

CHALLENGES FACED BY PREFECTS IN MANAGING STUDENTS' DISCIPLINE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN BUURI SUBCOUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract

Prefects in secondary school are important due to the role they play in bridging the gap between the administration and students. Being a prefect in secondary school is an added responsibility on top of the academic work. So, a prefect may find him/her self-trying to meet many expectations from different quarters; fellow students, school administration and personal challenges. This study therefore sought to investigate the challenges faced by prefects as they manage students' discipline in secondary schools of Buuri Sub-County, Meru County, Kenya. Descriptive survey research design was adopted and data was collected using questionnaires. The target population was 650 subjects from 25 secondary schools comprising of principals, guidance and counseling teachers and prefects. A sample of 248 respondents was drawn for the study. The study revealed that prefects face threats from fellow students, school administration do not train prefects and that prefects loose command especially when they do not perform well academically, prefects also have personal based challenges. The study recommends induction courses for prefects after they are democratically elected by other students. The school administration should also work closely with prefects to enable them overcome their challenges.

Keywords: Prefects, School Administration, Students' Discipline, Personal-Based Challenges

INTRODUCTION

Prefects are learners who are given limited trust type authority over other learners and brought on board to assist in discipline management of fellow students (Arekenya, 2012). In the United Kingdom, prefects are from upper classes that are charged with the responsibility of ensuring students do not report to class late (Berger, 2002). In Britain prefects are students in 5th and 7th year given the responsibility to run the school outside the classroom (Berger, 2002). Arekenya (2012) observe that a prefect in America literally ensures that students are duly permitted to be out of class during lessons.

In Kenya, secondary schools are managed by Board of Managers (B.O.M.) who are appointees of the Cabinet Secretary of Education and the school principal who is in charge of day to day running of the school, accounting officer and the secretary to the B.O.M. (Ministry of Education, 1987). The Ministry of Education allows the principal to have prefects from the student community and delegate some duties to them especially in helping to maintain discipline of the students within the school (Ministry of Education Science and Technology, 2000). Koli (2006) observe that delegating leadership responsibilities to prefects is important because it prepares them for future leadership roles.

A prefect body is important because it frees the teacher from small school duties to do other important responsibilities for the school and also makes the students responsible and accountable (Williams, 2009). Both Ozigi (1983) and Mwiria (1995) observe that giving students responsibilities as prefects prepare them for future leadership roles. Ozigi (1983) further adds that, from administrative point of view, students' participation in school administration contribute greatly to the efficient and orderly operation of the institution because it improves communication, lead to a better understanding and co-operation and help in resolving many non- academic problems giving the teacher enough time to concentrate on the academic issues. According to Otieno (2005), prefects are charged with many responsibilities in school like giving direction to fellow students by setting objectives and proposing what should be done in order to attain the objectives and also participate in attaining the objectives. Prefects represent other students in the prefecture and they take responsibility of what happens in the areas they oversee.

MOE (1987) notes that prefects will assist the staff at all times with general discipline of the school; in addition, they may have special responsibilities in particular parts of the school, this includes punishing of the minor offenders within the school. Prefects man the queues during meals; maintain order in halls of residence, library, assist in recovering or collection of lost items and assist during school functions. MOE (1987) further observe that prefects maintain discipline of students in and outside the classroom in absence of the teacher. Wanderi (2008) notes that

some teenagers are irritants and eager to cause chaos anywhere; such teenagers who are students become a challenge to prefects because they have to manage them.

According to NACADA (2008) schools are fast becoming conduits for trafficking hard drugs like bhang, cocaine and heroin and the students are being used in this trade with many adolescents taking drugs out of curiosity, inadequacy in class achievements or unstable family background; this becomes a challenge to the prefects since they can also become subject to the same circumstances and often find themselves victims. Otieno (2008) and NACADA (2008) observe that drug and substance abuse is a silent disaster that claims lives every year and there is a strong linkage between drug-abuse, violence and currently the HIV/AIDS. Schools continue to experience these problems and especially prefects who are expected to manage students who have already abused drugs and therefore are not sober.

