

**AN ASSESSMENT OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND ITS  
INFLUENCE ON STUDENTS' UNREST MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC SECONDARY  
SCHOOLS IN MERU COUNTY, KENYA**

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**ABSTRACT**

**Background of the study:** This study focused on assessment of the schools communication practices and its influence on students' unrest management in public secondary school in Meru county of Kenya. In Meru County, the rate of students' unrest is about 30 % while the national average is about 10% of all cases reported in year 2017. This rate is way above the national average.

**Objective of the Study:** The objectives of the study was; to determine school communication practices of two way communication and its influence of student unrests in public schools in Meru county of Kenya, to establish whether school management practice of listening skills, and its influence on students unrest management in public secondary schools in Meru county of Kenya, to determine whether school management language skills have influence on schools unrest in Meru county of Kenya and to investigate whether schools have suggestion box system, and its influence on student unrest in schools in Meru Kenya.

**Methodology:** The study used mixed method of research.

**Findings:** The conclusion of the study was schools ineffective communication practices of top down communication practices, poor listening skills, poor language skills, lack of timely feedback on student issues and lack of suggestion systems lead to development of conflict leading to student unrest. In addition, the student councils handled many responsibilities in punishing student's resulting in conflicts and students unrest.

**Keywords.** *Communication, Practices, Listening, Skills, Language Skills, Feedback, Suggestion Box System*

### **1.1 Background of the study**

Kenya has declared its intention to achieve middle-income status by following vision 2030 blue print based on its three pillars; namely political, economic and social. Vision 2030 objectives was to provide a framework to guide long-term national goals and eliminate tendency to focus on short term goals that only focus on the politics of the day. The journey towards widespread prosperity and building of a cohesive society that Kenya has taken, is founded on key sectors namely; education and training, health, water and sanitation, the environment, housing and urbanization as well as gender, youth, sports and culture. Kenyan government views education and training as fundamental in the achievement of its vision 2030. Education is crucial in providing knowledge and skill to raise productivity and standards of living in the country to middle income status.

There are several challenges in terms of meeting human resources requirements for a rapidly changing and diverse economy in ensuring that the education provided meets quality standards, raising transition rates from 60% to 100%. In addition, that requires changes in policies that address issues of cost, fees, teacher training, provision of facilities, funding of curriculum reforms, high rates of students dropouts, high rates of repetition, absenteeism by both teachers and students and students unrest in secondary education level. Student's unrest is one of the impediments of achieving free universal basic education in Kenya. Strikes impact on students dropping out of school, destruction of property, lost time in solving conflicts and psychological trauma that takes time to heal. Student unrest as identified in international literature is any behaviour that threatens to inflict physical and non-verbal pain or harm on others and it affects almost all countries in the world (Republic of Kenya 2011)

### **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Student unrest is a global problem affecting countries in Europe, America, Canada, Africa and Asian countries. Its intensity varies from country to country, region-to-region, but still remains a concern to all stakeholders and Kenya is not an exception. Secondary schools students discipline is at crossroads in Kenya with increased rate of students' unrest, bringing to question the effectiveness of schools management practices, and its influence on students 'unrest in Kenyan secondary schools. Students' unrest has resulted in loss of life, disruption of learning, and destruction of property. In Meru County, the rate of students' unrest is about 30 % while the national average is about 10% of all cases reported in year 2017, it's still not

clear why students' unrests have been on increase instead of declining after implementing some policies that reduced the workload in the education system. This study is therefore timely and can inform policy since student unrest is a global issue as well an issue that affects Kenyan society. It was therefore, necessary to assess the influence of school management practices and their influence on management of students' unrest. If the issue of students' unrests is not resolved, the integration and adoption of management practices on school system may lead to high rate of student unrest in Meru County of Kenya. The study focused on internal school management practices. School management practices impact negatively or positively on the integration and adaptation of school systems likely leading to either high school performance or students' unrest.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were;

1. To determine whether two-way communication practices has influence on student unrests in public schools in Meru county of Kenya,
2. To establish whether school management practice of listening skills, has influence on students unrest management in public secondary schools in Meru county of Kenya
3. To determine whether school management language skills has influence on schools unrest in Meru county of Kenya
4. To investigate whether schools have suggestion box systems and their influence on student unrest in schools in Meru Kenya.

### **2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

The objectives of the section were; to determine whether, two-way communication practices has influence on students` unrests in public Schools in Meru County, establish whether School management practice of listening skills, has influence on students` unrest management in public secondary Schools in Meru County, determine whether school management language skills has influence on Schools unrest in Meru County, and to investigate whether schools have suggestion box systems and their influence on students` unrest in Schools in Meru County.

