



# Exploring the Experience of Teachers in Management of discipline among the Students using Mentorship in Secondary Schools in Thika West Sub-County, Kiambu County-Kenya

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## ABSTRACT

### Background

Formal education conducted through a schooling system in contemporary society is key to the integral development of persons and in turn, societal development. It provides an opportunity to enhance holistic development including physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and moral guaranteeing a prosperous society. We utilized a qualitative phenomenological study design, using a face-to-face interview to collect data from 10 secondary school teachers in Thika sub-county-Kiambu County. Audio-recorded data was transcribed and analysed using an inductive thematic approach, and results were presented in narrations. Results revealed that mentorship is a new approach in schools. Different measures which included Preventive measures, Supportive discipline, and corrective measures were utilized in managing discipline among the students. Challenges involved in mentorship programs included inadequate time, lack of training, and Lack of, or weak structures to sustain effective mentorship programs. Mentoring as a model for managing discipline is a new approach that is not well entrenched in schools. It has challenges and therefore requires a lot of support and empowerment for teachers to be able to domesticate it in their cultures and day-to-day engagement with students. Therefore, to use alternative approaches in disciplining students, it is imperative to equip teachers with adequate skills to cultivate cooperative relationships that encourage students to be open and close to being mentored and guided. In addition, there should be concerted efforts by the school Boards of Management (BOMs) as well as the government through the Ministry of Education to capacity build the parents through seminars and workshops to appreciate their role in their children's discipline to promote sustained and seamless support of the children.

**Keywords:** Experience, Discipline management, Kiambu County, Kenya, Mentorship, Secondary School teachers.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Formal education conducted through a schooling system in contemporary society is key to the integral development of persons and in turn, societal development. It provides an opportunity to enhance holistic development including physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and moral guaranteeing a prosperous society. For this to be achieved in schools, discipline is paramount. It is the structure that helps the child fit into the real world happily and effectively (Canadian Paediatric Society, 2004). However, many schools present inadequacies as observed in separate studies carried out in Kenya and Cameroon, where researchers established that, students had been culprits of different forms of indiscipline in schools including drug abuse, examination malpractices, abuse of dress code, drugs, and alcoholism, absenteeism, rudeness to teachers and bullying (Waithaka, 2017, Ngwokabuenui, 2015). This has continued to interfere with expected student outcomes, economic losses, waste of precious study time, poor student-teacher relationships, low transition rates, dropout, poor student relationships, and in some instances death.

Discipline involves imparting knowledge and skills to children on expectations, guidelines, standards, and principles that can help them acquire self-respect, integrity, and sensitivity to others (Ministry of Education-Kenya, 2016). Were (2006) views discipline as a system of guiding the individual to make reasonable decisions managed through what Nieman and Shea (2004) refer to as preventive, supportive, and corrective means in a loving environment. Unfortunately, in many communities discipline is often equated with punishment and control (Canadian Paediatric Society, 2004). Mostly, discipline is viewed exclusively as behaviour, and actions taken to deal with behaviour are construed as indiscipline and not necessarily teaching children the ways to live productively. According to Adeniyi and Adedotun (2020), indiscipline is any unruly behaviour, disobedience, and general disorder whose forms can be identified as demonstrations, unrest, mass disobedience, deliberate breaching of school rules, drug use, drunkenness, stealing, truancy, absenteeism, bullying, and laziness.

A great deal of controversy has been experienced on the appropriate ways of maintaining and managing discipline in schools among teachers, parents, government, and other stakeholders. The question of student discipline is a critical issue, particularly in the increasingly modern society that we find ourselves in today. These modern times have seen a greater focus on human rights advocacy approaches in nearly all spheres of life where traditional methods of discipline including corporal punishment among other punitive methods have increasingly become less desired and even outlawed in many jurisdictions. Despite these developments, students' discipline remains a significant challenge for teachers to grapple with, particularly in an era that has also seen increased incidences of indiscipline particularly concerning school unrest. For instance, for close to 8 years, Kenya has experienced several indiscipline cases including arson where students are alleged to have burned down their classes and dorms for various reasons (Cooper, 2018). In this regard, it is critical to find alternative approaches and methodologies for instilling discipline and good conduct in students while they are in school.

