



Challenges Encountered by Student Councils in Promoting Students' Discipline in Public Secondary Schools in Ilemela District, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the challenges faced by student councils in enhancing student discipline in public secondary schools in Ilemela District, guided by Path Goal Theory. A mixed-methods research approach was employed, utilizing a convergent parallel research design. The sample comprised of 183 participants, including 5 heads of schools, 5 discipline teachers, 5 student council members, 76 teachers, and 92 students. Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and questionnaires. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics with SPSS version 20, while qualitative data were analysed through content analysis. The findings revealed that student councils faced significant challenges in enhancing student discipline. Key challenges included inadequate training and workshops, leading to a lack of skills necessary for implementing discipline programs effectively. Additionally, student council members were overburdened with dual responsibilities, balancing academic work with handling disciplinary matters. The councils also struggled with inadequate facilities for their official duties and faced poor managerial involvement in the formulation of school rules. Based on these findings, the study recommends that school management involve student councils in the formulation of school rules, regulations, and by-laws, as they are more attuned to student concerns and issues of discipline. Furthermore, the study suggests that regular training be provided to student council members to enhance their skills and capacity. This would ultimately ensure that the councils are more effective in promoting student discipline, contributing to a positive school environment.

Keywords: Student councils; discipline; challenges; by laws; regulations

INTRODUCTION

A student council is a representative body formed by students appointed by school administrators, alongside those elected by their peers, to serve as the voice of the students within a school (Gathura & Momanyi, 2021). Mayes (2019) defines the student council as an executive board composed of key roles, including the head prefect, vice president, and secretary, who hold primary responsibilities, accompanied by other elected representatives such as class monitors. The number of representatives may vary based on the specific needs

of the school. The mission of a student council is to serve as a liaison between students and school administration. This mission is accomplished through their participation in decision-making on behalf of their fellow students, as well as through their role as peer mentors. This involvement fosters the development of managerial skills and facilitates student engagement in a variety of school activities, including clubs and addressing disciplinary issues among peers (Nduta, 2018). Research suggests that student councils provide an important platform for students to express their

opinions, advocate for reforms, and improve overall student discipline and educational experiences (Dominic, 2021).

In the United States, disciplinary practices in schools have become a significant issue, with a rising number of students facing suspension for behavioural infractions. Suspension, however, has proven to be an ineffective solution in many cases. It has been suggested that involving student councils in campaigns designed to educate and engage their peers in addressing discipline could mitigate indiscipline within schools. Similarly, in Poland, cooperative efforts between students and teachers to utilize student councils have contributed to improving discipline (Joanna & Romaniuk, 2020). However, the autonomy of student councils in these efforts often depends on the management practices of individual schools. In Austria, student councils play a crucial role in promoting discipline by initiating and managing various programs within schools (Kythereotis et al., 2020). Likewise, in Singapore, a collaborative approach involving student councils, teachers, and school administrators has proven effective in promoting peer support, organizing social events, and reinforcing discipline (Mansor et al., 2015). In contrast, Brazil presents a more complex situation, as the influence and effectiveness of student councils in promoting discipline are inconsistent across schools, largely due to a lack of uniformity in the councils' authority and organizational structure (Souza & Romano, 2015).

In Nigeria, student councils, referred to as the "Students' Union Government" (SUG), are present in many public and private secondary schools (Okoye & Omoike, 2018). However, these councils often lack the necessary autonomy to address disciplinary issues such as examination malpractice, truancy, sexual immorality, and drug abuse behaviours that contribute to poor academic performance (Adeyanju, 2019). Similarly, Usman (2016) observes that the failure of most Nigerian public secondary schools to decentralize discipline to the student government hinders their potential to alleviate indiscipline. In Ghana, indiscipline remains a chronic issue in secondary schools (Kpunde, 2019), with scholars like Ngwokubaenui (2015) advocating for the involvement of student councils and school boards in addressing these concerns. In Zambia, the effectiveness of student councils in managing discipline varies across schools, as some schools benefit from their involvement in promoting positive student behaviour, while others face significant

challenges in ensuring discipline (Mbongonya, 2018; Nkolola & Miuzata, 2021).

