RESEARCH ARTICLE

STRATEGIES OF MANAGING STUDENT DISCIPLINE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN GULU DISTRICT

Denis Thaddeus Ofoyuru and Lawrence Too-Okema

Strategies of Managing Student Discipline in Secondary Schools in Gulu District, Uganda

ABSTRACT

The issue of student discipline is a pervasive and constant challenge. Secondary schools in Gulu District have also suffered alarming deterioration in student discipline in the past decade. This study aimed at establishing relationship between school ownership and strategies of managing student discipline in Gulu District with specific objectives of identifying strategies used in managing student discipline. Cross-sectional parallel sample survey design was used in the study with both qualitative and quantitative orientation. Target population consisted of headteachers, teachers and students with 377 respondents sampled. Questionnaire survey and key informants interview were used as techniques; interview guide and questionnaires as research instruments for data collection respectively. Data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Frequencies and percentages were used. The results showed that strategies of managing student discipline in secondary schools in Gulu district included rewards, punishment, communication, and counselling. The researchers concluded that strategies of managing student discipline in secondary schools in Gulu District include rewards, punishment, communication and counselling and both faith-based and non faith-based schools in Gulu district use similar strategies of managing student discipline. Recommendations were made that policies on discipline management be streamlined, implementers should balance all the strategies and researchers should delve further into each strategy of managing student discipline.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of school discipline is a global and constant challenge [CCBD], 2002) and is a matter of concern to all (Mafabi cited in Byaruhanga, 2004). The place of discipline in both faith and non-faith schools is a number one problem (Ochulu, 2009, Kidner, 2003). Discipline according to the Webster's Third New International Dictionary (1961) means control gained by enforcing obedience or behaviour in accordance with rules, prompt and willing obedience to the orders of superiors: systematic, willing and orderly conduct. In the view of Charles (1999) discipline deals with prevention and suppression of unwanted behaviours. In this study, the term discipline was used to mean prevention of undesirable behaviours, promotion, and sustenance of desirable behaviours. Managing is a process of designing, developing, and effecting organisational objectives and resources in order to achieve some predetermined goals (Okumbe, 1998). In this study, managing was used to mean a deliberate effort directed using words or actions to make a group of people act in a way towards achieving desirable and common objectives.

Strategies mean careful plans or methods or a clever stratagem the art of designing or employing plans or stratagems towards a goal (Webster's Third New International Dictionary, 1961). In this study, strategies of managing student discipline was used to mean methods for controlling students so as to elicit from them and sustain desirable behaviours on the one hand and prevent undesirable behaviour in respect to established rules and expected norms in a school on the other hand. The challenge of managing student discipline is pervasive and constant. In Australia, China and Israel managing student discipline ranked the second most significant factor stressing teachers (Lewis, Romi, Qui, and Katz, 2005). In America, discipline problems in high schools in the medium past were less serious. Today there are more compelling ones like presence of drugs, gangs, and weapons on campus and threats of assault, robbery, theft, vandalism, and rape. Tragic incidences of shooting occurred between 1997 and 1999 in Colorado, Georgia, Mississippi, Kentucky, Arkansas and Oregon mainly in public (Kenney and Watson, 1999). In Africa, both faith and non faith founded schools exhibit worrying level of student discipline. Yaroson and Zaria (2004), and Maicibi (2005)

Corresponding author: denisofoyuru@yahoo.com

In Uganda two prominent categories of school foundations exist (Ssekmwa and Lugumba, 2000): faith based and non faith-based. Yearly, cases of student discipline problems are reported countrywide in schools of both foundations. From 2001-2006, a wave of student strikes rocked the whole country. Schools which experienced serious student discipline problems in the recent past included Namilyango College, Kidetok Girls SS, Kibuli SS, Comboni College-Lira, St. Catherine Girls School, Sir Samuel Baker, Gulu High School, and Kabalega SS (Byaruhanga, 2004). The situation above makes it apparent that discipline problems are normally sparked off by lack of requisite strategies of managing student discipline. Gulu District in particular suffered alarming deterioration in secondary student discipline in the recent past. According to Touch FM (2008) the District Security Committee came up with a list of schools with severe discipline problems. These were: Gulu Central High school, Layibi College, Gulu College, and Sacred Heart S S. Others were Alliance High School, Gulu SS, and Gulu Parents Comprehensive School. Notable among these are faith based schools which were hitherto known to have high levels of discipline in their olden days due to requisite strategies employed.

