

The Implications of Management of Visiting Days on Discipline in Boarding Secondary Schools in Lugari District, Kenya

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Abstract: The culture of visiting days is common in Kenyan boarding schools yet there is no universal policy to regulate this occasion. Each school has independent internal policies on when to visit, who visits, and what the visitors bring to students on visiting days. These policies are often flouted resulting into indiscipline. The purpose of this study was to investigate the implications of management of visiting days on students' discipline in Lugari District of Western Province Kenya. Ten schools were sampled comprising of three boys boarding, four girls boarding, seven mixed day and boarding while three were girls' day and boarding schools. The sample size was 1,303 students, ten principals, ten teachers in charge of boarding and ten school workers. Data were collected using questionnaires, interview and observation schedules and document analysis. Analysis was done using descriptive statistics and data were presented on tables, pie charts and bar graphs. The population of the study comprised of all the 42 secondary schools comprising of 13,236 students. Schools were categorized into five types: pure boys' boarding, pure girls' boarding, pure girls' day and boarding, mixed day and boarding and day schools. The study revealed that all the sampled schools had varied internal policies regulating visiting days and the same were not universally enforced paving way to indiscipline among students in boarding secondary schools. In an attempt to minimize negative external influence on students, the study recommends that the Ministry of Education should formulate policies to guide these occasions. The policies should stipulate the level of involvement of parents in their children's education as well as create awareness to school managers with regard to discipline in boarding secondary schools.

Key words: Behavior, boarding schools, indiscipline, management, policies, visiting days

INTRODUCTION

The rapid pace of globalization which has caused rapid changes in education has prompted high demand for quality education. As a result, Parents perceive boarding schools as having the attributes required for quality education (Smith and Mosby, 2010). Boarding schools are defined as independent or government schools or intentional communities which provide housing facilities for students and teachers, have committed staff, provide an environment that is safe, academically challenging, active and fun (ibid). Although criticized as elitist, boarding schools are not only popular among parents who can afford to pay school fees, but also those from less affluent backgrounds who struggle to pay for their children to access boarding schools (Patrikakou, 2009).

However, the rationale for choice of the school varies. At family level, the choice of the school could be motivated by the need to perpetuate family tradition because other members of the family attended those schools; others send their children to boarding schools because of the nature of their jobs which require them to move frequently and would like their children to settle in

schools even when they relocate. Yet others do not approve of the quality of education that is offered in their present locations and prefer sending their children to schools they perceive as the best; and for some, the boarding school is handy in families or communities with problems or for academic excellence (Smith and Mosby, 2010).

On the whole, boarding schools offer a more disciplined environment, a tight daily schedule, socialization with a varied population, adherence to religious, sporting, as well as recreational activities. In Kenya, significant attempts have been made by the government to increase access and improve the quality of education (Eshiwani, 1993). It is for this reason that Free Primary Education (FPE) was introduced in 2003. In view of this, and in collaboration with development partners, the Ministry of Education (MoE) and other stakeholders, has been undertaking a Sector-Wide Approach to Education (SWAP) whose aim was to support education through the years 2005-2010. Under this development plan, the Government has set targets to meet its objective by the year 2015 and it spends up to 29% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on education (Matemba, 2009).

This calls for quality service delivery in the education sector which can only be ensured through proper policies on education management.

However, living conditions in boarding schools are said to be poor and insecure leading to perpetual students' unrests (Onyango, 2008). Amidst these challenges boarding schools remain ideal for providing descent education which is perceived as a means of escape from grinding poverty associated with the day to day living. Equally, Kwena (2000) concurs with Onyango (2008) that boarding schools face challenges some of which are: drugs and substance abuse, fear of examinations, poor boarding conditions and mismanagement of both financial and personnel resources, to name but a few.

