

## Challenges Encountered by Student Councils in Promoting Students' Discipline in Public Secondary Schools in Ilemela District, Tanzania

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### Abstract:

This study investigated the challenges faced by student councils in promoting student discipline in public secondary schools in Ilemela District. The Path-Goal Theory guided the research and utilized a mixed-methods approach with a convergent parallel research design. The sample consisted of 183 participants, including five heads of schools, five discipline teachers, and five student council members selected purposively. Additionally, 76 teachers and 92 students were chosen using stratified and random sampling techniques. Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and questionnaires. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics with the assistance of SPSS version 20, while qualitative data were analyzed through content analysis. The findings revealed that student councils are experiencing significant difficulties in enhancing student discipline in public secondary schools. The study identified several challenges that hinder the effectiveness of student councils. Key challenges include inadequate training and workshops, which leave council members needing more skills to implement discipline programs. Additionally, student council members often need help to balance their dual responsibilities of studying and managing disciplinary issues. The councils also require better resources for their official duties and greater involvement from school management in developing school rules. The study recommends that school management collaborate with student councils when formulating rules, regulations, and by-laws, as council members have valuable insights into student concerns and disciplinary matters. Furthermore, student council members should be provided with regular training to build their capacity and ensure they can effectively promote student discipline.

### Keywords:

By laws, Challenges, Discipline, random sampling techniques, Regulations, SPSS, Student councils.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

A student council is a representative body formed by students appointed by school administrators, along with others elected democratically by their peers, to serve as a voice for the student body within a school (Gathura & Momanyi, 2021). According to Mayes (2019), the student council typically includes an executive board comprising a head prefect, a vice president, and a secretary who oversees operations. Other elected representatives, such as class monitors, support this board. The number of representatives can vary based on the specific needs of each school. The mission of a student council is to serve as a bridge between students and school administration. This goal is achieved by participating in decision-making on behalf of their peers and acting as mentors. Such involvement fosters managerial skills and encourages student engagement in various school activities like clubs and addressing disciplinary issues among fellow students (Nduta, 2018). Research indicates that student councils provide a platform for students to voice their opinions, advocate for reforms, and enhance overall student discipline and educational experiences (Dominic, 2021). Allman and Slates (2017) argue that disciplinary practices in American schools are currently a problem. Many students are being suspended from class due to disciplinary issues, even though suspension is not an ideal solution. The enforcement of discipline in schools often relies on consequences rather than proactive measures to prevent disciplinary issues. It is suggested that

involving student councils in discipline education campaigns and allowing them to deliver messages to their peers can help address discipline problems within a school.

In Poland, school discipline has improved through a collaborative effort between students and teachers, with student councils playing a key role (Joanna & Romaniuk, 2020). However, the autonomy of student councils depends largely on school management. Kythereotis et al. (2020) explained that student councils in Austria play a crucial role in enhancing discipline in schools. These councils effectively promote positive behavior change in public secondary schools by implementing various discipline schemes and programs. In Singapore, a collaborative environment has been established among student councils, teachers, and school administrators to offer peer support, enforce discipline, and organize social events that contribute to improving discipline in public secondary schools (Mansor et al., 2015).

In Brazil, the situation regarding student councils is complex. While they are recognized as important platforms for students to voice their concerns and engage in promoting discipline, their influence and effectiveness vary across schools (Souza & Romano, 2015). There is a lack of uniformity in the approach and collective methods used by student councils to address disciplinary issues among students.

In Nigeria, student councils, known as "Students' Union Government" or "SUG," exist in many public and private secondary schools (Okoye & Omoike, 2018). However, these councils lack sufficient autonomy to effectively address disciplinary issues such as examination malpractice, theft, sexual misconduct, truancy, and drug abuse among students. These disciplinary challenges contribute to poor academic performance in public secondary schools (Adeyanju, 2019).