The Problem

Normally, all schools should pursue high standard of discipline with clear strategies and promote self-discipline of students (MoES, 1992; MoES, 2001).   In Gulu District discipline in secondary schools has greatly declined. Leaders in the District decried the apparent defect in strategies of managing student discipline (Ayugi, 2008).   Over 50 headteachers confirmed existence of gangs in secondary schools in Gulu (Ojwee, 2008) which included the most notorius and infamous *Kiboko* squad. Apparently they could not respond in a requisite manner. If not mitigated, this situation could plunge secondary schools into oblivion. This called for an investigation to establish whether secondary schools in Gulu district have any appropriate strategies of managing student discipline at all.

Purpose of the Study

 The purpose of this study was to find out the strategies adopted by secondary schools in Gulu District in managing student discipline so as to explain the relationship between school ownership and strategies of managing student discipline in secondary schools.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the current study were to identify strategies used in managing student discipline and establish the relationship between school ownership and strategies of managing student discipline in secondary schools in Gulu District.

Research Question

The study was expected to answer the question "what strategies are used in managing student discipline in secondary schools in Gulu District?"

Scope of the Study

The current study covered the subject of school ownership and strategies of managing student discipline in secondary schools. Geographically, it covered the whole of Gulu District, composed of three geographical sub units namely Omoro County with six sub-counties, Aswa County with five sub-counties and Gulu Municipality with four divisions. The population scope included headteachers, teachers, and students in all the 34 schools from the eleven sub-counties and four divisions in the District.

Significance of the Study

It was hoped that this study would be useful to implementers of in managing student discipline to balance the different strategies of managing student discipline and use them with consistency. Policy makers would be informed of hitherto taken for granted facts while researchers would benefit from the literature that would be added to the existing ones.

Related Literature

This was meant to throw more light on the variables under the study according to other scholars. It was reviewed under sub-heading "discipline" and "strategies of managing student discipline".

Discipline

Discipline is normally associated with punishment, pain and fear (Mbiti, 1973) yet it is a system of guiding children's behaviour to make reasonable decisions responsibly. Charles (1999) adds that discipline is what teachers do to help students behave acceptably. Charles' emphasis on the roles of teachers can be appreciated because he looked at discipline only at the class level. Kabandize (2004) concluded that school administrators, teachers, parents and students all have a role in discipline management.

Strategies of managing student discipline

Effective school discipline does not just occur (Ochullu, 2009a). Elias and Tobias (1990) maintain that discipline management requires clear strategies. Strategies of managing student discipline are many (CCBD, 2002). This seems to agree with the views of Mbiti (1973), Elias and Tobias (1990), Smith (1993), Kabandize (2004), Mpiso (2004), and Kyamulabi (2006). Common strategies revealed by these literatures are: punishment, rewards, communication, and counseling. Mbiti (1993) observes that the traditional strategies for managing discipline were mainly ruthless and were premised on the view that children were naturally bad. The strategies he cites are punishment and reward. Loukes, Wilson, and Cowell (1983) maintain that punishment must be unpleasant otherwise it loses its meaning. However, Egwel (1989) warns that excessive disciplinary measures frustrate students. He seems to have been alluding to punishment which many authors justify. Loukes, Wilson, and Cowell (1983) and Mpiso (2004) maintain that punishments are indispensable in enforcing rules. Reward is yet another common strategy of managing discipline. To Woolfolk (2004), reward is an attractive object or event supplied as a consequence of a

particular behaviour (Robbins, 2003). Rewards range from praise, recognition to increased responsibilities and material things (Mullins, 1996). Punishment is to bad behaviour, reward is to good behaviour (Mbiti, 1973). Watkins and Wagner (1987) observe that it is difficult to classify behaviour as acceptable or not in space and time, implying that it is difficult to determine which behaviour to reward and which one not to. Counselling is another strategy of managing student discipline. Counselling is not something that is done to people or given to them. It is a joint process in which a person seeking help, support or advice shares his dilemma with a trained person (Cole, 2004) Gomez-Mejia, Balkin, and Cardy (2001) and Charles (1999) consider counseling as an important strategy of managing student discipline. Whether or not students are willing to be counseled of course is a different matter.

Communication is a strategy of managing student discipline (Kabandize, 2004). She emphasized sharing of views between administrators and students. She also seems to advocate for decision making by consensus involving students. This may not be possible for all issues. She adds that administrators should constantly talk about dangers of indiscipline to students. Kyamulabi (2006) and Kabadize (2004) found communication was very important as a strategy of managing student discipline. This agrees with who refers to it as bridging the communication gap. Ginott cited in Charles (1999) emphasizes congruent communication, that which is harmonious with students' feelings about situations and themselves. According to the literature reviewed, strategies of managing discipline are many.   The question that remains, are these strategies used in secondary schools in Gulu District or not?

