

## INFLUENCE OF STUDENTS' UNREST ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MAARA SUB COUNTY, THARAKA NITHI COUNTY, KENYA

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**Abstract:** *Schools not only in other regions of Kenya but also in Tharaka Nithi County are frequently plagued by student unrest. Student unrest has recently become a common occurrence in a number of Maara Sub County public secondary schools, particularly between the years of 2018 and 2021 despite efforts to curb the problem. Although there are many factors that affect students' academic achievement in KCSE, the effect of student unrest has not been conclusively looked into. Therefore, the main goal of this study was to investigate how students' unrest influences their academic performance in KCSE in public secondary schools in Maara Sub County, Kenya. A descriptive research design using survey method was utilized for this study. The study population was 23 045 persons that comprised 76 principals, 243 teachers and 22 726 students in 76 public secondary schools in Maara Sub County. Persistent student unrest and poor academic performance in KCSE exams rationalized the choice of the study locale. Proportional random sampling was used to select 2 principals, 4 teachers and 372 students for this study. Data was collected using questionnaires and interview guide. The main findings show that the main consequence of student's unrest was poor academic performance precipitated by the inability of teachers to cover the syllabus and disruption of academic programmes causing students to spend longer time at home thereby affecting their academic performance negatively. Further it was concluded that students' unrests is a precursor to poor examination performance among students since many a time students experience loss and destruction of instructional materials. It was recommended that school administrators at public secondary schools should educate their students on the consequences of unrests. They should be made aware of the losses and negative effects of unrests on academic progress and achievements. This therefore behooves the management in every school to develop mentorship programmes to help students to handle issues with care and every sense of urgency it deserves. However, a gap was established. The difference in academic performance or educational outcomes among student demographic groups as a result of unrest in institutions of basic learning is a topic that should attract more attention for further research.*

**Keywords:** Student Unrest, Academic Performance, Public Secondary Schools

## INTRODUCTION

The importance of education cannot be ignored worldwide. Education's primary objective is to produce virtuous citizens (Bhardwaj, A. (2016). However, student unrest has persisted in schools all throughout the world, raising the question of whether the objective of moral growth is genuinely being met. Student unrest is described as a dissatisfied attitude on the part of students toward school and its goals that is expressed in a way that threatens the written or implied norms of conduct and interferes with the orderly educational process (Chemutai, B.Onkware, K. &Iteyo,C. 2020). It is a deliberate infraction of educational activities that are frequently carried out in an effort to gain or impose control over management in order to make certain demands (Chemutai, B. et al, 2020).

In various nations around the world, there has been an increase in student discontent in educational institutions (Okolie, U. &Etaneki,A.F. 2020). For instance, in the United States of America (USA), student discontent has been associated with gang activity in schools and incidents of non-fatal violent victimization among children between the ages of 12 and 18 (Huntley, J.R. 2021). In the past, United Kingdom (UK) media reports have discussed schools where teachers have had traumatic incidents such as being attacked, intimidated, and having knives and loaded weapons pulled on them by their allegedly unruly children (Cowan, S.& Munro, V. E. 2021). The media in China has also covered a number of incidents involving student unrest, including one when students attacked a teacher in solidarity with a fellow student who had been disciplined by the teacher (Ong, L. H. &Göbel,C. 2014). Although student unrest is an international phenomenon that has wracked nations like South Africa in Southern Africa; Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, and Republic of Benin in West Africa; Cameroon, Zaire, and Gabon in Central Africa; its occurrence in African secondary schools in the recent past has assumed such an alarming proportion that educationists, administrators, policy makers and other stakeholders have been compelled to look for ways to curb the menace (Ngwokabuenui, P.Y. 2015; Malley, 2014). What therefore emerges is that this problem is a 'malaise of international proportions' as described by various researchers including Ngwokabuenui, P.Y. (2015), Chemutai, B.,Onkware, K. and Iteyo, C. (2020). The primary causes of student unrest in schools have received extensive documentation. The detrimental repercussions of disturbance in schools include student mental health issues, career path disruption, and administrative hassles.

