

**The relationship between Enrolment age of pupils and head teachers' management of pupil discipline in public primary schools in Kisii Sub-County, Kenya.**

Obonyo Duke Dubeniberg<sup>1</sup> Dr Emily Nyabisi<sup>2</sup> Juniter Kwamboka Moku<sup>3</sup>

Mt Kenya University Mt Kenya University Huanzhong University

**Correspondent Author's Email:** dukeobonyo@yahoo.com

***Abstract:***

*Management of discipline by head teachers in public primary schools is an impetus in increasing efficiency and effectiveness in the schools. This paper sought to establish the relationship between enrolment age of pupils and head teachers' management of pupil discipline in public primary schools in the Kisii Sub-County. Three objectives guided the study: To explore indiscipline issues prevalent in public primary schools in the County, to establish if there was variations in enrolments ages of grade 8 pupils in the Sub-County and lastly, to examine the relationship between the enrolment age of pupils and head teachers management of pupils discipline in the Kisii Central Sub-County. Mixed methods and descriptive research design were used in the study. A sample of 41 head teachers was drawn from the 118 schools in the Sub-County schools using proportionate stratified sampling. A questionnaire was used to collect data from the 41 head teachers in line with the stated objectives while an interview schedule was used to collect qualitative data from 4 Education Quality Assurance officers (TAC Tutors). Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS version while qualitative data was analyzed thematically. Lateness to school, chronic absenteeism, fighting and bullying were found to be the most prevalent indiscipline issues in public primary schools in the Sub-County. The study also found out that indeed there was a variation in average age of grade 8 pupils from schools to school with rural schools recording high proportion of overage pupils than urban schools. OLS regression was used to establish the relationship between*

*average age of grade 8 pupils and the composite variable representing level of discipline in the school, and it was established that every unit increase in age of grade 8 pupils increased their propensity of being involved in indiscipline cases by 0.035 units. The study concluded that the government should strengthen policies that promote entry of pupils with the required schooling age to schools even in the wake of FPE.*

**Key Words:** Enrolment age, Head teachers' management, Discipline, Free Education.

## **1. Introduction**

Management of discipline in public schools is a key determinant of efficiency and effectiveness in school systems. Without discipline an organization cannot function well towards the achievement of its set goals and objectives (Akoth, 2012). Throughout the world, cases of student indiscipline have been on the rise with pupils' rebellion against establishment authority has occurring in every country with significant increase and intensity (Otieno, 2004). In United Kingdom, more than 2000 primary school Pupils were suspended in 2009 as principals struggled to cope with the surge in violent and unruly pupils (Mucmahron, 2009). In Kenya, cases of pupils discipline have been reported to be on the rise with the inception of free primary education. Among the reported cases of discipline include: pupil lateness to schools, use of vernacular languages in schools, chronic absenteeism, theft, fighting, vandalism of school property, fighting, various incidents of drug abuse etc. The no restriction laws on enrolment have been cited to be a major contributor of influx of pupils from different backgrounds to schools. Abuya, Admassu, Ngware, Onsomu, and Oketch (2015), noted that the enrolment guidelines from the ministry of education restrict head teachers' from conducting placement tests as well as vetting pupils previous discipline before enrolling them into schools. The enrolment guidelines have been cited to have contributed to enrolment of both underage and overage pupils into schools, however little evidence exists on the implication of the existence of both underage and overage pupils in schools on head teachers' management of discipline in public primary schools.

## **2. Literature Review**

Pupils discipline has been defined as the tendency of pupils to conform to set rules, regulation and norms within and without the school learning environment (Bush, 1995). This conformity is situational and will depend on a number of factors within and outside school. The within school

factors which determine pupils discipline range from quality of school climate, nature of school based management, quality of teaching and learning, location of the school and school based policies governing reward and punishment(Duflo, Dupas, & Kremer, 2015). Discipline is an important component of human behavior. It helps in regulating people's reaction to various situations. Without discipline different subsets of an organization will not function in harmony and as such, the organization will not realize its set goals and objectives.