### **2.1 School Management Practices and its Influence on Students Unrest Management.**

In a school, the output of the management practices are student knowledge, skills and attitudes or performance criteria or broadly, what is referred to as learning (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012). Learning also involves various dimensions of psychological and mental activities. Kundu and Tutoo (1993) as cited by Somashekar (2012), and Buchanan and Huczynski (2004), agree that “an academically effective school is distinguished by its culture; structure, practices, the climate of values and norms that channel staff and students in the direction of successful teaching and learning and thereby overcoming student unrest”. According to Buchanan and Huczynski (2004), school management practices can be understood by analysing the values that govern the behaviour and uncovering the underlying and often-unconscious assumptions that determine how those in the school think, feel, interact and react. Conflicts in school may bring positive or negative consequences. Some conflicts lead to higher performance while others result in poor in performance. If conflicts are not resolved in good time, they may lead to student unrest. Conflicts in schools are disagreements in the context of school settings, between individual employees, groups, and students within the school setting. A research undertaken under the auspices of The Human Science Research Council of South Africa used observations, interviews on key informants, focus group interviews with educators, learners, teachers and parents. Findings of the study on perceptions of discipline differed greatly, with both learners and the educators guilty of misconduct and teachers used punitive measures and corporal punishment to deal with students’ unrest. In Kenya, schools have their own discipline mechanisms. However, there are some common methods of discipline that most schools use such as; rules and regulations, punishments, guidance and counselling, suspension for two weeks and expulsion for criminal cases. In addition, for effective and efficient management of discipline practices in schools, the teamwork of the following stakeholders is required, principals, teachers, parents, students and the community (Mbiti, 2003). In the Kenya Education, Master plan for Education Training, 1997-2010, it is argued, that the quality is not mere passing of examination or certification, but development of independent analytical, creative potential for the students, including critical thinking, spiritual, and values (Sessional Paper No.1, of Republic of Kenya, 2005). This report noted that secondary education is characterized by poor performance in national examinations, shortage of textbooks, shortage of teachers, overloaded curriculum.

The researcher, therefore, attempted to establish the extent to which the above factors influence student unrest in public Secondary School in Meru County, Kenya. Every day, principals make decisions that influence the school in a big or in a small way and understanding how they arrive at their choices is important. Several factors influence communication practices, these are active listening, use of concise words, and use of correct medium (Smith 2015 & Kapur 2018)

### **School Management Communication practices and its Influence on Students' Unrest Management.**

Hoy and Tarter (2012) define communication as transmitting information via codes. A code is a system that maps a set of signals into a set of meaning. Hoy and Tarter view that "human communication as encoding and decoding practices in which the encoded message is transformed into a signal whose elements are transferred by the sender, transmitted over a channel and decoded into an abstract proposition that is believed". One reason why a received message may not be identical to the transmitted one is that all communication channels contribute some degree of noise (any undesired signal) to the message. Noise in the communication practices may be caused by incomplete understanding or poor listening skills (gap) which the recipient of the message "fill in" based on his experience with cultural recitation which may distort the message and cause misunderstanding and sometimes unrest in schools (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012).

Communication plays four major roles in educational management: First, it helps to control the behavior of teachers, students and non-teaching staff in a number of ways. For instance, it is through communication that teachers and other staff members are inducted into the various aspects of their jobs and other organizational and employment regulations. Through communication practices of listening, sending information and feedback, the students and staff members are informed about the expected behaviour within the educational institution. The consequences of undisciplined behaviour are also specified, and understood by effective communication, secondly. Communication helps to motivate teachers, students and other workers in an educational organization. Through communication, all members of educational organizational are informed about what is to be done, how well they are performing their tasks, what can be undertaken to make the tasks to be done even better and this is done through proper feedback mechanisms, thirdly, communication provides a release for the emotional expression of feeling and for fulfillment of social needs. For teachers, students and

other workers an educational organization or a work group provides a primary source of their social interaction. It is through communication in the work place that people show their satisfaction, or shares their feelings of frustration, with both their work-related activities and social aspects of their lives. Fourth, communication facilitates decision-making. Communication provides teachers and others with the information, which they require for making appropriate decisions (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2012), (Smith 2015 & Kapur 2018).

School management communication practices, refers to communication that takes place among groups within public secondary schools. In public secondary schools, structure is imposed on the natural patterns of interpersonal relationships. There are three directions in which a message can flow; these are top–downward, downward top and horizontal. Top downward communication, is used by educational managers to direct and influence the activities of teachers, students and other workers in the school who occupy subordinate levels. In superior-subordinate communication, educational managers direct subordinates, and learners to perform certain tasks, give information about schools task, procedures, and practices, telling staff members and students what their role is in achieving schools goals and objectives. Informing staff members, and students how well or badly their organization is fairing, and finally encouraging them to improve by sharing information in staff meetings, general assemblies and prize giving days where schools awards members who have done well in advancing schools objectives and goal (Okumbe, 2005).

Upward communication in public secondary schools mainly refers to staff members and students communicating information about their problems and grievances in implementing ministry policies, school objectives and goals. Educational mangers receive feedback from teachers, students, and other workers, which help, gauge needs to be improved. Suggestion systems can be incorporated in the system to receive additional instructions orders and guidance participative decision making is recommended, attitude surveys and grievance handling procedure to reduce conflicts which if not resolved result in student unrest. (Robbins, 2012).

