

Influence Of School Discipline Policy In Promotion Of Child-Friendly Learning Environment In Rural Public Primary Schools In Meru County, Kenya

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Abstract: School discipline policies play an integral role in fostering favorable and safe environment requisite for quality learning. Head teacher have a responsibility to foster appropriate disciplinary policies that promote conducive and safe learning spaces for all children. This is fundamental for maintaining order both in classroom and school environment towards encouraging appropriate and socially acceptable behaviours, thus promoting a safe environment for all children to learn. As envisioned in child-friendly schools' framework, schools should promote humane and fair discipline policies that are aimed at developing children's abilities to their fullest potential while respecting their rights. The purpose of this study was to determine the influence of school discipline policy in promotion of child-friendly learning environment in rural public primary schools in Meru county, Kenya. The study utilised descriptive survey design, and involved 155 participants from a target population of 775 teachers who taught class 7 pupils. A semi-structured questionnaire with self-administered items was used for data collection. Data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results revealed a significant relationship between school discipline policy and promotion of child-friendly learning environment ($r(146) = .26, P = .001$). School discipline practices in this study were: establishing rules and conduct; sexual misconduct, antibullying, complaint handling mechanisms; and maintaining disciplinary procedures. Based on the reported outcomes, the study suggests that for children to learn in a friendly and welcoming environment, there is need for the Ministry of Education to embark on policy amendment as well as awareness campaign regarding new guidelines on school discipline including anti-bullying, sexual misconduct and other measures taken to uphold the rights of children in the learning environment.

Keywords: Child-friendly school, School management practices, School antibullying policy, School sexual exploitation policy, Complaint handling mechanisms

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of child-friendly learning environment is based on UNICEF (2009) child-friendly schools' framework and the convention on the rights of the child (CRC) recommendations (CRC, 1990). These frameworks envisioned schools as learning systems developed in the best interest of children and educational environments that promote safety and

protection of all children. Among the suggested requirements for promoting such learning environments include ensuring that schools are equipped with well trained teachers, and discipline is instituted in a humanely, fairly manner and without infringing on the rights of the child (Cheruto, Allida, & Amimo, 2021).

The CRC, which is a universally agreed set of standards and non-negotiable obligations sought to champion four main

principles. The requirements included non-discrimination of all children, devoting to children's best interests, right to life and respecting the views of children (CRC, 1990). The CFS model aims at progressively transforming schools into quality standards, addressing restrictions that affect the well-being and rights of children as pupils and the main beneficiary of teaching, while improving the quality of other school functions (Fitriani, 2020). While schooling is a common experience for many children across the world, not every child enjoys being in learning environments as many learners have had to endure various negative treatments, including being threatened with punishment, violence, sexual harassment and violation or being bullied by others (Thomas, Alphonsa & Aneesh, 2018).

There is need therefore for school managers, such as headteachers to foster discipline procedures whose goal is to create a positive learning environment where all children feel safe and free to learn and achieve their full potential. In view of negative experiences occasionally faced by children in schools, the Indian Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), advocates for school based managements to promote practices that protect children from violence, bullying, and sexual abuse (Chakrabarty, 2018). The study therefore sought to establish the influence of school discipline policy in promotion of child-friendly learning environment in rural public primary schools in Meru county Kenya.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

School discipline policy and guidelines are termed as a set of expectations and consequences established in schools with the aim of achieving specific behaviour and norms, guiding day to day functioning, as well as promoting safe and effective learning environment (Forstall, 2019). While different schools may have specific policies for various reasons, school discipline policy is mainly put in place to guide school acceptable behaviour and to ensure provision of safe environment for learners, teachers and school community (Wong, 2017). Traditionally, the role of a school head resembled that of a middle manager in an organization. However, in a rapidly changing time, a different concept of a headteacher has emerged. School administrators must now lead with utmost clarity on what is right, what needs to be done and how it should be done (The Wallace Foundation, 2013).