Global literature cites a number of pupil level factors that affect pupils discipline in learning environments. These factors differ in magnitude and effect depending on the category of learning institutions. The social economic status of pupils contributes immensely to various discipline outcomes of pupils(Bush, 1999). According to Bush (1999),pupils from low economic status have a high propensity of being involved in various discipline cases in schools because of lack of proper parental guidance and involvement in pupils learning. Low social economic status families have been associated with normlessness due to weal facility structures (Asuga, Eacott, & Scevak, 2015).

Another pupil level factor influencing pupils discipline is gender. Research alludes that while controlling for other pupil background factors, boys are more prone to discipline cases than girls but this gets mirrored as pupils age and social economic status is factored in(C Colclough, Packer, Ellis, Van Ravens, & Barry, 2003). School entry age though endogenous, is a factor with long lasting effects on pupil's outcomes. According to Heckman (2000), "early learning begets later learning and early success breeds later success just as early failure breeds later failure". This implies that pupils enrolling schools at an earlier age learn better than those who enter at a later age. In terms of discipline, Heckman (2000) alludes that pupils with the right school going age tend to have high participation and schooling rates. The pupils tend to be more responsive to school rules and regulation and are more adaptive to school environments than older pupils. Educational system may exacerbate the effects of student entry age to grade level schooling through grade retention. Grade retention with minimal improvement on student achievement scores may be retrogressive to both the learner and the education system. Evidence alludes that grade retention affects pupil schooling age and discipline. Pupils who forced to repeat grades quite often indulge in various discipline issues as a form of compensation or projection (Cheruto & Benjamin, 2010).

However, many studies have offered mixed findings on the implication of pupils enrolment age on student discipline and ultimate academic achievement(C Colclough et al., 2003; Hungi, Ngware, &

Abuya, 2014). A study by Hungi et al. (2014) found out that since the inception of free primary education in Kenya, urban informal settlement public schools and those in rural communities have been witnessing a surge on enrolment of both underage and overage pupil. As per Hungi et al. (2014), this surge was as a result ministry of education policy guidelines on enrolment restricting head teachers from administering entry tests (for placement of pupils into various grades), turning away pupils who apply for enrolment in any grade on grounds of previous discipline issues or absence of previous achievement test results

As per the education act of 2013, it's the sole responsibility of head teachers in public primary to manage discipline of teachers and pupils in their schools. As per the 2013 education act, Pupils discipline issues range from chronic absenteeism, truancy to any deviation from the laid down school rules and regulation. The policy offers guidelines to head-teachers on how various offences committed by pupils should be punished. The policy abolished expulsion and corporal punishment restricting head teachers to use more proactive and student friendly measures of combating student indiscipline (Basic education Act, 2013). Many studies on student discipline have only focused on the causes of pupil's indiscipline in public primary schools since the inception of FPE and the challenges head teachers are facing in managing discipline in public primary schools in Kenya. It is imperative therefore for this study to try to establish if there is any effect of both overage and underage pupils on head teachers' management of pupil discipline in public primary schools in Kenya

### **3. Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study was to assess the effect of enrolment age on head teachers' management of pupil discipline in public primary schools in Kisii County. To address the purpose, three objectives were formulated as follows:

- (i). To explore types of discipline issues inherent within various public primary schools in the sub-county.
- (ii). To establish if there are variations on enrolment age amongst pupils across various public primary schools in the county
- (iii). To assess the relationship between age of pupils and head teachers management of pupils discipline in public primary schools in the sub-County.

#### 4. Methodology

The study utilized mixed method approach of qualitative and quantitative nature. A questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data from a sample of 41 teachers while an interview schedule was used to collect data from a sample of 4 TAC tutors. Both head teachers and TAC tutors were sampled through proportionate stratified sampling. Data was cleaned, coded and analyzed using SPSS version 22. The Ordinary least square (OLS) regression was used to establish the effect of enrollment age on level of pupil discipline.

#### 5. Results and discussions

This section addressed the above three objectives to the study. In addressing these objectives, it was vital to examine the demographic aspects of the head teachers who are managing public primary schools with respect to age and experience. This was imperative in minimizing errors associated with associating head teachers' school management capacity and pupil's discipline.

