STUDENTS AND STAFF AWARENESS ON SCHOOL SAFETY MEASURES IN PUBLIC BOARDING SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN TRANS-NZOIA COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract:

The Kenyan government is committed to ensure access, equity, participation, retention, completion and quality of education at all levels. Education is bound to be affected if safety and security concerns of students are not addressed fully. The objective of the study was to find out the levels of awareness of school safety measures among students and staff in public boarding secondary schools in Trans- Nzoia County, Kenya. The study used descriptive survey research design. The study targeted 40 principals, 754 teachers, 22,562 students and 84 security officers in 40 public boarding secondary schools in Trans-Nzoia County. Simple random sampling and purposive sampling procedure were used to select boarding secondary schools. The total sample was 403 respondents which comprised of 20 principals, 143 teachers, 220 students and 20 security officers. Questionnaires, interview schedule, document analysis, observation checklist and focus groups were used as data collection instruments. Data was analysed using descriptive statistical techniques that were frequencies and percentages. Data was presented in tables. The study established that, students and staff were not trained on safety requirements as per the Ministry of Education Safety Manual and therefore not aware of the safety measures. The student, teacher and any other stake holder should be sensitized on the safety rule. The school principals should ensure that all students and staff are trained on safety measures in order to prevent insecurity issues in boarding schools.

Keywords: students, staff, awareness, school, safety, measures

1. Introduction

The education sector is an important pillar for the realization of Vision 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals in regards to attaining the socio-economic and political developments (MOE, 2008). In recent past, schools have become unsafe grounds for both students and teachers alike and sometimes their properties contrary to the expectations.

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In the United States of America, the Pontiac Rebellion School Massacre left only three survivors out of the 13 children who had been enrolled (Dixon, 2005). In Colorado, on April 20, 1999 at Columbine High School in Littleton, two teenagers murdered 12 students and one teacher before taking their own lives (Larkin, 2009). In the Virginia Tech shooting, alone gunman on April 16, 2007, left 33 students dead (Wike & Fraser, 2009). These incidences raised the concerns on levels of preparedness in responding to students' safety (Fallahi, Austad, Fallon, & Leishman, 2009).

In South Africa, research has shown that gangs intrude schools and use them as market for drugs, alcohol and weapons. Young girls are abducted, assaulted and raped (Simpson, 2001). African public learning institutions have tried to put in place a number of measures that aim at increasing the security of the employees and the students. The purpose is to reduce or deter strangers from entering the school ground and to control and monitor behaviour and movement of the students while in the school. These measures should be clearly explained to all the school stakeholders who are expected to respect and implement (Hull, 2010).

The school managers and administrators are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that safety policies and laid down regulations concerning student safety are implemented in the school by coordinating all the phases of the program implementation. Shaw (2002) found out that most students do not have knowledge of the security risks within or without their schools. As a result, they are not adequately prepared to handle safety emergencies. It was revealed that a big number of secondary school students are not informed about the safety concerns and the proper procedures to take if their security is threatened. In the wake of the recent wave of violence, bullying, school fires and break-ins, safety concern has become a major agenda in most of the schools.

In Uganda, it has been established that safe schools' contract has been implemented as one of the identified interventions which strengthen the roles of teachers, pupils, parents and their involvement in children's education to enhance quality learning (Lulua, 2008). School administrators bear the primary responsibility for working with teachers and other partners to create an environment in which individual students and adults are treated fairly, equitably, and with dignity and respect. Schools as macro-organizations requires principals with courage and capacity to build new cultures based on trusting relationships and a culture of disciplined inquiry and action (Fullan, 2003). School managers need to identify appropriate strategies; tools and resources they can use to create awareness among the students, teachers and support staff in order to address specific challenges.

In Kenya, safety and security concerns of students have gained significance with recurrent unrest and fire breakouts witnessed in schools. A dormitory raid by boys at St. Kizito Secondary School left 19 girls dead and 79 others seriously injured (NCCK, 1992) while a fire tragedy at Bombolulu girls secondary school claimed the lives of 27 girls (Oriang', 2001). Over 300 schools were closed down by the year 2008 due to students' unrest (Mwenga, 2011). 48 fire outbreaks in schools were reported in 2012 that led to deaths of 14 students and 3 teachers (Kisurulia, Katiambo, & Lutomia, 2015). These

reports are evidence that schools in Kenya, as in other countries are faced with challenges related to security preparedness. Students' safety is an important aspect of human life that needs to be taken care of so that it is safeguarded from any form of risk in a given situation. As such, a safe school environment is a place free from violence and fear with respect to disciplinary procedures (Hernandez, Floden, & Bosworth, 2010).