For a year and a half, a team of professors at Loyola University in Chicago studied hundreds of businesses around the United States to determine the single most important characteristic of an effective manager. The team found that listening was the most important tool for any manager. Unfortunately, listening skills are often ignored, or taken for granted by organizations. Institutions invest in training to improve managers accounting, human

relations, public speaking, writing and even reading skills, but they forget about listening. This may be due to the assumption that listening is the same as hearing, indicating that anyone with adequate hearing also has adequate listening skills. However, listening goes well beyond hearing, involving an intellectual and emotional integration of material on the part of the receiver. The untrained listener retains only 50 percent of what is said immediately after hearing it; 48 hours later, the retention rate falls to 25 percent. No wonder people argue over what might have been said a few days ago (Deborah, Bell, & Cheng (2015)). Environmental and psychological factors also contribute to poor listening. Too much information may burden the receiver, or information may be so sparse or so slowly presented that the receiver begins to daydream instead of listening. Self-centeredness and self-protection also impair listening. Often, people are more interested in defending their own opinions on a given subject than in listening to what other people have to say. Their self-centeredness prevents them from truly understanding what the other party is saying. If a coworker begins to explain a procedure that you like to perform differently, you might ignore the individual or jump in with your own view on how to get the job done.

Semantic barriers also referred to as language skills can cause conflicts in public secondary schools and often leading to students' unrests especially when school managers and subordinates or students are defensive about criticism directed to them. Staff members or students may accept criticism from principals if given in a warm climate or in a friendly manner, which can lead to better understanding between parties without hurting feelings of the parties involved. Constructive criticism from both top managers or subordinates or students should be specific. Vague comments create confusion and anxiety; describe the things that the staff members or students did incorrectly. Principals should avoid attacking the person or evaluating the person's personality. In addition, the timing of the criticism may reduce defensive need. If criticism is meant to improve performance, it may be taken positively but if it is during a discipline session it may cause defensive behaviour. When communicating face to face, one can reduce semantics by passing information in several ways. First, one should be person-minded not word-minded. Communication takes place between people, not words, always one must make an effort to understand what other people are trying to convey rather than focusing on the dictionary definition of words. If one knows someone well, one will learn the particular way in which that person uses words and learn the vocabularies of their supervisors and coworkers; second, one must ask questions if the meaning of something is

unclear to them. One must remember that the average word has 28 definitions, so there is plenty of room for error. One must not be afraid to ask. People appreciate the fact that one is interested enough- and are listening carefully enough- to inquire. Clarification early on may save money in the end; third, one should be sensitive to contexts. Individual words often derive their meaning from the world surrounding them (Hoy & Tarter, 2012). (Smith 2015 & Kapur 2018)

In public secondary schools, where educational managers send information to teachers and students, feedback is expected from them. This is then response expected from them. Feedback may be immediate if it is face to face or in meetings. In written communication, response takes longer, especially if it involves written reports analyzing data on subjects or students' progress reports. The ideal outcome of communication is a match between feedback and the senders intended effect. Communication in schools should follow formal lines of hierarchy or from the BOM, Deputy Principal, Head of Departments and then to teachers or students. This type of communication embraces all members of the school (Robbins 2012).

First, there is no need to communicate issues about which shared beliefs and values exist. Second sharing information provides guidelines and cues to help the receiver interpret messages. The values and attitudes about what to communicate and how openly to communicate are crucial and this affects the language of the parents, teachers and students. In a study by Freshow (1989), working with performance systems internationally indicate that principals spend 70 percent of their time communicating, while it is estimated that over 30 percent of the principals time is devoted to listening, tests of listening suggest that these individual listen at 25 percent efficiency. Listening skills affect the quality of staff, students and support relationships in the workplace. The language of communication in a school speaks volumes about the school cultural practices for example, how staff dress, describe students, express anger and greet stakeholders and how co-workers relate. If the language is positive, the organization will have a positive image and vice versa. In addition, the physical infrastructure, size, shape, and location of buildings can indicate other set values. Hoy and Tarter (2012), Maniero and Tromley (2012), agree that in as much as they have written on culture influence on the communication practices, they have not addressed the impact of communication practices and self-interest of the principals concern to ensure the outcome favours them and ensure they are in control and therefore, distorting the communication practices. This study, therefore, tried to unveil whether the principals communicate

effectively and efficiently to all the stakeholders. According to Watson Wyatt's Communication Survey for (2005), organizations that have effective communicators "have the courage to talk about what employees want to hear, redefine the employment deal based on changing circumstance and have effective discipline plan and measure their progress effectively". The study showed that these organizations had 47% higher return to stakeholders over a five-year period from 2012-2016. The intention of effective communication by the school administrators are to achieve integration of management practices of communication to all stakeholders in terms of the school mission, objectives and goals, and then adapt to the changing global environment that is dynamic, and failure results in conflicts that ultimately leads to student unrest.

According to Hoy and Miskes (2005), conceptualize school management practices in terms of dominant beliefs that teachers and principals' share about controlling students and their studies focused on student control with regard to both structural and normative aspects of the school management practices and describe antagonistic student sub-cultural and attendant conflicts. They concluded that student control and feedback had a significant effect on student achievement, which sometimes influence students' unrests if their expectations are not met. Suggestion systems also referred to as suggestion programs are those programs through which employees, students and support staff voice their recommendations. Educational institutions that operate this system benefit by getting the voice of its members in improving upward communication. No one knows their jobs better than front line employees who perform their jobs such as subject specialist. Through Suggestion Systems such as suggestion boxes, institutions gain valuable information on ways to improve their performance and cutting cost of operation. In addition, one key to a suggestion system success is how is to be administered. Effective system appears to have the following ingredients; they are open management, support involvement of all the employees and students at all levels, respect for the employees and students contributions and suggestions. A customized system ideally meets the specified needs of the institutions and the groups concerned and follows up on issues raised by groups in the institutions (Kemelgor, 2000).

