Principals use of Student Support Systems and Promotion of Social Cohesion in Public Secondary Schools in Machakos County, Kenya.

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to investigate how principals' use students' support systems in promoting social cohesion in public secondary schools in Machakos County. The study was guided by the ecological systems theory of human development and socialization. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design wherein a target population of 375 principals' and 9 Sub County Directors of Education were respondents. Further, the study used stratified proportionate sampling in selecting sample sizes for the study in which case a sample size of 113 principals and 9 Sub County Directors of education totaling to 122 respondents were surveyed. Data was collected using questionnaires, interview schedules and document analysis. Quantitative data was processed and analyzed using SPSS software version 26 and presented in tables. Simple regression analysis was employed in testing hypotheses of the study for inferences. While qualitative data was transcribed into themes and presented in narratives. The findings of the study revealed that principals use of students support systems $t(113) = 10.586$; $p \leq .05$; $\beta = .734$ was statistically significant in contributing to the promotion of social cohesion in public secondary schools in Machakos County. The MOE should increase Form one admissions quota for the national and any extra county schools to allow more students from other regions and ethnicities get admission into these schools for more integration and cohesion to occur.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Worldwide, use of students support system in enhancing social cohesion is an important theme. In japan and Hong Kong elementary schools engage students in learning about and taking action to promote social cohesion (Chong and Tsubota, 2023). According to their study on creating a culture of social cohesion: Case studies of community participation projects at Japanese and Hong Kong elementary schools, the study established that at school level the students are given chances to learn how to apply problem solving skills, use creativity in designing materials and share what they have learnt with their community. This implies that the support systems in place build a foundation for them to become good and engaged citizens in the future.

A study carried out by Mooij and Smeets (2011) on multi-level aspect of social cohesion of secondary schools and pupils' feelings on safety in Netherlands established that school measures against playing truant influenced a pupils' feelings of safety at school and therefore social cohesion in Dutch secondary schools. The study was a survey design carried out via the internet and using digital questioners that were completed by 78800 pupils, 6200 teachers and educational staff and 600 school managers. The current study examined how principals use students' welfare, democratic election of students' council, Guidance and Counselling and sports in promoting cohesion in public secondary schools in Machakos County. The design of the study

was descriptive survey design and data was collected by use of questionnaires, interview schedules and document analysis. The sample size included 113 principals and 9 Sub County Directors of Education.

In South Africa, students may participate in social events both within and outside of the classroom. Cohesive engagement in school might take the form of membership in the student council or activity in other extracurricular activities. Apart from these activities, active participation in class during class time is thought to contribute to a pleasant school environment that fosters social cohesion. In contrast to the school climate perspective, which focuses primarily on the effects of participation on behavior within the school, student participation refers to providing students with knowledge and participatory skills that enable them to participate in civic affairs and social life outside of their schools in their neighborhood and country (Banks, 2017, Leeman 2008). In Uganda, according to Omara (2020) the role of school prefects in promoting cohesion seems to have an influence on student discipline. Classrooms, school campuses, co-curricular activities, dorms, and beyond school gates are all places where students engage with one another and therefore become appropriate avenues for integration and cohesion. The current study examined how principals use students' welfare, democratic election of students' council, Guidance and Counselling and sports in promoting cohesion in public secondary schools in Machakos County.

In Kenya, students are both the input and output of the school and therefore their entry behaviour, integration and school environment determine what moral values and grades they leave the school with. The student personnel include all students across the genders that are undergoing a course of study and instruction in a learning institution. Therefore, principals use of student's personnel for promoting national cohesion is important given the fact that since independence, national unity has continued to feature more prominently among the national goals of education. A study by Mosomtai (2017) on factors influencing social cohesion initiatives in secondary schools:

A case study of Baringo County, found out that the social cohesion programmes were very effective in bringing about a peaceful school. The study further established that there is a positive relationship between the training of students in social cohesion and the peace in school. The current study examined how principals use students' welfare, democratic election of students' council, Guidance and Counselling and sports in promoting cohesion in public secondary schools in Machakos County. The present study targets a larger sample of 113 principals and 9 Sub County Directors of Education of Machakos County to determine the extent to which the study findings concur.

Objective of the study

The objective of the study was to determine the influence of principals' use of student support systems in promoting social cohesion in public secondary schools in Machakos County.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized descriptive survey design. According to Orodho (2012), descriptive survey design is used to collect in-depth information and enabled the researcher to study the relationships that exist, practices that prevail, beliefs and attitudes held and trends that are developing in regard to promotion of cohesion. The sample size comprised of 113 principals' and 9 Sub County directors of education, totaling to 122 respondents. The study used questionnaires, interview schedule and document analysis to collect data.