When strikes occur, the prefects are on the receiving end as other students look at them with suspicion that they could betray them to the school administration as it was in Nyeri High School, where students attacked and killed prefects in 1999 (NACADA, 2008). Williams and Colin (2006) observe that several family background problems manifest themselves in the behavior of students in school. Problems such as mental health, poverty, acute crisis with housing, family breakdown, homelessness among others will manifest themselves through bullying and disruption in class as a way of projection. Such pose a big challenge to prefects who also may be victims of the same background or may not know how to counsel such students; especially because academic achievement has become a centre of interest in Kenya to the extent that every parent and student desire high academic achievement (Kanga, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Prefects play a critical role in the management of students' discipline in secondary schools. Prefects are expected to manage other students both inside and outside classroom and assist teachers with all discipline issues. In some parts of Kenya, prefects have either been killed or attacked by other students. A study by NACADA (2008) revealed that four prefects were killed in Nyeri High School by fellow students and property destroyed. In 2008 there were 300 cases of school unrest across the country and prefects and students lost their lives, property destroyed and school programmes disrupted. Though prefects are meant to help in discipline management, they face challenges which, unless looked into, schools will continue suffering loss of property and losing lives and school programmes getting affected. This study sought to establish the challenges prefects face as they manage discipline in secondary schools of Buuri Sub-county, Meru County.

Objectives of the Study

This study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To determine factors that pose challenges to prefects from fellow students as they manage discipline in secondary schools of Buuri Sub-County.
2. To determine the school administration-based challenges faced by prefects in management of students' discipline in secondary schools of Buuri Sub-County.
3. To establish the personal-based challenges that prefects face in the management of discipline of the students in secondary schools in Buuri Sub-County.

Research Questions

The research sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the factors that pose challenges to prefects from fellow students as they manage students' discipline in secondary schools of Buuri Sub-County?
2. What are the school administration-based challenges faced by prefects in discipline management of students in secondary schools of Buuri Sub-County?
3. What are the personal based challenges that prefects face in discipline management of students in secondary schools of Buuri Sub-County?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Prefects' Roles in Kenya

Arekenya (2012) observe that prefects' work with and for the school community to ensure smooth running of the school and should be able to: command respect of the fellow students, exercise authority in a responsible manner and should be proactive considering themselves prefects always, not just on their designated duty slots. Hence, they must be able to be: reliable, conscientious, authoritative, polite, approachable and able to relate well with staff and students. Arekenya (2012) maintain that prefects should monitor queues during meals, the behavior of other students in the library, halls of residence and classrooms, assist in recovering or collection of lost items, conduct tours in the schools for prospective parents and guardians and assist at school functions. Berger (2002) notes that prefects maintain order in the school corridors at all times.

Prefects play a very important role in schools because of the functions they perform like giving directions to other students who they lead and setting pace of activities for them (Mutua, 2008). Prefects achieve their objectives by setting goals and proposing what should be done in order to achieve the set goals. This can be done by encouraging other students to perform duties without necessarily being pushed or supervised (Maina, 1999). Otieno (2008) observe

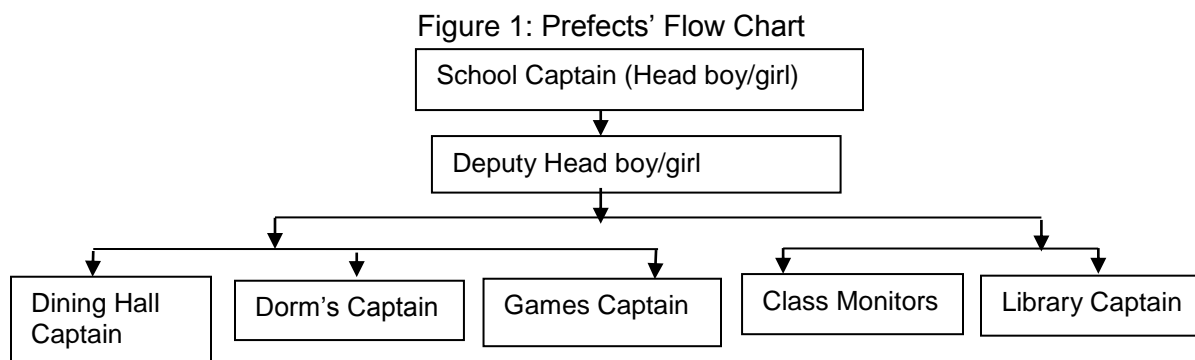
that prefects represent other students in their prefecture like the class monitor will take responsibility of what happens in the classroom at all times.