This remains a challenge for teachers particularly in Kenya to find the right balance between punitive methods and more diplomatic and mentorship-oriented methods of disciplining students. In Kenya, ensuing confusion has been experienced in schools and at the national level on the choice of effective discipline strategies for students with some advocating for Corporal Punishment (CP) while others supporting alternatives to corporal punishment. While these discussions are ongoing, researchers have revealed that CP and other forms of humiliating approaches are detrimental to the children's well-being and academic achievement hence alternatives should be pursued (Cooper, 2018). One of the different alternatives proposed by the Ministry of Education-Kenya is a mentoring strategy whose mission is to nurture learners' potential through comprehensive mentorship by harnessing social competencies and talents in society. Efforts have also been made to accomplish this mission by providing structure and acceptable practices for effective mentoring by development of a policy and mentorship guide for early learning and basic education in 2019 by the Ministry of Education. This research therefore sets out to explore the teachers' experiences of the use of mentoring in managing student discipline in secondary schools with a focus on Thika West Sub County, Kiambu County, Kenya.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Research design**

We utilised epistemological, qualitative phenomenological study design. According to Creswell (2014), and Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), this type of study design enables the researcher to describe the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants. The design is also useful in ensuring comprehension of the perceptions and understanding of the phenomenon by the researcher (Pathak, 2017). This design was appropriate for our study because we sought to explore and describe the experience of teachers in using mentoring to manage student discipline in secondary schools in Kenya focusing on Thika West Sub County, Kiambu County.

### **2.2 Study area.**

The study was conducted in Thika West sub-county, Kiambu County in Kenya. The sub-county has a concentration of different types of schools including private day schools, public day schools, public boarding schools, private boarding schools, girls-only schools, boys-only schools, and mixed schools. It also has a diverse social economic landscape for rural and urban elements.

### **2.3 Study population.**

The study population comprised secondary school teachers with the target population being deputy principals and counselling teachers. These teachers are charged with the responsibility of ensuring school discipline through their different approaches determined by their professional orientation, socialisations, and practice. One deputy principal and one counselling teacher were selected from each school identified. Thus 10 teachers from 5 secondary schools were involved in this study. The counselling teacher provided their views on the role they take in promoting positive discipline, while the deputy principals provided insight into enforcing discipline.

### **2.3 Sample selection and sample size.**

We utilised a sample size of 10 teachers who were selected from 5 secondary schools in Thika West Sub County. A simple random sampling was used in the selection of 5 schools, using a list of schools with mentorship programs-data rich- provided by the Thika West Sub County education office as the sampling frame. We then purposely recruited the deputy principal and the counselling teacher from each school to participate in the study.

### **2.4 Inclusion criteria**

Deputy principals and counselling teachers from schools with mentorship programs were included in the study.

### **2.5 Exclusion criteria**

Deputy principals and counselling teachers from schools with mentorship programs who had not been in such capacities for more than six months were excluded from the study.

### **2.6 Data collection tools**

Data were collected using an interview guide. The guide was developed by the researcher. Their development was informed by a literature review and study objectives. It contained questions related to modes of discipline used in schools, mentorship for preventive discipline as an alternative to CP, mentorship as an alternative to CP in supportive discipline, and mentorship as an alternative to CP for corrective discipline.

### **2.7 Validity and reliability**

Before the actual data was collected, the face validity of the tool was tested. It was subjected to critique and evaluation by the supervisors, and they agreed that it could capture the information intended for. To ensure reliability, the tool was also pretested in two different schools that had not been selected for the study.

