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RESEARCH ARTICLE

INFLUENCE OF VISITING DAYS ON STUDENT DISCIPLINE IN GIRLS' PUBLIC BOARDING SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN UASIN GISHU COUNTY

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ABSTRACT

Visiting days in boarding schools have become a phenomenon in Kenya. Each school has its own policies on the management of the whole event, relating to who visits to what is brought to students during visiting days. These policies are often flouted resulting in indiscipline. The purpose of the study was to investigate the effects of visiting days on student discipline in girls' boarding secondary schools of Uasin Gishu County. The target population comprised all the 92 secondary schools with an approximate population of 12,273 students. Out of these, 6079 were girls. All the Form Three girls in the schools were 850. Thirty (30) Form Three girls from each school were selected using lottery technique; yielding 210 girls. For schools, purposive and stratified sampling was used to yield seven girls' only boarding secondary schools comprising: 1 national, 2 provincial, 2 district and 2 private secondary schools. The 7 head teachers automatically qualified once their schools were selected. The 2 Guiding and Counselling teachers in each school were selected purposively. The entire sample size consisted of 7 schools, 210 students, 7 head teachers and 14 guiding and counselling teachers; totalling 231. Data collection utilized mainly the questionnaire, augmented by interviews and documentary analysis. Analysis was done using qualitative computer software with matrix output capabilities (SPSS and Excel). Results were presented and interpreted using suitable simple tables, charts, graphs and prose. The study revealed that mothers were the main visitors to schools during visiting days, with foodstuff being the major items brought. There was also no uniform system used in managing visiting days as each school was to come up with their own devices. However, lapses in enforcement compromised discipline management. The study recommends to the MOEST to streamline and regulate visiting days; as well as determine the extent of parental involvement when children are in boarding schools.

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INTRODUCTION

Formal education arrived in Kenya in the 1840s, through pioneer Christian missionaries. They gained popularity for perceived quality, efficiency and convenience in education provision (Eshiwani, 1993; Bogonko, 1992). Contemporary educationists gradually came to acknowledge that boarding schools predisposed children to significant detachment from their primary socializing agents (parents). Thence, visiting days was conceptualized remedy and ameliorate the situation. At first, a few schools embraced it and soon after, it was in vogue across the country. Parental visits to their children in boarding school were considered vital to boost their emotional and psychological nourishment (Kisuke, 1995). (*Daily Nation*, February 2, 1997).

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Indeed, the Sagini Report (1991) encouraged visiting days in boarding schools to dilute perceived mental stress occasioned by intensive learning, especially after the newly introduced 8-4-4 system of education. This encouragement gave visiting days an impetus to spread rapidly, initially in urban schools and later into rural schools (Wandabwa, 1996; Kinai, 2002). Incidentally, visiting days in schools had been the practice in the United Kingdom (Kenya's former colonial master) for a long time. Boarding school traditions in the UK date back to 1902, when the Local Education Authorities (LEAs) were allowed by the Education Act to charge fees if of boarding school status of a certain size (Wilkins, 1975).

This incentive encouraged conversion of several schools into boarding schools. Soon after, individual school authorities with the backing of parents facilitated the introduction of visiting days to ameliorate perceived isolation and loneliness in boarding school. Gradually, visiting days became a

characteristic in British boarding schools, popularly known as 'exeats'. They were scheduled for weekends once a month (UNESCO, 1971). With the onset of colonialism, the idea of visiting days was brought into Kenya and other British colonies such as Australia and New Zealand. Individual schools and parents were involved in facilitating visiting days as they deemed fit. Strictly, schools kept records for monitoring attendance of authorized students' visitors, often parents and relatives. Names of the visitors become listed on visiting cards and it was rare to find boyfriends, girlfriends or any stranger hijacking the opportunity to visit students (Wilkins, 1975). In British schools, items brought to students ranged from personal items, food, alcohol or wine usually as per student request. In the course of visiting, parents interacted with teachers extensively on issues touching on their children, especially academics.

