

Full Length Research Paper

Safety awareness and preparedness in secondary schools in Kenya: A case of Turkana district

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Safety for students and staff from hazards that can be created by unsafe conditions, behaviour, disasters or emergencies in schools cannot be guaranteed. This is because of inadequate preparedness and awareness programs for safety needs. This study investigated the adequacy of procedures, precautions and infrastructure to respond to fire outbreaks and destructive violence with a view to making recommendations for improving safety conditions in schools in Kenya. The study adopted a survey research design in which a random sample of 210 respondents was drawn from seven secondary schools in Turkana District, Kenya. They included students, head teachers, teachers, non-teaching staff, community members and key informants. Observation method was used to complement interviews in data collection. The data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings showed that there were no awareness programs of school safety needs in Turkana District; teachers and students were poorly prepared to respond to fire outbreak and destructive violence. Based on these findings, the Schools should be advised to conduct fire drills and talks periodically in order to improve the level of awareness on school safety needs; the schools should also conduct training of staff and students on how to prevent violence in order to improve preparedness; schools should not over depend on reactive policies and legislation at the expense of pro-active programs that seek to involve other stakeholders like community in management of students' discipline. The findings of the study and their implications will assist the teachers, students, parents and educational managers in policy guidelines on school safety.

Key words: Safety, awareness, preparedness, policies, legislations.

INTRODUCTION

Safety awareness and preparedness in schools are becoming major concern in the wave of violence and arson. In the recent past, there have been perpetual reports on violence and fire outbreaks across the schools in the country. These reports are evidence that schools are not immune to destructive violence. Apparently, there exists constant fear among the leaders and a growing need to address the issue of safety in depth.

According to Indiana Education Policy Centre (2000:2); school violence prevention demands that we be prepared for the eventuality of violence. Schools that are safe and responsive have plans and procedures in place to deal with violent and disruptive behaviours that may occur. According to Begun (2001), most violent situations can be avoided if training of social skills becomes part of proac-

tive safety procedures.

The School administrators have a responsibility to ensure that the school environment is conducive for learning (Day and Golench, 1995). They can accomplish this by working through an establishment of clear rules and procedures; thus School policy takes an important role in safety procedures.

Day and Golench (1995) classified policies that would promote school safety into four types. These types are response or dealing with misbehaviour, expectations in form of a model for appropriate behaviour which students should follow, preventive strategies and programs that inhibit misbehaviour and lastly community focus where community groups are included in initiatives to address the problem of school violence. The question here is whether the existing rules adequately deal with other issues of safety such as preparedness, favourable environment for learning, relationships, drug abuse and violence in general.

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Table 1. Safety needs and plans for contingent aspects of safety.

Safety needs	Plans for contingent aspects of safety
Need to identify early warning signs that endanger safety.	Preparing all stakeholders to be able to identify early warning signs that endanger safety.
Need for safety precautions.	Precautions for safety.
Need for safety procedures.	Steps stipulated in advance as guidelines in case of emergency or preparation for it.
Need for training and induction.	Awareness campaign among students, teachers and school workers.

Some literature shed light on programs meant to teach students self-control and social competency skills. Gottfredson (Day and Golench, (1995: 226), for example, states that “school - based programs aimed at altering individual behaviours, skills, attitudes or beliefs have been shown to reduce problem behaviour for all age groups”. On community participation, Gottfredson exerts that “parents in disorganized areas are less active in the school and less likely to exert external pressure to improve schools”. However, this might not imply that less active parents exclusively come from the ‘disorganized’ areas. The passive participation may result from lack of awareness.

From research studies by US Department of Education and US Department of Justice, it is clear that a combination of programs and strategies that include security checks, education in violence or arson prevention and counselling of students would be ideal. Arson prevention would include installation of fire extinguishers in school laboratories, offices, and other fire prone spots. It would also be expected that fire drills and first aid, form part of the weekly activities and the fire equipment is checked for readiness in case of emergency.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The main purpose of this study was to determine the level of awareness of school safety needs and establish the extent to which school management; teachers and students were prepared to respond to fire and violence related disasters in Turkana district.