Although boarding schools offer quality education, they involve students spending a significant part of their life detached from their parents who are primary socializing agents. Such children experience homesickness and left alone, may be disoriented (Patrikakou, 2009). This prompted the introduction of visiting days in boarding schools. As stated by Kamunge (2007), these are days set aside by Parents and the school management, preferably weekends of every end of the month when parents come to visit their children and discuss their welfare with or without the teachers. It is also an opportunity for parents to replenish their children's personal effects and bring gifts where necessary.

The governments of Jamaica, United States of America and United Kingdom have policies and legal provisions regarding visiting days save for Kenya. Depending on the culture of the school, parents are even allowed to pitch tents in the school compound, cook assorted foodstuffs using portable gas cookers amidst flashes of cameras as videos are taken. This occasion gives an impression of a picnic at a tourist camp site. While this is taking place, there are students whose parents cannot afford to host such parties or even be visited regularly.

The Ministry of Education (1998) revealed that such students retreat to certain parts of the school compound which are referred to as "desperation corners" where they cry when they are not visited. Such are practices that propagate, not only social-economic strata in schools, but may impact negatively on how students. These occasions are liberalized and depending on how they are managed, they may become conduits through which students' behavior is negatively influenced. To address challenges in school management in general, policy guidelines and legal provisions have been put in place regarding registration of schools, management of school finances, national examinations, public health and safety standards in schools, tuition fees and other levies. However, there are no uniform policy guidelines formulated to guide

school occasions particularly visiting days in Kenyan boarding secondary schools. As a result, boarding schools continue to experience indiscipline, causes of which could be emanating from the schools' macro-environment.

Statement of the problem: Like any other organization, a school is a social agent through which students socialize and learn to appreciate one another (Kibera and Kimokoti, 2007). It shapes a child's values, beliefs and emotions. However, this key role of education is unattainable if adequate policies are not put in place to regulate the management of boarding schools. Boarding schools are liberalized so much that they formulate their own policies on how visiting days are conducted. This has left room for external influence on students leading to vulnerability to negative attitudes, general indiscipline, school instability, and to some extent, less school participation (Rono, 2006).

Visiting days are occasions through which unwanted things and relationships are likely to infiltrate schools, consequences of which could disrupt the smooth operations of the school causes of which could be resulting from outside the school (Kwena, 2000). It is in the absence of government policy to guide this occasion that this study was undertaken to investigate the implications of management of visiting days on discipline in boarding secondary schools.

Purpose and objective of the study: The purpose of this study was to investigate the implications of management of visiting days on discipline in boarding secondary schools in Lugari District. The objective of the study was: To investigate the implications of management of visiting days on students' discipline in boarding secondary schools.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted a descriptive research design. According to Ngechu (2006), Cherry (1999) and Babbie (1992), descriptive studies are useful for describing characteristics of a group of people or extend of general conditions of a phenomenon. Such an approach produces a clearer picture of a group as well as a whole. In this study, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected, organized, cleaned and analyzed using basic descriptive statistics. Results were presented using percentage tables, pie charts and bar graphs.

The study area: This study was conducted in Lugari District of Western Province in Kenya from 2009-2010. The district was formed in 1995 after curving the divisions of Likuyani, Lugari, and Matete from the then Kakamega District. It is located on the Northern part of

Western Province. It borders Trans-Nzoia District to the North, North Kakamega District to the South, East Bungoma District to the West and Uasin Gishu District to the East. Lugari is a settlement scheme which was initially settled by the British colonialists and was referred to as the White Highlands. Upon independence in 1963, the government of Kenya took over the land and allocated it to farmers by selling shares. They were allocated equal shares of land ranging from 15 to 30 acres. This saw different communities settle in the district making it cosmopolitan (Republic of Kenya, 2008).

