

Principals' Personalities as Determinants for Effective Management of Students' Discipline in Public Secondary Schools within Nairobi City, Kenya

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Abstract: This study sought to link the school principals' personality traits with the management of disciplinary issues at Primary Schools in Nairobi County, Kenya. The study employed the mixed-methods approach and a concurrent triangulation research design with a total sample of 363 school heads, teachers and students' leaders. Data collection took place through a questionnaire, an interview schedule and focus group discussions. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics and the thematic approach. The study concluded that principals exhibiting various personality traits tend to have schools with fewer instances of disciplinary cases. Thus, principals need to develop traits such as self-concept, self-efficacy, self-confidence and emotional regulation to implement disciplinary measures effectively. The study recommends that the school principals should strive to manage students' disciplinary cases using a combined range of various personality traits. They should exhibit different personality characteristics, such as self-concept, self-efficacy, self-confidence and emotional regulation, which will enable them to manage well the disciplinary issues in their respective schools.

Keywords: Principals; personality characteristics; management; discipline, public secondary schools.

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Introduction

Discipline is understood as the observance of rules set within a culture or an organization. In the context of education, Toldson (2013) points out that discipline includes students' adherence to rules, their willingness to follow the guidelines from authorities in the school and their respect for the bounds laid down by the school. Students who do not comply may find it challenging to accomplish their academic goals. Toldson further argues that at the secondary school level, students' discipline determines their success largely.

Currently, some secondary schools observe a greater rise of students' indiscipline. In Malaysia, Azizi et al. (2014) highlight a significant rise in students' indiscipline, which increased from 17.8% in 2014 to 24.1% in 2018. They also note that in the 2013 year, 59.3% of secondary schools faced issues

such as students' strikes, arson, peer assaults and even the murder of security guards. This experience points to the fact that despite the crucial role discipline plays in improving students' academic performance, indiscipline is common in the schools.

A similar pattern has been noted in Haiti, where indiscipline rates have climbed to 12.8% (Diana, 2019), linked to various factors, including personality characteristics of school principals. To mitigate these challenges, schools adopted a multiplicity of interventions and strategies, including school-based counseling. This intervention aimed at addressing underlying issues such as trauma, family problems or peer pressure that contribute to students' indiscipline.

Goldring (2015) defined personality characteristics as a range of traits, behavior patterns, cognitive

processes and emotional styles developed from a mix of biological dispositions and environmental influences. According to Ackerman and Heggestad (2010), personality traits are individualizing attributes that characterize people and are representative of their typical patterns of articulation in various situations. Watson and Clark (2013) support that Principals' personalities determine how children interact with one another.

Essentially, personality traits are the collection of more-or-less stable characteristics that define a person in a great variety of contexts and times, making them distinguishable. Regarding the educational settings, the personality characteristics of principals consist of a blend of traits, features and qualities, influencing their conduct and effectiveness in daily responsibilities. Daminabo (2013) points out that key personality indicators include self-efficacy, self-esteem, self-concept, emotional regulation and problem-solving skills. Factors as such play a significant role in determining the approach employed by school leaders in addressing disciplinary issues. Timo (2017) maintains that successful management of students' disciplinary issues is affected by personality traits demonstrated by school managers. Timo (2017) points out that principal who manifest personal traits such as positive self-concept, high self-esteem, self-efficacy and effective emotional management are more likely to deal with instances of students' misconduct more successfully.

In Italy, Agasisti et al. (2020) posit that if school principals develop good interpersonal relation, positive self-concept and effective problem-solving skills, they will be better placed to comprehend the issues of their students. In the United States of America, a study carried out by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2018) indicated that principals with strong self-concept, self-esteem, self-efficacy and problem-solving skills are more successful in managing students' disciplinary issues. In Pakistan, Shafa (2016) noted that school leaders who manifest high self-esteem, self-efficacy and self-confidence witnessed 11.7% decline of disciplinary issues. These results show that in addition to learning management skills, the personality of principals play a significant role towards effective management of disciplinary issues in schools.

In some African countries, students' indiscipline has become increasingly common. For example, a report by Borders and Drury (2017) highlights that 13

schools in Nigeria were set on fire by students. In KwaZulu Natal Province, South Africa, Cicognani (2017) noted that the level of unruliness among secondary school learners has surged to alarming levels, becoming a significant and challenging aspect of every teacher's experience. Kenya faces similar issues, with incidents of student indiscipline in secondary schools becoming a routine. Njoroge and Nyabuto (2018) pointed out that unrest, arson, drug and substance abuse, absenteeism and even suicide among students have become daily realities, negatively impacting their education.

