

Teachers Actions to Curb Homosexuality Activities in Secondary Schools in Nakuru County, Kenya

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Abstract

Teachers are charged with the responsibility of maintaining discipline in schools but at the same time be cognisant of disciplinary actions that would make school environment unfriendly. Unfriendly school environments impact negatively on students' learning. This study investigated actions teachers take against students who get caught up in disciplinary cases involving homosexual activities in school. Bandura's social learning theory informed this study and *ex-post facto* research design was used. Accessible population was approximately 35,000 form four students in public secondary schools within Nakuru County. Participating students were selected through purposive and stratified random sampling and 400 form four students participated in the study. A students' questionnaire was used to collect data and the instrument's reliability was estimated using Cronbach's alpha, a reliability coefficient of 0.763 was obtained. The questionnaire was validated by two experts from school of Education, Laikipia University, Kenya. Data was analysed qualitatively using percentages, frequency counts and graphs with assistance of Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 at $\alpha=.05$. Majority of the students (76.5%) observed that sexual orientation is an issue of concern in their schools and teachers used various strategies to maintain discipline in school as far as inappropriate sex and sexuality behaviours were concerned. The study recommended in-service training of teachers with regard to sex and sexuality education issues encountered in schools as well as strengthening guidance and counselling strategies.

Keywords: Disciplinary actions, homosexual activities, homo-phobic school environments, learning outcomes.

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INTRODUCTION

Sexual orientation is a person's sense of identity based on romantic attractions, related behaviour and membership in a community of others who share those attractions [1]. Firestein [2] goes further and describes sexual orientation as a characteristic pattern of sexual behaviour which ranges along a continuum from androphilia (male-male attraction/gayism), male-female attraction/heterosexuality, attractions to both sexes/bisexuality and gynephilia (female to female attraction/lesbianism). Human sexual orientation is a result of a complex interplay of biology and environmental influences (socialization), an acquired trait or a learnt behaviour depending on the individuals a child interacts or socializes with [3]. Pepper and Kramer [4] concur that complex interaction between genetic makeup and the environment may be responsible for an individual's sexual orientation.

In most cases, teachers have to step in or else children would have to manoeuvre this tough terrain on their own [5]. Paternal absence has also been linked

with adolescent risky sexual behaviour including confusion about sexual orientation among the adolescents [6] and there is no better option than skilled teachers in the area of sex and sexuality studies since teachers spend most of the time of the year with these adolescents in schools. Teachers' disciplinary actions against non-heterosexual students can lead to unfriendly school environment, a case that is common in the world [7]. In a study involving young Australian students, Pallota-chiarolli reported that non-heterosexual students described classrooms as hostile environment due to the tendency by the teachers to use /tell stereotyped jokes which to the students were demeaning (homophobic classes). This scenario impacted negatively on attitude towards learning in school despite the fact that a schools is a place where children spend most of their time more than anywhere else [8].

In connection to this scenario of homophobic class environment Kodero, Misigo, Owino & Mucherah [9] reported rampant sex and sexuality related incidences among secondary school students in Western

Kenya and noted that teachers acted promptly by expelling and suspending students who contravened school rules. Ouko [10] also noted that students are usually sent away (expulsion) from Kenya’s secondary school because of engaging in any sexual activities and bullying, whether homosexual or otherwise. This led to loss of learning time and consequently a decline in achievement.

In view of the 2006 study findings by Pallota-Chiarolli that unfriendly school environments are common world over, the current study focused on the school environment that is; classroom, the teachers and the students since all are players and game changers in this case. It has also been noted that heterosexism and homophobia are common in schools yet sex and sexuality education concerns remain invisible in teacher education contexts [11]. This study sought to find out students’ suggestions on how teachers settle any cases involving homosexual activities discipline cases apart from the conventional methods (suspension and expulsion) which lead to loss of school time and definitely affects achievement.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study were:

1. To investigate if sexual orientation is an issue of concern in secondary schools in Nakuru County, Kenya.
2. To find out how teachers deal with students who engage in homosexuality activities in secondary schools in Nakuru County, Kenya.