However, Rich (2011), and Robbins (2012), have a contrary view that conflicts in schools encourage common understanding when they try to resolve conflict. Thus encouraging effective communication when school managers are trained in communication skills, have wide knowledge, skills acquired during training, give feedback to teachers, and student issues

that affect their lives. Noise of any kind that causes incomplete understanding necessitates the recipient to ‘fill in’ the gap based on their experience or cultural framework of their communication. This study concurs with the view that poor language skills have influenced student unrests in Meru County of Kenya. Principals who encourage two-way communication system by involving students in open forums, encouraging airing their grievances openly and planning change in a participative decision making system reduce conflicts in schools and students unrests.

Findings of this study concurs with the above studies that principals who encourage two-way communication, who listen to students issues, have good language skills, give feedback to teachers and students grievances and delegate power to handle discipline issues have positive reduction of conflicts and students unrests in Meru County. Good listening skills help improve interpersonal skills which reduce conflicts.

### **3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a mixed method approach methodology because it has both the qualitative and the quantitative aspects. Qualitative and quantitative data collection was carried concurrently. The choice of these methods was significant since it allowed the researcher to collect both qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously and allowed the use of quantitative standardized instruments or a qualitative theme analysis of interview data (a combination of both). The method was used because it enables the researcher to use the quantitative and qualitative approaches combined together and complementing each other. Qualitative data can be transformed into quantitative data and qualitative methods together and provides a more comprehensive understanding of the study problem than if the two approaches are used separately (Creswell, 2003) as cited by Almalki (2016).

### **4.0 FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

#### **4.1 Management of school students strikes (dependent variable)**

To get a background about students’ unrest management, the study inquired about whether the school had gone on strike the last four years, to the students who were the real participants in those strikes, when it occurred, and the behaviour exhibited by the students. The same information was sought from the County Education Officer.

The study findings on whether their school has ever gone on strike in the last four years between 2013 and 2016 show the following;

**Table 1: Has your school ever gone on strike in the last four years?**

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	187	99.5
No	1	.5
Total	188	100.0

Source: Researcher (2017)

Table 1 shows 99.5% (187) students responded that there were strikes in their schools in the last four years and about 1% responded that there was no strike in their school in the last four years. This was also supported by the information provided by the County Director of education who indicated, “*That in 2016 between January and June in Meru County, 66 secondary schools out of 192 targeted for the study went on strike*”. To establish the frequency of the incidents, the students were asked to indicate on which year the student unrest occurred. Students responded as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: When did the strike occur?**

	Frequency	Percent
2012	48	25.5
2013	40	21.3
2014	70	37.2
2015	30	16.0
Total	188	100.0

Source: Researcher (2017)

The findings in Table 2 from student respondents indicate that 26% (48) of strikes occurred in 2012, 21% (21) occurred in 2013, 37% (70) occurred in 2014 and 16% occurred in 2015. The conclusion of the study was that student strikes occurred in almost all schools in Meru county of Kenya in the last four years. On the kind of unacceptable behaviour did the students display during the strike the students responses are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Which unacceptable behaviour did students engaged in?**

	Frequency	Percent
Refused to attend class	47	25.0
Destroy school property	48	25.5
Refused food	73	38.8
Match out of school compound	20	10.6
Total	188	100.0

Source; Researcher 2017

The findings in Table 3 show 25% (47) of student respondent refused to attend classes, 25% (48) destroyed school property, 39% (73) refused to eat food and 11% (20) matched out of the school compound. The conclusion of the study was most students strikes was food related and in one quarter of the cases students destroyed school property.

**Table 4: Mean and Deviation**

	Mean	Std. Deviation
As your school ever gone for strike in the last four years	1.01	0.073
Unacceptable behaviour displayed	2.35	0.972

Source; Researcher 2017

In Table 4, all the responses fall below 1 standard deviation which indicates that students were almost unanimous that most students strikes are food related and in most Cases students refused to attend class, matched out of school compound and in a quarter of the cases destroyed school property.

### **4.3 To what extent do school communication practices influence students' unrests management in Meru County of Kenya? (Independent variable)**

#### **4.3.1 Descriptive Statistical Analysis**

The study examined the influence of communication practices influence on student unrest management in public and Secondary Schools with reference to management practices in

three levels i.e. descriptive statistics, thematic analysis and mixed interpretation of data was carried out. The findings are presented in the following subsections;

Descriptive frequency and percentages were used to establish the value of variables on a five points Likert scale. The researcher sought to answer the research questions on whether two-way communication practice was encouraged that is, whether schools held open discussion forums, expressed grievances openly, and whether principals discuss change with students, whether they had good at listening skills to issues that are affecting students, whether language skills were good, whether feed-back was provided, and whether there existed a suggestive system in the school.