School discipline guidelines are important tools that headteachers utilise to set school goals, establish positive conduct, promote safe learning climate and overall school productivity. These aspects are critical for realization of child-friendly school framework, since good and positive principles of discipline and order are good factors for safe learning and quality education model (UNICEF, 2009). Disciplinary guidelines help define the procedures that schools need for smooth running, ensuring safety, containing cases of bullying, sexual harassment, and ensuring proper classroom management for quality education (Wong, 2017).

In United States, Grant, Wilkerson, Pelton, Cosby, and Henschel (2017) carried out a qualitative study to assess the effectiveness of policies established to prevent sexual

misconduct by employees in public sponsored kindergarten and primary schools. The study found that schools were required to prevent misconducts from happening by implementing and complying with guidelines as provided by the federal law. The survey indicated that cases of sexual misconducts by employees were rife, leading to lifelong consequences in students, including psychological problems, and negative outcomes in relation to physical health and learning performance. The study also found that school heads still lacked guidelines for training staff. Other challenges affecting the implementation included lack of clear communication about guidelines and reporting procedures, fear of repercussions and budget limitations. This study was however done in United States and it was important to see how the findings would compare with the present study to be done in Meru County, Kenya.

School leaders should have firm and enforceable guidelines including disciplinary measures, as well as policies that protect children against violence and corporal punishment and proper codes of conduct for teachers and others staff (UNESCO, 2015). According to UNESCO (2017) Global Education Monitoring Report, national and school policy and guidelines should be focused on school related violence. The report revealed that school related violence may occur in various forms including physical, psychological or sexual, being perpetuated by stereotypes, gender norms and power dynamics, hence the need for policy, guidelines and disciplinary mechanisms (UNGEI, 2017).

Some of these acts of violence and flouting of the rights of children take place in the classroom or within the school environment, which paints a negative picture on the role of the headteacher in enforcing rules and conduct for better learning environment or gender responsiveness. Indeed, according to the Samoa Office of the Ombudsman and NHRI (2015) in Samoa, up to 41 percent of students reported to have suffered acts of violence through their teachers.

Research indicates that various countries such as Korea, Finland, Chile, Fiji, Peru and Sweden have enacted codes of regulations to contain violence and promote safety in educational institutions (UNESCO, 2015, 2017). Despite the progress achieved, the survey did not provide any information regarding the impact of implementation on components of CFS framework, such as inclusiveness, safety and protection, quality of learning, gender responsiveness or sanitation and hygiene. In Philippines, all schools are required to adopt the anti-bullying Act, 2013, which is aimed at preventing cases of violence and bullying (Disini, 2015).

The headteachers and principals as school heads, are obligated to enforce such guidelines in order to address violence and bullying, hence promoting safety and inclusiveness. However, a UNESCO (2017) assessment report indicated that one year following the legislation, only 38% of schools had started implementing the child protection school policy, with the low rate being blamed on school leaders' poor communication and weak monitoring structures. The present study sought to assess the efforts made by head teachers in their management practices on formulation and implementation of discipline policy and guidelines towards the realization of child-friendly schools in Meru County.

WHO (2015) in an overview of surveys on assessment for risk factors in schools and the existing policies for safe and healthy school environment found that schools in various countries around the world had enacted policies for averting risk factors related to indoor air pollution, smoking and poor ventilation. The survey found that although many schools had adopted these policies, the biggest challenge was on the part of implementation, implying that school managers such as school heads were not doing their part to ensure safe learning environment for children. The present study would therefore be important in order to compare how school discipline policy impacted on safe learning environment and ultimately promotion of child-friendly learning environment in rural based public primary schools in Meru.

In Indonesia, research indicates that schools have made remarkable progress in implementation of CFS programme. According to Liestyasari, Karsidi, and Asrowi, (2021) schools were found to have met various prerequisite indicators of child-friendly schools' framework. Based on students' perceptions, it was established that schools had put in place complaint handling mechanisms to report issues such as violence, and bullying. Such mechanisms are important for creating a safe and protective environment to promote sense of security among learners (Yosada & Kurniati, 2019). It was however not clear how other aspects of school discipline policy such as sexual exploitation policy and rule and conduct would impact on promotion of CFLE.