Principals are charged with overseeing the implementation of safety procedures and thus are responsible for the outcomes of any of the threats that attack the schools Kirui, et al., (2011). Low level of awareness among the administration, teachers, and students could be as a direct failure of the principal to relay the knowledge of the safety policies within the school. It is essential for the support staff, teachers, the students and the parents to be involved in the implementation of the safety procedures. All groups should receive proper training on safety and preparedness procedures.

In Kenya, Omolo (2010) in his study recommended that strategies be devised by head teachers to enhance the implementation of safety policies including: integration of safety activities into daily school routine, regular inspection of school plant, training staff on emergency preparedness, purchasing the required safety equipment, and conducting regular emergency drills. Quality Assurance and Standards Officers should devise strategies to monitor safety awareness and implementation.

The sources of risks to the safety of the students and the school at large may either come from the internal or external environment (Ministry of Education, 2008). The threats are emanating from negligence or accidents. Only thirty-seven per cent of school heads have participated in security management courses. Twenty-one per cent of schools' boards of management and forty per cent of security guards have participated in courses that teach security management. Only a relatively small percentage of key decision makers, head-teachers and the board of management, were knowledgeable in security matters that may affect their schools; therefore, most of those charged with making critical decisions on security do not possess sufficient knowledge to do so and thus endanger the lives of the stakeholders as well as the security of the assets they are charged with (Kirui, Mbugua and Sang, 2011).

The state of safety in Kenyan public boarding secondary schools has been of great concern to the government and members of public. Public boarding secondary schools have experienced frequent insecurity cases (Muthuiya, 2013). The insecurity cases have destabilized the smooth running of the schools. They have also resulted to loss of time, lives and resources. After the incidences of unrest at Itiero and Endarasha high schools in the County of Kisii, the Cabinet Secretary gave a directive for all Kenyan secondary school principals and their deputies to be offered a training to refresh their knowledge and skills in administration and at the same time, discuss among themselves on methods of sustaining peace among the school administrators, parents, students, support staff and the entire community and all the school systems and programmes be developed clearly to be understood by all school stakeholders. He requested that some private security firms be contracted to train the principals, teachers, students and the security officers on how to operate the safety gadgets such as, first aid kits and the fire extinguishers. School

administrators should conduct regular security drills with the students and the staff in order to be prepared for any security emergencies. At the beginning of every term students should take the first two weeks to engage in safety drills to enable them tackle any risk that may occur.

In Trans-Nzoia County, there have been a series of school riots, fires, and theft and student death in public boarding secondary schools. There has been no study related to awareness of safety measures by students and staff in the County. Trans-Nzoia County allowed the study to deal with a population that has had a share of school safety challenges. The findings of the study will assist the policy makers in evaluating the implementation plan of the safety standards manual. With proper implementation of the Ministry of Education Safety policy, most of the challenges facing boarding schools regarding student safety will be a thing of the past. The study will also make the schools communities aware of the need to invest in security preparedness plans that will enhance safety of the students. School stakeholders and communities will understand their roles in ensuring student safety. Findings of this study generate more study insight as well as provide reference material for more research to scholars.

2. Statement of the Problem

The safety of students in boarding Secondary schools is a major concern in the current school setting (MOE, 2008). In the recent past, there have been numerous reports on violence, fire outbreaks, destruction of property and student loss of lives across boarding schools in the country. Since the beginning of the Twenty First Century, there have been many cases of school insecurity which have triggered a sense of fear among students, parents, leaders and the community. This brings about the need to look for better ways of addressing the issue of student safety in a comprehensive manner (Ronoh & Kyalo, 2009).

Schools are expected to be safe and have the ability to respond to security challenges with the urgency required. The life-threatening incidences in schools have serious implications that may endanger the supportive environment for students and learning in general (Ronoh, 2018).The Ministry of Education in Kenya rolled out the basic safety standards for all schools to comply with (MOE, 2008). The insecurity cases have resulted to loss of time, lives and resources. The students are important stakeholders of the education system and are the primary reason why school safety policies are developed.