Research Questions

The study sought answers the following research questions:

RQ1: Is sexual orientation an issue of concern in secondary schools in Nakuru County, Kenya?

RQ2: How do teachers deal with students who engage in homosexual activities in secondary schools in Nakuru County

Kenya?

Theoretical Framework

Bandura’s social learning theory proposes that people’s environment (surroundings) causes people to behave in certain ways [12]. Similarly, Rotter [13] postulated that behaviour is influenced by environmental factors or stimulus, an observation also supported by Jeronimus, Riese, Sanderman & Ormel

[14]. The link of Bandura’s social learning theory to this study is that disciplinary actions taken by teachers highly influences school environment. Disciplinary actions can cause student to abide hence continue with learning but if learners find the disciplinary actions punitive they can rebel leading to lose of learning time and decline in academic achievement. In Kenya’s secondary schools, sexual relations of all kinds are prohibited and any student who breaks that law is treated as an indiscipline case. This study explored actions taken by teachers against students who engage in homosexual activities in school and students listed various actions that teachers take so as to maintain order in schools.

METHODOLOGY

Ex-post facto research design which is a non-experimental research technique was used and research was carried out in Nakuru County. The target population of this study was all students in the 340 public secondary schools while accessible population was 35,000 form four students who are relatively mature age wise (above 16 years) and handled sexuality issues adequately as far as this study was concerned. According to Krejcie and Morgan [15] the sample size for 35,000 form four students is 379. The researcher used simple random sampling method to get a sample of 400 form four students so as to take care of attrition [16]. A questionnaire was used for data collection in this study namely Students’ Self Evaluation Questionnaire (SSEQ). The questionnaire was appropriate because the researcher was able to test, quantify and analyse the data collected statistically as proposed by Shaughnessy, Zechmeister, and Jeanne [17]. The instrument was developed by the researcher with assistance from supervisors from the School of Education, Laikipia University who validated the instrument. Pilot study was done to estimate reliability of the instrument by administering the instrument to three randomly selected schools from the different school levels specifically; one national, county and sub-county schools in the neighbouring Nyandarua County. Reliability coefficient of .763 was obtained and it was acceptable for this study since it was suitable to make possible group inferences that were accurate enough as recommended by Frankel and Wallen [18] as well as Orodho [19]. Data collected was analysed using percentages, means, frequency counts and graphs as shown in Table 1.

Table-1: Data Analysis Matrix

Null Hypothesis/ Research Questions	Independent Variables	Dependent Variable	Statistical test
RQ1: Is sexual orientation an issue of concern in secondary schools in Nakuru County, Kenya?	Sexual Orientation		Frequencies and Percentages
RQ2: How do teachers deal with students who engage in homo-sexual activities in secondary schools in Nakuru county, Kenya?	Homo-sexuality		Frequencies, bar graph and Percentages

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings of the study were as represented as shown in Table 2:

Table-2: Gayism/Lesbianism in Secondary Schools

Item No.	Statement	Yes %	No %
1.	Is Gayism/Lesbianism an issue of concern in your school?	306 (76.5%)	94 (23.5%)

Table 2 shows that 76.5% of the students in the study observed that Gayism/Lesbian is an issue of concern in their school, while only 23.5% indicated that

the issue was not a concern in the schools. Further the research investigated students' sexual orientation and the findings are as shown in Table 3 and 4.

Table-3: Male Students towards gayism

Item No	Gender of the student	DT (%)	T (%)	MT (%)	NT (%)	DNT (%)	Mean	Std. Dev
1.	I am sexually attracted to boys only	0	1.4	2.4	21.6	74.5	1.31	.591
2.	I like watching movies where men are portrayed as being very sexually attractive	4.8	1.4	5.8	9.1	78.8	1.44	1.015
	Valid N (listwise)	208						

NOTE: DT- Definitely True T- True MT- Moderately True NT- Not True

DNT – Definitely Not True

Table 3 shows that male students responded that it is definitely not true that they are sexually attracted to boys only (M= 1.31, item 1). Male students also considered that it is definitely not true that they like watching movies where men are portrayed as being very sexually attractive with a mean of 1.44 (Item 2). The researcher noted that the views of the respondents were very cohesive in item 1 with standard deviation of