METHODOLOGY

Cross sectional parallel sample survey design was used. The target population consisted of headteachers, teachers and students. The size of the study population was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan Table for obtaining sample size (refer to Appendix). Accordingly, 259 students, 90 teachers and 28 headteachers were sampled, making a total of 377 respondents. The current study used convenient and stratified random sampling. Questionnaire survey and key informants interview (KII) were used as techniques for data collection. With the techniques of data collection chosen above, it became imperative for the researcher to use interview guide, and questionnaires. In this study, content validity index (CVI) was used. Three experts who were asked to rate the items on a scale of very relevant, relevant, irrelevant, and very irrelevant. *Chronbach's alpha (a) coefficient* Reliability coefficient of 0.75 was obtained for students' questionnaire and 0.86 for teachers' questionnaire.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to findings, rewards, punishment, communication, and counselling are used as strategies of managing student discipline in secondary schools with communication being most predominant.   This is in tandem with the views of Kabandize (2004) who found communication featuring prominently as a strategy of managing student discipline just as Kyamulabi (2006) later did. The current study however

Table 1: *Average Percentage of Student Responses on Different Strategies*

Strategies	Response Categories					
	SA	A	NS	D	SD	Total
Rewards (%)	37.23	26.25	21.24	8.61	6.62	100
Punishment (%)	43.85	30.89	14.01	6.51	4.75	100
Counselling (%)	31.93	35.52	19.19	7.12	6.18	100
Communication	49.42	31.22	11.97	3.97	3.42	100

Table 2: *Average Percentage of Teachers' Responses on Different Strategies*

Strategies	Response Categories					
	SA	A	NS	D	SD	Total
Rewards (%)	31.9	39.68	11.9	11.42	5.05	100
Punishment (%)	20.96	40.48	9.52	17.47	12.07	100
Counselling (%)	30	40.63	15.23	7.62	6.34	100
Communication (%)	38.25	37.3	12.86	6.19	4.99	100

goes ahead to point the predominance of communication above other strategies of managing discipline with 75.55% of students and 84.6% of teachers reporting its use. Although punishment is used as a strategy of managing student discipline, the current study has found communication to be the most predominant as opposed to Mbiti's (1993) view and Nsereko's (1997) that punishment was the most predominant. The change in the trend, with communication being most predominant might be a reflection of changes in development of the human race with much focus on human rights in general and children's rights in particular. It could also reflect a success story of The Ministry of Education and Sports' policy against corporal punishments. The study also found reward being used as a strategy of managing student discipline. This is consistent with the views of Mbiti (1994) and in agreement with Woolfolk (2004) who categorized rewards as ranging from praise, recognitions, responsibilities, and material things. Although it ranked least for students with 63.4 8%, rewards ranked second highest for teachers with 71.58%.   All the forms of rewards above are being used in schools in varying proportions. Use of open praise as a form or reward was reported by majority of teachers (86.7%) and students (83.4). On the other hand giving material things was reported 52.2% of teachers and 40.9% of students only. The findings also revealed that counselling was being used in managing student discipline. This supports the views of Smith and Lastett (1993) who maintained that counselling was being used in managing student discipline. They were rather skeptical on the effectiveness which has not been addressed by the current study anyway.

Conclusions

A number of conclusions were made based on the findings. Strategies of managing student discipline in secondary schools in Gulu District are many. They include rewards, punishments, communication, and counselling. Escalating problems of discipline could therefore be attributed not to lack of requisite strategies of managing student discipline but possibly other factors. Communication is the most predominant of these strategies as opposed to punishment which was most predominant in the pioneer schools up to 1970s.

Recommendations

Policy on discipline management should be made comprehensive not just to prohibit corporal punishment but to prescribe other strategies of managing student discipline. Discipline management at implementation level be given due consideration just like academics and spiritual development because good education should take care of the trio. Multifarious strategies of managing discipline should be used consistently. Situations on the ground should determine the mix of strategies to be used. Rewards should be appealing to students and easy to obtain and should be presented in a way which does not cause the recipients to develop pride, otherwise it could be counterproductive. On the other hand, punishments should be administered with moderation, clear reasons, impartiality, at the right time, and in the right proportion. When possible, punishment should be the last alternative strategy when other strategies have proved futile. For further research, it is suggested that each individual strategy should be studied in-depth.

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