In Nairobi, there has been a notable increase in the cases of students' indiscipline in public secondary schools with instances of strikes, arson, bullying, vandalism and a general disregard for rules as well as alcohol consumption. Buore et al. (2023) highlight that many public secondary schools in Nairobi County are struggling with students' disciplinary issues. In the same vein, Njenga et al. (2018) discovered that 18.5% of the schools in the study have suffered from different types of indiscipline. Their results identify an increase in incidents of arson in hostels, destruction of school property and inflicting injuries on other students. It is these experiences that led the researcher to conduct this study.

Literature Review

Personality characteristics exhibited by educational administrators have a great impact on the discipline of their students. In support of this assertion, a study by Glickman (2010) in the United States revealed that principals with high emotional intelligence were more successful in managing disciplinary issues. Principals who were empathetic and interpersonally skilled could diffuse conflict and establish good relationships with students, and as a result, their schools had fewer disciplinary issues. In addition, research by Leithwood and Seashore-Louis (2012) found that principals who employed a collaborative and democratic leadership styles, marked by extroversion and openness, were more successful in developing a school culture that reinforced collective responsibility for students' behaviors.

In France, Huber (2014) conducted a study that focused on the contribution of the Principals' personality traits on students' behaviors. The study revealed that principals with high authority, which has often been paired with qualities of assertiveness and conscientiousness, were most effective in

managing the discipline of students. In contrast, those administrators who possessed greater openness to students' feedback and expressed greater agreeableness were most effective in limiting misbehavior through communication-centered and positive-reinforcement models. The study highlighted the imperative of achieving a balance between authoritarian control and democratic participation. Almeida and Borges's (2015) study discovered that school administrators with high emotional stability and openness were more receptive to restorative justice practices that promoted students' self-regulation and accountability. Leaders who focused on communication, understanding and empathy resulted in a reduction of students' misbehaviors.

Management of students' discipline in India is often associated with cultural expectations toward respect for authority. Sharma and Kaur (2018) discovered that principals who exhibited traditional leadership qualities, such as assertiveness and sense of responsibility, were more successful in maintaining order in schools. In Africa, the scenario is the same with studies indicating that personality traits exhibited by principals are key to their discipline management. For instance, a study carried out in Nigeria by Okoroma (2016) found that school principals with such characteristics as extroversion, decisiveness and emotional regulation performed better in discipline management. In the same vein, a study conducted in South Africa by Govender (2013) found that Principals who were empathetic, approachable and had effective conflict-resolution skills developed more disciplined learning environments. In Kenya, research conducted by Mutua and Mwirigi (2017) established that school leaders who were high in emotional intelligence and openness to innovation were more successful in creating favorable learning climates that enhanced students' engagement and reduced discipline problems.

Theoretical Framework

The framework for this study is based on Allport's personality trait theory (1961), which identifies five basic dimensions of traits: openness to experience or intellect, agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness and neuroticism or emotional stability. The basis of this theory is that every person possesses a wide range of personality and behavioral characteristics at different levels. Trait theories require individuals to understand others better. This approach acknowledges the possible

influence of biological factors on personality development. The theory is relevant in this study as it lays emphasis on personal characteristics of school leaders that could impact their effectiveness in managing students' discipline.

Methodology

This section outlines the research methodology in terms of design, population and sampling, instrumentation, validity and reliability, treatment of data and ethical considerations.

Design

This study applied a mixed-method approach and the concurrent triangulation design, which is a single-phase design that enables researchers to implement both quantitative and qualitative methods at the same time and with equal weight.

Population and Sampling

According to Nairobi County Education Office (2025), Nairobi County has 163 public secondary schools. Thus, target population included 163 principals, 2084 teachers and 3260 students' leaders totaling 5507 possible respondents. From the targeted population, the researchers calculated a sample of 363 respondents using various sampling procedures. Stratified sampling method yielded 11 strata, which correspond to the sub-counties in the Nairobi County. Through purposive sampling, the researchers obtained three principals from each of the 11 sub-counties, making 33 principals. Simple random sampling yielded six teachers and four students' leaders from each of the three schools selected in every Sub-County for all the 11 Sub-Counties, making up a total of 198 teachers and 132 students. This brought the final sample to 33 principals, 198 teachers and 132 student leaders.

Instruments

Data collection involved administering questionnaires to teachers while interviews were conducted among principals and focus group discussions for student leaders.

Validity and Reliability

The views of university experts enabled the researcher to improve the quality of the research instruments, based on their comments. On the other hand, the researcher determined the reliability through the SPSS test, which yielded the Cronbach's Alpha of 0.7. The researcher further enhanced the reliability through data triangulation.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The analysis of qualitative data involved the narrative approach where ideas were organized according to themes.