The study revealed that 36.6 % (15/41) of the head teachers had between 2-4 years of experience, 24.4% (10/41) of the head teachers had between 5-7 years, 4.9% (2/41) had between 8-10 years while 34.2% (14/41) had over 10 years' experience.

*Table 1 Years of experience of head teachers*

No. of Years	Frequency	Percentage
2-4	15	36.6
5-7	10	24.4
8-10	2	4.9
Above 10	14	34.1
	<b>41</b>	<b>100</b>

A study by Akoth (2012) on problems faced by head teachers in managing public primary schools found out that head teachers with more years of working experience experienced minimal challenges in managing school finances and pupil discipline. Therefore in estimating the implication of pupils' enrolment age on head teachers' capacity of managing pupils' discipline. It's vital to bear

in mind that the effects of the enrolment age may be insignificant in schools where head teachers' have more years of experience. With respect to age, majority of the head teachers (44%) were between 45-55 years, 30% were between the ages of 35-44 years while 26% were less than 35 years of age. The same study by Akoth (2012) intimated that young and middle aged head teachers experienced minimal discipline issues in their schools due to their ability to resonate well with pupils.

### 5.1. Indiscipline cases inherent in public primary schools.

The first objective of the study sought to explore indiscipline cases inherent in various primary schools in the sub-county. An analysis of the quantitative data collected from head teachers revealed the following indiscipline issues being experienced by head teachers in public primary schools in the county

*Table 2. Indiscipline cases inherent in public primary schools*

<b>Indiscipline incidences</b>	<b>Number of cases</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Lateness	7	17
Chronic absenteeism	6	15
Fighting	5	13
Truancy	3	9
Bullying	4	10
Vandalism to school property	2	7
Petty theft/stealing	3	8
Use of vernacular	4	11
Illicit sexual relationships	2	6
Drug and substance abuse	2	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>100</b>

From the table 2 above, pupil's lateness was the most prevalent form of indiscipline (17%) experienced by head teachers in public primary schools. One of the reasons offered by head teachers concerning the rampant cases of pupil lateness was the distance of schools from pupils' households where majority of pupils have to engage on some household chores before they travel long distances to attend schools. A study by Achoka, Odebero, Maiyo, and Mualuko (2007) found

out that majority of public primary schools are not accessible by pupils and as such, many pupils travel several kilometers to access schooling.

Chronic absenteeism was another prevalence indiscipline issue in public primary schools in the sub-county (15%). One of the reasons offered by head teachers concerning the level of absenteeism was extraneous costs of free education and child labor. The same study by Achoka et al. (2007) revealed that most pupils from rural public primary schools were victims of child labor which interfered with their schooling. Majority had to engage on income generating activities so as to raise extra incomes to vent their families as well as meet extraneous costs of free education.

Another form of indiscipline revealed by this study was fighting (14%) and bullying (10%). The two related vices may be prevalent because of heterogeneous pupil's population with respect to age where the school population may be having both old and young pupils. Research has revealed that older pupils normally bully the younger counterparts and that girls are normally bullied by boys in mixed sex primary schools (Christopher Colclough, Rose, & Tembon, 2000)

The use of vernacular was also prevalently reported by head teachers (11%) in many public primary schools in the sub-county. The vice could be common in these schools as a result of its rural location where pupils use vernacular as a language of instruction in their homes. Another form of indiscipline cited in the study was petty theft or stealing (8%) where head teachers reported a new wave of theft of school textbooks by pupils who normally sell them to private textbook vendors in the streets. In summary, many indiscipline cases were cited by head teachers as shown in table 2 above. Therefore there was need to explore whether there was variation in grade specific enrolment ages and its implications.

## 5.2. Variations on grade level enrolments ages amongst pupils in the schools

As per the Kenyan ministry of education, the right school going age for pupils is 6-13 years for primary schooling and 4-6 years for pre-school education. This objective specifically sought to find out if there was a variation in grade level enrolment age among grade 8 public primary schools pupils and its implication on head teacher management of pupil discipline. The response from head teachers was that almost all the grades in each school had both underage and overage pupils. In terms of rural-urban divide, rural schools had more overage pupils than urban schools whereas urban schools had more underage pupils. For more clarity on the aspect of enrolment age, several

items on age related aspects of enrolment were presented to head teachers and the results were as follows.