All plans and strategies developed by the government and the schools on school safety have the primary goal of protecting the welfare and wellbeing of the students (Ng'ang'a, 2013). Studies have been done on student safety in other Counties of Kenya. So far, no study has been conducted on student safety preparedness in Trans-Nzoia County. In Trans-Nzoia County, there have been a number of cases compromising student safety in boarding secondary schools such as student riots, protests, fires, loss of property and student death.

Stakeholders such as the County Director of Education, teachers and parents have called for urgent attention. The cases of student unrest, loss of property and life in public boarding secondary schools can be an indication of safety unpreparedness. The researcher carried out the study to ascertain the awareness of the school safety measures by the students and staff in Trans-Nzoia County boarding secondary schools. How effective schools are implementing laid down safety guidelines determines the awareness and preparedness to handle safety threats.

3. Research Methodology

This study utilized descriptive survey research design. Kothari (2009) views a research design as an arrangement of conditions for collection and analysis of data in a manner that aims to combine relevance to the research purpose with economy and procedure. This study employed surveys, interviews and focus group discussion which make the design ideal (Creswell, 2012).

The study targeted 40 principals, 754 teachers, 22,562 students and 84 security officers in the 40 public boarding secondary schools. The schools are categorized into four groups comprising of 2 national schools, 8 extra county schools, 21 County schools and 9 sub- County schools. Creswell (2006) suggest that a sample of 30% and above can be enough for a study.

The researcher selected 20(50%) of the 40 public boarding secondary schools in the study area using purposive, stratified and simple random sampling techniques from the 2 National schools, 8 public boarding Extra County schools, 21 public boarding County schools and 9 public boarding Sub- County schools. The schools were further stratified as: Public boys' boarding schools, public girls' boarding schools and public mixed boarding schools. During the time of data collection, there were 17 public boys' boarding schools, 20 public girls' boarding schools and 3 public mixed boarding schools.

The 2 national schools were purposively selected for inclusion in the study. 4 extra county schools, 10 county schools and 4 sub-county schools were proportionately selected across the strata based on gender for this study. Therefore, using proportionate random sampling, 2 boys' schools and 2 girls schools were selected from the extra county category, 5 boys schools, 3 girls schools and 2 mixed schools were selected from the county schools category and 2 boys school, 3 girls schools were selected from the sub-county schools category. Every principal was purposively sampled as each school has one principal.

The researcher purposively sampled one security officer from each of the twenty sampled schools. Therefore, 20 principals and 20 school security officers in the schools sampled were purposively included in this study. There were 387 teachers and 11570 students in the 20 sampled schools representing 51.3% of the total number of teachers (754) and students (22562) respectively in the 40 public boarding secondary schools. For the purpose of this study, the teachers' and students' samples were obtained using coefficient of variation.

Nassiuma (2000) asserts that in most surveys, a coefficient of variation in the range of $21\% \leq C \leq 30\%$ and a standard error in the range $2\% \leq e \leq 5\%$ is usually acceptable. The study therefore, used a coefficient of variation of 30% and a standard error of 2%. The higher limit for coefficient of variation and standard error was selected so as to ensure low variability in the sample and minimize the degree of error. Nassiuma (2000) gives the formula as follows:

$$n = \frac{N * C\text{\textasciicircum}2}{C^2 + (N-1) * e\text{\textasciicircum}2}$$

Where,
N = S size,
N = Population,
C = covariance,
E = standard error

For the teachers, N = 387, therefore:

$$n = \frac{387 * (0.3)\text{\textasciicircum}2}{0.3^2 + (387-1) * (0.02)\text{\textasciicircum}2}$$

n = 143 respondents.

For the students, N = 11570, therefore:

$$n = \frac{11570 * (0.3)\text{\textasciicircum}2}{0.3^2 + (11570-1) * (0.02)\text{\textasciicircum}2}$$

n = 220 respondents

A sample of 220 students was selected proportionately from each of the selected 20 schools. A sample of 11 students was randomly sampled from the school prefects. Questionnaires with closed and open ended questions were administered to143 teachers in the 20 sampled boarding secondary schools , oral interview to 20 Principals and 20 security officers and
Focus group interview was administered to the 220 students.