Similarly, Usman (2016) points out that many Nigerian public secondary schools do not delegate discipline activities to the student government, which could help address the issue of indiscipline in schools. Indiscipline cases have also been a persistent issue in Ghanaian secondary schools (Kpunde, 2019). Ngwokubaenui (2015) emphasizes the importance of prioritizing meaningful discipline by involving the student council and school board in addressing disciplinary matters.

In Zambia, the approach to student discipline and student councils varies depending on the policies and practices of individual schools (Mbongonya, 2018). Some schools prioritize discipline and positive behavior through student councils, while others struggle with management challenges in maintaining discipline effectively (Nkolola & Miuzata, 2021). The Kenyan Education Act of 2013 mandated the establishment of Student Councils to enhance the quality of education for students.

The Ministry of Education (MOE) established student councils to address student unrest and indiscipline in schools (Simiyu, 2020). However, despite the presence of student councils and disciplinary policies, many Kenyan public secondary schools still face issues such as riots, strikes, and violence (Gethura et al., 2021).

In Tanzania, student councils were introduced under Education Act No. 25 of 1978 and subsequent amendments (No. 10 of 1995 and 2002), Education Policy of 1995, and Child Act No. 21 of 2009 (Lumanija & Mkullu, 2020). The structure and functions of student councils vary among schools based on factors such as student enrollment and the school environment (Chuma & Kabogo, 2018).

Tanzanian student councils are established to enhance learning environments by helping fellow students avoid disciplinary issues (Thomas, 2019). These councils are meant to collaborate with teachers to enhance student discipline and achieve academic goals. However, despite these efforts, student councils' impact on promoting discipline among students has been limited (Lyogo, 2017).

The quality assurance report for the Ilemela district in 2019 recognizes the involvement of student councils in activities aimed at enhancing discipline and improving the learning environment for students. Despite the efforts made by school councils in addressing disciplinary issues, the discipline status of students in public secondary schools continues to be a concern, raising questions about the effectiveness of the councils' roles in benefiting students.

The report from the Ilemela District Education Officer for the academic year 2021/2022 highlighted concerning statistics in public secondary schools. Out of 17,147 students, 1714 dropped out, 307 were truants, and 50 were suspended for drug abuse. Additionally, there were 24 pregnancy cases

reported from January 2021 to May 2022 (URT, 2022). This study aims to examine the obstacles faced by student councils in promoting discipline among students in public secondary schools.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### PATH-GOAL THEORY

The Path-Goal Theory, developed by House in 1974, posits that effective leaders should clarify the paths to achieving goals and provide necessary support and rewards to motivate their followers. By adapting their leadership styles to meet the needs of their followers and the situational demands, leaders can improve follower satisfaction, motivation, and performance. This theory underscores the importance of leader flexibility and identifies four primary leadership styles: directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented.

The Path-Goal Theory aims to establish a positive work environment that supports followers in achieving their goals (Murage, Mwaruvie & Njoka, 2017). Khalfan et al. (2013) suggest that leaders following this theory should overcome barriers to progress by adapting their leadership style to the situation and the characteristics of their followers. Effective leaders may employ directive, supportive, or participative leadership styles based on the specific circumstances and the needs of their followers, ultimately working towards the organization's goals.

#### Strengths of Path-Goal Theory

The Path-Goal Theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the role and effectiveness of student council members in enhancing students' discipline to achieve organizational goals. By considering various leadership behaviors and their impact on subordinates' perceptions, motivation, and performance, the theory provides a well-rounded perspective on how effective leaders influence their followers to improve. The theory emphasizes the importance of setting clear goals and providing precise guidelines to help students understand expectations regarding discipline. Clear and consistent communication from student councils regarding discipline and expectations leads to improved student discipline and academic outcomes. When students know what is expected of them, they are more likely to follow rules and meet expectations. Supportive leadership plays a crucial role in increasing motivation among students. Theory emphasizes the significance of leaders being supportive and approachable, which can enhance students' motivation to follow school rules and actively participate in disciplined educational initiatives. Positive student council-student relationships fostered by supportive leadership lead to decreased levels of disciplinary problems and higher student engagement. By creating a positive school climate where students feel valued and understood, supportive leadership helps reduce the occurrence of disciplinary issues (Ndwiga, 2022). Additionally, this approach promotes adaptability to student needs. It recognizes various directive, supportive, participative, and achievement-oriented leadership styles tailored to student requirements. This flexibility can effectively address a range of disciplinary issues. By adopting adaptable leadership that responds to students' diverse needs, overall discipline can improve. Student councils can more effectively manage various disciplinary challenges by customizing their strategies.