#### 4.3.2 Influence of communication practices on students unrest management in Meru County.

**Table 5 Influence of communication practices on students' unrest management. (Principals' responses)**

Item		F	%
Do you hold dialogue with students?	Sometimes	5	29.4
	Often	7	41.2
	Always	5	29.4
	Total	17	100.0
Do you always listen to student issues?	Always	6	35.3
	Sometimes	2	11.8
	Never	9	52.9
	Total	17	100.0
Do you have good language skills?	Always	6	35.3
	Sometimes	4	23.5
	Never	7	41.2
	Total	17	100.0
Do you give feedback to student grievances?	Sometimes	5	29.4
	Rarely	7	41.2
	Always	5	29.4
	Total	17	100.0
Do you have a Suggestion system in your school?	Never	2	11.8
	Rarely	10	58.8
	Sometimes	3	17.6
	Often	1	5.9
	Always	1	5.9
	Total	17	100.0

Source: researcher (2017)

The findings in Table 5 indicate that 100% of the principal respondents agreed that dialogue between students is effective in enhancing discipline in various schools. The conclusion of the study was dialogue is one of the methods used by schools to enhance discipline in schools. Maslowski (2009) concurs with the research findings that schools which have strong participative culture that practice shared values) have teachers and students who are committed and follow negotiated routine that is likely to be more effective in achieving their goals. Rutters et al. (1979) as cited by Kakupa (2014) makes similar conclusion. The findings of this research are in agreement with similar findings by Bass and Avolio (2017) that principals have very big impact in the curriculum implementation process and in negotiating with interested parties/groups and also allocating human and financial resources in their schools

The findings in Table 5, principal respondents indicated that, 47% (8) agreed that they listen to student issues always or sometimes and 53% (9) said principals never listen to student issues. Watson Wyatt's communication survey for (2005), posits that organizations that have effective communicators "have the courage to talk about what employees want to hear, redefine the employment deal based on changing circumstance and have effective discipline plan and measure their progress effectively". The study showed that these organizations had 47% higher return to stakeholders over a five-year period from 2012 - 2016. The above findings are also supported by another study by Freshow(1989), working with performance systems internationally indicate that principals spend 70 percent of their time communicating, while it is estimated that over 30 percent of the principals time is devoted to listening, tests of listening suggest that these individual listen at 25 percent efficiency. Listening skills affect the quality of staff, students and support relationships in the workplace. The findings of this study indicate that most principals have no time for students, and this may influence students to strike in order to be listened to.

Data in Table 5 indicates that 59% (10) of principal responded that principals have good language skills and 41% (7) have poor language skills. The findings indicate almost half of the principals in sampled schools do not have good language skills. These views are similar to Lunenburg and Ornstein (2012) observation that communication entails the idea of information transfer. Information that originates in one part of a system is formulated into a message that is transmitted to another part of the system in the education system. Noise in the communication practices may be caused by incomplete understanding (gap) which the

recipient of the message “fill in” based on his experience with their cultural framework of communication, which may distort the message, cause misunderstanding, and sometimes influence students’ unrest in schools.

The findings in Table 5 indicate that 29.4% (5) of principals responded that principals always give feedback to student grievances, another 29.4% (5) give feedback sometimes and 41.2% (7) rarely do give feedback. The conclusion of the study was principals rarely give feedback. Maslowski (2009) concurs with the research findings that schools which have strong participative culture that practice shared values) have teachers and students who are committed and follow negotiated routine that is likely to be more effective in achieving their goals. Rutters *et al.* (1979) as cited by (Kakupa 2014) make a similar conclusion; Educational managers must have honest commitment to encourage two-way communications between themselves and students through effective communication where people get feedback on their contribution to the organization (Banks, 2010). Those schools, which rarely give feedback, suffer many conflicts which if unresolved lead to student unrest. This study findings concurs with the above studies that lack of feedback may influence students’ unrest in Meru secondary schools.

The findings in Table 5 indicates that 29% of the principal respondents supported that, use of suggestion box always, or sometimes help in enhancing discipline, 59% said that it rarely helps, and 12% said that suggestion box never help in enhancing discipline. The conclusion of the study was that, suggestion boxes were not useful in enhancing discipline in schools. This suggests that, suggestion boxes content follow up was lacking, but can be used as an informal way of screening student feelings.

The conclusion was that about half of the schools in Meru County use suggestion system to enhance communication in schools. Kemelgor (2000) posits that suggestion system, if administered properly, students and teachers can be involved in improving upward communication. This concurs with the above findings especially if the administration respects the students and teachers contributions and suggestions. Failure to respect the students and teachers contributions and suggestions may influence students’ unrest in Meru secondary schools.

**Table 6: School management communication process mean/std. deviation (Principals' respondents)**

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Do you hold dialogue with students?	4.00	.791
Do you always listen to student issues?	2.18	.951
Do you have good language skills?	2.06	.899
Do you give feedback to student grievances?	4.29	.772
Do you have a Suggestion system in your school?	2.35	.996

Source: Researcher (2017)

The variables analyzed in Table 6 lie below one standard deviation of the mean. This means that about 70% lie between one standard deviation of the mean and the group is thus homogenous which means the respondents have a similar opinion of the communication practices on student unrest management, at 95% confidence level ( $\sigma < 1$ ). The conclusion of the study was suggestion system is one of the methods used by schools to enhance effective communication in Schools. Maslowski (2009), concurs with the research findings that schools that have a strong participative culture that practice shared values have teachers and students who are committed and follow negotiated routine are likely to be more effective in achieving their goals. In addition, failure to achieve the goals may influence students' unrest in Meru secondary schools. Rutters *et al.* (1979) as cited by Kakupa (2014), makes a similar conclusion.