In Uganda, boarding schools have gained prominence since the 1880s when western education gradually took root. Just like in the United Kingdom, the combined effort of parents and school authorities saw the introduction of visiting days in the Ugandan schools. Relative to Kenya, visiting days in Uganda were done with much fanfare, especially in private schools (*Education Watch*, Oct/Nov 2004, p. 5). In all the emerging scenarios, the latent philosophy for the introduction of visiting days was that, since students spent much of their time 'parentless' in boarding school, there was need to incorporate an opportunity for parental visits. This was perceived to be vital for emotional and psychological development (Sagini Report, 2001; Kinai, 2002).

The practice first took root in town schools in the early 1980s (*Daily Nation*, February 7, 1997, p. 7) and soon by design and demand, became the 'in-thing' that slowly crept into rural schools. Visiting days were deemed to facilitate some kind of 'remote parenting' or bonding as done in Kenyan prisons, whereby the convicts' children are allowed to visit their parents while in prison (*The Standard*, April 7, 2007, p. 14). Many teachers and parents supported visiting days of the perception that it was a therapeutic event capable of combating withdrawal and loneliness in boarding schools. They saw it as a suitable 'pressure release valve' that spiced up life, and reduced the monotony of school routine (*Parents magazine*, 2004).

All along, the MOEST had considered the modus operandi of visiting days as a school's internal matter, just like the selection of colours for school uniform. This casual attitude continued quietly for some time, until complaints started filtering in that visitors to schools had become overzealous; so that instead of visiting to complement academic pursuits, they used visits to entrench opulence and materialism (*The Standard*, July 29, 2004). The development posed serious threats to student discipline and school administrators had a new problem since not all students were visited. The resulting scenario was that of divided feelings within the school: The visited students were beside themselves with vivacity and joy; yet the unvisited were on the opposite. They felt left out, despised and full of self-pity; undergoing a period of 'burn-out' and eventual hate for school. They ended up becoming

hostile and rebellious (Melgosa, 1997; Mwika, 1996; Poipoi, 1999; Kombo, 1998).

With the current increase of indiscipline in boarding schools, many articles have isolated the causative factors. The Wangai Report (2001) blamed visiting days for fuelling student indiscipline in boarding schools. The media also abound with assorted comments on how visiting days are generating indiscipline in schools. One critic aptly explains: "When you carry a 'meko', four deep-fried chicken and 20 chapattis to school, you are saying that the school food is terrible...and the school is the worst place to be...you will have told them (students) to persevere with the prison-like conditions...and teach them to tell others, look, we are doing better than you..." (*Daily Nation*, October 12, 2001, p. 10). Indeed, some students in a Central Province's boarding school rioted soon after visiting day, raising suspicion that they were under the influence of drugs delivered during the visiting days (GOK, 2001).

While reacting to the controversies surrounding visiting days in 2001, the then Minister for Education, Hon. Henry Kosgei, discontinued visiting days in boarding schools stating thus: In view of the fact that visiting days have been turned into ostentatious occasions thereby causing frustrations and discomfort to some students, the Ministry will discontinue visiting days and replace them with mid-term holidays (Kosgei, 2001). In spite of the discontinuation by MOEST, visiting days go on in Kenya's boarding schools.

Statement of the Problem

Schools are social crucibles expected to nurture future generations into productive citizens. When boarding school culture gradually took root within Kenya's education system, parents favoured them expecting quality tidings. They religiously enrolled their children into boarding schools to benefit from the perceived disciplined environment therein. However, the restricted, environment soon made stakeholders soon consider designated visiting days to ameliorate the situation.

Visiting days enabled parents to acquaint themselves with the school, its problems, endowments and shortcomings. Parental visits to school were deemed vital for students' emotional development and the uplifting of academic performance (Kinai, 2002). The visits facilitated parent-teacher interaction, monitoring of student discipline, enhancing bonding and socialization (Kinai, 2002; Wandabwa, 1996). With time, it was realized that the haphazard visits by parents into school constantly interfered with routines, programmes and activities. Subsequently, respective school managers came up with a plan designating a day for visits; hence visiting days. This was the scenario until the Wangai Report (2001) blamed visiting days for contributing to the rising cases of student indiscipline in secondary schools in Kenya. The report condemned visiting days for entrenching opulence and materialism, facilitating opportunities for the delivery of contraband, such as pornographic materials, drugs, alcohol among others. Clearly student discipline was under threat. This was an ominous awakening as MOEST took the cue and banned visiting days

(*The Standard*, July 29, 2004; *Daily Nation*, November 27, 1999).