### **2.8 Data collection process**

Data was collected on weekdays for a period of one week (5 days), aiming at ensuring that no interference with service delivery to the students. This was achieved by visiting one school in a day. Before the actual date of data collection, the principal researcher visited the selected schools to ask for permission from the management and book an appointment with the study participant. Introduction was done to the study participants including an explanation of the benefits of the study, and they consented to participate in the study. During data collection, the principal researcher interviewed the study participants using questions from the interview guide, while recording their responses. This was a face to face-to-face interview and was conducted in all the schools. Each interview session took about 30 minutes.

### **2.9 Data management and analysis**

Audio recorded data was transcribed to establish a first impression and re-read in detail identifying relevant data, and keywords/phrases before coding was done. Codes with similar contents were grouped and related to the study objectives for validation. Analysis was done using an inductive thematic approach, and results were presented in narrations.

### **2.10 Ethical considerations**

The research proposal was presented for ethical review and approval by The University of Birmingham Research Ethical Committee. Furthermore, a research permit was sought from the National Commission for Science,

Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI-Kenya-Ref no.308081). Permission was sought from the management of participating schools by visiting the schools and requesting the school principals to allow for the participation of the deputy principal and counselling teacher in the research. The two teachers were approached individually, and their participation was requested. Their dignity and rights were promoted during the process. During data collection, all participants were informed about the purpose of the research and sensitized of their right to withdraw at any point. An opportunity was provided for the participants to ask any questions about the research. The study was voluntary, and participants were requested to sign consent forms to confirm their willingness to participate. Participants' identity was not being disclosed hence codes were used for anonymity during reporting.

### **3. RESULTS**

The research sought to explore the experience of secondary school teachers in managing discipline among students using mentorship. We explored the common disciplinary issues, how such issues are handled, and the challenges involved as follows:

#### **3.1 Disciplinary issues**

It was observed that indiscipline cases in schools are categorized into two main categories which include academic indiscipline and general indiscipline. Academic indiscipline consisted of cheating in an exam, failure to take exams without convincing reasons, leaving some questions unanswered, and not updating class notes. General indiscipline was further categorized into major and minor indiscipline. General major indiscipline included bullying, fighting, drug use, and peddling, sneaking out of school, destruction of school property, and unacceptable sexual behaviour (lesbianism, being gay, and physical sexual engagement with students of the opposite sex). General minor offenses included defiance, dressing against acceptable code, noisemaking, untidiness and uncleanliness, late coming to class, and use of vulgar language.

#### **3.2 Approaches to managing disciplinary issues.**

Regarding the management of common disciplinary issues, it was noted that schools used different approaches, as described under the following themes.

##### **Theme 1: Preventive measures**

These included the strategies used to ensure that students did not get into a situation of indiscipline. Some of the strategies used in this category included setting out behaviour protocol for students, induction to school core values, induction to student roles in school, checking for unacceptable items at the gate during opening day, the teaching of life skills, use of mentoring and motivational speakers, talking to the student, verbal warning use of CCTV surveillance and actual school patrols by security personnel, use of cashless operations, regular class and dormitories meetings in which student are allowed to express any issues that may be disturbing, worrying, or risking their wellbeing. Some schools also presented a scenario where students were allowed to report any risky behaviour observed among other students through means such as anonymous notes and confidential sharing with school authorities. This method was seen as a particularly very useful way of gathering intelligence information and socializing students to values acceptable to community expectations. This role of mentorship has been explained by Tripartite Integration Model of Social Influence by Kelman cited in Hernandez et al (2020) who said, 'the individual and community operate as social influence agents that integrate the targets of social influence into a social system by rewarding compliance with social norms (rule orientation), cuing the role by which the target to-influence is identified (role orientation), and/or reinforcing how the groups' values are consistent with the target of influence's internalized values (values orientation)'. According to one of the participants, the use of a preventive approach has been useful in reducing indiscipline cases by 80%. Additionally, it was reported that life skill education has helped students develop self-efficacy, resilience, time management, and study skills. This was emphasized by another study participant who stated the following: "*We embrace preventive against punitive discipline, discipline policy-expounds school rules. There is 24/7 supervision-patrolling the school by the deputy principal, an open-door policy for reporting, prioritizing students, allowing students to slip notes under the door of the school management offices, and cashless operations to prevent theft*".