**Table 7 Influence of communication practices on students’ unrest management. (Discipline/ G and C masters/ mistresses responses)**

		Frequency	Percent
Inform parents/guardians on the students’ academic progress	Strongly disagree	1	2.7
	Disagree	4	10.8
	Undecided	1	2.7
	Agree	13	35.1
	Strongly Agree	18	48.6
	Total	37	100.0
Provide feedback to students	Disagree	3	8.1
	Agree	13	35.1
	Strongly agree	21	56.8
	Total	37	100.0
Implement school policy without consultation	Strongly disagree	8	21.6
	Disagree	5	13.5
	Undecided	6	16.2
	Agree	9	24.3
	Strongly Agree	9	24.3
	Total	37	100.0
Help each other to create open atmosphere where problems are discussed	Strongly Disagree	2	5.4
	Disagree	1	2.7
	Undecided	2	5.4
	Agree	13	35.1
	Strongly Agree	19	51.4
	Total	37	100.0

Source: Researcher (2017)

Data analyzed in Table 7 indicates that 84% of the respondents agree that principals inform parents/guardians on the students’ academic progress, 13% disagreed and a small percent of 3% were undecided. The study conclusion was that schools inform parents/guardians of students’ academic progress regularly.

Data analyzed in Table 7 shows that 92% G. & C. & Discipline agreed, 8% disagreed that the school provides feedback to students. The conclusion of the study was that almost all the schools provide feedback to students.

Findings in Table 7 indicate 49% of the respondents agreed principals implement school policy without consultation 35% disagreed and 16% were undecided that principals implement school policy without consultation. The conclusion was that most principals do consult when implementing school policy. In a study done by Freshow (1989), working with

performance systems international indicate that principals spend 70 per cent of their time communicating, more over the estimated that over 30 per cent of the principals time is devoted to listening, tests of listening suggest that these individual listen at 25 per cent efficiency. Listening skills affect the quality of staff, students and support relationships in the work place. Principals may be overburden by other responsibilities such that they may not have time to afford people individualised attention in solving their issues. The language of communication in a school speaks volumes about the school cultural practices for example, how staff dress, describe students, express anger and greet stakeholders and how co-workers relate. If the language is positive, the organization will have a positive image and vice versa.

Data in Table 7 show that 87% of the respondents agreed, 8% disagreed and 5% were undecided. The conclusion of the study was that teachers assist each other and create an atmosphere in which problems can be discussed.

**Table 8 Influence of communication practices on students’ unrest management Standard deviation.**

	Mean	Std. Dev.
Inform parents/guardians on the students’ academic progress	4.16	1.093
Provide feedback to students	4.41	.865
Implement school policy without consultation	3.16	1.500
Help each other to create open atmosphere where problems are discussed	4.24	1.065

The variables analyzed in Table 8 lie below one standard deviation of the mean. This means that about 70% lie between two standard deviation of the mean and the group is thus homogenous which means the respondents have a similar opinion of the communication practices on student unrest, at 95% confidence level ( $\sigma < 2$ ).

**Table 9: Influence of communication practices on students' unrest management.  
(Students' council's leaders)**

		Frequency	Percent
Does your school have open discussion with the head teacher every term?	Always	8	42.1
	Sometimes	4	21.1
	Rarely	4	21.1
	Never	2	10.5
	Total	18	94.7
	Missing system	1	5.3
	Total	19	100.0
Does your school have dialogue between students and school management?	Never	1	5.3
	Rarely	4	21.1
	Sometimes	7	36.8
	Often	2	10.5
	Always	4	21.1
	Total	18	94.7
	System	1	5.3
Total	19	100.0	
Does your school have clear channels of communication?	Strongly disagree	7	36.8
	Disagree	6	31.6
	Undecided	2	10.5
	Agree	1	5.3
	Strongly Agree	2	10.5
	Total	18	94.7
	System	1	5.3
	Total	19	100.0
Does your school management have good human relations?	Strongly Disagree	7	36.8
	Disagree	8	42.1
	Undecided	1	5.3
	Agree	1	5.3
	Strongly Agree	1	5.3
	Total	18	94.7
	System	1	5.3
	Total	19	100.0
Does your school have a suggestion box?	Never	9	47.4
	Sometimes	4	21.1
	Often	4	21.1
	Always	1	5.3
	Total	18	94.7
	System	1	5.3
	Total	19	100.0

Findings presented in Table 9, show that 63% of the respondents held discussions and 31% rarely or never held regular discussion. This indicates that there is lack of effective communication. The findings in Table 9 shows that dialogue is used to enhance discipline in schools at 68% and 26% responded rarely and never. The conclusion of the study is that dialogue is used to enhance discipline in schools.

