

# Students' Perception of School Rules and Regulations as a Quest for Good Governance. A Case Study of a Peri-Urban Mixed Secondary School in North-Rift Kenya

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this study was to investigate students' perception of school rules and regulations with regard to teacher-student relationship. The theoretical framework adopted was informed by Etzioni's (1961) Compliance Theory. The philosophical orientation was relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology. While methodology was case study. Unstructured interviews were used in data collection followed by data transcriptions. To uphold trustworthiness of the study, "the member check" was used to check validity while reliability was enhanced through cross checking the transcripts for obvious mistakes. Piloting was carried out with form 4 students; 3 male and 3 females at a peri-urban mixed secondary school in South Rift-Kenya and ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Data were analyzed thematically and the results were presented as reported by the participants with the aid of thematic networks. The study found out that the students' perception of school rules and regulations with regard to teacher-student relationship was generally negative. Teacher-student conflicts were as a result of excessive force that teachers used on the students. Their inhuman, discriminative and impolite nature made students to oppose them. On the basis of the findings, the researcher recommended that teachers ought to take their time in explaining school rules and regulations to their students and avoid casting them in steel. Besides teachers ought to shun discrimination and harshness in enforcing of school rules and regulations and uphold dialogue.

**Keywords:** School, Students, Perception, Rules, Regulations

## I. INTRODUCTION

It is paramount for schools to formulate and interpret school rules and regulations to their learners as part of democracy and good governance. Friendly schools promote education for sustainable development as Kelly and Dikkers (2016) argue that school culture should be conducive to conversation and based on ideals of student-centered approach.

Teacher-student relationship has a significant influence on interaction in the classroom in that it affects both children's learning and behaviors (O'Connor, Dearing, & Collins, 2011; Song & Liu, 2007).

Hosie (2007) argues that students tend to believe schools do not serve their concerns adequately. This misunderstanding appears to limit the extent to which staff provide credible mes-

sages and support to students as they make healthy transition to adulthood. Njozela (2008) points out that principals and other stakeholders should not underestimate the contributions of students especially if they are given the opportunity to develop their skills and their level of maturity. While Huddleston (2007) and Magadla (2007) state that students should be involved in all areas of school life.

### A. Statement of the Problem

Learners are more likely to seek assistance when they perceive teachers as supportive and available (Marchand & Skinner, 2007).

However, a low to moderate correlation is shown between the reports by teachers and students on teacher-student relationship quality (Henricsson & Rydell, 2004) Besides, Kamau and Njenga (2009) argue that the attitude of both teachers and students on school rules and regulations matter.

According to Nchogu (n.d), strikes in secondary schools in Kenya are usually a recurring event and there are many reasons why students in secondary schools go on strike and among them are; congestion teacher-student relationship, and corruption.

While Kats (2006) argues that green schools provide financial benefits that are 20 times larger than conventional schools.

Although there have been strikes and loud voices on the greening of the environment in schools, not much has been said on the greening of the socio-emotional environment in which students find themselves especially on students' perception of school rules and regulations with regard to teacher-student relationship.

### B. Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study was to investigate students' perception of school rules and regulations with regard to teacher-student relationship.

### C. Research Objective

The following objective guided the study:

To find out students' perception of school rules and regulations with regard to teacher-student relationship

#### *D. Research Question*

The question that guided the study was:

What is the students' perception of school rules and regulations with regard to teacher-student relationship?

#### *E. Justification*

There is frequent occurrence of students' unrest in schools.

#### *F. Assumptions of the Study*

The participants would be knowledgeable and honest in giving honest in giving information.

#### *G. Theoretical Framework*

The study was embedded in Etzioni's (1961) compliance theory. According to this theory, authority structure (superordinates) and the students (subordinates) in schools have bargaining power on school rules.

### II. SCHOOL RULES AND REGULATIONS AND TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

The major aim of administration in any secondary school institution according to Ong'ondo (2005) is coordinating the effort of the members towards the achievement of certain specific goals.

Lutomia and Sikolia (2006) posit that positive reinforcement technique reduces the frequency and extent of students' misbehavior (breaking of school rules). Student involvement in school administration, if properly organized and supervised, offers the best of the opportunities for developing students' morale, co-operation, prudent leadership and intelligent followership while increasing self-direction and dependence (Sushila, 2004). Neff and Helwig (2002) argue that the extent in which social environment is sustainable emanates from both shared and non-shared aspects of culture, both with and between individual memberships of the society. Wainnyb (2006) supports the sentiments of Neff et al. by stating that children as well as adults can have different views on the meaning of social practices and of values, and norms regulating these practices. They can even develop critical attitudes to different aspects of the social environment that they live in and oppose or even try to change them. Thornberg (2006b) also contend that students have judged their teachers in terms of worthiness and they are critical of disrespect and unfair treatment and of inconsistencies in the school's rules system. Thus, students' perception of school rules and regulations connotes a positive or a negative response.