Response rate

Response rate refers to the number of people who answered the survey divided by the number of people in the sample (Best & Khan, 2011). In this study the total number of respondents sampled to represent the principals were 113 while 9 Sub County Directors of Education were sampled to represent the education

directors. After data collection, a total of 113 questionnaires from the principals and 7 interview schedules from the Sub County Directors were returned having been fully completed, thus representing a response rate of 100 percent for principals and 78 percent for the Sub County Directors. These response rates were considered ideal for data analysis as per (Best & Khan, 2011) who avers that a response rate of above 50 percent is considered ideal for data analysis. The response rate was motivated by the method of administration ultilised during data collection.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The study sought to determine principals' use of student support systems in promoting social cohesion in public secondary schools in Machakos County. In this regard, the principals were asked questions revolving around the management of student affairs and were to rate them on a scale range of 1-5 where 1= very great extent, 2= great extent, 3 = moderate extent, 4= low extent and 5= no extent at all. Analysis of this is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Principals use of student support system to promote social cohesion

	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	S.D
Planning educational trips	25.4	38.6	18.4	8.8	8.8	2.37	1.21
Using school uniform to foster cohesiveness	37.7	32.5	16.7	9.6	3.5	2.09	1.12
Formulating school rules and regulations applicable to all	51.8	28.9	14.9	3.5	.9	1.73	.91
Encouraging of democratic elections of students' council	38.6	33.3	20.2	6.1	1.8	1.99	1.00
Integrating of all students in the school system	37.7	35.1	20.2	5.3	1.8	1.98	.98
Encouraging group discussion and assignments	36.8	44.7	11.4	5.3	1.8	1.90	.921
Supporting students welfare	33.3	35.1	21.9	5.3	4.4	2.12	1.07
Enrolling of students	27.2	42.1	21.1	5.3	4.4	2.18	1.03
Promoting students to the next class	35.4	29.2	21.2	9.7	4.4	2.19	1.15
Distributing materials on cohesiveness	25.4	32.5	26.3	11.4	4.4	2.37	1.11
Inviting guest speakers to speak on values	36.8	27.2	19.3	8.8	7.9	2.44	2.63
Valid N (list wise)						2.122	.746

As can be observed from Table 1 majority of the principals (64%) held that planning educational trips contributed to the promotion of social cohesion to a great extent, while 18 percent held the view that it contributed to a moderate extent and 18 percent others agreed to a low extent. On the other hand,70 percent of the principals agreed to a greater extent that using school uniform can foster cohesiveness, while 17 percent agreed to a moderate extent while the rest (13%) agreed to a low extent. Similarly, 81 percent of principals agreed to a great extent that formulating school rules and regulations contributed to the promotion of social cohesion, while 15 percent agreed to a moderate extent and 4 percent to a low extent. Encouraging of democratic elections of students' council was also touted to promote social cohesion to a great extent as agreed by majority (72%) of the principals, while 20 percent agreed to a moderate extent and 8 percent to a low extent.

Another way of using student support system to promote social cohesion was through Integrating all students in the school governing council This was agreed to a great extent by 73 percent of the principals while 20 percent agreed to a moderate extent and 7 percent to a low extent. Also, 83 percent of the principals were of the view that encouraging group discussion and assignments promoted social cohesion to a great extent while 11 percent agreed to a moderate extent and 7 percent to a low extent. With regard to student welfare, 68 percent of the principals agreed that supporting students' welfare contributed to the

promotion of social cohesion to a great extent while 22 percent agreed to a moderate extent and 10 percent to a low extent. Equally, the activity of enrolling students was advanced by 69 percent of the principals as a way of promoting social cohesion to a great extent, while 21 percent agreed to a moderate extent and 10 percent to a low extent.

On the same note, promotion of students to the next class was agreed by 65 percent of principals as a way of promoting social cohesion to a large extent while 21 percent agreed it contributes to a moderate extent and 14 percent to a low extent. Distributing materials on cohesiveness was also one of the student support factors which 58 percent of the principals agreed that it contributes to promotion of social cohesion to a great extent, while 26 percent agreed it contributes to a moderate extent and 16 percent to a low extent. Lastly, inviting guest speakers to speak on values promoted social cohesion to a great extent as agreed by 64 percent of the principals while 19 percent agreed it contributes to a moderate extent and 17 percent to a low extent. Overall, principals used student support system to a great extent in promoting social cohesion (mean =2.1223, SD =.746). among the prevalent activities employed by principals to a great extent in promoting social cohesion were: Formulating school rules and regulations applicable to all (mean =1.73), Encouraging of democratic elections of students' council (mean =1.99), Integrating of all students in the school system (mean =1.98) and Encouraging group discussion and assignments (mean = 1.90).