Conceptual framework

Some of the issues that relate to safety are safety risks, precautions, preparedness, procedures and training. This is better illustrated in the Table 1 below.

It is important, however, to note that the framework is dynamic because safety issues are constantly changing in terms of nature, magnitude and new challenges that are brought about Orora (1997) classified certain problems facing institutions as “unique, unusual and exceptional” problems that have not often occurred

enough to be covered by existing policy”. There should, therefore, be continued adjustments to maintain equilibrium. Security needs are also interdependent on one another and it might be difficult to establish those that are primary and those that are secondary.

Paine and Sprague (2000:1), made the following statement concerning school crises:

“Typically, people refuse to believe crisis could happen to them, and school personnel are no exception. But this tendency toward denial must be replaced by active participation and preparation for a potential school crisis. Careful planning is required to reduce the impact of low-incidence crises such as disasters, murders, suicides, or fires.”

The author stresses the need to have a procedure that reduces the impact of fires or any other crisis. The purpose of such a set of guidelines is to assist a school during and after a crisis.

Making of contingent plans would, therefore, be most appropriate if done in a spiral format such that each safety need compliment the other. Cole (1996:55) relates Contingency Theory to stress the need to “take specific circumstances or contingencies into account when devising appropriate organizational and management systems”. The theory seeks to predict organizational behaviour by studying people, structures, technology and environment. This theory assisted in pointing out the important features for research questions used in the study.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study adopted a survey research design that was used purposely to collect factual information describing safety procedures and preparedness in secondary schools. Data collected was analyzed and used to make comparisons and evaluations relating to safety procedures awareness and preparedness.

Sampling procedures

Non-probability (purposive) sampling was used to select head

Table 2. Students, teachers and head teachers' participation in fire drill(s) in comparison with schools that conducted fire drills.

		Participation in any fire drill		Total	
		Yes	No		
Schools that performed fire drill	Teachers	Count	1	1	
		Percentage	100.0%	100%	
	Students	Count	3	5	8
		Percentage	37.5%	62.5%	100.0%
	Head teachers	Count	1	1	1
		Percentage		100.0%	100.0%
	Total	Count	3	7	10
Percentage		30.0%	70.0%	100.0%	
Schools that did not perform fire drill	Teachers	Count	34	34	
		Percentage	100%	100%	
	Students	Count	1	131	132
		Percentage	8%	99.2%	100.0%
	Head teachers	Count	6	6	6
		Percentage		100.0%	100%
	Total	Count	1	171	172
Percentage		6%	99.4%	100.0%	

teachers and key informants. Teachers, school workers and members of the community were chosen through simple random sampling. Students were picked through stratified random sampling.

Sample size

Respondents selected for this study were head teachers, members of teaching staff in each school, students and non-teaching staff. Members of the community and education officers were selected as key informants. The sample size drawn was 210 which constituted of 140 students; 35 teachers; 14 non-teaching staff; 10 community members; 7 headmasters and 4 key informants.

Research instruments and data collection procedures

The research instruments used for data collection in this study were: questionnaire; interview schedule and observation schedule. Questionnaires were administered to students, teachers and headmasters. Interviews were used for key informants, community members and schools' non-teaching staff on issues concerning safety procedures and precautions. The researcher made observation of the physical environment that included buildings, fences and the entire school compound with a view to establish the situation on the ground. Observation was done and unstructured notes were made. Document analysis was also done on school policies, vision and mission statements and routines in relation to safety procedures. These included time-tables and program routine, memos, reports and staff minutes.

Data analysis

The data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Inferences on null hypothesis were made through the use of chi-square test. Statistical significant relationship existing between variables was accepted at 99% level of significance.

Measures of central tendency and percentages were also calculated to enable descriptive interpretation of collected data.