The MOE (1987) allows prefects to punish students for the minor offences within the school and at all times assist the teaching staff in the general discipline of the school and in addition they may have special responsibilities in particular parts of the school. Otieno (2008) notes that prefects help in ensuring that the physical facilities are well maintained and utilized by the students without waste and that they act as role models to other students and act as a bridge between the students and the school administration ensuring that the grievances of the students are well communicated to the office in time and ensure that self-discipline is promoted among students at all times.

Muli (2011) observe prefects are charged with supervisory roles over students in and outside classroom: in classes they control noise making during private study and maintain general hygiene while outside classroom, they organize and control co-curricular activities. Muli (2012) further notes that prefects oversee the organization and life of students in the dormitories and ensure that the concerned serve meals well and on time. Graffin (1996) notes that prefects are managers in practice not by name, they are so efficient that the teachers' work is limited to teaching and carrying out other academic duties.

The role of the prefects include supervising of students as they carry out their duties, maintaining order and discipline in schools and assisting the running of day-to-day activities of the school (Njenga, 2005).

Information on Figure 1 shows the various offices of the prefect body with the school captain reporting to the School Administration; however it may not be the same to all schools.



Fellow Student Based Challenges

Prefects ensure that daily routines are adhered to, order is maintained in the halls of residence, dining hall and in the field during co-curricular activities (UNESCO, 2010). Gorton and Alstan (2009) assert that prefects play a key role in resolving conflicts among learners and promote

cohesion among students for a peaceful learning environment. Sharma (2005) observes that prefects should be entrusted with organizing and running of co-curricular activities. The M.O.E. (2000) maintains that prefects must be used to detect any bullying alongside other small crimes. KSSSA (2010) observes that prefects or student leaders help in making the voice of students and opinion be heard in school management and promote general welfare of the students at the school level.

Kibe (2005) in the study 'role of prefects in management of secondary schools notes that prefects are very important in a school since they are the ones who interact more with students and know their needs best. Kibe further notes that among the undisciplined learners, prefects are enemies and very unpopular and actually called 'Makarao' or spies. Kosgey (2009) observe that teen mothers who are readmitted back to school suffer unique problems; emotional and psychological leading them to truancy. This causes a big challenge to prefects since the problem and the 'world' of a teen mother is unique and not understood by prefects. In the year 2000, Kericho High school students bullied and sent prefects away before assaulting and raping a female teacher (Kigotho, 2000). Nairobi Chronicles (2008) notes that preferential treatment to prefects and rigid hierarchy contributes to bitterness between students and prefects.

NACADA (2008) observes that drug and substance abuse have high clientele among school-going age. This is a challenge to prefects since they could also be victims, or have to manage fellow student who are already intoxicated. According to NACADA (2008), the following incidences took place in Kenyan schools first in 1992, 19 girls of St. Kizito Secondary School, Meru County were raped and killed by fellow students (boys) and second in 1999, Nyeri High School students attacked and killed their own prefects.

A study done by Mugali (2011) on the "Prefect System in Secondary Schools in Kajiado North" it was realized that students were dissatisfied with the prefect system due to the master-servant mentality that it portrays.

It is evident that prefects face challenges from fellow students as they manage discipline because some have been injured, raped or killed.