As per the census of 1999, the District had 215,920 people; 105,273 (41.8%) males and 110,647 (51.2%) females reflecting more females than males by 9.4%. This could be attributed to the fact that mortality rate among females is lower than among males. The population density was 322 persons per square kilometer and 41,809 households (Kenya Bureau of Statistics, 2008). The average farm size was 6 ha and the average family size was eight members. In terms of size, the District covers 670 km². Endowed with agricultural and forest activities, there is readily available cheap labor (Kenya Forest Service, 2009). This, coupled with the poor terrain has adverse effect on enrolment of boys in secondary schools because they engage in farm activities as cheap laborers and in *bodaboda* transport to earn a living.

where,

Bodaboda: Transport business involving bicycles and/or motorcycles for ferrying people and luggage from one physical point to another

Study population: In terms of education, there are 42 secondary schools in the District. These are grouped in five categories: Girls' Boarding, Boys' Boarding, Mixed Day and Boarding, Girls' Day and Boarding Schools and Day schools. As at the time of the study, the student population comprised of 13, 236 students in all the schools. Of these, 2168 (16.4%) were in three boys' boarding schools, 3176 (24%) were enrolled in four girls' boarding schools, 1008 (7.6%) were enrolled in four girls' day and boarding schools while 2467 (18.6%) were in eight mixed day and boarding schools the remaining 4,417 (33.4%) were in twenty four (24) day schools (Lugari District Education Office, 2009).

Sampling procedure and sample: Stratified random sampling was used to select the categories of schools to be included in the study sample. The population strata included pure boys' boarding school, pure girls' boarding schools mixed day and boarding schools and girls' day and boarding schools as illustrated in Table 1.

Using simple random sampling, 30% of the individual school population was selected making 29.8%

Table 1: Sample of the study

School type	No. Sch	Enrolment	Sample (30%)
Boys' Boarding	2	832	250
Girls' Boarding	2	1161	348
Girls day and Boarding	2	680	204
Mixed/day and Boarding	4	1701	510
Total	10	4374	1303

of the total population of the schools with boarding facilities in Lugari District (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). Participants were selected across the school giving an equal chance to students at all level of education and gender to participate.

Instruments of data collection: Data were collected using questionnaire, document analysis observation and interview schedules. A questionnaire was preferred because it is economical to administer to a large population and also it suited the literate population under study (Kothari, 2004). Two types of questionnaires were drawn: one for the principals, teachers and school workers which was designed to capture data concerning policies guiding visiting days and how they are articulated. The second questionnaire was for students meant to capture their awareness of policies guiding visiting days. Both questionnaires had questions on the demography of the respondents, issues of policy on visiting days, how they are enforced and issues of discipline.

Interview schedule: Principals and school workers in the sampled schools were interviewed. This tool was used to fill up the gap in data collected using a questionnaire (Kothari, 2004).

The interview results were recorded under the headings that emerged during the interview and results were recorded, cleaned, coded, synchronized and analyzed.

Observation schedule: Data were also gathered by observing behavior patterns exhibited during visiting days. The schedule containing observable behavior was drawn and used to verify the responses on the questionnaire. The schedule was filled in by the researcher who was a participant observer during visiting day occasion (Oso and Onen, 2008). Relationships between them that were crucial in the understanding of who visits students were recorded.

Document analysis: Documents related to visiting days such as the registers of parents' authorizing the school management on who would visit their children on their behalf, registers of visiting cards' counterfoil, registers of visitors who visit the school on visiting days, major and minor punishment books, and guidance and counseling records. These documents gave insight into the appropriateness of management of visiting days.

Quality control: The instruments of the study were developed by the researcher with the aid of lecturers from the Department of Educational Planning and Management Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST) who scrutinized, verified them and advised accordingly. Reliability was ascertained by categorizing the schools basing on homogeneity of characteristics of the respondents (Babbie, 1992). The researcher conducted a pilot study to assess the adequacy of the research and instruments (Nachmias and Nachmias 1996). Four schools drawn from each of the categories of schools were used to pilot the research tools. The schools used in the pilot study were not the actual study. The questionnaires were used to get responses from the students and teachers. The purpose of this pilot study was to help design a code register for each Questionnaire and to adjust the tools to rid them of ambiguity and irrelevancies.