0.591 meaning there appeared to be a consensus that it is not true that boys are sexually attracted to boys only. However boys' views were very diverse on item 2 returning a standard deviation value greater than one. As such the boys had no consensus on whether they like watching movies where men are portrayed as being very sexually attractive. The study further sought the female students' perception on girl-girl sexual attractions and recorded the findings shown:

Table-4: Female Students tendencies towards lesbianism

Item No	Statement	DT (%)	T (%)	MT (%)	NT (%)	DNT (%)	Mean	Std. Dev
1.	I admire girls only romantically	2.6	4.7	6.3	32.8	53.6	1.70	.967
2.	I like watching movies depicting/showing beautiful girls	16.1	9.9	9.4	15.1	49.5	2.28	1.540
	Valid N (listwise)	192						

NOTE: DT- Definitely True T- True MT- Moderately True NT- Not True

DNT – Definitely Not True

Table 4 shows that female students considered it not true that they admire girls only romantically (M=1.7 item 1) and their views were cohesive since standard deviation is less than 1. Female students also considered the assertion that they like watching movies depicting/showing beautiful girls as not true (M=2.28, item 2) though they had divergent views returning a standard deviation greater than one. Having established students views on gayism and lesbianism in schools, they study sought from the students actions taken against students caught engaging in any homosexual activities.

How Teachers Deal with Students Who Engage in Homosexual Activities in Secondary Schools

Respondents listed various actions that teachers take against students who engage in homosexual activities in schools. The findings were established in frequencies and presented in form of bar

graphs as per students' responses. The results were as shown in Figure 1.

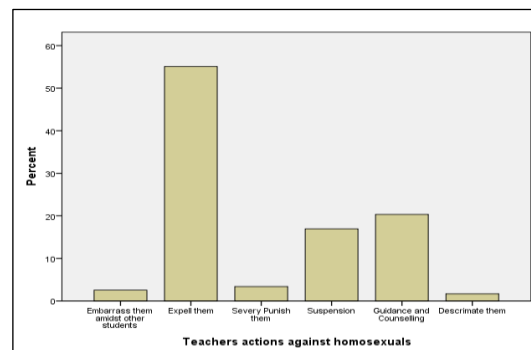


Fig-1: Teachers Actions against Homosexuals

Figure 1 indicates that the responses varied from counselling, expulsion, suspension, embarrassing students, discrimination and severe punishments. Majority of the students observed that such students

were expelled from the school (55%). 20% of the respondents observed that the teachers gave guidance and counselling to homosexuals, about 17% observed that the homosexuals were suspended from school while about 4% observed that the homosexual students were severely punished. Further, Figure 1 indicates that 3% of the respondents observed that the teachers embarrass homosexual students amidst other students while 2% of the students observed that the teachers discriminated against homosexual students.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Table 1 show that students were aware of the existence of sexual orientation issues among in schools and that 76.5% agreed that sexual orientation issues raised a concern. The findings in Table 2 and 3 also show that a small number of boys admit they have homosexual tendencies (1.4%+2.4%= 3.8%) while (2.6% +4.7%+6.3=13.6%) of the girls admitted that they admire girls only sexually hence showing tendencies towards lesbianism. These study findings were in concurrence with study findings by Mutsutaka, Uchino, Kihana and Hidaka [21] that investigated sexual orientation awareness among Japanese student counsellors and found out that students were aware of their sexual orientation. Dowshen [20] is of the opinion that adolescence is the dawn of sexual attraction due to hormonal changes of puberty which involve both the body, the mind and it was therefore not a surprise that students were aware of three types of sexual orientations (homosexuality, bisexuality and heterosexuality) which occasionally raised issues among adolescents attending secondary schools and teachers have had to intervene to maintain discipline in school.