Theoretical Framework

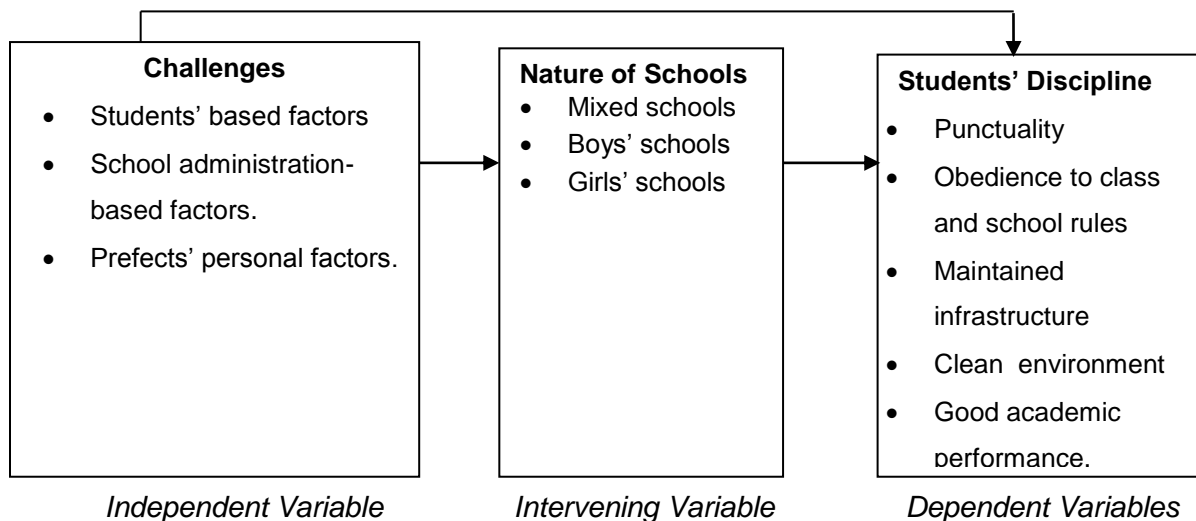
This study was guided by the Positive Approach Theory developed by Glasser (2005). Positive Approach Theory is grounded on Teachers' respect for students. The Theory aims at instilling in students a sense of responsibility by using youth /adult partnership to develop and share clear rules, provide daily opportunities for success and administer punishment to non-compliant members. This approach helps to identify leadership abilities and nurture them by giving the individuals opportunity to lead. This theory fits the current study because in secondary schools

when prefects are elected, they come up with rules in conjunction with the school administration for the purpose of discipline management. When prefects manage discipline teachers are able to settle down especially to prepare for lessons instead of settling indiscipline cases. The students also gain leadership skills which they use later after school. Schools will save resources which could have been used to repair destroyed property due indiscipline.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework has been developed from reviewed related literature where the independent variable is challenges and the dependent variable is management of the students' discipline.

Figure 2: Relationship between the Prefects' Challenges and Discipline



The information in Figure 2 shows the relationship between independent, dependent and intervening variables. The independent variables were the selected factors that pose a challenge to prefects as they manage discipline which include: fellow student factors, school administration and personal factors. The dependent variables are the students' outcome of the independent variable in the form of: punctuality, obedience to class and school rules and maintained infrastructure.

Prefects' challenges which are categorized as student based factors, school factors and personal factors will constitute independent variable. Once the independent variable is managed the dependent variable will be displayed by the students in terms of punctuality and obedience to class and school rules. The researcher recognizes that variations in discipline management may be due to the nature of the school hence the nature of schools will form intervening

variables. When the prefects have been able to manage the challenges that they face in discipline management, the results are a disciplined student community in schools and the vice versa is true: prefects who have not been able to manage their challenges we get an in disciplined student community.