Summary of findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

Level of awareness of school safety needs

Questions were asked to determine the level of awareness programs relating to fire drills, riots, fires and fire drills, training of staff in violence prevention, parents' or guardian talks about behaviour and correlation between awareness programs and preparedness.

Fire drills as awareness on fires

Teachers, students and head teachers were asked whether their schools had performed fire drills in the past one year and their responses were cross tabulated with responses on whether they themselves had participated in any fire drill. A summary of these findings is shown in Table 2.

The study found out that neither head teachers nor teachers had participated in any fire drill a year before the time of the study. 10 respondents said that their school had performed a fire drill. All the teachers and head teachers who said their schools had not performed any fire drill indicated that they also had not participated in any such activity. 30% of respondents from schools that had performed fire drills had participated in the same. Comparatively, only one (0.6%) respondent from the category

Table 3. School type, gender and students talks on riots.

			Told what to do in case of riots		Total	
			Yes	No		
Male	School type	Boys Boarding	Count	19	41	60
			% within school type	31.7%	68.3%	100.0%
		Girls Boarding	Count			
		% within school type				
	Mixed Day	Count		41	41	
		% within school type		100%	100%	
	Total	Count	19	55	74	
		% within school type	25.7%	74.3%	100.0%	
Female	School type	Boys Boarding	Count			
			% within school type			
		Girls Boarding	Count	15	45	60
		% within school type	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%	
	Mixed Day	Count	1	5	6	
		% within school type	16.7%	83.3%	100.0%	
	Total	Count	16	50	66	
		% within school type	24.2%	75.8%	100.0%	
Summary totals (number of students)				35	105	140
Summary totals (number of students in percentages)				25%	75%	100%

of schools that had not performed any fire drills in the past one year indicated to have participated in a fire drill.

Awareness on riots

Information on how many students had been talked to or counselled in relation to riots, which is a safety risk, was solicited and results are presented in Table 3. These data aided the study to investigate whether students were aware of the dangers of riots.

A total of 105 students (75.0%) indicated that they had not been told what to do in case of riots. The percentage of boys who acknowledged that they had received talks on riots was 26.4% as compared to 23.5% of girls. In boys boarding secondary schools, 68.3% of the students indicated that they had not been told what to do in case of riots compared to 75.0% of those from girls boarding secondary schools. It was also revealed that 83.3% of girls in mixed day secondary schools had not been told what to do in case of riots.

Training of staff and students on how to prevent violence

The study sought to establish the extent to which teachers and students had been trained on issues relating to violence and safety. Such information would show how they have been made aware on the need to participate in reducing violent behaviour in schools. Table 4 describes the findings.

The study found out that 85.7% of the teachers and 42.1% of the students indicated that they had not been trained on how to prevent violence. The findings show that a greater percentage of students (57.9%) had received talks on how to prevent violence as compared to 14.3% of members of teaching staff.

Students' conflicts and students' involvement in conflict resolution

Students were asked whether conflicts existed in their schools and whether they got involved in solving them. These statistics are vital to the study because according to New York State Centre for School Safety (2001), there should be peer mediations programs on conflict resolution, which is an aspect of preparedness in school safety. A summary of this analysis is given in the Table 5.

Eighty percent of those who got involved in solving conflicts were boys and 60% of those who did not get involved were girls. Of those who confessed that conflicts existed, 75 out of 100 did not get involved whereas 28.6% of all the students interviewed said that their colleagues had not been involved in any kind of conflict. Out of 100 students who said conflicts were existed, 25% got involved in solving them. However, 53.6% had not gotten involved in solving conflicts that they said existed.

Preparedness versus awareness programs

In this category information was solicited from students in

Table 4. Training of staff and students on how to prevent violence.

		Trained on how to prevent violence		Total	
		Trained	Not trained		
Students and teachers	Teachers	Count	5	30	35
		Percentage	14.3%	85.7%	100.0%
	Students	Count	81	59	140
		Percentage	57.9%	42.1%	100.0%
Total		Count	86	89	175
		Percentage	49.1%	50.9%	100.0%

Table 5. Gender and students' involvement in conflict resolution.