Since 1908, when Maseno School recorded the first episode, there have been incidents of student discontent and violence in Kenya (Okello, L.M.,Otengah, W.A. &K'oder, J.O. 2022). Since then there has been an increase in the frequency and severity of student discontent, especially in the second term. One of the worst incidences in the history of Kenya's education system was witnessed at St. Kizito high school when boys invaded girls' dormitory and in the process raped a number of girls (Manasi, E

&Andiema,N. 2021). Nineteen students lost their life in just this one incident. Numerous pupils were killed by colleagues in other unsettling school student cases at Kyanguli Secondary School and Nyeri High Schools (Ministry of Education, 2001). This precipitated research and inquiry focusing on this phenomenon. However, despite the extensive research and accompanying body of information that this phenomenon has generated, student dissatisfaction in Kenyan secondary schools' second terms still persists unabated. Currently, the main concern has shifted to the frequency and the violent nature of the vice.

Students' unrest is a prevailing problem affecting schools not only in other parts of Kenya but also in Tharaka Nithi County. In various public secondary schools in Maara Sub County, student unrest has become a regular occurrence in recent years, especially during the years between 2018 and 2021. For example, in 2021 alone; about 5 secondary schools were hit by student unrest in Maara Sub County (Mutegi, M.W. 2019). Aggression, violence, and damage to school property have all been visible during the unrests in a few of the public secondary schools in Maara Sub County. Examples of this in 2021 include the secondary schools Kieganguru Girls, Kiriani, Kajiunduthi, Muthambi Boys, and Nditune. While some research has been done to identify the root causes of discontent in public secondary schools, a thorough examination of how student unrest affects their academic performance is lacking. Academic performance measures how well a student, instructor, or institution has completed their educational objectives (Chiekem, E. 2015). Performance in Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education examinations is therefore a good indicator of the quality of education offered in schools. This is because it is a standardized instrument and therefore a reliable measure. Performance in KCSE determines a student's progress academically. Academic performance is a major problem for educational experts since students' lives become unpredictable and depressing when they fail the national examinations. The students' academic standing determines whether they will enroll in university or another type of tertiary institution. As a result, a student's life is based on how well they perform academically on their national exams.

According to Maara Sub County Education Office Report (2022), there were 5 schools in Maara Sub County that experienced serious incidences of student unrest between 2019 and 2021 with reported cases of arson with another 8 schools experiencing mild protests and school closure. The report further showed that academic performance of students in public secondary schools that experienced students' unrest in Maara Sub County had declined (Maara Sub County Education Office, 2019). Although there are many factors that affect the academic performance, the factor of student unrest has not been conclusively looked into. It was therefore important and urgent to have an in-depth assessment of how academic performance of students in public secondary schools in Maara Sub County, Tharaka Nithi County, Kenya, is impacted by student unrests.

## METHODOLOGY

A descriptive research design using survey method was adopted. Descriptive research is a research method that describes the characteristics of the population or phenomenon that is being studied (Nardi, P.M. 2018). The design was an appropriate choice for this study because the research investigated students' unrest and their effect on examination performance in public secondary schools in Maara Sub County, Kenyasince not much was known about the study variables. By using the survey method, the study collected the information needed without manipulation of the study variables. It was also possible to collect data from the respondents without influencing them.

Using an online sample size calculator that computes the minimum number of necessary samples to meet the desired statistical constraints, a sample size of 378 was obtained at 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Proportionate stratified random sampling was then used to select the study sample. Proportional allocation sets the sample size in each stratum equal to be proportional to the number of sampling units in that stratum. Thus, two principals, four teachers and 372 students constituted the sample. A pilot study was carried out in Maara sub county in two schools that were not included in the final survey. The supervisors of this study and other experts in the Department of education at Presbyterian University of East Africa (PUEA) evaluated the items in the questionnaires to find out if they would truly measure what they were intended to measure and whether the questionnaire items included all the content of a particular construct and advised accordingly. Reliability of the research instruments was assessed using the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient. The results found that the range of Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was 0.721 for parish leaders' questionnaire and 0.723 for presbytery moderators' questionnaire. This resulted in a mean of 0.722 on the reliability test. Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) recommend a reliability coefficient of 0.70 and above. Therefore, a reliability coefficient of 0.722 was considered adequate for the study.