#### Weakness of Path-Goal Theory

One weakness of the Path-Goal Theory is that it places a heavy burden on followers, as it requires them to rely heavily on their leaders to achieve their goals. This leader-centric approach fosters a strong dependence among followers on their leaders for support and guidance, making it difficult for them to accomplish organizational objectives in the absence of their leaders. Despite this weakness, a recent study found value in the theory, particularly in enhancing discipline effectiveness within a student council.

#### Relevance of Path-Goal Theory to the Study

The Path-Goal Theory offers a valuable framework for comprehending and improving the efficacy of student councils in fostering discipline among students. According to this theory, effective leadership involves clarifying the path to achieving goals, eliminating obstacles, and offering support and rewards to motivate subordinates. In the context of student councils, this theory suggests that by clearly communicating expectations regarding discipline, removing barriers to adherence to school rules, and providing support and encouragement, student councils can effectively motivate students to maintain discipline (Murage et al., 2019).

### Empirical Literature Review

A study by Bickmore and Parker (2017) in the USA revealed that students' diversity in backgrounds, beliefs, and values makes it challenging for student leaders to develop inclusive and fair disciplinary initiatives for all students. Similarly, Alexander (2017) conducted a study on disciplinary strategies in secondary schools in Mississippi County, USA, where 70% of informants noted that student leaders struggled to unite students and prevent disciplinary issues effectively due to parents' perceptions of the leaders' initiatives.

Kuper and Seipel (2017) from Germany demonstrated that cultural diversity in schools presents challenges in comprehending and addressing disciplinary approaches proposed by student councils to improve student discipline. Furthermore, a study by the European Union (2018) found that many secondary school student council members lack awareness of their responsibilities, particularly in relation to discipline, which impacts their effectiveness in school activities.

However, the researchers failed to examine how enhanced training and collaborative efforts among student councils, teachers, and the community can address disciplinary challenges. Thus, the current study aims to fill that gap by exploring interactive strategies that empower student councils to effectively navigate cultural differences in fulfilling their disciplinary roles.

Furthermore, a study conducted by Souza and Romano (2015) in Brazil suggests that student councils play a crucial role in addressing the lack of resources and infrastructure needed to implement various discipline programs. The study highlights that schools often prioritize addressing issues such as overcrowded classrooms, access to technology, and teaching materials over implementing effective discipline measures. As a result, student discipline is often perceived as a lower priority in many public secondary schools. Similarly, a report by UNICEF (2011) found that student participation in school governance in France is limited. France student councils often feel a sense of obligation towards their peers who voted them into power, prioritizing the interests of their fellow students over the demands of the school. Additionally, a study by O'Donovan (2015) from Ireland suggests that student leaders encounter resistance to change, as some students view disciplinary actions taken by their leaders as unnecessary and persuade others to oppose them. Adetoro and Oni (2015) studied the impact of students' participation in decision-making in Nigeria and highlighted that students struggle to balance academic responsibilities with leadership roles. This imbalance leads to internal conflicts among student council leaders, resulting in academic decline and difficulty in persuading others while dealing with personal crises. In contrast, Glover (2015) observed that Ghanaian student leaders encounter challenges in exercising authority and managing interpersonal conflicts when enforcing disciplinary actions on their peers, as they perceive their teachers to hold greater legitimacy and power.