Data analyzed in Table 9 shows that 68% of the respondents agreed that unclear channel of communication influence indiscipline, 16% disagreed and 11% were undecided. The study concluded that poor communication was one of the major sources of student indiscipline in secondary schools in Meru county of Kenya.

The findings in data analyzed in Table 9 indicate that 79% of the respondents agreed that poor human relations bring indiscipline, 11% disagreed and 5% were not decided. The study conclusion was majority of students went on strike due to poor human relations. According to Gordon (1957); Coleman (1961); Willower and Jones (1967), as cited in Hoy and Miskes (2005), conceptualize school administrative practices in terms of dominant beliefs that teachers, and principals' share about controlling students, and their studies focused on student control with regard to both structural, and normative aspects of the school administrative practices. They also describe antagonistic student sub-cultural and attendant conflicts. They concluded that student control orientation had significant effect on student achievement. Schools with custodial orientation had significant greater teacher disengagement, lower morale and experienced close supervision by the principals leading to conflicts and students unrests. Schools that had humanistic open systems had higher achievement as a result of staff members and student motivation, and experienced less student conflicts

**Table 10: Influence of communication practices on students' unrest standard deviation (students' council's leaders)**

	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Does your school have open discussion with the head teacher every term?	19	2.16	.898
Does your school have dialogue between students and school management?	19	3.74	1.368
Does your school have clear channels of communication?	19	3.32	1.635
Does your school management have good human relations?	19	1.47	.612
Does your school have a suggestion box?	19	2.89	1.370

The variables analyzed in Table 10 lie below one standard deviation of the mean. This means that about 70% lie between two standard deviation of the mean and the group is thus homogenous which means the respondents have a similar opinion of the communication practices on students' unrest management, at 95% confidence level ( $\sigma < 2$ ).

Do you encourage two-way communication practices? (Form 4 respondents)

**Table 11: Discussion/ forums (form 4 students)**

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	135	71.8
No	53	28.2
Total	188	100.0

Source: Researcher (2017)

The findings in Table 11 shows 71.8% (135) of students' responded that principal of Meru County Schools hold open discussion forum with head teachers, and 28.2% (53) of the respondents indicate that some schools never hold open discussions/forum with the head teachers. The conclusion of the study was majority of the head teachers organize for discussions/forum with students. Also almost one third of the schools do not hold open discussions/forum with students. In addition, failure to hold open discussions/forum with students may influence students' unrest in Meru secondary schools.

**Table 12: How often do you hold open discussions (form 4 students)**

	Frequency	Percent
Always	30	16.0
Sometimes	122	64.9
Rarely	26	13.8
No	10	5.3
Total	188	100.0

Source: Researcher (2017)

The findings in Table 12 indicate that 16% of students' responded that principal of Meru County Schools always hold open discussions and open forum with their students, 65% sometimes, 14% rarely, and 5% never hold any open discussions/forum with students. The study findings differs with some conclusion made by Wangeri (1986) as cited by Redempta (2010), that school rules are made by the head teacher, the deputy head teacher and staff members only, and this reduced conflicts and student unrests.

**Table 13 Principal School management communication practices mean/std. deviation (students)**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. deviation</b>
Discussion/ forums	188	.451	.033
How often	188	.711	.052

Source: Researcher (2017)

The variables analyzed in Table 13 lie below one standard deviation of the mean. This means that about 70% lie between one standard deviation of the mean and the group is thus homogenous which means the respondents have a similar opinion of the communication practices on students' unrest management, at 95% confidence level ( $\sigma < 1$ )

**Table 14: Chi-square on influence of communication practices on students' unrest in Meru County**

	<b>Value</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)</b>
Pearson Chi-Square	4.504 <sup>a</sup>	4	.342
Likelihood Ratio	5.784	4	.216
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.221	1	.269
N of Valid Cases	17		

a. 9 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .24.

Based on Chi-Square results, the obtained chi-square value for; listening to students, language skills, opportunity to offer feedback, and suggestions systems was less than 0.5 indicating that the observed frequencies for all the variables would be significantly different from what you would expect to get by chance.

Thus, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis that there is no significant influence on communication practices on students' unrest management in public secondary Schools in Meru County and accepted the H<sub>1</sub> alternative hypothesis that communication practices influence students' unrest in public Secondary Schools in Meru County. Therefore the study conclusion was that, there is significant influence between communication practices and student unrest in public secondary Schools in Meru County of Kenya, a chi-square test statistic was carried out, with hypothesis tested at 95% level of significance

### **Thematic Analysis and Interpretation**

Under this section, the researcher analysed interview information from the County Educational Officer based on whether management communication practices influence students' unrest in public secondary schools in Meru County of Kenya. Specifically the variables guiding the study were whether management encourage two way communication, listen to student issues, whether management give feedback to student grievances and whether the schools has a suggestion system where creativity of the students can be captured. Thematic analysis was carried out, focused on responses from the interview schedule.

The CEO opinion on students unrest, when they occur and what influences students unrest.