This study investigated the effects of visiting days on student discipline in girls boarding secondary schools of Uasin Gishu District. Specifically, it looks at the rationale for the institutionalization of visiting days in boarding school; who was visiting students and why; How visiting days were organised in terms of policies and procedures; What was brought into school during visiting days; How visiting days were affecting student discipline and management in schools and finally, why visiting days had outlived MOEST official discontinuation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was a survey research of girls' boarding secondary schools in Uasin Gishu County, Rift Valley Province of Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey design because it helped gather data at a particular point in time. The target population for the study was fifteen (15) girls' only boarding, secondary schools, their respective fifteen (15) head teachers, thirty (30) Guiding and Counselling teachers, and eight hundred fifty (850) Form Three students in the sample schools. The County had a total of 92 secondary schools out of which 15 were girls' only boarding secondary schools. Majority of the secondary schools were mixed-day and single gender boarding schools. They had a total population of 12,273 out of which 6,079 were girls'. Form Three girls in the 15 (fifteen) schools constituted eight hundred and fifty (850) learners.

To obtain the sample size, more than one approach to sampling was used because the population of the study was large and varied. To obtain the schools sample, the study used stratified and purposive sampling methods. The secondary schools were grouped into four (4) categories of National, Provincial, District and Private Schools. Consequently, a list of 15 purely girls', boarding secondary schools was obtained. From this number, purposive sampling was used to yield 1 National school and 2 schools each from the Provincial, District and Private schools categories. Eventually, the schools selected constituted 46% of all secondary girls' boarding schools in Uasin Gishu County.

The seven (7) head teachers became automatic respondents once their schools were selected. They were chosen on the strength of being the educational managers on the ground, conversant with curriculum implementation and heavily determined student discipline in their respective schools. They were, therefore, in a better position to understand their students and had varied experiences and opinions concerning student discipline. The head teachers' perceptions were relevant for the study. The Guidance and Counselling teachers became automatic respondents once their schools were selected. Two teachers in each school were purposively picked, yielding fourteen (14) Guidance and Counselling teachers. All the students in Form Three in the sampled schools (850) were targeted. Thirty students were selected from each school using the 'lottery technique'. Consequently, the sample consisted of one head teacher, two Guidance and Counselling teachers and thirty Form Three girls from each school. The study largely

used questionnaires to collect data from respondents. Besides the questionnaires, interview schedules and documentary analysis were also used to the questionnaires. At the MOEST Headquarters Resource Centre, the author obtained available files on all previous and present ministerial speeches and documents concerning discipline in schools such as the ministerial statement of September 29th, 2001 discontinuing visiting days, the Sagini Report (1991), Wangai Report (2001) and The MOEST (2001) report on *Causes, Effects and Remedies of Indiscipline in Central Province*. The author obtained the following documents from the local DEO's office in Eldoret town: assorted files on student discipline, the KSSHA Schools' Annual Report Files (2005-2006), together with the current list of all secondary schools and their categories in Uasin Gishu County. School-based records such as discipline files, guidance and counselling files, occurrence books and duty books were also obtained and used. The duty book, usually filled by the teacher on duty (TOD), shows the nature of occurrences within the school in a specific week. Data collected in the study was analyzed using non-parametric or 'distribution-free' statistics. Responses to questions in the questionnaire were scored by hand, manually tallied, totalled and grouped accordingly in tables. Then, the frequency, percentages and means of the grouped responses were calculated and expressed as percentages of the survey.