Ethical Considerations

The respondents were assured that the information provided would only be used for the stated purpose. To guarantee anonymity, the researcher assured the respondents that their individual identities would not be revealed. Besides, no identifying information about the individual or the institution would be revealed in written or other communication. The nature and the purpose of the research were explained to the respondents for them to participate with an informed mind. The researcher sought consent from the respondents who were required to sign informed consent forms.

Results and Discussions

This section details the study's findings. The findings section is guided by two research questions.

Response Rates

In this study, the researcher distributed 198 questionnaire sheets to teachers, with 180

completed and returned. At the same time, interviews took place with 25 principals and focus group discussions with 180 students. Principals achieved the response rate of 75.8% while teachers attained the rate of 90.6% and student leaders recorded 75.8%. This brought the overall response rate of 84.0%.

Research Question 1: What are students' discipline trends in public secondary schools?

In Table 1, a significant majority of teachers at 66.6% (120) concurred that there has been a rise in instances of student indiscipline in the public secondary schools, with only a minimal 27.7% (50) expressing disagreement. Additionally, 63.3% (114) of teachers supported the notion that there have been increased occurrences of guidance and counseling related to students' indiscipline in these schools while 32.8% (59) disagreed. Finally, 68.3% (123) teachers agreed that schools have experienced situations where students fail to comply with established rules and regulations, with 28.3% (51) opposing this view. These findings imply that cases of students' indiscipline have been in the rise trends in the public secondary schools.

Table 1: Students' Discipline Trends

students' Discipline Trends	A		U		D	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
There has been an increase in the number of cases of students' indiscipline in public secondary schools	120	66.6	10	5.5	50	27.7
In schools, there have been more cases of guidance and counseling related to students' indiscipline	114	63.3	7	3.9	59	32.8
Public secondary schools have witnessed situations where students do not adhere to set rules and regulations	123	68.3	6	3.3	51	28.3

During the interviews, principals stated that cases of students' indiscipline have not gone down. For instance, Principal, P1, stated,

In my school, management of students' discipline has been a challenge. We have had to deal with disciplinary instances about learners' violence against one another. In a number of instances, learners engage in physical fights among themselves and at other times bully their peers. They also absent themselves from school and steal from each other.

On their part, student leaders expressed similar views, stating that there have been many reported cases of indiscipline among themselves. When probed further a student leader reported, "In our school, there have been cases of theft and violence among students, strikes, arson and vandalism caused by students. Managing such cases have not been easy.. These findings reinforce the conclusions of a study by Mwangi (2020), which highlighted that students' indiscipline in public secondary schools is a significant concern in Nairobi County, with the management of these incidents being sluggish and ineffective, thereby worsening the situation. The author observed that unresolved disciplinary cases

often lead to a culture of impunity, where students continue with misbehavior without fear of consequences.

Research Question 2: What is teachers' perception on the principals' personality characteristics in Management of Students' Discipline?

This research question sought to establish teachers' perception on the principals' personality characteristics in managing students' discipline as it appears in Table 2.

Report in Table 2 indicated that 65% (117) of the teachers supported the view that principals' self-concept traits such as the ability to understand students' problems and relate with staff has lowered the cases of indiscipline among students whereas 33.3% (59) disagreed.

These finding corroborate the assertions of Angga and Iskandar (2022) that principals who actively engage with students' concerns and develop targeted interventions witness significant reductions in behavioral incidents. Similarly, Riski et al. (2021) concluded that enhanced communication between principals and students fosters trust, encouraging students to comply with school policies. Similarly, a study by Jamrizal (2022) reported that principals who collaborated effectively with teachers ensured a unified approach to maintaining discipline. These findings underscore the importance of cultivating self-concept traits among school leaders. By honing their interpersonal skills and prioritizing stakeholder engagement, principals can promote a positive school environment, ultimately leading to fewer disciplinary issues.

Table 2: Teachers' Perception on the Principals' Personality in Management of Students' Discipline

Test Items in the Questionnaire	Ratings					
	Agree		U		Disagree	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Principals' self-concept traits such as the ability to understand students' problems and relate with staff has lowered cases of students' indiscipline in schools	117	65	3	1.7	60	33.3
In schools, principals with high self-efficacy beliefs have been able to effectively students' discipline	145	80.5	5	2.8	30	16.7
In schools, principals who rarely manifest self-confidence attributes have found it hard to manage students' discipline	110	61.1	3	1.7	67	37.2
Principals who have higher emotional regulation attributes have found it easy to manage students' discipline in their public secondary schools	141	78.3	7	3.9	32	17.8
In public secondary schools, where principals manifest a combination of different personality traits, there have been fewer instances of students' indiscipline	100	55.6	6	3.3	74	41.1

In Table 2, report further indicates that the majority of teachers at 80.5% (145) were in favor of the view that principals with high self-efficacy beliefs have been able to manage students' discipline whereas 16.7% (30) disagreed. This is consistent with the assertions of Smith and Jones (2020), who highlighted that principals who believe in their capability to influence students' behavior employ proactive disciplinary measures, such as restorative justice practices rather than punitive approaches. Similarly, this echoes the findings of a study undertaken by Adams et al. (2021), which found that schools led by such principals observed fewer students' behavioral issues.