*"I have been a teacher for 15 years and County Education Officer for seven years and I have witnessed many students' unrests. This year alone this office has recorded 66 students unrest some of them violent, and burning of school property. Student unrests occur at night and over the weekend when many teachers are not in the compound. The main factors that influence student unrest are; embezzlement of funds, fear of mock examinations, poor food, harsh school rules and lack of funds to finance sports and athletics (County Education Officer, 2016).*

Respondents' opinion on communication practices influence on students' unrest management responded that,

*"Effective communication practices means, using all types of communication in the School environment; upward, downward lateral and non-verbal communication to pass messages or information to staff members, students and all other stakeholders in the School community"(County Education Officer, 2016).*

Do principals listen to student grievances? The CEO responded that,

*"Reports that reach us when students disrupt school activities during strikes indicate that principals implement school policies without consulting students and there has been issues with high handedness (County Education Officer, 2016).*

On the language used by school authority, the CEO responded that,

*"Principals who head multi-cultural schools lack language skills to address diversity in schools. Schools that have high Muslim student presence have issues concerning the use of language that is discriminative. (County Education Officer, 2016).*

On feedback concerning student grievances, the CEO responded that,

*“Many cases of student unrest resulted from a lack of follow up and lack of feedback. These two issues build up tension in students and sometimes student perceptions of discrimination or unfair treatment trigger student unrest (County Education Officer, 2016).*

What has your office done to mitigate against lack of effective communication? Further, the CEO responded,

*“That most Schools have arrangements to have at least two Schools assemblies per week, two staff meetings per term, one academic day, and one parent annual general meeting” (County Education Officer, 2016).*

On communication between County Education Officer and Schools, the CEO responded that,

*“The office of the county director of education is in constant communication with telephone, circulars and monthly reports” (County Educational Officer, 2016).*

On feedback of student grievances, the CEO responded that,

*“senders of the message seek to have common understanding of the information or the message, beliefs and values which are both explicit and implicit in Schools through training or information passed on by policy documents and good behaviour practices and there are various communication techniques that are approved in Schools both verbal and non-verbal” (County Education Officer, 2016).*

### **Mixing of data and interpretation**

The study established the significance of the various variables concerning communication practices in schools and it was concluded that principals are effective communicators to the members of the staff and students. However, principals do not give students an opportunity to express their grievances freely, and also they fail to hold open discussions regularly. The student respondents expressed different opinions as far as effective communication practices are concerned. The respondents indicated that principals do not give feedback and are not accorded freedom to air their grievances openly, while Guidance and Counselling masters/mistresses indicated that principals give clear direction and explain the need for change to students and staff members

The impression I got from the County Education Officer was she was generally concerned about learning in Meru County. She even came up with strategies of improving effective communication to school by organizing open day discussions during prize giving days in six sub counties although misunderstandings occur in schools.

Lunenberg and Ornstein (2012) posits that one reason why received message may not be identical to the transmitted one is that all communication channels contribute to some degree of noise (any undesired signal) to the signal. In addition “Noise”, in school management communication practices, is caused by incomplete understanding, or poor listening skills. A (gap), which the recipient of the message “fill in” is based on their experience in the culture of their community, which may lead to misunderstanding hence influencing students’ unrests in schools.

### **How do the school management decision-making practices influence student unrest management in Meru County of Kenya? (Independent variable)**

#### **Descriptive Statistical Analysis**

The second objective was to assess the extent to which school management practices contributes to students’ unrest. To achieve this, the principals, the discipline and guidance and counselling master/mistresses were asked to comment on school management decision-making practices that were suspected to contribute to student strike.

The study examined the decision-making practices and its influence on students’ unrest in public secondary schools, with reference to school management practices under three levels, namely: descriptive statistics, thematic analysis and mixed method interpretation of data. The findings are presented in the subsequent tables. The findings are based on analysis of variable indicators; A list of management styles was provided in the principals questionnaire to rank the extent to which they were used by principals. They are; Do principals explain the need to Change and help them to See Logic Rationale for Change. (Democratic style in decision-making), Do principals force employees to accept change by use of threats. (Directive style in decision-making), Do principals allow staff to participate in the change process by discussing issues affecting them. (Participative style in decision-making), and Do principals offer additional incentives for compliance to staff and students. (Collaborative decision-making). In addition, a list of management styles was provided in the Discipline and G&C Masters/Mistresses questionnaire to rank the extent to which they were used by principals.

## **5.1 CONCLUSIONS**

### **School management communication practices and its influence on students' unrest management in Meru County of Kenya**

Sometimes highly organized, sometimes-haphazard communication happens all the time. Principals and teachers should improve communication quality by being open, honest and accessible to everybody. This can be done by encouraging two-way communication contacts by moving to where the teachers and students are attending official and informal activities, reducing bureaucracy by keeping it to a minimum and using different media, one channel of communication is never enough, the more they are the better. The use of team meetings that occur more often must have a purpose and must keep people informed of the School progress in achieving set goals. Minutes, and meetings Agendas should be circulated to staff members well in advance before meetings. The principal should endeavour to listen to everybody and commitment of employees, staff and students. This can be done by meeting their key needs, paying attention to all people at all levels, tolerating individuality and creating a blame-free atmosphere where people are appreciated and valued. Staff, students and principals should use language that is civil, recognise dominant values in their community, are given feedback on grievances through formal and informal interactions.

## **6.1 RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER STUDIES**

- i. Further research is recommended on informal communication often referred to as grapevine to determine how they influence students' unrest in Schools.

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