In a study conducted in Kenya by Nekessa (2018), it was found that student councils face various challenges in fulfilling their duties effectively. The study revealed that student council members often miss classes while dealing with disciplinary issues, leading to feelings of boredom and dissatisfaction with their roles. Additionally, student council leaders expressed concerns about a lack of time for personal studies, low motivation, and insufficient training in leadership skills from teachers and school administrators.

This is supported by Ndwigah (2022) and Nakessa (2018), who noted that schools lack space for feedback on discipline matters from the student council in the fixed general school timetable. Additionally, Nyende (2018) highlighted external factors contributing to resistance conflict in management in Uganda, while Mukiti (2014) emphasized that student leaders have limited opportunities and resources to conduct discipline education awareness campaigns. Consequently, student councils' efforts are often hampered by a lack of institutional support.

Furthermore, Mnubi (2017) argues that school councils have the potential to enhance basic education in Tanzania. However, a significant issue arises from the teachers' dominance over students' choices. Despite students having their preferences, teachers often intervene in elections by influencing the selection of leaders. These appointed leaders end up serving as spies or puppets for the teachers, lacking the necessary support to fulfill their duties effectively and address discipline issues.

Yusuph and Ambich (2017) argued that student leadership in Tanzanian secondary schools is not democratically elected but rather influenced by teachers' preferences. As a result, students often feel



betrayed, resent their leaders, and maintain a social distance from them, which hinders teamwork and unity within the student council. This lack of cohesion can lead to ambiguity in disciplinary measures. To address these issues, the researchers aim to identify the challenges faced by student councils in Ilemela public secondary schools.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a mixed research approach with a convergent parallel design. The sample consisted of 76 teachers and 92 students from 5 public secondary schools selected using stratified and simple random techniques. Additionally, 5 school heads, 5 student council leaders, and 5 discipline teachers were purposively selected for the study. The data were collected through questionnaires administered to students and teachers, as well as interview guides for discipline teachers, student council leaders, and heads of schools. Piloting was conducted to ensure the validity and reliability of the research instruments. After data collection, questionnaire data were analysed using descriptive statistics with the assistance of SPSS version 20. The data from interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. All research ethical issues were strictly observed throughout the study.

### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:

This section presents the results and discussion based on the study's purpose. The study findings were gathered through questionnaires administered to teachers and students, as well as interviews conducted with heads of schools, discipline teachers, and student council leaders. The results are presented quantitatively and supplemented with qualitative insights in the following subsections. Participants were asked to identify the challenges faced by student councils in improving students' discipline in public secondary schools. The summarized results are presented in Table 1 below.

**Table 1**

*Students' and Teachers' Responses on Challenges Faced by Student Councils in Enhancing Students' Discipline*

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Inadequate support and cooperation	29	17
Inadequate leadership skills	66	40
Conflict	22	13
Inadequate facilities	34	20
Multiple responsibilities	17	10
Total	168	100

**Source:** Field Data (2024)

#### Insufficient Support and Cooperation

The data in Table 1 shows that 29 (17%) participants identified insufficient support and cooperation as a key challenge faced by student councils in their efforts to enhance student discipline. This indicates that a lack of collaboration and encouragement from school authorities and peers hinders the effectiveness of student councils in enforcing disciplinary measures in public secondary schools. Furthermore, during interviews, a student leader highlighted this issue by stating:

*Many teachers should better support discipline programs led by student leaders, but these initiatives often need proper implementation. As members of the discipline club, we tackle disciplinary issues and organize campaigns about school rules. However, our requests for funding from the discipline office and administration are often denied. Additionally, some teachers are hesitant to participate, and many students do not engage with these campaigns despite being their target audience (Interviewee 3, July 2024).*

The quotation suggests that student councils operate independently with little backing from the school administration and some students, indicating a lack of support for student leaders. This implies that students may not respect their leaders, and some teachers may not prioritize student discipline. These teachers may view discipline as a low priority and only focus on their salary. This aligns with Murage's (2019) study, which found that student councils receive minimal support from school management, leading to ineffective discipline efforts. The findings contradict House's Path-Goal Theory (1974), which asserts that an effective leader removes obstacles and supports

subordinates by clearly outlining a path to achieve the organization's goals. Therefore, the lack of support from teachers for student councils highlights a gap in their leadership effectiveness. Student councils require more encouragement, support, guidance, and resources from their teachers to motivate students and enhance discipline successfully.