Data analysis entailed doing mathematical computations on the data obtained from the field to generate useful information to facilitate cogent discussion and draw inferences. Data was cleaned, coded and entered in the computer for analysis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 for windows. Quantitative data was analysed quantitatively using descriptive and inferential statistics while data elicited by interview were analysed qualitatively by using the Qualitative Data Analysis Program (QDAP) which is free open source software.

## RESULTS

### Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The study sought to examine demographic characteristics of the respondents who took part in the study. The characteristics examined include the following: gender, age, and teaching experiences.

Regarding gender, all of the (100%) of the principals were males. Similarly majority of the teachers, i.e. 75% were males. The gender gap is also visible among students with 53% males and 47% females. This implies gender disparity in favour of females.

Regarding the age bracket, all the teachers and principals were above 41 years of age. When it comes to students, slightly more than a half (58%) of the students ranged between 16-18 years, while the remaining, (39%) of them ranged between 13-15 years.

Regarding the teaching experience, the principals had for a period of 11-20 years while 25% of the teachers had taught for a period of between 1-5 years, another 25% for 6-10 years and 50% for 11-20 years.

### Policy Implementation Practices and Employee Development

The study determined the implications of students' unrest on their academic performance in public secondary schools in Maara Sub County, Kenya. Presented are the results of the analysis.

Table 1: *Implications of Students' Unrest on their Academic Performance*

Implications of Students' Unrest on their Academic Performance	Descriptive Statistics Student Responses		
	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Loss and destruction of instructional materials such as books lowers academic performance	348	2.3784	1.25305
Closure of schools makes students to lose interest in their studies	348	2.3986	1.19943
Inability of teachers to cover the syllabus contributes to poor academic performance	348	2.6284	1.37163
Trauma due to unrest affects student cognitive acumen	348	2.5270	1.28543
Student unrest compromises attendance to lessons contributing to low achievements	348	2.6216	1.32688
Unrest disrupts successful completion of learning activities affecting students' academic achievement negatively	348	2.2432	1.23785
<b>Aggregate</b>		<b>2.466</b>	<b>1.279</b>

The data from the study revealed that the main consequence of student's unrest on their academic performance is inability of teachers to cover the syllabus which contributes to poor academic performance of students (Mean = 2.6284 and SD=1.37163). Results presented in Table 4.7 further reveals that students' unrest actually disrupts academic programmes and causes students to spend longer time with less zeal to pursue their academic endeavors. Findings also show that students' unrest leads to loss and destruction of students' instructional materials such as books thereby affecting academic performance negatively. Students' unrest is followed by destruction of students' valuables which is traumatizing. This affects their cognitive acumen contributing to lowering of academic performance. It is also evident that student unrest compromises attendance to lessons contributing to low achievements because unrest disrupts successful completion of learning activities. This study found that students' unrest has negative implications on academic performance.

## DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study are closely in line with the findings of Egbegi and Iheriohanma (2018) who established that when students are kept away from school for a long time or frequently, most of them are completely cut off from academics. This, according to them, is because the condition of home may not favour productive and rigorous academic exercise. Principals and teachers interviewed proffered that disruptions due to students' unrest result in the destruction of school property especially students' books and contribute to the loss of instruction time leading to low academic achievements. Sang, Masila, and Sang (2012) noted that while gender parity has been attained, a considerable extent in primary schools, gender gaps in secondary education are the greatest, resulting in a low proportion of female instructors compared to male instructors. Education is the most populated industry in Kenya and therefore a diverse set of people is naturally valuable. According to research ethnic diversity among teachers, especially in secondary schools, can greatly benefit students. We are stronger as a nation when people of different backgrounds experiences, and viewpoints work and study together: diversity and inclusion fosters innovation. It has been found that teams with more diverse problem-solvers outperform teams with less diverse problem-solvers, and that organizations with more diverse leadership tend to have higher financial performance. In terms of gender, teaching at the secondary level in Kenya remains largely dominated by men. Therefore, the gender imbalance in the teaching profession and its possible effect on students' unrest warrants a detailed study. While there is little evidence that a teacher's gender has an effect on student unrest, male and female teachers can contribute to students developing positive gender identities and challenge stereotyped views that predispose them to riot.