Finally, thematic analysis was used to analyse the results from head teachers' interview schedules and the attitude scale. This was done to gauge of the direction of thought and the cutting edge. An attitude score was obtained by summing up all the item scores; the higher the score, the more the favourable the attitudes; the lower the score, the less favourable. The analyzed data was used in discussion within relevant themes, reaching conclusion and providing answers for the research questions in the study. Only the most important data was presented using simple clear and easily understood formats such as tables, bar graphs and pie charts. The findings and recommendation were organized around key outcomes and their indicators. The researcher hoped that they will provide necessary important and encourage audience acceptance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The table below presents the problems relating to student discipline in secondary boarding schools in Uasin Gishu County based on statistics in the documents found in the schools and DEO's office dating 2000-2005.

Table 1. Reported Cases of Indiscipline in Uasin-Gishu County Secondary Schools

Year	Cases of indiscipline in Boarding schools		Non-Boarding schools
	Boys Boarding	Girls Boarding	No. of Reported cases
2000	6	3	10
2001	7	4	11
2002	10	6	9
2003	7	5	7
2004	9	4	5
2005	11	3	8
Total	50	25	50

Source: DEO's Office, Uasin-Gishu District; School Discipline Files 2000-2005

Rationale for Introducing Visiting days in Boarding Schools

From the results of the study, visiting days were endorsed by parents in 42% of the schools during annual general meetings (AGMs) to facilitate bonding between students and their parents/guardians. These findings concur with the views of Kinai (2002), Wandabwa (1996) and Melgosa (1997) that parents play a crucial role in the emotional development of children. The scholars recommend that visiting days must be streamlined to produce an interactive, social event capable of enhancing student discipline. In boarding schools, students are often predisposed to loneliness, so that visiting days act as 'pressure-release valves' (Sagini Report, 1991). Indeed, 47% of the teachers in the study were in support visiting days in their schools.

Who visited students and why

Mothers constituted 47% of all the visitors to schools during visiting days in followed by fathers and siblings, each at 19 %. Occasionally, 8% of the girls reportedly connived to have other people, mainly boyfriends and sugar-daddies, visit them. These agree with the assertions of Nyasato (*Daily Nation*, 2003, November 6, p. 6) that strangers with sinister motives usually find their way into school, masquerading as parents. The same strangers often deliver contraband. The study findings further concur with the view that visiting days create opportunities to be easily exploited by strangers to deliver contraband such as pornographic material, alcohol, drugs, among others to students; the mere presence of these items in school is detrimental to student discipline and academic work (Kili, 1996).

The reasons for visiting were varied. Of the students, 28.5% felt that they were visited to satisfy a school regulation, 23.8% felt they were visited to facilitate monitoring of academic progress and the rest of the reasons coalesced around socialization and replenishment of personal items. In addition, 9.5% of the students admitted forcing their parents to visit in order to have personal items replenished. This agreed with the views of one parent that some parents visit their children under duress from them (*The Standard*, 2004, July 29, p. 12). The research clearly shows that visiting days are valued by students as it helps them obtain material replenishments and emotional stability. These findings concur with those of Kinai (2002), Kili (1996) and Wandabwa (1996) that parental attention, timely provision of basic items and monitoring of children's activities are crucial in enhancing student discipline.

The Items brought to Students during Visiting Days

Sixty (60) percent of all the items brought to students during visiting days were mainly foodstuff. Personal items and pocket money made up 26%; school fees balances constituted 2% and assorted magazines and revision papers 11%. This implied that there was a high probability of the visitors bringing food items than academic-related stuff. It was hard in the study to establish whether or not illicit drugs were brought to school during visiting days since the student respondents would not openly admit to it fearing victimization. Nevertheless, statistics