A close look at this literature reveals the neglect of qualitative data on students' perceptions of school rules especially through unstructured interviews. There is heavy reliance on quantitative data. Moreover, these studies give more attention to teachers, ignoring student opinion. Democratization of the school system has been underscored by the reviewed litera-

ture, including the greening of students' socio-emotional environment. This qualitative study therefore sought to investigate students' perception of school rules with regard to teacher-student relationship.

### III. RESEARCH APPROACH

This section entails the study area, research design, philosophical orientation of the study, research methodology and methods.

#### *A. Study Area*

The research was carried out at a peri-urban mixed secondary school in North-Rift Kenya. The school was also ethnically heterogeneous.

#### *B. Research Design*

Silverman (2006) defines research design as a broad conceptualization of the entire research process. The study adopted qualitative research design. Shreiber and Stern (2001) argue that when qualitative approach is used, the researcher can explore areas where little is known or gain a new perspective in an area in which much is known. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) argue that choosing a qualitative research design presupposes a certain view of the world that in turn defines how a researcher selects a sample, collects data, analyzes data, and approaches issues of validity, reliability, and ethics.

#### *C. Philosophical Orientation of the Study*

The study engaged relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology. Richards (2003) argues that relativist perspectives take a view that knowledge is constructed as people interact. While Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008) agree with social constructionist philosophical position which argue that it takes a critical stance towards the taken-for-granted knowledge and trying to open it up for discussion.

#### *D. Research Methodology*

The research adopted case study methodology.

Merriam (2009) posits that case study involves a detailed analysis of data for themes and patterns for understanding the complexities thereof but not for generalizing beyond the case but rather transferability.

#### *Research Methods*

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) assert that research methods include description of data collection method, field testing of instruments, recording and safe-guarding of data and description of the steps taken to preserve confidentiality and anonymity of data.

##### *i. Selection of Participants*

The target population for this study was Form 4 students at a peri-urban mixed secondary school in North-Rift Kenya. Majority of the students were mainly between 17 and 19 years old and the total number of the Form 4 students was 40. The class teacher picked the first three girls and the first three boys from

the class register (Ministry of Education (2012)). All the form 4 students were considered to have adequate information on school rules and regulations and overall school life having stayed in school for close to 4 years, by the time of the study and therefore, were trusted to give unbiased rich and in-depth information (Dornyei, 2007). Thus, the most appropriate sampling strategy was non-probabilistic-the most common form of which is purposive (Chein, 1981) or purposeful (Patton, 2015).

#### *ii. Data Collection Instrument: Unstructured Interview Guide*

DeMarrais (2004) defines a research interview as “a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study” (p. 55). The researcher engaged unstructured interviews according to (Ong’ondo, 2010). The unstructured interview guide for the form 4 students was designed by the researcher according to the objective of the study and the research question.

#### *iii. Piloting*

Yin (2003) posits that piloting is a process where a researcher tries out the proposed research techniques and methods. Piloting was done at a peri-urban mixed secondary school in South Rift Kenya.

#### *iv. Data Collection Procedures*

With an improved and relevant unstructured interview guide, letter of introduction to the County Director of Education was obtained from Kenya Association of Professional counsellors. Letter of authorization was sought from County Director of Education directed to the principal of the study school who granted permission to carry out the study. The researcher also got permission and assistance from the class teacher who helped identify the participants from the class register. The researcher secured consent from the participants after they were assured of confidentiality and they signed the consent form. Data collection exercise took one week where unstructured face to face interviews were conducted.

#### *v. Ethical Considerations*

The researcher obtained a letter of introduction to the County Director of Education from Kenya Association of Professional Counsellors. Letter of authorization was sought from County Director of Education directed to the principal of the study school who granted permission to carry out the study. The researcher also got permission from the class teacher and secured consent from the participants after they were assured of confidentiality and they signed the consent form. All the participants were assured of none victimization from the school administration. The researcher made every effort to protect the identity of the participants by use of pseudonyms as follows; John, Joshua, James, Jane, Janice and Joyce. The class register did not have any student called by these names. Polonski and Waller (2005) advocate for hidden identity of the participants.