### **Theme 2: Supportive discipline**

Mentorship and character development were extensively reported by the study participants as strategies used in managing discipline among the students. Students who are regularly indiscipline or were at risk were identified early enough. Their strengths and positive attributes were identified and encouraged through activities that engaged them including leadership positions, drama, and other co-curricular activities that increased their responsibility. Such engagement was useful in diverting them from risky situations. Further, the study established that schools used verbal warnings before taking any other action. This was reported by the study participant as follows: For any case of indiscipline, (major or minor) the first action is a verbal warning. We always start with a verbal warning from the class teacher. If the indiscipline persists, the student faces the discipline committee.

### **Theme 3: Corrective discipline**

This category of discipline deals with the consequences of unacceptable behaviour. The strategies used in this case were applied selectively in different schools depending on the seriousness of the offense in terms of impact on general school discipline and individual student well-being. The measures ranged from those applied due to major offenses that required police intervention, loss of privileges-such as sponsorship, exclusion from school, referral to a professional counsellor, and expectation to bring back a report of accomplished counselling sessions, parental involvements and in case of theft paying of stolen items several times more. Minor offenses were dealt with by allocating student manual work in public places within the school. One of the study participants reported the following: *“Some students can only understand the language of punishment to maintain discipline. Some need big punishment to hear, some also need the cane although this is at one own risk because it is illegal”*. In case of discipline issues that were criminal in nature such as drug use, some schools involved the police. One study participant narrated a scenario experienced in one school where a student was peddling drugs, by stating the following: *“When it comes to drug and substance abuse, we have students who sometimes are distributing and will tell you this one is coming from home. The parent has allowed the students to carry on with the business you see now we have to involve the police so that the parent is summoned and it also gets to the sub-county education office”*.

### **3.3 Challenges to successful mentorship in schools**

Though mentorship was used and acclaimed to be bearing fruits in the management of discipline, the study participants reported that they experienced the following challenges:

#### **Theme 4: Time limitation**

All the participants (100%) reported that they lack adequate time to provide effective mentorship to the students. They cited shortened school terms as the major reason. A study participant stated the following: *‘We have many responsibilities including coverage of the syllabus which is taken with more value than other aspects of education. You see this was made worse by shortened school terms aimed at recovering the time lost because of COVID break.’* Another study participant affirmed by reporting: *‘It is time-consuming, it is sort of a long-term you know. Like when you compare these with minor indiscipline cases like those making noise, they quickly do a punishment and they're done... There is also that challenge of how many teachers are going to work with the students; like now we have many students against 44 teachers and not all the 44 will be walking along with the students. So there is also that challenge and the issue of student-teacher ratio. Also, now time even if you're working with one, it is time-consuming with the current syllabus and very short terms due to COVID 19 break- you might not have enough time with the students.’*

#### **Theme 5: Lack of training**

Most of the participants (90%) observed that they lacked training and capacity building in mentorship. They reported that lack of mentorship training has resulted in issues which included concern about management and follow-up of some of the issues that emerge during the mentoring process needing certain skills to deal with and insufficient understanding of student issues. One of the study participants acknowledged by stating: *‘We have the challenges like lack of training and lack of policies. The element of this is compulsory without having a choice of if to do or not to do it. Also, the possibility of having teachers who do not have good morals, what will you call that? Good morals or goodwill?’*

**Theme 6: Lack of, or weak structures to sustain an effective mentorship program**

It emerged from the study participants that schools lacked foundations for mentorship programs. The majority of the participants (99%) reported that their schools lacked structures to sustain effective mentorship programs. They raised concerns about the lack of policies and guidelines, lack of monitoring and evaluation structure, weak mentor recruitment processes, and lack of leadership structures for the process. One of the study participants stated: *‘Mostly, mentorship is treated as a duty for all teachers. Teachers are just assigned mentees and are expected to take part without choice. The school administration assumes that all teachers have the skills needed for effective mentorship. So, my worry is you have given students to all teachers.... and that it is a must, you don't even know the discipline of these teachers that maybe, you have exposed students to more risk... because again not all of us are 100% okay. There are so many issues in society today and you may have somebody who may be recruiting into some issues.’*