The study also sought to determine how schools were promoting social cohesion through student governance. In this respect, principals were asked to indicate the total number of members of the student governing council and also indicate the number of students in the governing council who were of non-Kamba extraction are shown in Table 2. It should be noted that the Kamba is the most predominant community in the study area.

Table 2. Responses by principals on the average number of members of student governing council

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean		Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Indicate the number of members of student governing council in your school	0	70	26.48	Out of the total number of members of student governing council, how many are non-Kambas	0	27	6.41

Regarding the number of members of student governing council, it can be observed from Table 2 that some schools did not have a student governing council while others had a membership of up to 70 students forming the governing council. On average however, it can be seen that student governing council had a formation of about 27 students in each school. Of these 27 students, the study found that on average there were about 7 students hailing from the non-Kamba community.

As to whether principals encouraged non-Kamba students to participate in student governance, the study established that about 97 percent of the principals encouraged non-Kamba students to participate in student governance while 3 percent never encouraged them as shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Responses by principals on whether they encourage non-Kamba's students to participate in school governance

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	110	97.4	97.4	97.4

No	3	2.6	2.6	100.0	
Total	113	100.0	100.0		

Majority of the principals who encouraged non-Kamba to participate in student governance issues explained that they did this as a way of encouraging inclusivity in student governance. In particular they did this since all students are treated as Kenyans and deserve equal treatment thus no profiling on basis of tribes, they also do this in order to boost national unity, improve cohesion and coexistence, encourage democracy and participation, discourage discrimination, create an enabling platform for all students to be elected and encourage diversity in leadership. On the other hand, the minority who were of a contrary view about encouraging non-Kamba students to participate in student governance averred that in some cases the non-Kamba students shy off from taking elective positions and that some schools are remotely located thus attracting only the students from the local community which makes it difficult for them to have a mix of ethnicities.

In the interview schedule, sub county directors were asked whether their offices have a policy on learners' support system and if so, how the office implement the policy to promote social cohesion? In this regard all the sub county directors responded in the affirmative meaning that there were policies in place on learner support for social cohesion. With regard to how the sub county implements the learner support policies to promote social cohesion, the some of the respondents retorted that the policy on guidance and counselling was being implemented through the training of Guidance and Counselling teachers in order to capacity build them in handling students discipline and character formation.

In order to find the relationship between principals use of student support systems and promotion of social cohesion as espoused in the hypothesis, it was necessary to conduct a simple regression analysis to establish whether there was any significant relationship between the dependent and independent variable. Analysis of this variable relationship is as provided in Tables 4., 5 and 6 respectively.

Table 4.: Model summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.709 [a]	.502	.498	.54720
a. Predictors: (Constant), STUDE_COH				

Regression results in Table 4 indicate the goodness of fit for the regression between principals use of student support systems and the promotion of social cohesion was satisfactory in the linear regression, considering that the regression coefficient was different from zero. Besides, the regression coefficient of .709 implies that the relationship between principals use of student support system and social cohesion was strong and positive. An R square of 0.502 in the model, indicates that 50.2% of the variances in social cohesion among public secondary schools in Machakos County can be explained by the variances in use of principals use of students support systems.

In order to ascertain whether the model depicted in Table 4 could be used to predict the dependent variable on the basis of the independent variable, an ANOVA table was generated and presented as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: ANOVA students support system and social cohesion

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	33.553	1	33.553	112.056	.000 [b]

Residual	33.237	111	.299		
Total	66.790	112			
a. Dependent Variable: SOCOHSION					
b. Predictors: (Constant), STUDE_COH					

Table 5 shows that the overall prediction model was statistically significant; F (1,112) = 112.056; P ≤ .05. This implies that principals use of students support systems had a statistically and significant relationship with the promotion of social cohesion in public secondary schools in Machakos County.

In order to check the contribution of the independent variable (students support systems) in terms of predicting the outcome variable (social cohesion), analysis was done using the unstandardized coefficients. Table 6 displays the regression coefficients of the independent variable (students support systems)

Table 6: Coefficients on use of students support systems and social cohesion

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.544	.156		3.487	.001
STUDE_COH	.734	.069	.709	10.586	.000
a. Dependent Variable: SOCOHSION					

Table 6 displays the regression coefficients of the independent variable (students support systems). The results reveal that principals' use of students support systems was statistically significant in explaining the promotion of social cohesion in public secondary schools in Machakos County; t (113) = 10.586; p ≤ .05; β = .734). The unstandardized beta coefficient of .734 means that for each unit increase the principals use of students support systems, social cohesion increases by .734 units which is significant as per the model. This therefore implies that principals use of students support systems plays an important role towards the promotion of social cohesion. Thus, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no statistically significant relationship between principals' use students support systems and promotion of social cohesion was rejected and conclusion made that principals use of students support system had a significant relationship with social cohesion in public secondary schools in Machakos county.