Methods of data analysis: The data collected by questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as percentages while data collected by interviews, observations and document analysis were transcribed, organized thematically the analyzed using statistics to indicate percentages.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to investigate the management policies that regulate visiting days in boarding secondary schools. Results revealed that all the sampled schools had policies that guide visiting days. Such policies include: who visits, how visitors are identified, who identifies the visitors, what students are brought and how these policies are enforced by the school management. However these policies are not universally applied.

School management policies: It emerged that schools permitted not only parents and guardians to visit students, but also people nominated by parents to visit on their behalf such as siblings and relatives.

Policy on who visits: The study showed that 71.2% of students are visited by their parents or guardians while 19.9% by nominees or unauthorized people who maraud as nominees and visit students without the knowledge of the school management and parents. Findings also revealed that such visitors traffic into schools pornographic materials, civilian clothes and even drugs as per the findings in Table 2. There are however 8.9% of students who are not visited. This is because some parents are poor and may not afford regular visits or some students are sponsored and some sponsors may not make it to visit. The responsibility of providing students with

Table 2: Response of Teachers and Workers on what students are brought on visiting days

Things brought	%
Food Stuffs/snacks/fruits	63.3
/Shopping	29.0
Alcohol and drugs	6.7
Civilian clothes	1.0

Table 3: How visitors are identified

Mode of identification	No.	%
Rangers	355	55.7
Nobody	90	14.3
Gatekeepers	167	27.6
Teachers	15	2.4
Total	637	100

basic needs is left to non- custodial parents who may not afford to visit as desired by the students. Such students withdraw when they see their peers visited while they are not. This makes them resort to indiscipline to have their problems addressed. Some cry, lose confidence, steal from those who are visited and even feign sickness in order to be allowed a temporal break from school or they just sneak out of school (Ministry of Education, 2002).

Policy on who identifies visitors: The policies on identification of the visitors were available in the sampled schools to ascertain that only authorized people visit students. Findings of this study revealed that this is done by certain members of the school community. Results showed that a majority of visitors are identified by rangers or scouts (55.7%). In other schools, identification is done by gatekeepers (27.6%), principals, their deputies and teachers (2.4%) and 14.1% of the visitors are not identified at all. Whereas the ideal is that the principal, deputy principal and teachers are better placed to identify genuine visitors, they participate minimally in the identification process. This irregular mode of identification of visitors doesn't guarantee that the visitors who come to visit students are authentic. As a result, room is left for strangers to interact with students and may influence them negatively causing school unrests (Onyango, 2008).

Effectiveness of identification of visitors: The mode of identification of visitors varied with individual schools. This included use of national identification card (42%), visiting cards designed by the school and issued to parents on admission of the students or on parents' days (21%), while other schools had internal registers which contained details of those authorized to visit (32%) yet others did not have a mode of identification of visitors (5%) as illustrated in Table 3.

On arrival of the visitor, those assigned the responsibility of identifying and ushering in visitors ask the visitor to verbally prove their relationship with the

student and they may or may not counter check with the school register to confirm this. Where the school has no register, the visitors write their personal details and the name of the student they want to visit then they are allowed to see them. However in schools where these methods were used, there was lack of thorough scrutiny of the visitors in terms of verification of the image of the visitor and as such strangers marauding as parents got access to schools by producing national identification cards. Also the schools' internal registers of visitors were not strictly adhered to especially where students were wholly relied upon to carry out the task of identifying visitors.

Policy on what is brought/trafficked to schools on visiting days: It was established from students' responses that schools restrict the type of foodstuffs visitors bring to schools on visiting days. Prohibited are soft and alcoholic drinks; certain foodstuffs cooked at home, sweets and snacks. They also prohibit exchange of letters with visitors on this day, civilian clothes, pornographic materials and mobile phones. It emerged from the study that the same find their way to schools on visiting days via unauthorized visitors. Response from principals, teachers and workers revealed that some of the things brought or trafficked to schools on this occasion include food cooked at home (63.3%), students' personal effects (29%), alcoholic drinks drugs 6.7% and civilian clothes 1.1% (Table 2).