Majority (60.1%) of the teachers supported the view that principals who rarely manifest self-confidence attributes have found it hard to manage students' discipline whereas 37.9% were in disagreement. This suggests that self-confidence, as a leadership attribute, directly affects decision-making, conflict resolution and communication, which are essential ingredients for maintaining discipline. These findings support those of research conducted by Johnson (2022) which noted that self-confident principals are more likely to implement assertive disciplinary policies, which in turn fosters a culture of accountability and respect among students. Johnson further found that principals who exhibit low self-confidence often struggle to command authority

and enforce rules, leading to increased instances of indiscipline. Research carried out by Brown (2020) found that principals with low self-confidence are more prone to hesitation, resulting in inconsistent policy enforcement and diminished respect from students.

Govender (2023) reinforces this view, noting that self-confidence equips principals with resilience and ability to address behavioral challenges decisively. This implies that principals' self-confidence plays a key role in the management of students' discipline and thus, by strengthening this attribute, public secondary schools can expect more effective discipline management.

The study also found that most of the teachers (78.3%) were in agreement with the view that principals who have higher emotional regulation attributes have found it easy to manage students' discipline in their public secondary schools while 17.8% disagreed. This indicates that in the realm of educational management, emotional regulation emerges as a pivotal attribute for principals, tasked with managing students' discipline. This corroborates the results of research undertaken by Smith and Taylor (2020), who observed that principals with advanced emotional regulation skills were better equipped to mitigate conflicts and implement restorative disciplinary measures. By staying composed, such leaders act as role models and handle disciplinary challenges with fairness and empathy, thereby promoting trust and respect among students and staff.

Their findings show that principals practicing emotional regulation often cultivate a positive school culture, which discourages disruptive behaviors in the first place. Rodriguez and Carter (2021) underlined that emotionally regulated principals navigate the complexities of diverse students' needs and societal pressures with greater ease, thus ensuring consistency in their disciplinary approaches. These findings underscore the correlation between a principal's emotional regulation and their ability to manage students' discipline effectively in public secondary schools.

Most of the teachers 55.6% (117) were in support of the view that in public secondary schools where principals manifested a combination of different personality traits, there have been fewer instances of students' indiscipline, whereas 41.1% (60) disagreed. These findings indicate that when principals exhibit a balanced combination of traits,

including empathy, assertiveness and adaptability, there is a noticeable decline in students' indiscipline cases. These traits empower school leaders to manage complex interpersonal dynamics effectively, fostering an environment of mutual respect and cohesion. These findings are consistent with the results of a study carried out by Garcia et al. (2022), which revealed that principals who are approachable and communicate openly with students often see reduced behavioral issues.

Brown (2023) similarly revealed that leaders who are adaptable in their leadership approach tend to address disciplinary issues with strategies tailored to specific situations, reducing the recurrence of such problems. These findings underscore the vitality the principals' multifaceted personality traits play in shaping disciplined school environments. This further implies that principals' personality traits play a profound role in shaping the overall school environment.

When interviewed, the principals stated that their personality characteristics such as self-concept, self-efficacy, self-confidence and emotional regulation play a key role in the management of students' discipline. Principal, P2, for instance revealed, "In my school, I have been able to minimize cases of students' indiscipline owing to my self-concept, efficacy and confidence to understand challenges students face and relate with staff." On their part, the student leaders noted that the Principals' ability to understand their challenges and resolve them has reduced cases of indiscipline in the public secondary schools. These findings prove the triangulation of the findings from various sources, thus the study findings are reliable.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that the public secondary schools experienced challenge of students' disciplinary cases as revealed by reported cases. The existing disciplinary issues include theft, violence among students, strikes, arson and vandalism. The study further concludes that when principals exhibit a balanced combination of personality traits, including empathy, assertiveness and adaptability, there is a noticeable decline in students' disciplinary cases. These traits empower school leaders to manage complex interpersonal dynamics effectively, thus fostering the environment of mutual respect and cohesion among the students.

Based on the conclusions, the study recommends that the school principals should strive to manage

students' disciplinary cases using a combined range of various personality traits. They should exhibit different personality characteristics, such as self-concept, self-efficacy, self-confidence and emotional regulation, which will enable them to manage well the disciplinary issues in their respective schools.

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