Many developing countries, including Sub-Saharan African nations have already passed laws and regulations to guide teachers' and general school codes of conduct. However, research shows that these policies are hardly enforced at the school level (UNESCO, 2017; ActionAid, 2013). In Ghana, for instance a study by ActionAid found despite the existing code of conduct that proscribes sexual relations between teachers and pupils, majority of teachers interviewed were unaware of such regulations (ActionAid, 2013). The findings affirmed those of Proulx and Martinez (2013), which found that main perpetrators of sexual abuse against girls in Ghana were familiar figures, such as teachers, classmates and neighbours. The studies established that applying codes of professional conduct in schools had been problematic. These findings indicted government authorities, educational managers and school heads for their failure to enforce school regulations to provide safe, secure and protective environment for pupils.

In South Africa, Makwarela et al. (2017) sought to investigate the policies being enforced by schools to promote caring, safety and realization of child-friendly schools. The study relied on quantitative information from headteachers, heads of department and teachers as well as students. The findings indicated that despite progress made by UNICEF in designating CFS framework in South Africa, implementation of discipline and professional conduct policies was wanting due to lack of commitment and poor management practices. The study however did not show which specific policies were being assessed or their connection with the indicators of CFS framework. The present study assessed the impact of school rules and conduct, complaint mechanisms, disciplinary procedures and sexual exploitation policy on promoting CFS.

Various studies carried out in East African region show similar trends, where schools have continued to perform poorly in formulation of policies and implementation of codes of conduct and disciplinary procedures as a way of promoting child friendly learning environment. In Uganda, for instance, it was found that approximately 32 percent of all cases of violence against children occurred within the school environment (ActionAid, 2013). The findings supported Namuleme (2012) in a study carried out in Kampala and Kiboga districts, which established that weak policies, regulatory and disciplinary procedures at the school level were associated with teachers' unethical behaviours, which affected learners emotionally, mentally and academically.

These literature points out to weaknesses on the side of school management, especially headteachers, who are expected to encourage top to bottom ethical conscience in their respective schools, reinforce ethical behaviours as well as promote policies, code of conduct and procedures that enhance safety of learners in the school environment. However, there was need to have a comprehensive study to assess the relationship between specific areas of implementation of school discipline policy and the impact on promoting CFS, which was the intent for the present study.

In Rwanda, UNICEF (2009) reported that many factors worked against school attendance and achievement for girls. These challenges included, poor enforcement of policies against gender bias and lack of procedures to report and deal with cases of sexual harassment and gender stereotypes. The findings point out to necessity of having in place proper disciplinary mechanisms to increase safety for child-friendly environment as violence against children and violating their rights may cause them to struggle to reach full development and learning potential. From a broad perspective, head teachers have a role to enforce complaint mechanisms and positive disciplinary procedures for positive school climate and a learning environment that is welcoming for all children.

Studies in Kenya show that despite government's efforts to enact laws that uphold the standards of child friendly schools, many children still continue to endure difficult conditions, including cases of violence and violation of their rights. According to Kinyanjui (2019), in a study covering Nairobi and Kajiado counties, school heads were still unenthusiastic about enforcing guidelines against corporal punishment. The current study was important to establish the role of headteachers management practices in regard to adherence and enforcement of school discipline policy on enhancing safe and protective schools.

In a related study, Otieno (2020) found that gender-based violence was still rampant in many Kenyan schools. The study established that about 48 percent of girls and 47 percent of boys between 13 and 17 years of age had been subjected to physical violence. Further, 10 percent of girls and 5 percent of boys reported to have experienced sexual violence both in and outside schools. Although the study indicated that these acts were tolerated in schools, it did not show the relationship between school based management practices, specifically policy and guidelines on promoting the aspects of CFS framework.