**Table 3: Age related aspects of enrolled pupils.**

<i>Statement on age related issues of pupils</i>	<i>Head teachers responses</i>		
	Agree	undecided	Disagree
School admits students with no age restriction	82	8	10
Schools are under obligation to enroll pupils who appears for admission	91	2	7
Most pupils admitted to this school are from low SES	61	12	27
School admits pupils without vetting their previous discipline records	74	4	12
School admits pupils without regard to their previous academic records	61	13	26
School admits teenage mothers into mainstream classes	92	7	1

As per the findings shown in table 3 above, majority of head teachers agreed that they admit any pupil who presents himself or herself for enrolment (91%) without vetting prior behavior or academic performance. 82% of head teachers reported that they admit pupils with no age restriction while 61% of head teachers reported that majority of the pupils they admitted were from low SES. Of key interest to this study, majority of head teachers (74%) admitted pupils without vetting their previous discipline records especially if they seeking admission to upper primary. This four findings concur with the findings of Orodho, Waweru, Ndichu, and Nthinguri (2013) who blamed the whole fiasco to the basic education Act number 14 of 2013. The primary education system is still experiencing a surge in enrolment of teenage mothers especially into mainstream classes with 92% admitting doing so perhaps in conformity with the new guidelines on inclusive education.



### 5.3. Relationship between age at enrolment and discipline incidents in the schools.

Objective three was geared towards finding effect of enrolment age on head teacher's management of discipline in public primary schools in the sub county. To address this objective, the study began by establishing a composite variable for the level of discipline in each school. The variable encompassed all the discipline variables listed in 'objective one' of this paper and the new composite variable was abbreviated as 'level of discipline'. Grade 8 pupils' average age was calculated based on the official birth documents submitted to the Kenya National Examination Council and was recorded on a continuous scale. For unbiased estimation of the effect of enrolment age of pupils on their level of discipline, an ordinary least square regression (OLS) model was constructed as follows:

$$Y = \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \epsilon$$

Where,  $Y$  represents the outcome variable 'level of pupils' indiscipline',  $X_1$  represents a continuous variable 'Average age of grade 8 pupils' and  $\epsilon$  is the error term representing other variables not included in the model that influence pupils discipline. The results from the OLS regression was as shown in table 4 below.

Table 4. Ordinary least square regression between pupil indiscipline and age.

		Coefficients <sup>a</sup>				
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	7.849	2.553		3.074	.004
	Age of pupils	.032	.468	.030	.173	.044
	Gender(Boy)	.017	.568	.199	1.189	.032
	classroom size	.011	.042	.044	.261	.025

a. Dependent Variable: pupil indiscipline

Implying that every unit increase in age of grade eight pupils, significantly increases pupils' level of indiscipline by 0.035 units. However, when gender of pupils was factored into the model, the effect of age of pupils reduced significantly to 0.032 and that of dummy variable 'boy' being 0.017 implying that every increase in pupils population by one boy, increases the propensity of experiencing pupils indiscipline by 0.017 units; thus suggesting that in public primary schools in Kenya, boys have high probability of being involved in indiscipline cases than girls. This study

therefore established that indeed age of pupils is affecting their level of discipline in public primary schools with boys having high propensity than girls. This findings concur with those of Wachira, Mwenda, Muthaa, and Mbugua (2011), who found that the presence of both overage and underage pupils was hindering head teachers in managing pupils discipline where older pupils were bullying younger pupils. However, this results should be interrupted carefully without implying that every overage pupil in a school is indiscipline.

## **Conclusions**

This paper sought to assess the various indiscipline issues inherent in public primary schools and if indeed there was any variation in those cases from school to school in relation to pupils average enrolment age. The study established that the nature and magnitude of various indiscipline cases differed from school to school especially within the rural and urban divide. Among the indiscipline issues that were rampant in the sampled schools was lateness to school, chronic absenteeism, fighting and bullying. Theft of textbooks was also reported in most schools as one of the upcoming threat to the free textbook policy in public primary schools. The responses from the head teachers hinted that since the inception of FPE, enrolment guidelines have imposed obstacles in managing pupils' discipline. The head teachers have no authority of refusing to enroll a pupil on grounds of previous achievement scores or discipline records. In administering punishment to pupils, the education act of 2013 abolished corporal punishment and raised the bar in standards for expelling a pupil leaving head teachers with minimal choices in sanctioning indiscipline issues. It's quite evident that late entry of pupils to schools negatively impacts on their level of discipline thus posing a big a challenge in many head teachers in managing discipline in schools.