The choice to indicate the location of the study as a peri-urban mixed secondary school was an ethical concern. The re-

searcher was weary of close personal relationships that could develop between the participant and the researcher in qualitative studies resulting in the blurring of boundaries and role confusion according to (Creswell, 2009) and was ready to take appropriate measures if any. The researcher also engaged rational ethics as part of ethical concerns. A relational ethic means being aware of one’s own role and impact on relationships and treating participants as whole people rather than as just subjects from which to wrench a good story” (Tracy, 2013. 245). Using the term participants as opposed to subjects was indeed part of ethics.

#### *vi. Trustworthiness of the Study*

Creswell (2009) asserts that proposal developers need to convey the steps they take in their studies to validate the accuracy and credibility of their findings.

#### *Techniques Used to Enhance Trustworthiness of the Study: Validity of the Study*

The credibility and accuracy (validity) of the study was enhanced using “The member check,” whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stake-holding groups from whom the data were originally collected, is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, p. 314, 1985).

#### *b. Techniques Used to Enhance Trustworthiness of the Study: Reliability of the Study*

The researcher achieved this by cross checking the transcripts for obvious mistakes by asking such questions according to (Creswell, 2009) as; what general idea was the participant saying? What was the tone and the impression of the overall depth? This eliminated cases of deviating from the focus of the study and improved the reliability of the study.

### IV. DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

The data collected was analyzed thematically (Attride-Stirling, 2001) and the results were presented as they were described by the participants (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). The research question was: What is the students’ perception of school rules and regulations with regard to teacher-student relationship?

*Analysis stage A:* Reduction of the Text on Students’ Perception of School Rules and Regulations with Regard to Teacher-Student Relationship. The researcher began the analysis by reducing the collected data.

*Step 1:* Coding the Collected Data on Students’ Perception of School Rules and Regulations with Regard to Teacher-Student Relationship.

Data on students’ perception of school rules with regard to teacher-student relationship was broken down with the aid of a coding framework based on the salient issues that arose in the study as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Presenting, Dissecting Codes and Identifying Basic Themes for Teacher-Student Relationship

Codes	Dissected	Basic Themes Identified
Firm	Demanding	1.School rules are too demanding for students to follow
Unfavorable	unrealistic	2.Some of the rules do not make sense
Coarse	compel	3.Forced to take school food yet could buy from across the gate
Demanding	difficult	4.Teachers are too strict when executing school rules
Torture	punished	5.Making them suffer when they fail to follow school rules
Inaccessible	unreachable	6. Teachers being unreasonable in implementation, they are too proud
Unpleasant	hate	7.Did not like punishments from teachers for small mistakes
Raging	hungry	8.Teachers punishing students when boiling
Availed	provide	9.Demand of money in hospital for sick chit to be given
Consultation	Payment	10. Teachers demand for a letter yet Doctors cannot write a letter without a fee
Rude	unkind	11.Teachers approach the students is <i>very</i> impolite manner
Hate	dislike	12.Disagree with teachers
Annoyed	disagreement	13.Teacher on duty had been quarreled by the principal
Favoritism	inequality	14.Punished a lone yet late with a prefect
Canned	beaten	15. Prefects do not wear ties yet I am the only one whose back was worked on.
Torture	cruel	16.You are made to kneel alone when you speak vernacular with a prefect

*Step 2:* Identification of Themes for Teacher-Student Relationship

The identification was done by abstracting themes from the coded text to get basic themes, organizing themes and finally a global theme as shown in table 2.

Table 2: Theme Extraction and Systemization for Teacher-Student Relationship

Basic Themes	Organizing Themes	Global Theme
1.School rules are too demanding for students to follow	Rigid	Unwarranted
2.Some of the rules have made students to stay at home	Rigid	Unwarranted
3.Forced to take school food yet could buy from across the gate	Inhuman	Unwarranted
4.Teachers refused and punished them for going to shops after 4.30pm	Rigid	Unwarranted
5.Making others suffer by dropping out of school when they fail to follow school rules	Oppose	Unwarranted
6.Teachers being unreasonable in implementation of rules, they are too proud	Rigid	Unwarranted
7.Did not like punishments from teachers for small mistakes	Inhuman	Unwarranted
8.Teachers punishing students when boiling	Rigid	Unwarranted
9.Demand of money in hospital for sick chit to be given	Oppose	Unwarranted
10.Teachers demand for a letter yet Doctors cannot write a letter without a fee	Inhuman	Unwarranted
11.Teachers approach to students is very impolite Manner	Oppose	Unwarranted
12. Disagree with teachers on religion.	Oppose	Unwarranted
13.Teacher on duty had been quarreled by the principal	Oppose	Unwarranted
14.Punished alone yet late with a prefect	Discrimination	Unwarranted
15.Prefects do not wear ties yet I am punished alone	Discrimination	Unwarranted
16.You are made to kneel alone when you speak vernacular with a prefect	Discrimination	Unwarranted