		Conflicts among students and how they got involved in solving			Total	
		Conflicts existed got involved	Conflicts existed not got involved	No conflicts		
Gender	Male	Count	20	30	22	72
		Percentage	80.0%	40.0%	55.0%	51.4%
		Total percentage	14.3%	21.4%	15.7%	51.4%
	Female	Count	5	45	18	68
		Percentage	20.0%	60.0%	45.0%	48.6%
		Total percentage	3.6%	32.1%	12.9%	48.6%
Summary totals		Summary totals of the number of students	25	75	40	140
		Summary totals in percentages	17.9%	53.6%	28.6%	100.0%

order to establish the association between two variables touching on fire. It was assumed that knowledge on how to effectively use a fire extinguisher is sign of preparedness and fire drills falls on training and awareness programs. The study used chi-square to find out whether there was significant difference between students in schools, which performed fire drills and knowledge of effective use of a fire extinguisher. This was to test the null hypothesis, which states 'Safety preparedness does not depend on safety training and awareness programs.' The data used is summarized in Table 6.

The test was subjected to 99% level of confidence and the chi square value of 17.667 was established with 1 degree of freedom, above the related critical table value of 6.64. So the null hypothesis was rejected and affirmations of the alternative claim that 'safety preparedness depends on safety training and awareness programs' was made.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study the following conclusions were made:

1. There were no deliberate awareness programs of

school safety needs in terms of fire drills in schools in Turkana District.

2. Students had not received sufficient talks on what to do in case of riots.

3. Most parents and guardians of high school students from the district had not talked to their children on riots.

4. Schools had not conducted adequate training of staff and students on how to prevent violence.

5. Lack of training hindered efforts to improve safety in schools.

6. A big percentage of teachers and 75% of students did not know how to effectively use a fire extinguisher.

7. Most of the students in the district had been harassed by their colleagues and a greater percentage of them had not been involved in conflict resolution.

8. Teachers and students in Turkana District were poorly prepared to respond to fire outbreak and destructive violence.

9. There is a direct correlation between administration's safety preparedness and students' safety preparedness.

Based on the salient findings of the study and conclusions made, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Schools should conduct fire drills periodically.

Table 6. Schools that performed fire drills versus knowledge of use of fire extinguisher.

		Effective use of fire extinguisher			Total
		Yes	No		
		Count	7	1	8
Schools that performed fire drills	Yes	% within schools that perform fire drills	87.5%	12.5%	100.0%
		% within effective use of fire extinguisher	20.0%	1.0%	5.7%
	Count		28	104	132
	No	% within schools that perform fire drills	21.2%	78.8%	100%
		% within effective use of fire extinguisher	80.0%	99.0%	94.3%
Count		35	105	140	
Total	% within schools that performed fire drills	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%	
	% within effective use of fire extinguishers	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

2. School management should regularly talk to students on riots.
3. A well thought out plan for parental involvement on the issues. Parents should not just 'dump' their students in schools.
4. Consequently the students should be inducted on how to solve conflicts among themselves so that they can actively participate in matters relating to schools' safety.
5. Schools should, with the help of Kenya Education Staff Institute, to facilitate training of staff and students on how to prevent violence as part of their curriculum. e.g. be trained on how to gather and use intelligence.
6. Similarly, students should be assisted to foster and maintain a safe learning environment and all members of schools' community should be trained on how to use fire equipment.
7. The role of each member of the schools structure in safety should be clearly defined and communicated well.
8. The Quality Assurance Officers should constantly evaluate safety programs in schools with a view to offer valuable suggestions for improvement.
9. All stakeholders should be made aware of contemporary challenges in schools such as drug abuse, misuse of mobiles and negative exposure among teachers and students.
10. All players be sensitized on recommendations made by task force committees in the recent past and be allowed to offer critical analysis and contributions.

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