Other researchers, such as, Cheruto, Allida, and Amimo (2021) however indicate that some schools have made notable

progress in implementation of CFS programmes. The study was focused on school management practices towards implementation of CFS programme in Chesumei sub-county and established that schools had put in place rules and guidelines to foster positive discipline as opposed to corporal punishment, thus promoting safe and protective environment for learning. The study however did not cover other domains of school discipline policy and guidelines such as sexual exploitation, which was on the purview of the present study.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was aimed at establishing the influence of school discipline policy in promotion of child-friendly learning environment in public primary schools based in the rural settings of Meru county in Kenya. The study was guided by Transformational leadership theory (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1998). The study targeted 775 primary school teachers who taught in class seven.

A sample of 155 participants was selected through simple random sampling technique. Out of those who participated, 52.7% were female, while 47.3% were male. A semi-structured questionnaire of 5 level Likert scale with a set of eight questions was used to obtain data from the participants. Instrument's reliability was established through Cronbach's alpha, where a robust alpha value of .83 was obtained. Data was analysed by way of descriptive and inferential statistics.

IV. RESULTS

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF SCHOOL DISCIPLINE POLICY AND PROMOTION OF CFLE

The study sought to establish teachers' perceptions on the influence school discipline policy in promotion of child-friendly learning environment. Data on ratings of the measures of school discipline policy was obtained and computed to find frequency counts, and means as scored in the scale. The results are presented in Table 1.

Description	5 Strongly Agree	4 Agree	3 Neutral	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree	M	SD
Headteacher provides guidelines relating to school rules and conduct for staff and learners.	82 55.4%	53 35.8%	11 7.4%	1 0.7%	1 0.7%	4.44	.72
School code of conduct enhances safe and protective learning environment	55 37.2%	78 52.7%	12 8.1%	3 2.0%	-	4.25	.68
HT has set up effective code of practice to deal with complaints to the satisfaction of complainants	46 31.1%	82 55.4%	19 12.8%	1 0.7%	-	4.16	.66
Effective school	48 32.4%	79 53.4%	19 12.8%	-	2 1.4%	4.15	.74

complaints policy and procedures have enhanced inclusive learning	55 37.2%	73 49.3%	17 11.5%	3 2.0%	-	4.21	.72
Headteacher champions effective disciplinary procedure, upholding professionalism and discipline	48 32.4%	78 52.7%	20 13.5%	2 1.4%	-	4.16	.70
Existence of headteacher's championed disciplinary procedures enhances child-focused instruction	54 36.5%	81 54.7%	12 8.1%	-	1 0.7%	4.26	.66
Headteacher has set up and promotes effective sexual exploitation and anti-bullying rules.	55 37.2%	78 52.7%	11 7.4%	2 1.4%	2 1.4%	4.22	.75
Existence of sexual exploitation and anti-bullying rules as established or championed by the headteacher enhances school completion rate							

Note. N= 148, M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation.

Table 1: Participants' Ratings on Measures of School Discipline Policy

According to the results in Table 1, there was general consensus among the participants that headteachers had established school-based rules and conduct for guiding both students and staff as exemplified by a high mean score of 4.44 ($SD= .72$). With regard to the proposition that school code of conduct was helpful in enhancing safe and protective learning environment, the participants responded with strong affirmation, given the high mean score of 4.25 ($SD= .68$). The participants also generally concurred with the statement that headteachers had put in place effective code of practice to address and resolve complaints to the satisfaction of complainants as demonstrated by a high mean score of 4.16 ($SD= .66$).

The results indicate that the participants generally agreed that establishment of effective complaint policy and procedures for complaint resolution had resulted in enhanced inclusive learning as demonstrated by a relatively high mean score of 4.15 ($SD= .74$). The participants also rated the measure that head teachers had fostered effective disciplinary mechanisms resulting in professionalism and discipline within the school environment. This was supported by a high mean score of 4.21 ($SD= .72$). The findings indicate that there was general affirmation among the participants that instituting disciplinary procedures resulted in improved child-focused instruction as shown by a fairly high mean score of 4.16 ($SD= .70$).

The participants were also asked to rate the statement as to whether headteachers in their respective schools had set up or effectively promoted sexual exploitation and anti-bullying rules, to which they responded with strong affirmation as exemplified by a mean score of 4.26 ($SD = .66$). Lastly, the results demonstrate that the participants largely affirmed that head teachers' institutionalisation of sexual exploitation and anti-bullying rules had positive outcomes with regard to keeping children in school until completion. This is supported by a high mean score of 4.22 ($SD = .75$).