METHODOLOGY

The research design used in this study is descriptive survey design in which respondents filled in questionnaires. The study was conducted in secondary schools in Buuri Sub-County, Meru County, Kenya. The district has 25 secondary schools in total, out of which respondents were drawn from 12 schools, which were sampled. The population of the study was 650 subjects which included 25 principals, 25 guidance and counseling teachers and prefects in the 25 secondary schools in Buuri Sub-County (D.E.O., Buuri Sub-County, 2011). According to Kathuri and Pals (1993), a population of 650 will give a normal sample size of 241 respondents. To take care of attrition the researcher sampled 248 respondents. The schools were stratified based on gender; mixed (19) schools, Boys' (3) schools and Girls' (3) schools. From the mixed school strata 10 schools were sampled. To get individual schools systematic random sampling was employed: the schools were numerically numbered 1-19; every odd number was sampled. In the boys and girls strata simple random sampling was employed to select one school from each stratum. This gave a total of 12 sampled schools. For every mixed school sampled, stratified random sampling was used to get 17 prefects. From the boys and girls strata, one school was randomly sampled from each strata, and 27 prefects were randomly sampled. For every sampled school, 2 teachers: principal and guidance and counseling teacher were purposively sampled from each sampled school. Where prefects were less than the required sample, peer counselors were purposively sampled to take care of the difference.

The researcher developed three sets of questionnaires to get primary data for this study: the teachers' (principal and guidance and counseling teacher) and prefects' questionnaire. The questionnaire for the principal comprised of closed and open ended items. Data was collected on gender, nature of the school, experience of the principal in administration, frequency of meetings with the prefects and factors that are a challenge to the prefects based on fellow students, school administration and prefects' personal factors. The questionnaire for the guidance and counseling teacher comprised of closed and open ended questions. Qualitative data was analyzed using analysis based on meaning and implication of respondent. Quantitative data was carefully analyzed and presented using percentages and frequencies to help the researcher come up with conclusions and recommendations. The result of the data analysis was presented using frequency distribution tables and bar graphs.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study sought to find out challenges faced by prefects in managing students discipline in secondary schools in Buuri-sub-County, Kenya. The study established that there were 54% of the principals sampled had an experience of less than 5years, guidance and counseling teachers, 68% had less than 4years experience and 79% of prefects had less than 1year experience.

The first objective was to investigate the challenges prefects face from fellow students. The responses were as illustrated in table 1 below.

Table 1: Principals' Opinion on Challenges Prefects Face from Fellow Students

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	WA
	%	%	%	%	%	
Prefects are looked upon with suspicion by fellow students	25.00	66.67	8.33	0.00	0.00	4.17
Prefects are never looked upon with suspicion by fellow students.	50.00	36.33	6.33	8.33	0.00	4.25
Students do not take it kindly when prefects punish them for their wrong doing.	16.67	41.67	41.67	0.00	0.00	3.75
Students do not look at a prefect as a traitor	50.00	41.67	8.33	0.00	0.00	4.42

The table 1 above shows that the principals agreed (WA 4.17) that the prefects were looked upon with suspicion by fellow students. Principal also reported that students did not treat prefects kindly in-case they punished them and that prefects were ridiculed by other students when they do not perform well in academics. The guidance and counseling teachers agreed that prefect were looked upon with suspicion by other prefects (WA 4.25) and that students would keep grudge with prefects in-case they punished them (WA 3.75). The guidance and counseling teachers also noted that when prefects were looked as traitors by other students (WA 4.42). The students would not do their normal duties in school unless they were supervised by the prefects. The study obtained similar reports from prefects concerning challenges from fellow students. These findings concurs with Mutungi (2007) who observes that some principals hand pick prefects to serve their interest, such prefects find themselves at risk from other student since they are looked at as traitors or spies.

The second objective was to determine school administration based challenges faced by prefects with some of the responses in table 2 below

Table 2: School Administration Based Challenges Faced by Prefects with some of the Responses

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	WA
	%	%	%	%	%	
Indiscipline cases reported by prefects are not acted promptly	0.00	50.00	25.00	16.67	8.33	3.17
Students not allowed to hold elections to get the prefects	66.67	25.00	0.00	0.00	8.33	4.42
The school administration expects prefects to report teachers who come to lessons late or do not at all.	15.91	49.55	19.09	10.00	5.45	3.60