### **Inadequate Leadership Skills**

A significant issue identified in student councils is the lack of adequate leadership skills, particularly in managing disciplinary cases. According to 66 (40%) respondents, student councils struggle with handling disciplinary matters effectively. This indicates a deficiency in the necessary leadership abilities required to oversee discipline programs in public schools. The lack of sufficient knowledge and expertise in managing complex disciplinary responsibilities is attributed to limited managerial and leadership training or mentorship for student council members. Souza and Romano (2015) highlighted a similar challenge in Brazil, where student councils faced resource and training shortages in leadership skills, leading to ineffective implementation of discipline-related tasks. Consistent with these findings, interviews revealed that student council members often struggle with discipline issues due to inadequate leadership skills, as expressed by one student leader:

*We were selected through various methods, including elections and appointments by staff teachers. After being announced as the new council during the parade, we assumed our leadership roles without any formal training or seminars. Instead, we relied on observing the experiences of the previous council members, which left our responsibilities unclear. We lack the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively manage school activities, such as discipline, and are simply trying to maintain the status quo set by the previous council (Interviewee 8, July 2024).*

The student councils lack the necessary leadership induction and training to improve students' discipline. Respondents expressed concern that teachers are aware of the need for effective on-the-job induction, seminars, and training to enhance their performance in disciplinary duties, but they do not prioritize these. These findings are consistent with those of Lumanija and Mkullu (2021), who highlighted the importance of creating good student leaders with strong leadership skills to effectively manage school and student discipline. However, these findings do not align with House's (1974) Path-Goal Theory, which emphasizes the significance of administrators' and managers' mentorship, mission, and succession plans for developing leadership skills to guide and motivate followers, such as student councils and students, to achieve organizational goals.

### **Inadequate Facilities**

Resources such as offices, funds, and time are crucial for maintaining discipline in schools. However, the study revealed that schools and student councils often struggle with inadequate facilities, leading to substandard work, as reported by 34 (20%) participants. This indicates that many schools lack the necessary funds to establish offices and acquire equipment that would enable the councils to effectively carry out their disciplinary activities. During interviews, a school principal highlighted the issue, stating:

*The implementation of free education has resulted in a shortage of funds in our school, making it difficult to provide the necessary equipment for student councils. Previously, parents' contributions provided ample resources, but now we struggle to accommodate the needs of student leaders. There is no designated office or filing system for student leaders, leading to the loss of important disciplinary documents due to mishandling and misplacement (Interviewee 4, July 2024).*

The absence of necessary resources poses a challenge for student councils in addressing students' discipline issues. School administrators often lack alternative solutions and are constrained by financial limitations in public secondary schools. These findings align with Murage's (2019) observation that student councils struggle to improve discipline due to a lack of disciplinary records and essential facilities, making it difficult to evaluate their effectiveness. The Path-Goal Theory by Robert (1974) emphasizes the importance of a close relationship between leaders and followers, highlighting the need for student councils to have a designated office to engage with students on discipline matters effectively. School administrators should consider implementing income-

generating projects to support the needs of student councils and enhance their ability to address discipline issues.