have shown that, occasionally, a 'friend' delivers fruit juice laced with drugs, but many schools had since discovered the trick and banned delivery and consumption of fruit juice altogether (*The Standard*, 2004, April 29). However, in most cases the guidance and counselling teacher is aware of students who have been given access to such drugs (or were using them) among other forms of contraband introduced during visiting days (*Daily Nation*, 2001, July 5, p. 7). The problem persists especially in boarding schools, as Kili (1996) and Kertiony (2006) state; that students' drug taking habits first took place in boarding schools. Other study findings have also revealed that, often, the food varieties displayed during visiting days create problems for students and subsequently to schools in other ways; for instance, one girl in a Nairobi school complained bitterly that her mother had become notorious in bringing her chicken! (*The Standard*, 2004, July 29, p. 12). This is an indication that students tie the nature of items brought to them during visiting days with a sense of family identity and status, and this affects their self-esteem and confidence in studies. Similarly, another parent has expressed distaste about how some visitors carry assorted foods to students during visits days that make them (students) show contempt for school-cooked food. Moreover, the items brought by visitors make the unvisited students have low self-esteem, feel alienated and frustrated (*Kenya Times*, 1983, July 26).

The above views concur with those of Kisuke (1986) that some parents mistakenly use visiting days to buy off their children by treating them lavishly. This trend is especially common with those parents who for whatever reasons have no time to be with their children and so feel the need to compensate for their unavailability. This does not augur well for student discipline. In fact, it is one of the major reasons the MOEST discontinued visiting days in 2001 (Wangai Report, 2001, p. 102).

Influence of Visiting Days on Student Discipline

From the study findings, 43% of the students were visited during a visiting session and 57% were not. This means that after a visiting day event, the student body becomes divided into two emotional camps: the visited happy students and unvisited sad ones. Indeed, 72% of students admitted experiencing frustration and psychological disturbance whenever they were never visited. It is possible that this frustration is channelled through self isolation and engaging in petty offences in school (Ndururumo, 1993). As such, these emotional camps affected student discipline. The study established that students are generally euphoric about visiting days. This was shown by the fact that 57% of them admitted feeling recognized and loved about whereas 27% liked visiting days because of the opportunities to receive goodies and pocket money. Visiting days affected student discipline both positively and negatively. On a positive note, the study found out that visiting days stimulated feelings of motivation in 57% of the students and in 20% of them, it enhanced interaction between them and their parents.

The concept and practice of visiting days is based on the assumption that parents minimize their children's indiscipline when they (parents) collaborate with teachers in students' lives. Hence, frequent parental visits to school boosted the

development of proper student discipline. This is supported by the views of the Sagini Report (1991), Wandabwa (1996), Ndururumo (1993) and in *The Standard* (2004, July 29, p. 14). On the negative side, visiting days affected student discipline because it caused frustration and agony in 72% of unvisited students; about 15% felt bad and envied others; while 13% felt vengeful against society. The negative feelings were manifested in form of emotional turmoil, anxiety and low concentration levels that eventually undermined student discipline.

The research hypothesized that the psychological disturbances accumulated as vent up emotions that could explode violently. Of course other reasons came into play, so that the frustrations of not being visited just acted as the *casus belli*. These findings reiterate the views of Kinai (2002), Ingule (1996) and Kili (1996) who aver that constant lack of parental supervision in children movements and social interactions may predispose them to indiscipline. Furthermore, immoral values thrived when sugar daddies/ boyfriends visited, making unvisited girls to idolize the culprits. Eventually, they competed with one another to have such friends too (Parents Magazine, 2004). The respondents also gave cases in which some of their colleagues were used during visiting days to 'hook' some of their friends up with their 'relatives' or for the male relatives visiting their girlfriends within the school. Similar cases have been reported in *The Standard* (2004, July 29). The ploy was usually concealed to hoodwink a vigilant TOD. Consequently, cases of malingering and infatuation are reportedly common just after visiting days in girls' boarding schools (Education Insight, 2007). These experiences were emotionally taxing for students and the school at large.

