



## Interventions in managing indiscipline of learners with divergent gender orientations in Nyeri County, Kenya

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### Abstract

*Discipline of learners in secondary school has been an issue of concern to educational stakeholders. The purpose of this study was to determine educational stakeholders' perceptions on interventions employed in managing discipline issues affecting learners with divergent gender orientations. The study was guided by Watson's Behavioral Theory. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. Target population was 214 school principals, 214 teacher counselors and one County Quality Assurance and Standards Education Officer, and eight Sub County Directors of Education (SCDE) from Nyeri County, Kenya. Krejcie and Morgan's Table was used to obtain sample size of 140 principals and 140 teacher counselors. The County Quality Assurance and Standards Education Officer and all the three SCDEs were included in the study. Stratified sampling was used to select 140 schools. Simple random sampling was used to select 140 principals and 140 teacher counselors while purposive sampling was used to select County director of Education and sub counties directors of education. Data was collected using questionnaires and interview guides. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, Version 21 was used to analyze data. Findings show that key interventions to manage discipline issues affecting learners with divergent gender orientations in Nyeri County, Kenya include; guiding and counseling (96%), suspension (79.3%), strict school rules (74%), enhancing school security through installation of CCTV (71%), corporal punishment (63.4%), role modeling of students by peer counselors (65.2%), religious session for spiritual nourishment (53.7%), parental involvement in management of school discipline (30.8%), and expulsion (21.1%). Recommendations include principals to have a parent-mentoring program to educate and sensitize parents on parental duties in molding students discipline, parents to control children's television consumption, principals to recognize school counselors and provide resources for counseling and Teacher Service Commission to intensify on capacity building for teachers and school principals to educate them about gender diversity and inclusivity.*

**Keywords:** *Education stakeholders, Divergent gender orientations, Discipline management*

### INTRODUCTION

Discipline is regarded a key component of human behavior, serving as foundation for maintaining order and achieving collective goals within any organization (Novak, Kolesnyk & Palyvoda, 2018). In schools, discipline is not merely about enforcing rules but about creating an environment conducive to learning and personal development (Semali & Vumilia, 2016). According to Suriansyah (2020), discipline is central to the success of a school, as it directly influences efficiency and effectiveness of all organizational activities. Therefore, without discipline, a school cannot function optimally, and its educational objectives may be compromised. In many countries, schools have seen a rise in student indiscipline, manifesting in behaviors such as truancy, bullying, substance abuse and violence, especially in the form of riots. Hence management of student discipline is a fundamental aspect of maintaining an effective learning environment in secondary schools and the school administration plays a significant role in student discipline management (Mulwa, 2014).

Gender orientation is a person's sense of self-determined by their romantic interests, associated behaviors, and affiliation with a group of people who share those interests. A worldwide survey suggests that 9% of adults identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer plus (LGBTQ+). Slootmaeckers (2022), 5.9% of people in European Union (EU) identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. The highest number of people with divergent gender orientations identities in EU are in Germany, and lowest in Hungary (Government of the Republic of Serbia, 2016). The first recorded of likely homosexual couple was in Africa, in the ancient Egypt. This was known as *Khnumhotep* and *Niankhkhnum*, an ancient Egyptian male couple, who existed around 2400 BCE (Munthali, 2023). This male couple is presented in a nose-kissing position which at that time was the most intimate pose in Egyptian art Munthali added. Over the past decades, there have been rise in divergent gender orientations individuals in Africa (Harper et al., 2015; Meer et al., 2017).



Kenyan society generally upholds conservative views regarding gender and sexuality, with strict expectations for individuals to conform to established gender norms (Otieno, 2022). These expectations are mirrored in school settings, where students are expected to adhere to gender-specific codes of conduct, dress codes, and behavioral norms (Ngilu, 2019). For students with divergent gender orientations such as those who are transgender, non-binary, or gender non-conforming this environment can be particularly challenging. Their mere expression of gender identity, whether through dress, behavior or social interactions, can be seen as a violation of school rules, thus leading to disciplinary actions. In Kenya, the number of students with divergent gender orientations in secondary schools, tertiary colleges and universities are on the rise (Harper et al., 2015; Kamaku & Mberia, 2014; Mucherah, Owino & McCoy, 2016; Ngunjiri & Nyambura, 2019). The attitude of education stakeholders towards students with divergent gender orientations tend to be influenced by prevailing cultural and religious beliefs that prioritize traditional gender roles. These attitudes often manifest in lack of acceptance or outright disapproval of gender non-conformity, which is frequently perceived as challenge to established norms and values within school setting (Ngunjiri & Nyambura, 2019). As a result, education stakeholders may approach discipline issues involving these students with bias, viewing their behavior through a lens of non-compliance rather than as expressions of identity.