In Kenya, the Education Act of 2013 facilitated the formation of student councils with the aim of improving education quality and reducing unrest and indiscipline in schools (Simiyu, 2020). Despite the establishment of student councils and disciplinary policies, however, Kenyan public secondary schools continue to experience riots, strikes, and incidents of violence (Gethura et al., 2021). In Tanzania, student councils were introduced under the Education Act No. 25 of 1978, with subsequent amendments in 1995 and 2002, as well as the Education Policy of 1995 and the Child Act No. 21 of 2009 (Lumanija & Mkullu, 2020). These councils were created to improve the learning environment by assisting students in avoiding disciplinary issues (Thomas, 2019). The student councils are expected to collaborate with teachers to enhance discipline and help achieve academic goals. However, despite these efforts, the impact of student councils on promoting discipline in Tanzanian public secondary schools remains limited (Lyogo, 2017).

The Ilemela District Quality Assurance Report (2019) acknowledges the involvement of student councils in disciplinary activities aimed at improving the learning environment. Nevertheless, despite these efforts, the discipline situation in public secondary schools continues to be a significant concern. The Ilemela District Education Officer's report (2021/2022) revealed troubling statistics, including 1,714 student dropouts, 307 truants, 50 suspensions due to drug abuse, and 24 pregnancy cases from January 2021 to May 2022 (URT, 2022). These figures highlight that, despite the efforts of student councils, the effectiveness of their roles in enhancing student discipline is still in question. Consequently, this study seeks to assess the challenges that student council's face in their efforts to enhance student discipline in public secondary schools in Ilemela District.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Path-Goal Theory is a leadership theory composed by House in 1974. The theory suggests that effective leaders should clarify the paths towards achieving goals and provide necessary support and rewards to motivate their followers. By adopting different leadership styles based on the needs of their followers and situational demands. Leaders can enhance follower satisfaction, motivation, and performance. This theory emphasizes

leader flexibility and highlights four primary leadership styles: directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented. The ultimate goal of the Path-Goal Theory is to create a positive work environment that facilitates followers' success and goal achievement (Murage et al., 2017).

Comparably, Khalfan et al. (2013) emphasize that path-goal theory leaders should ignore all barriers that may hinder progress for the followers by adopting different leadership styles according to the situational context and the characteristics of the followers. An effective leader uses different means, for example, directive style, supportive leadership, and participative leadership. It depends on the situation and follower's characteristics for the intention of providing positive effects to the subordinates, and finally, the organization's predetermined goal can be achieved.

The theory provides a framework for understanding and enhancing the effectiveness of student councils in promoting discipline among students. According to the path-goal theory, an effective leader motivates their subordinate by clarifying the path to achieving their goal, removing obstacles, and providing support and rewards. In this context, the student council can clarify their expectations regarding discipline, remove any barriers that hinder students' adherence to school rules, and provide support and encouragement to ensure that students are motivated to maintain discipline (Murage et al., 2019).

Empirical Literature Review

A study by Bickmore and Parker (2017) in the USA revealed that students' diversity in backgrounds, beliefs, and values makes it difficult for student leaders to develop inclusive and fair disciplinary initiatives to all students. In the same vein, Alexander (2017) studied on disciplinary strategies in secondary schools in Mississippi County, USA, and 70% of informants pointed out that students' leaders failed to find an effective way to bring students together and prevent disciplinary problems due to parents' perceptions towards students' leaders' initiatives.

Kuper and Seipel (2017) from Germany showed that, cultural diversity within schools poses challenges in terms of understanding and responding to disciplinary approaches formulated by a student council to enhance students' discipline. Additionally, the European Union's (2018) study asserted that, most secondary school student council members are not aware of their responsibilities, including discipline duties which affect their performance in school activities. However, the

researchers failed to examine how enhanced training and collaborative efforts among student councils, teachers, and the community can address disciplinary challenges. Thus, the current study aims to fill that discrepancy by exploring interactive strategies that empower student councils to effectively navigate through cultural differences to fulfil their disciplinary roles.

Moreover, a Brazilian study by Souza and Romano (2015) asserts that, student councils in enhancing lack resources and infrastructure for running different discipline programs. This is because most schools invest to overcome overloaded classes, access to technology and teaching materials than in considering discipline measures. Therefore, students' discipline looks like a minor issue without priority in most public secondary schools. Similarly, UNICEF (2011) revealed that, students' participation in school government in France is minimal. Whereby France student councils feel indebted when coming into power in favour of their fellows who voted for them, this leads them to saving more interest of their fellow students than the schools' demands. Furthermore, O'Donovan's (2015) study from Ireland posits that, student leaders face resistance to change as some students see disciplinary initiatives done by their leaders as unnecessary and then convince others to oppose them.