Another participant expressed a similar worry, *‘If it is every teacher that has to have some students now that could be a small problem because we have not asked first who should do this and who should not. It can be risky sometimes.’*

We also noted that awareness about the Mentorship Policy and Mentorship Guide for Early Learning and Basic Education developed by the Ministry of Education-Kenya in 2019 was lacking.

**Theme 7: Mentorship was used after other disciplinary measures.**

It was observed that one of the challenges experienced by the teachers in the mentorship process is mentoring students after they have already gone through other disciplinary actions. This was reported by one of the study participants as the following: *‘Sometimes mentorship comes a bit too late after a student has already gone through other punitive disciplinary processes such as suspension, corporal punishment among other forms of punishment making them resentful and unwilling to be accompanied through mentorship’*. However, the majority of the participants (60%) opined that children were happier and gained confidence in realizing that someone was concerned about them and available to listen, guide, advise, and support them.

### 3.4 Discussion

This study explored the experience of teachers in using mentoring to manage student discipline in secondary schools in Thika West Sub County, Kiambu County – Kenya. Though discipline is critical for the smooth running of schools and the holistic growth of students, this study established that schools were grappling with two major forms of discipline issues which included academic and general discipline. This finding agrees with a similar finding presented by Waithaka (2017) in his study of public schools in Nairobi where he noted general and academic indiscipline among the students. This is an indication that children at this stage of life and in secondary school may be impacted by similar factors that influence their behaviour. With increased preventive measures such as the use of mentorship, discipline among the students has been improved.

Downs (2011) observed that school-based mentoring programs have emerged as a potential method to improve prosocial behaviour, academic success, resilience, and a sense of school connectedness, and reduce at-risk behaviours and drop-out probability among youth. This observation is in agreement with an observation by this study. Our study noted that a preventive form of discipline management was bearing positive results. This evidence therefore calls for schools to invest more in school mentorship programmes. Though mentorship was construed to be time-consuming and too demanding in terms of staff and time needed, it may enhance socialization to school routines, rules, values, and skills that promoted personal skills, and social skills that encouraged relationships and academic performance. This finding concurred with an observation by Schnautz, Hall, and Saavedra (2014) that unacceptable behaviour can be countered through developing skills and competencies that can promote academic excellence, personal and interpersonal skills, and life skills that have been proven to be enhanced through school mentoring programs.

Additionally, mentoring was useful in helping at-risk students facing discipline challenges to get back to expected behaviour through constant guidance on acceptable rules and their roles in their discipline. Though this is a slow process and time-consuming, schools should play this role with patience and commitment towards sustained positive school values that contribute to individual and group goals. Though mentorship was seen to be helping in discipline management, it was not afforded the deserving priority in terms of establishment of policies, guidelines, training of staff, and even time allocation. This is likely to compromise its effectiveness, especially in dealing with at-risk students who need more skills to support. As observed by Herrera and Kercher (2013), both theory and research to

date suggest that the [at-risk] youth ... may not be best served by school-based programs without significant additional efforts to recruit, train, and support mentors who can meet these specific needs.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Mentoring as a model for managing discipline is a new approach that is not well entrenched in schools. It has challenges and therefore requires a lot of support and empowerment for teachers to be able to domesticate it in their cultures and day-to-day engagement with students.

##### **4.1 Recommendations**

We, therefore, recommend that to use alternative approaches in disciplining students, it is imperative to equip teachers with adequate skills to cultivate cooperative relationships that encourage students to be open and close to being mentored and guided.

In addition, there should be concerted efforts by the school Boards of Management (BOMs) as well as the government through the Ministry of Education to capacity build the parents through seminars and workshops to appreciate their role in their children's discipline to promote sustained and seamless support of the children.

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