The principals agreed that that they had not specified prefects duties (WA 3.75) and that the administration did not have regular meetings with the prefects (WA 3.58). The principals also agreed they were not training sessions upon taking office. The school administration does not allow prefects to organize students in co-curricular activities (WA 4.0) but they were expected to report teachers who attended lessons late or did not attend at all. The guidance and counseling teachers revealed that the school administration had not specified prefects' duties and did not meet prefects regularly. The guidance and counseling teachers further agreed that students were not given an opportunity to elect their own prefects (WA 4.42) and that case reported by prefects were not promptly acted upon by the office (WA 3.17). The guidance and counseling teachers also agreed that administration expected prefect to report teachers for attending lessons late or not attending at all(WA 4.75)The prefects agreed that they do not have training sessions and that the school administration expected them to report the teachers who attended lessons late or did not attend at all(WA 3.60).

The third objective was to investigate personal based challenges that prefects faced in discipline management.

Table 3: Prefects Personal based Challenges

Statement	SA	A	U	D	SD	WA
	%	%	%	%	%	
Prefects do not know who to tell their worries and fears at school	33.33	16.67	41.67	8.33	0.00	3.75
Prefects do not derive any satisfaction from being prefects	0.00	75.00	16.67	8.33	0.00	3.67
Indiscipline cases reported by prefects are not acted promptly	0.00	50.00	25.00	16.67	8.33	3.17
Prefects often get discouraged by their academic performance	50.00	50.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.50

From the responses principals agreed that prefects did not know who to tell their worries and that they had challenges in managing their personal time(WA 3.75).Principals further agreed that prefects did not derive any satisfaction in their roles(WA 3.67)and they often got discouraged when they do not do well in academics. Principals also said that prefects got discouraged if fellow students do not obey them (WA 3.67).

The guidance and counseling teachers agreed that prefects do not know who to tell their fears and worries in school (WA 4.08) and that prefect find it hard to manage their personal time (WA 4.17). Guidance and counseling teachers further agreed that prefects get discouraged when they scored low grades in school (WA 4.5). Prefects got demolished when fellow students do not obey them and that prefects found it hard to get friends from among the students (WA 4.75).

The study established possible suggestions to overcome the challenges faced by prefects. The principals and guidance and counseling teachers suggested that once the prefects assume office they should be trained to equip them with leadership skills .The students should also be given opportunity to elect the prefects so that they could respect them instead of looking at them as traitors. The guidance and counseling teachers suggested that equipping guidance and counseling room in school would enhance confidentiality and prefects would find it easy to go for counseling services.

Prefects suggested that they should be trained upon assuming office, school administration should have regular meeting with prefects and that they should not overburdened with responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

The challenges in discipline management that prefects faced from fellow students were mainly caused by the fact that students did not elect them and therefore they were feeling like they had been imposed on them by the administration. The school administration did not have frequent meetings with the prefects neither did they organize for training sessions for the prefects. It is evident that school administration had not specified duties for prefects hence prefects were feeling overburdened.

The personal challenges that prefects faced were caused by weak guidance and counseling department which made prefects not to know who to turn to when they needed help; most schools did not have guidance and counseling room. Since there were no training sessions for prefects they did not know how to manage their own private time alongside the prefecture roles.

The policy makers, mainly the Ministry of Education should come up with clear guide lines on prefects' election training and roles. The school administration should ensure that the prefects getting elected are vetted in line with discipline and academic performance so that they can be accepted and maintain respect among the students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommends the following:

1. The school management should ensure that prefects' recruitment democratic and cautiously done to avoid resistance from students. It will also ensure that students who perform well academically get to office.
2. The school management should organize and facilitate training sessions for prefects so that they can perform their roles effectively.
3. Since prefects pointed out that they were overburdened, the school administration should not abdicate their responsibility like reporting teachers as this may cause bad blood between them and teachers.
4. There is need to strengthen guidance and counseling services in all schools through workshops, refresher courses and equipping guidance and counseling department.
5. The guidance and counseling department should have periodic sessions with prefects to help them on issues of time management and how to cope with challenges from fellow students.

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