Likewise, Adetoro and Oni (2015) examined the effectiveness of students' involvement in decision-making in Nigeria and pointed out that, students lack balance of priorities between academic issues and leadership roles. As such, student council leaders fall in intrapersonal conflict, and some drop academically, making it difficult for them to convince others while they are in a crisis of the soul. Conversely, Glover (2015) found Ghanaian students' leaders facing a lack of authority and interpersonal conflict when enforcing the disciplinary measures on their fellow students, as they compare the legitimacy power or authority hold by their teachers.

Nekessa (2018), in a study from Kenya reported that many studies that attempted to examine the challenges the student councils face in performing well their duties. It was revealed that student council members miss and skip classes sometimes while supervising or attending to students' discipline matters, this made them feel bored and hate a position. Student council leaders also complained to lack adequate time for private studies, low motivation, and having low knowledge of leadership skills due to the absence of training from teachers and

school administrators. This is supported by Ndwigah's (2022) and Nakessa's (2018) who pointed schools to lack space for feedback in discipline matters from the student council in the fixed general school timetable. Moreover, in Uganda by Nyende (2018) raised out the external factors for resistance conflict in management, while Mukiti (2014) stressed that student leaders were given low opportunities and limited resources to run discipline education awareness campaigns. Thus, student councils' efforts are frequently undermined by lack of institutional support.

Furthermore, Mnubi (2017) positions that, school councils can be used to improve basic education in Tanzania. However, the problem is the domination of teachers' over students' choice. Although students might have their own choice, their teachers do interfere in the election by influencing on those who want to be leaders. Students such leaders as spies (puppets) who serve the teachers' interests, hence they lack support in fulfilling their duties and dealing with discipline issues. Also, Yusuph and Ambich (2017) asserted that student leadership in Tanzanian secondary schools is not elected democratically but based on teachers' influence and interests. Therefore, students feel betrayed, hate their leaders, and establish a social distance from them leading to lack of teamwork, disunity and ambiguity to the student council in discipline-enhancing. In efforts to trying filling such gaps, the researchers seek to identify challenges faced by student councils in Ilemela public secondary schools.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed research approach and

convergent parallel design. The study employed a sample size of 76 teachers and 92 students from 5 public secondary schools chosen through stratified and simple randomly technique participated in the study. Moreover, 5 heads of schools, 5 students council leaders and 5 discipline teachers who were selected purposively. The data were collected through questionnaires administered to students and teachers, and interview guide for discipline teachers, students' council leaders also head of schools. Piloting was done to cross-check the research instruments validity and reliability. After data collection, questionnaire data were analysed through descriptive statistics with the aid of SPSS 20th version. The data from the interview was analysed basing on theme analysis. All research ethical issues were highly observed in the whole process of conducting a study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This part presents results, and a discussion based on the study purpose. The study findings were obtained through questionnaires administered to teachers and students, together with the interviews conducted to heads of schools, discipline teachers and student council leaders. The results are therefore quantitatively presented and qualitatively supplemented and discussed in the following sub sections. Participants were asked to identify the challenges that encountered the student councils in improving students' discipline in public secondary schools. The results are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Students' and Teachers' Responses on Challenges Faced by Student Councils in Enhancing Students' Discipline

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Inadequate support and cooperation	29	17
Inadequate leadership skills	66	40
Conflict	22	13
Inadequate facilities	34	20
Multiple responsibilities	17	10
Total	168	100

Source: Field Data (2024)

Inadequate Support and Cooperation

Findings in Table 1 above indicate that 29 (17%) participants pointed out inadequate support and cooperation as among the challenges that student

council's face in struggling to improve students' discipline. This suggests that low collaboration and encouragement from school authorities and their fellow students hamper the effectiveness of the student councils in practicing disciplinary measures in public

secondary schools. Additionally, this view was raised during the interview as one student leader exposed that:

Most teachers are non-supportive to the discipline programs which are planned by us as students' leaders, instead the programs are implemented poorly. For example, in the discipline club under the discipline students' leaders, we discuss disciplinary issues in our school and organize ourselves as a discipline club team to run different educational campaigns on school rules and regulations. But, when we ask for financial support to buy materials that can assist us during our encouragement, the discipline and head of schools' offices refuse to provide the money, and teachers are not ready to attend during such campaigns. Also, some students do not attend the campaigns while they are being held for them (Interviewee 3, July 2024).