The results have demonstrated that school based practices established by head teachers with the aim of fostering positive behaviour and discipline among learners as well as staff resulted in a conducive learning environment. The results indicate that institutionalization of practices such as school rules and conduct, complaint resolution mechanisms, sexual exploitation, and antibullying rules promoted a positive learning environment.

The results imply that providing guidelines on how learners ought to conduct themselves in classrooms, corridors and during breaks as well as playtime promoted positive interactions among the learners, thus enhancing safety, gender responsiveness and protection of all learners. At the same time, establishing or enforcing staff's code of conduct is likely to promote high standards and ethical values among such members of staff as well as their interactions with learners.

The results of the present study agree with the view by Forstall (2019) that aspects of school discipline policy such as code of conduct, guidelines and regulations can be effective in achieving positive behaviours and norms in learning institutions. Such policies are helpful as they enable school management to define specific expectations and consequences for individuals' conduct and behaviours in the learning spaces, effectively enhancing orderliness and safety in the learning environment.

Descriptive statistics were performed in order to summarise the scores on all the measures of school discipline policy, establish the lowest and highest values, as well as describe the distribution of data as shown in Table 2.

	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
School Discipline Policy	14.00	26.00	40.00	33.89	3.134	-.36	.30
Valid N (listwise)							

Note. $N = 148$, $SD =$ Standard Deviation.

Table 2: Summary of Descriptive Statistics of School Discipline Policy Scores

The data in Table 2 demonstrates that the total scores on all the measures of school discipline policy had a range of 14. The minimum score was 26 while the maximum was 40. The scores had a high mean value of 33.89 ($SD = 3.13$). The high mean score indicates that the participants generally agreed that the practices of school discipline policy influenced the promotion of child-friendly learning environment. The scores generated a negative skewness value of $-.36$, indicating that the participants ratings were high on the scale, resulting in slightly left-skewed distribution of data.

The scores had a positive kurtosis value of $.3$, indicating that the scores were not too peaked or too flat as the kurtosis

value was within normal univariate distribution of -3 to $+3$ (George & Mallery, 2010).

Further analysis was carried out on the scores in order to categorise the participants based on those who had rated the measures of school discipline policy with high or low levels on the scale. The results are presented in Table 3.

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Low	56	37.8
	High	92	62.2
	Total	148	100.0

Note. $N = 148$.

Table 3: Participants' Agreement Levels on School Discipline Policy Scores

Table 3 indicates that majority 62.2% of the participants rated the practice of school discipline policy with high agreement levels compared to 37.2% who rated the same with low agreement levels. The results suggest that most of the teachers sampled were emphatic school-based discipline policy influenced the promotion of child-friendly learning environment in studied schools.

The results are in concurrence with the view by Wriston and Duchesneau (2023) that if fairly implemented, school-based discipline policies can significantly transform the learning environment through establishment of safety in the classroom and other areas within the school setting. Such policies however, can be counterproductive and end up harming children's emotional, social and physical well-being, thus the need for head teachers to foster approaches aimed at restorative justice while still holding errant children accountable to their actions.

As expressed in Table 4, information on teachers' ratings on promotion of child-friendly learning environment was obtained and analysed for the purpose of comparing and establishing the relationship between the two variables.

	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Promotion of Child-friendly Learning Environment	14.00	26.00	40.00	33.97	2.61	-.44	.19
Valid N (listwise)							

Note. $N = 148$, $SD =$ Standard Deviation.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics of Promotion of Child-friendly Learning Environment

As demonstrated in Table 4, the scores on promotion of child-friendly learning environment as rated by teachers had a range of 14. The scores had a minimum value 26 and a maximum of 40. The total mean score was ($M = 33.97$; $SD = 2.61$), implying that participants' agreement levels on the measures of CFLE were generally high on the scale. The scores had a negative skewness value of $-.44$, pointing to slightly left skewed data, while a positive kurtosis value of $.19$, implied that data were near normal distribution and with infrequent outliers.

