they beat you.”

(John)

Ndakwa (2000) argues that where prefects are given powers to beat and order students to do all sorts of manual work for them is like endangering life in the school or institution. This is actually evidence of a weak governing system.

“Uneven punishment is applied to the same group of students when they break a rule and this is just but unfortunate. Rules are meant for the voiceless to follow.”

(Janice)

“When I am late with prefect’s friends and I am the only one punished, I just hate it.”

(Joshua)

“Prefects even punish us for mistakes that they do, like crossing the fence to buy ‘Mandazis’, and the same prefect will report you to the teacher on duty for punishment.”

(Jane)

Kiprop (2007) posits that corporal punishment dehumanizes the child, is brutal, and instills fear in the child which inhibits the child's normal growth and productivity. A teacher who uses a cane as a means of managing the learners depicts a weak governing system and negative reciprocation by learners. This shows that it would be worse when administered by a fellow student.

Evidently, the students’ council treatment of their fellow students is wanting. The administration in schools needs to avoid incidences where they abandon to the students’ council, the responsibility of the administration of punishment to their fellow students. The students’ council is a body of young people who need mentorship by teachers and continuous guidance on their responsibilities. Their mandate must also be well spelled out in the student's council code of conduct so that they may not impose on their fellow students what is not entailed of them. The deputy principals should monitor the activities of the students’ council very closely and the principals ought to create room for students to air their concerns freely without any fear of intimidation by the students’ council or the school administration.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

From the results, the study concluded that the students’ council could have used the school rules and regulations to serve all the students fairly. Based on the findings, the researcher came up with the following recommendations: The Deputy principals ought to ensure that the students’ council administers school rules and regulations in a non-partisan way, with equality to all, administration be appealing to all, and ought not be used to attract intimate relationships. The findings ought to inform policy makers on the need to make school rules and regulations ‘explicit’ rather than ‘all embracing’ for rules to be less restrictive and favourable to all students.

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Conflict of interest

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