The above quotation means that the student councils work in isolation with limited support from the school administration as well as some of their fellow students. This presupposes that, students hate their leaders, while some teachers do not hold themselves responsible in caring about students' discipline. Such negligent teachers work only for salary, take student discipline as a minor and a waste of their time. These findings match with the previous study by Murage (2019) who revealed that the student councils' role in improving students' discipline get little support from school management and hence the councils perform poorly in their discipline initiatives. On the other hand, the findings contradict the Path goal theory by House (1974), which insists on an effective leader to omit all obstacles and supports subordinates by showing a path to achieve the organization's goal. Hence, poor support from teachers to the student councils signifies a gap in their leadership effectiveness. Thus, the student councils lack the necessary encouragement, support, guidance and resources' supply from their teachers to successfully motivate students in enhancing discipline.

Inadequate Leadership Skills

Student councils were said to be challenged by inadequate skills in leadership in dealing with disciplinary cases as pointed out by 66(40%) respondents. This shows that the student councils do not possess the necessary and required leadership skills for running discipline programs in public schools. Moreover, the student councils are not capable of handling complexities in their discipline responsibilities

due to a lack of knowledge caused by limited managerial and leadership mentorship or training. Souza and Romano (2015) exposed the same experience from Brazil where student councils lacked resources and training for leadership skills. As a result, ineffective implementation of discipline enhancement duties is experienced. Similarly, the findings from the interview concurred that student council members fail to handle discipline issues due to poor leadership skills as one student leader explained:

We have been selected in different ways, sources and classes, some of us were elected, but others were appointed by staff teachers. After we were announced as the new council during the parade, we started to work as a new leader without any seminar or training, rather than observing the experience of the previous council members, which made our role ambiguous. We lack enough knowledge and skills in running different school activities, including discipline, we are just coping with what previously the council was doing (Interviewee 8, July 2024).

This implies that the student councils lack the necessary leadership induction and training to help them improve students' discipline. The respondents raised the concern that teachers are aware that they need effective on job induction, seminars and trainings to increase their performance in disciplinary duties, but they do not bother to teach them. The findings look similar to those of Lumanija and Mkullu (2021) who commended that, most of the challenges which good student leaders are to be created, because if they lack leadership skills they will perform poorly and fail to control school and student disciplines. However, the findings are misaligned with House's (1974) Path goal theory's propositions which emphasize on significance of administrators' and managers' mentorship mission and succession plans for leadership skills in guiding and motivating followers like student councils and students to achieve organization goals.

Inadequate Facilities

Resources like offices, funds and time are essential in ensuring discipline is maintained in schools. However, the study found that schools and student councils face inadequate facilities which could cause them to work below standards, as it was raised out by 34(20%) participants. This implies that many schools lack funds to secure offices and purchase equipments that enables the councils to carry out their discipline activities. During

the interview, one head of school pointed out that:

Free education causes a lack of funds in our school to cater for different equipments needed by the student councils and we have no other means to accommodate them more. Before this policy, the school had a lot of money, which the parents contributed, making it much easier to meet the needs of our students' leaders. No office is set aside for students' leaders, no files for filling out the disciplinary records. Some important student disciplinary issues' documents get lost because of poor handling and misplacement (Interviewee 4, July 2024).

This means that the absence of necessary is an obstacle to the student councils in dealing with students' discipline. On the other hand, the school administrators seem to have no alternative solution and just leave the situation as it is due to financial constraints emanating in the public secondary schools. These findings coincide with those of Murage (2019) who comment that student councils perform poorly in improving students' discipline because they lack previous disciplinary records and other helpful facilities. Hence, it has become difficult for the council to assess their failures and successes. The findings are affirmed by the Path-Goal Theory developed by Robert (1974), which insists on a close relationship between followers and their leaders. Thus, once a school has not set aside an office for the student council, they can meet and discuss several disciplines matters with their fellow students in a friendly manner. Therefore, heads of schools should establish different income-generating projects in order to meet the needs of a school, including those of student councils.