4. Results and Discussion

The data was collected from teachers through questionnaire, from students through focus group discussion guide and from the school principals and security officers through the use of interview guide. The teachers' responses on this variable are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Levels of Awareness of School Safety Measures among Students and Staff

Statement	SA		A		U		D		SD	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Students and staff have been taken through security drills to equip them handle security threats and emergencies	20	16.7	28	23.3	0	0.0	60	50.0	12	10.0
All students and staff have seen and read the ministry school safety manual	12	10.0	12	10.0	6	5.0	50	41.7	40	33.3
Students and staff are involved in decision making concerning school safety	25	20.8	65	54.2	6	5.0	20	16.7	4	3.3
Students and staff have been trained on handling and use of safety gadgets such as fire extinguisher	30	25.0	42	35.0	0	0.0	40	33.3	8	6.7
Student safety sensitization programmes have been enhanced in the school	35	29.2	43	35.8	36	30.0	6	5.0	0	0.0

The results also show that majority 60(50.0%) of the teachers disagreed that students and staff had been taken through security drills to equip them handle security threats and emergencies, 28(23.3%) agreed and the lowest 12(10%) strongly disagreed. This implies that students and the staff have not been taken through security drills therefore they are not aware of the measures and how to combat insecurity cases. This makes students vulnerable in case of any safety risk occurrence. This finding agrees with Cavanaugh (2004) that safety of students is highly dependent on stakeholders Knowledge of possible risks and laying strategies on how to prevent and manage them. The Ministry of Education Safety Standards manual (2008) requires students, teachers and support staff to be taken through regular drills in order to be ready to tackle any safety challenge.

At least 50(41.70%) of the teachers disagreed that all students and staff had seen and read the Ministry of Education school safety manual. However, 40(33.3%) strongly disagreed and 6(50%) were undecided. This implies that majority of the teachers and students are not aware of the contents in the Ministry of Education Safety Standards Manual and therefore not prepared for any security threats. Wanyama (2011) noted that most schools had not set up safety committees, nor trained their teachers on security management. Even though some of the schools have the equipment, the principals have not educated the students and the staff about the safety standards required in their schools.

There should be lectures given to students, teachers and support staff by law enforcers in order to maintain security and development of disaster preparedness plan. Ng'ang'a (2013) found out that there was little awareness of the contents of the safety standards manual among the staff members. There is need to educate students and staff on how to handle safety equipment such as fire extinguishers so that they can be able to react accordingly when a threat occurs. Awareness should be the first step in planning. Students and staff should be educated and informed about the possible threats and how to prevent and handle them if they occur. This can also put them in a better position to participate in decision making.

The results also show that majority 65 (54.2%) of the teachers agreed that students and staff were involved in decision making concerning school safety. 25(20.8%) strongly agreed and 4(3.3%) strongly disagreed. This implies that students and teachers are involved in making security plans. This was commendable for they can work as a team to come up with better plan for safety preparedness and safety mitigation. Leandri (2011) revealed that majority of the principals in Kenya have no knowledge on the safety and standards manual prescribed by the Ministry of Education.

The results indicate that only 42 (35.0%) of teachers agreed to the fact that students and staff have been trained on handling and use of safety gadgets such as fire extinguisher, 40(33.3%) disagreed to that fact and 8(6.7%) strongly disagreed. This implies that a good number of teachers are not prepared for any insecurity in case of any. The World Health Organization (2000) states that students are able to uphold the safety standards measures taught to them by their teachers.

The study also established that 43(35.8%) of the teachers agreed that student safety sensitization programmes had been enhanced in the school. 36(30.0%) were undecided and 6(5%) disagreed. Students should be trained on how to give first aid and how to respond to evacuation procedures through fire drills and field marshals; this will lessen the effects of a disaster if it occurs as in agreement with Gathoni (2013). The school safety manual recommends that all schools should involve students and staff in decision making processes, training them to handle and use safety gadgets such as fire extinguisher and sensitizing them on safety issues in order to ensure the safety of the school, staff and students (MOE, 2008). Safe schools are those in possession of comprehensive plans and procedures which give guidelines for dealing with disruptive violent behaviours. An ideal security program should include information and education concerning violence, arson prevention, discipline in adherence to the rules and counseling for students.