*Step 3:* Construction of Thematic Networks for Teacher-Student Relationship

ly a global theme was obtained. This culminated into web-like networks referred to as thematic networks as shown in figure 1.

The researcher went through the codes to identify themes. These themes were arranged from basic, organizing and final-

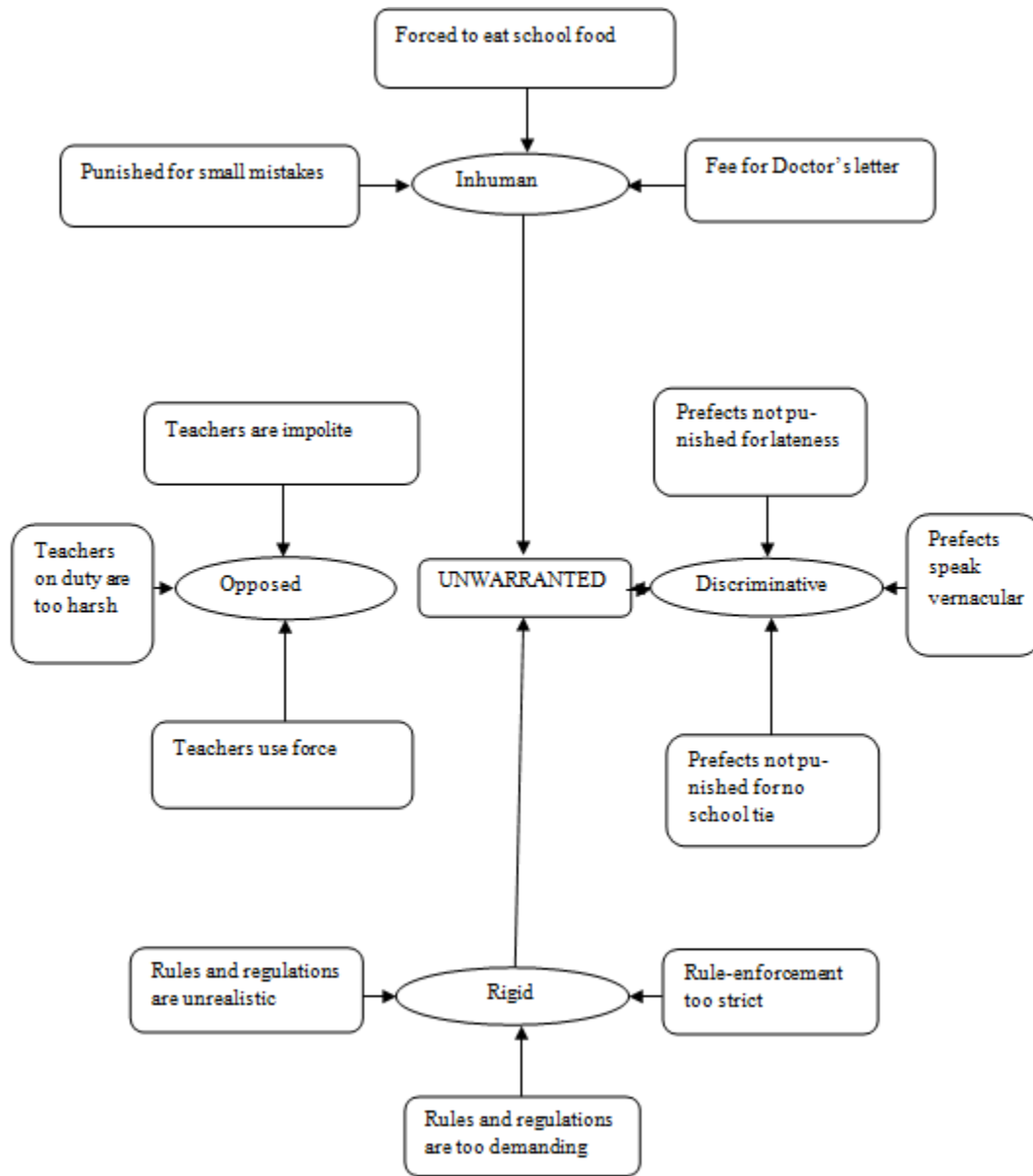


Figure 1: Structure of Thematic Networks for Students' Perception of School Rules with Regard to Teacher-Student Relationship.