INFERENTIAL ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS TESTING

The study aimed at establishing if any relationship existed between school discipline policy and promotion of child-friendly learning environment in rural public primary schools

in Meru county. To test if such relationship existed, the following hypothesis was advanced:

H₀₄: There is no significant relationship between school discipline policy and promotion of child-friendly learning environment in rural public primary schools in Meru County, Kenya.

The mean scores of the two variables, that is school discipline policy and promotion of CFLE were subjected to bivariate correlation through Pearson correlation coefficient (*r*) measure. The results are presented in Table 5.

		Promotion of CFLE	School Discipline Policy
Promotion of CFLE	Pearson Correlation	1	.26**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	148	148
School Discipline Policy	Pearson Correlation	.26**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	148	148

***Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Note. N= 148, CFLE= Child-friendly Learning Environment.

Table 5: Correlation Matrix for School Discipline Policy and Promotion of CFLE

From correlation matrix in Table 5 the results indicate that a statistically significant relationship was established between school discipline policy and promotion of child-friendly learning environment mean scores ($r(146) = .26, p = .001$). Since the *p* value ($p = .001$) was less than .05 as the level of significance, the null hypothesis that there was no significant relationship between school discipline policy and promotion of child-friendly learning environment was rejected.

The results thus indicate that there was sufficient evidence to support the assumption of relationship between the two variables. It can therefore be inferred that increased efforts in establishing and application of school discipline policies such as code of conduct, antibullying policy, complaints resolution mechanisms and rules against sexual exploitation and abuse influenced promotion of child-friendly learning environment in sampled schools.

The results of the present study are consistent with those of Mugisha, Twebaze, & Nyemara (2022) that established significant relationship between learners discipline and staying in school to completion. This increased discipline made schools safer and favourable for positive learning experiences resulting in reduced dropout rate.

V. DISCUSSION

Based on the results from descriptive analysis, it was found that school rules and conduct, maintaining disciplinary procedures and creation of complaint mechanisms were the most common strategies practiced by head teachers to enhance school discipline. The descriptive results indicated that institutionalization of school discipline practices promoted positive learning environment. The results showed that enforcing school rules and regulations, establishing complaint

resolution mechanisms, and professional code of ethics and conduct for members of staff led to reduced cases of bullying and school gender based violence, including sexual abuse.

It was established that providing clear guidelines to learners on how to conduct themselves in classrooms, playgrounds, school walkways and corridors nurtured positive interactions, enhanced safety, respect, gender sensitivity and inclusivity in the learning environment. The results demonstrated that such institutionalisation of school discipline policy played a significant role in fostering positive behaviour among the learners and school community. As a result, learners in these schools largely enjoyed learning in a tranquil, safe and healthy school environment.

The results from descriptive analysis are generally in agreement with those from inferential analysis, which showed that there was statistically significant relationship between school discipline policy and promotion of child-friendly learning environment ($r(146) = .26, P = .001$). This implied that the relationship between school discipline policy and promotion of child friendly learning environment was strong enough not to have happened by chance. It can therefore be implied that increased efforts in institutionalization of components of school discipline policy led to increased odds in realization of child friendly learning environment in schools under investigation.

There is evidence from existing literature that school based practices aimed at enhancing self-discipline can be helpful in developing decent interactions and positive behaviour, translating into a safe and healthy learning environment (Nishioka, 2019). The results of the present study are in harmony with Wong's (2017) views from a study carried out in Hong Kong in which it was argued that school based discipline practices can be essential for promoting acceptable behaviour requisite for upholding a safe and protective environment for effective learning. The findings however differ from those of Makwarela et al. (2017), who found that school leaders lacked commitment to enforce discipline and code of conduct and ethics policies in schools.