Muhavi, (2013) and Mwihi, (2020) established that students enrollment in secondary schools is characterized by a wide gender disparities in favor of males. The term gender relates to how men and women are treated in terms of status, positions, obligations, tasks, benefits and disadvantages in society. In general, a deluge of research in the body of literature has covered the subject of how gender affects individual and collective behavior, particularly students' protests.

Odebode (2019) discovered that students' opinions of the causes of students' unrest in Nigeria Higher Institutions of learning were unaffected by their gender. Similarly, Singh (2013) discovered that graduate students in professional and non-professional degree institutions in the Indian city of Ghaziabad did not exhibit significant different levels of student unrest. However, Adegun and Ojo (2016) found no discernible difference between male and female students' attitudes about unrests at postsecondary institutions in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Muhave (2013), established that school unrests in Kenya occurs in either all-boys schools or among male students in mixed sex institutions. Research across the globe has found that adolescent boys tend to report higher cases of externalized problem behavior than girls. It is therefore not surprising that we have major behavior challenge among our male students.

On the age of principals and teachers, most of them said that age was a contributing factor to students' unrests. The more a teacher is aged, the wider the generation gap. This means that there is a wider difference in tastes and preferences. Teachers may stick to the norms yet students may want some changes. If their grievances are not listened to, they may resort to violence.

On students' age, Mishra and Krishna (2014) found that adolescents struggling with anxiety will tend to be more reactive and therefore make fewer decisions that have been carefully evaluated.

On the teaching experience, teacher competence has concentrated on teachers' experience, abilities and the characteristics that enable them to react positively in adverse situation. Beltman et al (2018) and Mansfield et al (2012) established that teachers with longer years of teaching experience have acquired emotional competencies that enable them to deal positively with the emotional needs of students' thereby preventing unrests.

## CONCLUSIONS

From the findings, it was concluded that the main consequences of student's unrest were poor examination performance precipitated by the inability of teachers to cover the syllabus and disruption of academic programmes causing students to spend longer time at home thereby affecting their academic performance negatively. It was further concluded that students' unrest is a precursor to poor examination performance among students because many a times students experience loss and destruction of

instructional materials such as books used for learning. It was also concluded that students' unrest compromised students' attendance to lessons thereby contributing to low academic achievements. It was further concluded that students' unrest generally had negative implications on academic performance of students in public secondary schools in Maara Sub County.

Also strictness and dictatorship style of school administration, poor boarding facilities, poor management by principals, poor diet, and preparation of student's meals all exacerbated students unrests. Further delay in addressing students problems, interference of learning programmes, exam phobia, substance abuse and cultism, unreasonable and biased punishment meted on students, poor teacher- student relationship, etc all influenced students unrests.

Based on the study findings, the study was able to generate the following recommendations: Administrators should adopt leadership and management styles that embrace consultative governance approaches. The boarding facilities should be improved together with their diet. Students' grievances need to be handled promptly and conclusively. The prefect body should be trained on crisis management and be engaged in school management through proper channels of communication.

Administrators of public secondary schools should educate their students on the dangers of unrest. This will make them aware of the losses and negative effects of students' unrest on academic progress and achievements. This therefore behooves the management in every school to develop effective mentorship programmes to help students handle issues with care and every sense of urgency it deserves.

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