**Analysis Stage B: Exploration of the Text for Students' Perception of School Rules with Regard to Teacher-Student Relationship**

The interviews obtained thoughtful and honest information on students' perception of school rules with regard to teacher-student relationship. The exploration of the text by the researcher was done through interpreting and discussing thematic networks. Merriam et al. (2015) argue that the categories constructed during data analysis should meet several criteria: Categories should be responsive to the purpose of the research. In effect, categories are the answers to research question(s).

**Step 4: Interpretation and Discussion of Thematic Networks for Students' Perception of School Rules and Regulations with Regard to Teacher-Student Relationship as in Figure 1.**

The participants were asked to give their views on students' perception of school rules and regulations with regard to Teacher-Student Relationship and the following global theme emerged-the way teachers executed the school rules and regulations was unwarranted. The organizing themes that emerged were: The school rules and regulations were opposed, rigid, discriminative and inhuman.

- i. *Organizing Theme for School Rules and Regulations Being Opposed*



According to the participants, school rules and regulations were opposed because teachers were impolite, they used force and that teachers on duty were too harsh.

Jane intrigues that *“Actually, I hate teachers for punishing me for failure to attend Christian Union Fellowship. Well, I am Muslim and it is common sense that I do not pick anything from their services. I become more annoyed because they act impolitely by forcing me to attend that ‘fellowship’ yet there is freedom of worship.”* According to Kiptoo (2020, February, 1<sup>st</sup>), students should be allowed to freely participate in religious activities without interference as long as these activities do not go against the rules of the school.

Joyce argues that *“I do not like teachers who expect me to go for cross-country yet I have a chest problem. Besides why should I be forced to go for games when it is cold? I cough badly at the assembly in the mornings yet they cannot have mercy.”* As a wise teacher once said, if you don’t have a plan for your students, they will have a plan for you (Sithole, 2008).

Manefield, Robyn, Moor and Mahar (2007) posit that students should be involved in decisions about extracurricular issues, which classes students take, how time is used during the day, discipline and classroom management policies. Jeruto and Kiprof (2011) found out that students are not involved in decision making. James recounts that *“the teacher on duty had been quarreled by the principal for not making sure that students were not late for classes. I had gone to see my class teacher when the bell rang and as I was running to class this teacher on duty in his emotional mood rained blows on me without finding out why I was late.”* Lutomia et al. (2006) argue that some teachers may be too strict and although it is a standing school rule that lateness must be punished, there are many genuine reasons for lateness. According to Waldron (2005), students feel that ‘caring’ or ‘respectful’ teachers who define their role beyond classroom-based instruction are more effective in preventing and managing ‘risky’/ ‘problem’ behaviours.

The study found out that the teachers were harsh and impolite in enforcement of rules and regulations and the students detested.

### ii. Organizing Theme for School Rules and Regulations Being Rigid.

According to the participants, school rules and regulations were rigid because rules and regulations were unrealistic, too demanding and that rule- enforcement was too strict.

Joshua asserts that *“Some teachers are too strict when enforcing school rules. Why should I be beaten for wearing a shirt without a badge yet such shirts are expensive and my parents do not have money? Besides, of what use is it anyway when I am always in a school sweater and the student council members too do not wear them and are not punished?”*

Waldron (2005) argue that students challenge the rules they feel are unfair and which disadvantage them.

James exudes that *“Why should I be refused to go to the shops after 5pm, when sooner or later I will pass through the same shopping center on my way home? I mean we are day scholars and this is unrealistic”*

Stakeholders of schools ought to strike a balance for school rules and regulation for students to find value in them.

John posits that *“well I hate a teacher who will punish me after 5pm just because I have gone to the shopping center to relax myself by taking a soda, I mean these rules are too much”*

Markham and Aveyard (2003) posit that schools can maximize student commitment to the instructional and regulatory orders by eroding unnecessary boundaries, for example between staff and students, and between different areas of learning. The researcher found out that there seemed to have been no communication to the students concerning school rules and regulations and so a vacuum was created between the students and their teachers in regard to school rules and regulations and their purpose.