Figure 1 presents actions that teachers take against students involved in homosexual activities indiscipline cases in schools. It is notable that the leading 2 actions are expulsion from the school (55%) and suspension (17%). These actions may seem harsh to the students but in actual sense they are forms of punishment that would be meted on any other indiscipline case as prescribed in school rules and regulations. Meyer [22] however argues that these actions by the teachers are equivalent to homophobic harassment and that they are accepted parts of school culture where faculty and staff rarely or never intervene to stop homo-bullying instead they seem to perpetuate it. Meyer further noted that in a study conducted in North American schools observed that; teachers stand by and allow biased and hurtful behaviours to go unchallenged. Majiad [23] made similar observation like Meyer in a study involving African-American students in USA. Majiad observed that teachers do not intervene in the cases of homo-bullying involving students of the same age. The individuals are left to defend themselves as a way of promoting self confidence in victimised students.

The current study findings showing that, those students who engage in homosexual activities in school are expelled and suspended is proof that teachers do act as figure 5 show. The actions taken are of disciplinary nature (punishment) which is handed to any student who engages in any acts against school rules including fighting, incitement or sexual relationships [23]. Therefore punishing students who engage in homosexual activities is not an exception. Mucherah, Owino and McCoy [24] in a study involving 1250 high school students in Kenya noted similar findings. Mucherah, *et al.* established that the consequences for homosexuality within secondary schools include punishment (66%), suspension from school (61%) and expulsion from school (49%). The current study findings that teachers punish, suspend and expel students suspected of indulging in homosexual activities is actually the reality on the ground in Kenya's secondary schools. Each student is free to be who they are as far as their sexuality is concerned but any acts that would lead to disrespect or coercion is treated like any other indiscipline case hence cannot be tolerated in school. This happens in all secondary schools in Kenya and that is why 32 girls were severely punished and then suspended from a secondary school in Nyeri County, Kenya in the month of March, 2019 for engaging in lesbianism in school and forcing other girls to participate [25].

Actions taken by teachers in Kenya are in concurrence with study findings in South African schools that showed that students who engage in indiscipline cases involving sexuality issues are expelled and suspended from school [26]. Francis findings show that Kenyan teachers' actions against students caught engaging in homosexuality are a practice adopted by schools with an aim of maintaining order in school. Cassie [27] however argues that teachers should make classrooms friendly for all students and adopt more humane strategies like guidance and counselling. Teachers should not single out sexual orientation cases in schools since this would elevate the status of LGBT students from a protected class to a valued group [28]. This consequently would make students feel a special group and it would lead to formation of gay straight alliances (GSA) clubs in schools which promotes safety and gives youth a forum to discuss sexual orientation. Rather than form GSA clubs in schools where students would have to declare their sexual orientation hence labelling of students, teachers should openly discuss sex and sexuality issues during guidance and counselling sessions which leads to no labels. This would lead to tolerance and respect of persons with varied sexual orientation so that schools become supportive of multifaceted population as long as discipline is maintained in school [23].

Effective counselling of students with regard to sexual orientation would require teachers who are well equipped with sex and sexuality studies skills. This

would place teachers in a position to censor school activities so as to avoid student indoctrination from whichever quota like organised events including 'To B GLAD' meaning Transgender, bisexual, Gay and Lesbian Day [29]. Spriggs also noted that there is "Day of Silence" where all LGBT students and teachers keep silent the entire day as a symbol of protesting against discrimination and harassment. This disrupts the educational process just as much as when students or teachers decide to disrupt learning for one reason or another for example school strikes or expelling LGBT students [22]. Both actions of LGBT students keeping silent and teachers ignoring any section of student body based on their sexual orientation make schools appear like dangerous places. California safe schools coalition [30] in a study involving secondary schools in California reported that teachers rarely intervened in cases of verbal harassment among students based on sexual orientation.

Figure 1 indicates that 3% of the respondents observed that the teachers embarrass homosexual students amidst other students while 2% of the students observed that the teachers discriminate against homosexual students. Scholars have observed that while some LGBTQ discrimination occurs in more removed areas such as locker rooms, verbal assaults often happen in the presence of teachers. In fact, when compared to racial and sexist derogatory comments, homophobic comments are more likely to be said when a teacher is present [31]. As such, this demonstrates that teachers are most unlikely to intervene or impose discipline upon hearing negative remarks about LGBTQ individuals. This further implies the LGBTQ students are even hindered from seeking teachers' assistance in cases of homophobic attacks.