These things are brought by people purporting to be friends or relatives of the students. The civilian clothes are smuggled into schools with an intention of using them to sneak out of school or acquire permission to be out of school unnoticed and engaging in social vices like drinking alcohol and participate in local dances. These findings support findings by the Ministry of Education (2002) which established that a significant proportion of the causes of students' unrests are inspired from without the school.

Implications of management of visiting days on students' discipline: Self-discipline is synonymous with self-control (McKenzie and Ruto, 2008). This study sought to establish the extent to which students deprived of basic desires can control themselves in the presence of that which they desire but cannot afford. It was established that 55.7% of the participants adhere to these policies and 44.3% flout them. The latter smuggle foodstuffs into their dormitories, keep it in boxes and bags and eat it slowly until it moulds. This violates the school rules prohibiting this behavior. This behavior is characteristic of adolescents who are ambivalent towards adults and teachers whose advice or direction they ignore (Rono, 2006). It is therefore vital that the school

Table 4: Cases of indiscipline emanating from visiting days

Reasons for trouble	Girls school (%)
Unauthorized people	23.9
Stealing	5.2
Not Following routine	27.9
Carried food to the dorm	27.2
Sneaked	3.3
Borrowed mobile phone	7.0
Quarreled parents for less money	5.5

management intensifies supervision and guidance and counseling in order to enhance discipline in boarding secondary schools.

Indiscipline related to visiting days: On visiting days, students were unable to restrain themselves despite the school policies guiding the occasion. Cases of indiscipline range from talking to unauthorized people (23.9%), stealing from their peers who were visited (5.2%), not following the school routine (27.9%), carrying food to the dormitories (27.2%), sneaking from school (3.3%) and borrowing mobile phones to talk to their friends (7.0%). Students who are not visited are overwhelmed by anxiety prompting them to borrow mobile phones to confirm from home if they would be visited. Other incidences of indiscipline include quarrelling parents for giving them less pocket money (5.5%) (Table 4).

Although there are policies on how students and visitors should conduct themselves during visiting days, this is not adhered to. The victims of indiscipline are either punished by the teachers, counseled or suspended from school for a short while to go home and summon their parents to school to discuss their indiscipline with the teachers. A significant percentage (70.0%) of students flout the rules of visiting days and are punished while only 26.7% are counseled and 3.3% are suspended from school to bring their parents to discuss their discipline. This indicates that the rules are either poorly formulated or poorly articulated resulting into a lot of time being wasted on punishment after visiting days. These results show that management of visiting days is wanting. It also follows that involvement of parents in their children's discipline is minimal.

Those who are suspended are the ones whose parents get to be told of their indiscipline while a majority of the students are handled at school. This incapacitates the role of the parents in helping the school to effectively mould character in the students. Worth noting is the significance attached to guidance and counseling in schools. With the abolition of corporal punishment, The Ministry of Education (2002) emphasizes guidance and counseling. The fact that punishment is emphasized at the expense of guidance and counseling is a management weakness that should be addressed through policy formulation to guide this occasion.

CONCLUSION

It was evident from the study that visiting days are a source of indiscipline in boarding secondary school. This is as a result of parents' failure to visit their children on this occasion and to provide for them and strangers purporting to be relatives trafficking unauthorized things to schools on these occasions. It was further concluded that although schools have school based policies to guide visiting days, they are unique to individual schools and as a result they lack effective supervision programs leaving room for indiscipline.

RECOMMENDATION

Basing on this study it was recommended that the Ministry of Education formulates policies to guide visiting days, clearly stipulating the time to visit and what parents should bring to schools during this occasion and incorporating seminars for bonding among teachers, students and parents for academic concerns.

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