Attitudes of Teachers and Students towards Visiting Days

From the research results, 48% of teachers had a soft spot for visiting days since they believed it thwarted indiscipline in Kenya's boarding schools. Teachers said it helped reduce monotony; but 23% were negative because of increased supervisory roles that came with visiting days. Besides, they felt that visiting days occasioned the school unnecessary distractions that wasted valuable time (Wandabwa, 1996; Poipoi, 1999). These findings are in line with the views raised in *The Standard* (2004, July 29, p. 14) that, prior to visiting days, some students waste so much time grooming themselves in front of mirrors in order to appear presentable; for instance, they spend hours styling hair and applying make-up; others exhibit low concentration levels as a result of daydreaming and fantasizing. These affect individual student discipline in the long run. It has been pointed out that boarding schools facilitate the isolation of students and occasions such as visiting days ameliorate the situation (*Parents*, 2004, p. 37). This is because family and friends who come to school during visiting days are often a source of encouragement and emotional support to students. Ingule (1996) similarly agrees that parental visits to school are beneficial.

Why Visiting Days persist despite Official Ban

In 52% of schools, visiting days went on despite ministerial ban because it had been fused with other occasions like sports

day and academic days. In 22% of the schools, it had been streamlined; and a further 13% practiced visiting days to keep up with deeply entrenched school traditions. In another 22% of the schools, strict regulations had been used to streamline visiting days and a strong commitment to school tradition prevailed in 13% of the schools. The findings further revealed that students favoured visiting days more than half-term breaks because they felt that the latter exposed them to many risks from school (*The Standard*, 2004, July 29, p. 14). Hence, in spite of discontinuation by the MOEST in 2001, visiting days go on in boarding schools.

Conclusion

Discipline is vital for success in all human endeavours. Parents play an important role in laying the foundation blocks for discipline in their children that is expected to last a lifetime. In a school situation, parental involvement in a child's activities complements school efforts to establish and maintain discipline. As such, when parents visit children in boarding schools, the children conceptualize this as the strongest confirmation of love and regard. Since every child loves to please their own parents and be the envy of peers, the mere act of visiting boosts their morale and helps alleviate 'burn-out' in students while in boarding school.

Boarding schools predispose students to loneliness and occasions such as visiting days act as 'pressure-release valves' for vent up emotions. At no time should boarding schools be converted into 'sealed capsules' for neglected children; otherwise the ensuing scenario will be potent for student discipline. Boarding schools, being a microcosm of society, must facilitate visiting days to enhance socialization. Schools should thus streamline visiting days to ward off misuse by overzealous parents and visitors and weed out malpractices. Young people, just like tender plants, need loving care and guidance as they paddle their way through the turbulent waters of adolescence. Therefore, in order to ascertain children's success in a world where fate is unpredictable, nurturing the development of resilience and 'shock absorbers' in students is imperative. As long as boarding schools exist, visiting days will be here to stay; just like visiting times in every hospital, reformatory institutions among others. As such, visiting days should become a solution to and not a problem that undermines student discipline in Kenya's boarding schools.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study, it is recommended that visiting days should be streamlined and regulated by MOEST. On the other hand, parents should be sensitized on the importance of investing in the emotional development of their children early in life. To facilitate this, boarding schools should have at least two visiting days in a school term. Moreover, school authorities should design consistent watertight measures to keep out all unauthorized visitors during visiting days. School managers should also play a nurturing role by incorporating open forums, pastoral care, stress management and regular supervised body exercises to cater for student socio-psychological and emotional needs.

It is further recommended that the guidance and counselling teachers should be given proper offices to facilitate their work. Further, their teaching load must be reduced to accommodate increasing need for guidance and counselling services in boarding schools. There is also need to introduce spirituality early to students, especially through counselling at peer level. Respective school systems need to integrate values such as humility, self-control and resilience. This will facilitate long-term student discipline. In addition, students who exhibit disruptive behaviour should be given professional guidance within the school. There is need to have school and parent collaborative forums to regulate visiting days. Further, the amount of pocket money given to students must be strictly regulated. Students must be engaged in clubs, societies and sports so that they are kept busy. Majority of schools have moribund clubs that need revival. Schools should establish 'family-units' where individual teachers are assigned a number of students as 'parents'. This creates a homely environment that nurtures students' emotional stability. Indeed, family units have been used successfully at Loreto Limuru, Kangubiri, Eburnangwe and Kiambu High Schools. Parents should further be encouraged to invest in the provision of emotional security to their children early within the family, as is the case in The Netherlands.

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