In the current study, teachers could take such actions as shown in Figure 1 due to lack of skills on how to deal with sexual orientation issues just like the case of a study conducted in Ireland which showed that teachers had limited training on how to deal with homophobic teasing and bullying [32]. Gowen and Wings-Yanez [33] in a study involving Oregon high school LGBTQ reported that these students usually keep silent in class during sex education since teachers adopt a heterocentric perspective when presenting the content. Figure 1 show that expulsion and suspension (72%) of students caught engaging in homosexual activities is the common action taken by teachers in Kenya which is also a heterocentric approach. This explains why minority youth (non-heterosexuals) are more likely to express feelings of cultural and social conflicts, academic anxiety and feeling of victimization [34]. Phelan and Whitehead [35] suggests that these negative feelings described by Gowen and Wings-Yanez [33] could lead to considerably higher levels of mental illness and use of drugs among non-heterosexual students. Elias [36] however disagrees with this argument that social discrimination is a major factor

behind substance abuse and suicidal attempts among homosexual students.

People with same attraction are no more victims of their orientation than anybody else with deep seated emotional and social imbalances [37]. Therefore in a school setting students should be treated as equals by their teachers without special attention to GLBT students [29]. This perhaps explains the observation from the current study that teachers treat homosexuality like any other indiscipline case in school hence hand them severest form of punishment namely expulsion or suspension. However, instead of harsh punishments, answers and relief are possible where there is informed assistance and students offered alternative actions like guidance and counselling). Education that utilizes mental and physical capacities for betterment of present and future is needed so as to combat the challenges humans face and in this case the challenges school managers are facing on how to deal with LGBT students [38]. Such education demands comprehensive teaching of sex and sexuality education and take into consideration needs of the learners and the demands of the society.

Teachers spend a lot of time with students and as such have a profound effect on adolescents as they negotiate conflicts during adolescents therefore the actions they take against any kind of indiscipline must bring meaningful positive change in a student's life [35]. Whitehead further notes that the idea that adolescent with same sex attraction will always become homosexual adults is quite incorrect. It is important to offer proper guidance to help them come to terms with the changes they are experiencing in their body [37]. In a review of over 100 years of research and clinical literature done in USA, it was found that men and women change from homosexuality to heterosexuality and efforts to change do not invariably result to harm [35]. With this understanding, teachers can consider guidance and counselling of students more than they consider expulsion and suspension.

Students and teachers however have not yet understood why people portray different sexual orientations and as a result there is a lot of stereotyping and stigmatization of students with different sexual orientation. Due to lack of knowledge on sexual orientation, teachers' reactions to students' sexual activity in schools, for decades, have remained that of either expelling or suspending them from studies [39]. This means, any student discovered to have been involved in any sexual activity or relationships is punished leading to distraction from academics, lowered grades or failure and emotional upheaval [27]. According to Ofori [40] knowledge of sexual orientation by students, teachers and administrators may minimize stereotyping of this or that sexual orientation as the acceptable norm, and enable create conducive learning environment free of discrimination, hence give

all students equal chances to maximise on learning opportunities.

CONCLUSION

From the study findings gayism and lesbianism is an issue of concern in Kenya's secondary schools and teachers responded to any inappropriate expression of sexual behaviour in school. The study therefore concluded that teachers were responsive to sexual orientation issues just like they responded to any other indiscipline cases that occurred within the school environment.

Recommendation

From findings and conclusion from first objective, this study observed that sexual orientation was an issue of concern in secondary schools. The study therefore implored the ministry of education to consider implementing in totality sex and sexuality education as a subject of study in secondary schools. This would allow teachers to have healthy discussions on sex and other sexuality related issues like sexual orientation with their students. These teacher-student discussions would equip learners with necessary skills on sex and sexuality education. Secondly, this study noted that the prominent method applied by teachers in dealing with unwanted sexual behaviour as seen in the study findings was expulsion from the school. The study recommends use of mechanisms like guidance, peer counselling and mentorship to help the students acquire socially acceptable sexual behaviours. The study also recommends that teachers should be equipped with skills in sex and sexuality studies including sexual orientation so as to guide all students appropriately instead of suspending and expelling students leading to loss of learning time.

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