The findings of the present study indicated that head teachers' initiatives to establish school based guidelines on the manner that learners are expected to carry themselves in learning spaces, both inside and outside of classrooms enhanced gender sensitivity, safety and protection of all learners. Further, the findings indicated that a code of ethics and conduct for members of staff inspired high standards and moral values among the staff. Consequently, such members of staff act as good role models, spurring respect and positive relationships in the learning environment. As a result, learners in such schools are likely to be respectful and tolerant to one another, enhancing equality, inclusivity, gender sensitivity and reduced incidences of harassment, bullying and gender-based violence.

The findings of the present study are in harmony with Forstall's (2019) views that school-based discipline practices, such as rules and regulations and code of ethics play a pivotal role in nurturing positive behaviours and norms among the learners. It was established that through such discipline practices, school administrators spell out the expectations and consequences for individuals' behaviours in the learning environment. Essentially, learners get to know what is right

and what is unacceptable, as well as consequences for violation of the defined rules. The findings however disapprove those of Kinyanjui (2019), which established that head teachers were non-committal with regard to establishing guidelines against negative disciplinary strategies such as corporal punishment in schools in Nairobi county.

The findings of the present study imply that through the established code of ethics and conduct, teachers and other members of staff have clear guidelines on how to conduct themselves in an ethical manner. These practices are likely to foster right based and child-focused learning environment, and encourage inclusive, gender sensitive and responsive approaches where all children feel safe and accepted to learn and reach their full potential. This is however inconsistent with the outcomes of a study by Mtasingwa and Mwaipopo (2022) that linked school settings and community environments to gender based violence affecting female students in Tanzanian schools. Certainly, there is no shortage of regulations including national laws and school based policies for preventing violence among learners as well as misconduct by employees. Nonetheless, unless such rules are championed and enforced by school administrations, children are likely to be exposed to negative and unsafe learning environments.

The findings however agree with those of Yosada and Kurniati (2019), which established that school discipline practices such as antibullying policy and complaint resolution mechanisms helped in enhancing safety and protection of learners in the learning environment in Indonesia. The findings also support those of Liestyasari et al. (2021) as highlighted in the review of literature that many schools had met the prerequisites for implementation of child-friendly schools framework, and that subsequently, learners perceived the measures put in place to prevent school based violence as adequate.

The outcomes of this study are in line with the tenets of transformational leadership theory, which support the need for transformational leadership to reinvigorate partnerships among stakeholders (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1998). Partnerships such as those created among teachers and school managers, as well as parents can promote commitment to school discipline policy and day to day functioning of schools for better, effective and safe places for learning towards provision of child-friendly schools.

The findings nonetheless differ with those of Henschel and Grant (2019) in an American based study that found that even though federal law required schools to implement discipline policies for protecting students from sexual misconduct from the members of staff, incidences of sexual misconduct perpetrated by employees were still rampant. Consequently, the negligence of school leaders to rein in employees with practical and effective discipline practices caused lifelong psychological and health problems to the affected children. The findings further contradict those of Otieno (2020) who found gender based, and physical violence to have been tolerated in many Kenyan schools.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It was concluded that school discipline policy was positively and significantly correlated with promotion of child-friendly learning environment. The strategies put in place for establishing discipline practices contributed to positive learning environment. It was concluded that headteachers had implemented various practices for enhancing discipline and orderliness in their respective schools. Establishment of rules and regulations, and code of conduct, as well as discipline committee nurtured positive behaviours among the learners and inspired ethical interactions between staff and learners.

Many schools had installed locked suggestion boxes in strategic locations for learners to deposit their complaints. It was concluded that installation of suggestion boxes as a complaint handling and resolution mechanism enhanced protection of learners against violence, discrimination, and rights' violation. Children had avenues for reporting cases of indiscipline and aggressive behaviours perpetrated by peers, as well as misconduct from members of staff. The complaint handling and resolution mechanisms put in place were important for upholding positive behaviours, discipline and professionalism in the learning environment.

To ensure that children learn in a friendly and welcoming environment, there is need for the Ministry of Education to embark on policy amendment as well as awareness campaign regarding new guidelines on school discipline including anti-bullying, sexual misconduct and other measures taken to uphold the rights of children in the learning environment. The study further recommends that head teachers need to proactively promote a positive school culture, in which high values of discipline, respect and diversity are espoused.

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