### Materials and Methods

The study adopted positivism philosophical approach. The study employed descriptive research design. This study targeted 214 principals, 214 teacher counselors, and the education officers in Nyeri County. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size sampling table was used to determine sample size of 140 principals and 140 teacher counselors. Stratified sampling was used to select 140 schools where principals were sampled from. Then simple random sampling was used to select secondary school principals and teacher counselors while purposive sampling was used to select County Director of Education and sub-counties Directors who were issued with interview schedules. Primary data was collected using questionnaires and interview guides. Quantitative data from close ended questions was analyzed using SPSS, Version 21 using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentage, mean, and standard deviation). Qualitative data from open ended questions was analyzed using content analysis while data from interview guides is presented in verbatim.

### Results and Discussion

#### Background Information on School Category

**Table 1. Category of Secondary Schools, Principals and Teacher Counselors status in Nyeri County, Kenya**

School category	Principal		Teacher Counselors	
	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
National	1	1.0	1	0.8
Extra county	6	5.7	10	8.1
County	16	15.4	21	17.1
Sub county	81	77.9	91	74.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100</b>

The distribution of respondents by school category indicates that the majority of both principals and teacher counselors were drawn from Sub County secondary schools in Nyeri County. County schools had moderate representation, extra County schools were few while National schools had the least representation. This distribution suggests that the study's findings largely reflect the experiences and perspectives of educators from Sub County and County schools compared to their counterparts in higher-tier institutions such as National and Extra County schools.

**Table 2. Type of Schools, Principals and Teacher Counselors status in Nyeri County, Kenya**



School category	Principals		Teacher Counselors	
	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Boys boarding	22	21.1	23	18.7
Girls boarding	28	27.0	35	28.5
Mixed boarding	10	9.6	12	9.7
Mixed day	44	42.3	53	43.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>100</b>

The distribution of principals and teacher counselors by type of school in Nyeri County, Kenya, reveals that the majority are from mixed day schools. This was followed by girls' boarding schools, and boys' boarding schools. Mixed boarding schools had the lowest representation. These findings suggest that mixed day schools are the most common in the county, reflecting their widespread presence and possibly higher enrollment, while mixed boarding schools are less prevalent. The relatively balanced representation across boys' and girls' boarding schools highlights gender-focused education structures in the county.

**Table 3. Interventions to Manage Discipline Issues Affecting Learners with DGOs**

Intervention measures	Frequency	Percentage
Guiding and counseling	218	96.0
Religious session for spiritual nourishment	122	53.7
Strict school rules	168	74.0
Enhancing school security through installation of CCTV	161	71.0
Parental involvement in management of school discipline	70	30.8
Suspension	180	79.3
Role modeling of students by peer counselors	148	65.2
Expulsion	48	21.1
Corporal punishment	144	63.4

**N=227 (104 principals and 123 teacher counselors)**

Results show that the frequently used interventions include guiding and counseling, suspension, strict school rules, and enhancing school security through CCTV. Moderately used interventions include role modeling by peer counselors, corporal punishment, and religious sessions. The least used interventions include parental involvement and expulsion. The high use of guiding and counseling indicates a preference for addressing discipline through support and dialogue while significant use of suspension and strict rules suggests that punitive measures are also a common practice. There is also implementation of CCTV which highlights the increasing use of technology to monitor and manage student behavior. The fact that corporal punishment is used in a considerable number of cases is worrisome especially since many educational and psychological experts advocate for alternative, positive discipline strategies. The low level of parental involvement is a concern, as parental support is often crucial for addressing behavioral issues effectively. Expulsion is indeed used as a last resort which is a good thing. The findings provide a descriptive overview of the interventions used to manage discipline issues. It highlights the reliance on both supportive and punitive approaches, the use of technology, and the relatively low level of parental involvement.