### iii. Organizing Theme for School Rules and Regulations Being Discriminative.

According to the participants, school rules and regulations were discriminative because prefects were not punished for speaking vernacular, being late and for not putting on a tie. Jane laments that *“when I am late with a prefect and I am the only one punished by teachers, I feel so bad and sad that concentrating in class becomes a major problem.* Teachers ought not to show favoritism when enforcing school rules since it is an unfair endeavor. According to Bellingham (2003), to create a democratic climate in the organization, the school leaders should; be consistent, create trust, think in a long-term manner, be fair, respect for different thoughts, ensure the solidarity, share the power, be honest and give value to people.

Janice argues that *“Why should I be punished for not putting on a school tie when even prefects do not put them on?”* Could be the student Jane terms a rule of not wearing a tie not to be important since the prefects also were not putting them on. Naidoo (2005) democratic principles include respect, equality and equity.

James laments that *“We are used to speaking in vernacular as students, all of us including the prefects, yet when it comes to punishment, teachers do not punish the prefects even if both of you were talking. This angers so much.”* This argument reveals the distance between enforcement of school rules and regulations by the teachers and acceptance of the same by the students. Jeruto et al. (2011) argue that students hardly have the opportunity to express themselves because school administrators have remained autocratic in the way they manage their institutions. Blum (2007) also opines that effective principals are good listeners and are open to suggestions from every stakeholder. Bäckman et al. (2007) argue that democratic school governance enhances learning as learners are provided with opportunities to maximize their potential. It is evident

that although rules and regulations are inevitable in a school, they must be positively perceived by the students. The study found out that the teachers practiced discrimination in execution of school rules.

*iv. Organizing Theme for Teachers Being Inhuman in the Way they Enforced School Rules and Regulations*

According to the participants, teachers were inhuman in the way they enforced school rules and regulations for demanding a sick child yet to get one a fee had to be paid in the hospital, they punished for small mistakes and they forced them to eat school food. Janice argues that “*Students who are found buying food across the fence are heavily punished by teachers. Why should I be forced to take school food when there is a variety across the fence?*”

Jane posits that “*I disagree with teachers on duty who expect me to arrive at school as early as 6.30 am yet I am to pass through a forest. How can I risk being raped? These teachers are unkind! Let them use force and cane me hundred times but I cannot risk my life.*” Naidoo (2005) provides an exhaustive list of democratic principles which, include purpose and vision, collaboration, consultation and communication, participation and shared decision-making, accountability, transparency and openness, informed choice, rights of individuals, integrity and trust, critical thinking, common good and interconnectedness of the community.

Joyce argues that “*At school, I cannot produce a Doctor’s letter to show that I have a health issue since at the hospital I am asked to pay some money before a form can be filled for me yet I do not have any money and teachers are not human.*”

Proper management of finances in schools could gather with ease for small but critical concerns of students who could be in dire need. Pérez-Expósito (2015) observes that student participation in school governance includes making decisions about the effective use of resources and school budget among other things.

Joshua also asserts that “*Some teachers treat their students in a very unkind manner. As a result, students are not free to talk to teachers or even ask questions especially in class.*”

John argues that “*Some students have opted to drop out of school all together to escape punishments from teachers making completion rate among students to go down.*” Renuka (2012) suggest that values should not only be expressed in printed curricular but should be fundamental and central in the operation of school life.

The study found out that the teachers were rather unkind in the way they dealt with the students amidst the fact that school rules ought not to be broken.

## V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### *a. Conclusion*

The study found out that the students’ perception of school rules and regulations with regard to teacher-student relation-

ship was generally negative. Teacher-student conflicts were as a result of excessive force that teachers used on the students. Their inhuman, discriminative and impolite nature made students to oppose them.

### *b. Recommendations*

On the basis of the findings, the researcher came up with the following recommendations: Teachers ought to take their time in explaining school rules and regulations to their students and avoid casting them in steel. Besides teachers ought to shun discrimination and harshness in enforcing of school rules and uphold dialogue.

## VI. SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Qualitative studies on the same field ought to be carried out in other parts of the country for comparison purposes.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I give Glory to God for His inspiration. I appreciate Kenya Association of Professional Counsellors for giving me the opportunity to carry out this study. I thank the Government officials for authority given to me to carry out this research. I extend my special gratitude to my family members for standing with me throughout the study. I give thanks to the school administration for giving me the opportunity to conduct the study in the institution. Special thanks go to the research participants for trusting me and bringing the success of the study.

God bless you all.

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