The teachers were asked if they have ever attended training on student safety and their response is recorded in Table 2. The results show that majority 78 (65%) of the teachers had never been trained on how to respond to student's safety while 42(35.0%) of the teachers had been trained on students' safety.

Table 2: Teachers' Training on Student Safety

		Frequency	Percent
Response	Yes	42	35.0
	No	78	65.0
Total		**120**	**100.0**

The results show that majority of the teachers had never been trained on how to respond to student's safety. Similar findings were established by Ronoh and Kyalo (2010) who revealed that 42% of the students and 85% of the teachers had never received any training on how to prevent or handle safety threats in Turkana County. The Ministry of Education Safety Standards Manual (2008) requires teachers and students to be trained regularly on safety issues affecting the schools.

Interview responses from the security officers also indicated that the security officers who participated in this study were not trained on students' safety. Responses from students who participated in the focus group discussion indicated that they had neither seen nor read the Ministry of Education safety manual. This is an indication that most of the respondents were not aware of the school safety measures. Teachers who had attended the safety trainings stated that very few training sessions were sponsored by MOE and the school management. No training had been carried out by the fire department. The safety standards manual requires the fire department at the County levels in collaboration with the school management to regularly train the students and the staff on how to handle fire extinguishers and how to prevent and mitigate insecurity in general.

Further, the teachers were asked to state where the school safety manual is kept and their response is recorded in Table 3.

Table 3: Where School Safety Manual Is Kept

		Frequency	Percent
Responses	Principal's office	54	45.0
	Don't know	50	40.0
	Deputy principal's office	16	15.0
Total		**120**	**100.0**

The Table shows that 54(45.0%) of the teachers stated that the school safety manual is kept by the school principal in his/her office, 50(40.0%) did not know where and who kept the school safety manual while 16(15.0%) stated that the safety manual was kept in the deputy principal's office. This implies that some teachers do not know where the safety manual is kept. This reveals that they are not access to the manual therefore they have not read its contents. Majority of the principals who were interviewed stated that the safety manual was kept in their offices. This indicates that most teachers and students are not access to the guideline.

Chances are high that the respondents are not aware of its content and therefore not prepared for safety measures as required. This agrees with Ronoh and Kyalo (2009) who found out that most students in Turkana County did not have knowledge on likely threats to their safety while the teachers likewise did not have adequate skills that could enable them handle safety standards effectively. The MOE (2008) requires the safety manual to be accessible by all students and teachers and its contents known by all members including the support staff in order to be prepared for any security threat.

From the findings presented above, it is clear that majority of the respondents were not fully aware of the school safety measures. It has been established that majority of the respondents have not been trained on students' safety and they have not seen the safety manual as it is usually kept in the principal's office which make it difficult to access the information. Schools should have a safety plan that involve all students, teachers and support staff. The principals interviewed revealed that they did not conduct regular safety trainings because they required extra finances which were not available. This also

indicates that due to lack of training, the students and staff were not able to operate the safety gadgets. In case of safety risk, they cannot use the available tools to save property or lives.

Out of the 20 security officers interviewed, only 4 had attended a course on student safety measures. The highest number (16) had not attended any course on student safety measures. The security officers also indicated that the only gadget used to protect students was a fire extinguisher and few CCTV cameras. They were not aware of any other measures. In conclusion the students and the staff are not fully aware of the safety threats and the exhaustive measures required in managing the threats.

5. Conclusion

There was low level of awareness of school safety measures among the teachers, students and security officers. This is due to the fact that most students and staff had not been taken through security drills to equip them handle security threats and emergencies. The students, teachers and security officers had neither seen nor read the Ministry of Education School Safety manual and therefore not prepared for any security threats. Students and staff had not been taken through security drills to equip them handle security threats and emergencies. The students and staff had never seen nor read the Ministry of Education School Safety manual. They were not aware of the contents in the Ministry of Education School Safety Standards manual and therefore not prepared for any security threats. Less than half of the teachers had been trained on how to respond to students' safety, while none of the security officers who participated in this study was trained on students' safety.

5.1 Recommendations
The students, teachers and security officers should be sensitized on the safety rules. The school principals should constitute safety committees to spearhead the safety rule in the schools. School administration should train students and staff on safety risks and how to handle them if they occur. The Ministry of Education should facilitate regular safety training and awareness programmes in order to prepare stakeholders for insecurity eventualities.

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