Conflicts

The study findings revealed that 22(13%) of participants experienced conflicts as a challenge for student councils. The conflicts were observed between the student council members themselves, between student council members and teachers, and between students and student council members. These conflicts are caused by differing opinions and perceptions on discipline strategies as well as misunderstanding or resistance to authority. Thus, the conflicts are both from internal and external sources and could hinder the council's effectiveness in their ability to promote student discipline. When interviewed, one student council leader informed that:

Students hate us because they believe that we are teachers' puppets. They are not aware that

all the efforts we make are for them to behave well, so that in the end, they can perform well in their examination. They count us as their enemies and even plan to take revenge by beating us when we are on our way back home. On my side, I am not ready to report any indiscipline cases because I am really worried about being beaten when I am getting back home (Interviewee 11, July 2024).

The lesson from the above quotation is that students have no faith in their leaders and instead take them as informants of their misconduct to teachers. Hence, students set a distant relationship with their leaders, meanwhile planning to attack them as revenge against the pain from the punishment given by the teachers, after being reported by their leaders. The same concern was raised by Eman (2018) from Jordan, who exposed that, student leaders play part in suggesting punishment for their fellow undisciplined students which fuels misunderstanding among them. During the interview it was also argued that, sometimes disagreement raise among student council members in favour of some undisciplined students, hence raising conflicts. One student leader aired out the following:

We oppose each other among members of the student council when it comes to deciding about which punishment should be given to certain undisciplined student. Because some of us take sides with the indiscipline students and do not want to be punished severely because of their friends, also student council members take out the secrets of the council. For example, if we agree and decide to punish indiscipline students, some betrayers take the information to a victim by naming the name of the leader who was suggesting the agreed punishment in the meeting (Interviewee 7, July 2023).

The above quotation implies that there are both internal and external conflicts among student councils generated by several reasons. Some of the obvious reasons are like the absence of confidentiality among student council members and some teachers acting out of their ethics. These findings agree with Ndwiga (2022) who commented that student council members face conflicts a lot in schools. These conflicts create tensions in the school environment and make it difficult for the council to collaborate in their disciplinary efforts. Therefore, it is important for the student council and teachers and students to maintain respectful

relationships in order to effectively address disciplinary issues in a school.

Multiple Responsibility

The findings show that 17(10%) respondents proclaimed that student councils are overcharged by multiple responsibilities which limit their roles in improving students' discipline. This shows that performing more than one duty at once as students and as leaders becomes a challenge among the members of the student council, leading to confusion of priorities among them. This is supported by the findings of the interview when one of the interviewed student leaders had this to say:

In my school, sometimes student leaders do not attend some periods because they are attempting leadership roles. For example, sometimes while other students are attending teaching in classes, we as student leaders find ourselves supervising those punished by teachers during parades or supervising late comers while. Because of this, some leaders run from the disciplinary supervision role to attend the class session (Interviewee 5, July 2024).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study explored the challenges faced by student councils in improving students' discipline. The findings indicate that discipline is a critical factor in ensuring effective academic performance, and student councils play a central role in maintaining discipline among students. It was observed that school administration cannot effectively manage discipline across all students without the support of the student councils. This is because student councils, being closer to and more familiar with the students, are better positioned to address disciplinary issues than teachers. However, the practice of student councils in schools has shown that challenges persist in enforcing school regulations and rules effectively. The student councils are often burdened with multiple responsibilities within a limited timeframe, making it difficult for them to balance their roles as students and as student leaders. These overlapping roles sometimes affect their academic performance, leading to fatigue and mental strain. Additionally, student councils often lack adequate induction courses and training, which limits their leadership capacity in addressing disciplinary issues. Based on these findings, the study recommends that schools utilize student councils more effectively in

dealing with disciplinary matters. School management should ensure that student council members receive the necessary training, and that essential resources—such as office space, supplies, and funds—are made available to them to facilitate their work. Furthermore, the school administration should provide active support and foster collaboration with teachers to build a cohesive team working together to combat indiscipline, which will ultimately enhance academic performance. It is also suggested that future studies explore the impact of discipline on academic achievement in both public and private schools and examine the role of parents in supporting and improving disciplinary measures in public secondary schools.

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