The preschools policy in Kenya prohibits pupils from enrolling in preschools before the government stipulated age of four years. The strengthen this policy, the Kenya National Examination Council has insisted that no pupils who is less than 17 years of age will be allowed to sit for the Kenya Certificate of primary education. Nevertheless, this efforts have been fruitless since many education practitioners argue that the policies are obstacles in increasing access to education in the wake of universal education for all. In conclusion therefore, the government should strengthen the guidelines on compulsory preschools where no pupil whether in public or private school should be enrolled earlier than the stipulated age of fours. The ban on grade retention should also be reinforced to ensure no pupils will be compelled to repeat in any class since the presence of both overage and underage pupils in the schools has now posed a challenge of managing discipline by head teachers

in many public primary schools in Kenya. Lastly, there is need for more research to be carried out on the effective strategies that head teachers should use in administering discipline in public primary schools in Kenya in the wake of free primary education especially with the envisaged implementation of the new education curriculum.

## **REFERENCES**

- Abuya, B. A., Admassu, K., Ngware, M., Onsomu, E. O., & Oketch, M. (2015). Free primary education and implementation in Kenya: the role of primary school teachers in addressing the policy gap. *Sage Open*, 5(1), 2158244015571488.
- Achoka, J., Odebero, S. O. J. K. M., Maiyo, O. J. K., & Mualuko, N. J. (2007). Access to basic education in Kenya: Inherent concerns. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 2(10), 275.
- Akoth, S. A. (2012). *Problems faced by primary school head teachers in implementing free primary education (FPE) in Kisumu Municipality Kenya*.
- Asuga, G., Eacott, S., & Scevak, J. (2015). School leadership preparation and development in Kenya: Evaluating performance impact and return on leadership development investment. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 29(3), 355-367.
- Bush, T. (1995). *Theories of educational management*: Paul Chapman Educational Publishing.
- Bush, T. (1999). Crisis or crossroads? The discipline of educational management in the late 1990s. *Educational Management & Administration*, 27(3), 239-252.
- Cheruto, K. L., & Benjamin, K. W. (2010). Management challenges facing implementation of free primary education in Kenya: A case of Keiyo District. *International Journal of Educational Administration and Policy Studies*, 2(5), 71-76.
- Colclough, C., Packer, S., Ellis, S., Van Ravens, J., & Barry, U. (2003). Gender and education for all. The leap to equality. Summary report.
- Colclough, C., Rose, P., & Tembon, M. (2000). Gender inequalities in primary schooling: The roles of poverty and adverse cultural practice<sup>1</sup>The work presented in this paper is part of a research programme on Gender and Primary Schooling in Africa, directed by Christopher Colclough. The first phase of this programme was conducted in three African countries, under the auspices of the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation. 1. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 20(1), 5-27.
- Duflo, E., Dupas, P., & Kremer, M. (2015). School governance, teacher incentives, and pupil–teacher ratios: Experimental evidence from Kenyan primary schools. *Journal of public economics*, 123, 92-110.

- Hungi, N., Ngware, M., & Abuya, B. (2014). Examining the impact of age on literacy achievement among grade 6 primary school pupils in Kenya. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 39, 237-249.
- Orodho, J. A., Waweru, P. N., Ndichu, M., & Nthinguri, R. (2013). Basic education in Kenya: Focus on strategies applied to cope with school-based challenges inhibiting effective implementation of curriculum. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 1(11), 1-20.
- Wachira, C., Mwenda, E., Muthaa, G., & Mbugua, Z. (2011). Impact of free primary education on management of primary schools in Embu west district in Kenya. *International Journal of Business, Humanities and Technology*, 1(2).