Discussion and interpretation of the research findings

The results of this study revealed that principals' use of students support systems was significant in the promotion of social cohesion in public secondary schools in Machakos County; t (113) = 10.586; p ≤ .05. Further, it was revealed that the relationship between principals use of students support system and promotion of social cohesion was positive and significant (r = .734; p ≤.01) as shown in Table 4.20 implying that a strong student support system in the context of students' welfare, democratic elections of students' council, guidance and counselling as well as sports can lead to an enhanced social relations and interactions hence improved social cohesion in public secondary schools. As such, principals used student support system to a great extent in promoting social cohesion (mean = 2.1223, SD = .746).

As was established from the findings, the most prevalent student support activities employed by principals to a great extent in promoting social cohesion were in formulating school rules and regulations applicable to all (mean = 1.73); encouraging of democratic elections of students' council (mean = 1.99); integrating of all students in the school system (mean = 1.98) and encouraging group discussion and assignments (mean = 1.90). Further to enhance a sense of belongingness among students, the study revealed that principals gave all students equal treatment thus there was no profiling on basis of tribes. This action by principals was also

seen as a way of boosting national unity, improving cohesion and peaceful coexistence among students. It was also seen as a way of encouraging democracy and participation as well as discouraging discrimination thus creating an enabling platform for all students to be elected in order to have diversity in leadership. Kyungu (1999) in his study points out that prefects should possess certain leadership traits that allow them to be in command of a group and capable of demonstrating the methods and means of obtaining coherent relationships.

The Sub- County Directors of Education on the other hand averred that there were policies through which the education sector supported students. Among the policies which to them were student centric include the policy on teacher distribution which ensures that teachers are distributed equitably in all schools as per number of learners. This is to ensure that learners are not disadvantaged against others in different schools. Additionally, regarding the policy on admissions, the sub county directors ensured that students are admitted from different tribes to enhance national integration. Other support policies include actions for the support of sports and associated activities which enables students to interact with others from different communities. Studies which have been conducted elsewhere point to the criticality of having a strong student support system towards enhancing social cohesion. For instance, a study carried out by Mooij and Smeets (2011) on multi-level aspect of social cohesion of secondary schools and pupils' feelings on safety in Netherlands established that school measures against playing truant influenced a pupils' feelings of safety at school and therefore social cohesion in Dutch secondary schools.

Omara (2020) underscores the role of school prefects in promoting cohesion which accordingly influences student discipline. According to this author, student support services in classrooms, school campuses, co-curricular activities, dorms, and beyond school gates are all places where students engage with one another and therefore become appropriate avenues for integration and cohesion. A study by Mosomtai (2017) on factors influencing social cohesion initiatives in secondary schools in Baringo County, found out thatstudent-centric social cohesion programmes were very effective in bringing about a peaceful school. The study further established that there is a positive relationship between the training of students in social cohesion and the peace in school. Clearly, from the foregoing discussion, student support systems are critical enablers in having a cohesive school environment.

CONCLUSIONS

Involvement of students in school affairs and most importantly in decision making has a strong bearing in building positive student-teacher relations in schools. The findings of this study revealed that principals of schools in the study area had made concerted efforts to use student support systems like student welfare, democratic election of students' council as well as sport in promoting harmonious coexistence, teamwork and cooperation among students in public secondary schools in Machakos County. In particular, the study revealed that principals involved students in formulating school rules and regulations as well as encouraged a mix of local and non-local students in student governance. Also, the findings revealed that there was a positive and statistically significant relationship between principals use of student support system namely student welfare and promotion of social cohesion. This implies that with a strong student welfare and involvement in school governance, there are high chances of students developing a sense of belongingness and commitment to the school thus promoting a cohesive environment. however, results showed that principals of some schools did not involve students in selecting the student's council, and some did not make effort to integrate affirmative action in choosing the council. this left the majority tribe of learners to take most positions

From these findings therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no statistically significant relationship between principals use of student support systems and promotion of social cohesion was rejected. The study therefore concludes that there is a positive and significant relationship between

principals use of student welfare, governance and sports and promotion of social cohesion in public secondary schools in Machakos County implying that if principals use student welfare and governance, they can build unity and teamwork among teachers and students and reduce transfers of teachers and students away from schools that are outside their ethnic locale

RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding principals use of student support systems and promotion of social cohesion, the study recommends as follows:

1. MOE should increase Form one admissions quota for the national and any extra county schools to allow more students from other regions and ethnicities get admission into these schools for more integration and cohesion to occur.
2. Principals to ensure language policy in schools is enhanced and strictly prohibit the use of vernacular in schools in order to promote sense of belonging and a feeling of acceptance by the school.

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