Findings were supported by an education officer who had this to say during the interview:

“The main interventions employed in managing discipline issues affecting learners with divergent gender orientations in guiding in counseling. Majority of secondary school students



are teenagers who are at the adolescent stage and are discovering their sexuality. If not well guided, they may make bad decision influenced by peers and social media. The school administrators recommend guiding and counseling for students caught up in such acts for the first time. The schools also use peer counselors since the teacher counselors are very few and may not be able to attend to all students. The schools also engage religious leaders to guide students on good morals. The measures, though considered conservative, have been effective in managing discipline among students with DGOs.” (Interview, Deputy Principal, September, 10,2024).

Another education officer put forth that:

“Preventive guidance and counseling is conducted regularly in secondary schools for all students. The sessions are, however, optional for the students and therefore not everyone attends them. Corporal punishment is also employed, especially to students who are considered as new recruits to DGOs. Some schools have invested in innovative technology such as installation of CCTV which helps to monitor students in the accommodation areas. This has reduced sexual relationship especially in single gender schools since the students are always monitored and are aware of the repercussions of engagement in immoral acts.” (Interview, Deputy Principal, September, 9,2024).

Results imply that schools have made efforts to ensure that guidance and counseling department is functional to help with guiding and counseling students. This may enable students to understand their sexuality better and may reduce cases of DGOs such as lesbians, gays, and bisexuals which are mostly as a result of peer pressure and identity crisis. Students are also given documents outlining laws and regulations by the schools, which they are expected to read, comprehend, and sign as a pledge to follow. The schools use other extreme measures such as expulsion although it is rarely practices. Some of the schools also involve parents in management discipline among students with DGOs. Role modeling from the parents may help to significantly reduce cases of indiscipline among students and make it easier for school administrators tasked with discipline management. Findings are in support of Adeyemi and Bolarinwa (2020) study on interventions employed by schools to manage discipline issues related to gender-diverse students which revealed that most schools lacked formal policies on gender diversity and relied on ad-hoc measures, such as counseling or involving religious leaders, to address discipline issues. Further, Njue and Muthama (2021) study on interventions used by education stakeholders in Kiambu County to manage indiscipline issues related to gender-diverse students found that majority of schools continue to use punitive measures that are not effective in addressing the underlying issues. Kamau and Kariuki (2021) study on interventions employed by schools to manage indiscipline issues among students with divergent gender orientations revealed that while a few schools had started to implement peer counseling programs, majority relied on punitive measures, such as suspension or expulsion.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The interventions to manage indiscipline issues among students with DGOs include guidance and counseling, strict school rules, enhancing school security through installation of CCTV, role modeling of students by peer counselors, and religious session for spiritual nourishment. Other inventions are parental involvement in management of school discipline and expulsion.

The recommendations are; the school administrators should emphasize on strict adherence to rules and regulations and ensure that all are students oriented on the schools rules and regulations. There should be forums to constantly remind students on the school rules and regulations which should not only be clearly put on the schools' notice board but also in every class. Principals should implement comprehensive parent-mentoring program to educate and raise awareness of parents' responsibilities in shaping children's behavior once a term. Parents should be in charge of what children read and watch on TV, restrict children's access to cell phones, monitor behavior and academic progress in class, and discipline children for breaking rules after school. Principals should recognize school counselors and provide resources for counseling such as professional counselors and private rooms for counseling. Teacher counselors should be sponsored for professional counseling courses to enhance professional counseling. Curriculum developers should incorporate totality sex and sexuality education as a subject in secondary schools. This would enable educators to engage their pupils in constructive dialogue on sex and other sexuality-related topics, such as sexual orientation. The schools should also organize workshops and resources to



inform parents about gender orientation and its effect on students' well-being. The educational stakeholders should lobby for inclusion of gender diversity topics in education and teacher training curriculum to equip them with skills to manage students with DGOs.

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