### Conflicts

The study found that 22 (13%) participants faced conflicts as a major challenge in student councils. These conflicts arose among student council members, between members and teachers, and between students and council members. They stemmed from varying opinions on discipline strategies, misunderstandings, and resistance to authority. These internal and external conflicts can impede the council's effectiveness in promoting student discipline. During interviews, a student council leader mentioned:

*Students dislike us because they perceive us as being controlled by teachers. They do not realize that our efforts are aimed at helping them behave well and succeed in their exams. They view us as adversaries and even contemplate seeking revenge by attacking us on our way home. Personally, I am hesitant to report any instances of misbehaviour out of fear of being assaulted on my way home (Interviewee 11, July 2024).*

The lesson from the above quotation is that students lack faith in their leaders and see them as informants to teachers about their misconduct. As a result, students maintain a distant relationship with their leaders and may even plan to retaliate against them as a form of revenge for reporting them to teachers. This lack of trust can lead to conflicts and misunderstandings among students. Eman (2018) from Jordan also highlighted this issue, pointing out that student leaders sometimes suggest punishments for their peers, which can further exacerbate tensions. In interviews, it was revealed that disagreements can arise among student council members, particularly when advocating for undisciplined students, leading to conflicts within the student body. One student leader expressed the following sentiment:

*There is discord among student council members when it comes to deciding on the appropriate punishment for students who display misconduct. Some council members show favouritism towards the undisciplined students, seeking to avoid severe punishment due to their friendships. Additionally, there are instances where council members betray the trust of the council by leaking confidential information. For instance, if a decision is made to discipline a student, some individuals will divulge this information to the student, revealing the identity of the council leader who proposed the punishment during the meeting (Interviewee 7, July 2023).*

The quotation suggests that internal and external conflicts exist among student councils due to various reasons. Some common causes include a lack of confidentiality among council members and teachers behaving unethically. These findings align with Ndwiga (2022), who noted that conflicts are prevalent among student council members in schools. Such conflicts can lead to tension in the school environment and hinder the council's ability to work together on disciplinary matters. Therefore, it is crucial for student councils, teachers, and students to maintain respectful relationships to address disciplinary issues effectively in a school.

The findings reveal that 17 (10%) respondents believe that student councils are burdened with multiple responsibilities, which hinders their ability to effectively enhance student discipline. Juggling various roles as students and leaders poses a challenge for council members, causing confusion in prioritizing their tasks. This sentiment was echoed in an interview with a student leader who expressed:

*In my school, student leaders sometimes miss certain periods because they are fulfilling their leadership responsibilities. For instance, while other students are in class, student leaders may be overseeing disciplinary actions or monitoring latecomers. As a result, some leaders may have to leave their supervisory duties to attend class sessions (Interviewee 5, July 2024).*

The quotation suggests that student council members are required to attend to disciplinary issues during class hours, causing them to miss some periods and impacting their academic performance. This is often a result of poor timetable scheduling by school management in secondary schools. As a result, students are deprived of optimal learning conditions, leading them to prioritize their disciplinary responsibilities over their academic obligations. Numerous studies have consistently shown that student council members struggle to balance their leadership roles with their academic

responsibilities, often prioritizing their leadership duties over attending classes (Kambuga & Omollo, 2017; Murage et al., 2019; Johnson, 2021).

## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study explored the challenges faced by student councils in improving student discipline. The research highlights the crucial role of discipline in enhancing academic performance and the central role of student councils in maintaining discipline. Schools can only effectively address discipline issues with the support of student councils, as they are often better equipped to handle disciplinary matters due to their closer relationship with students. However, student councils face ongoing challenges in enforcing school rules and regulations. They are often overwhelmed with multiple responsibilities and need help balancing their student and leader roles. To address these challenges, it is recommended that schools provide additional support and resources to student councils, such as training programs and clear guidelines for disciplinary procedures. Additionally, schools should consider revising the student council's schedule to allow more time to focus on disciplinary issues. By addressing these challenges, student councils can be more effective in promoting discipline and enhancing the overall school environment. The multifaceted responsibilities sometimes affect students academically, leading to fatigue and mental stress. Student councils often need more induction courses and training, resulting in more leadership skills. Based on the findings, the study recommends that schools effectively utilize student councils to handle disciplinary issues. School management should provide necessary training and resources such as offices, supplies, and funds to council members to enhance their skills in managing student discipline. The school administration should also actively support and collaborate with teachers to address discipline issues and improve academic performance. Further studies should be conducted to compare the impact of discipline on academic achievement in public and private schools and assess parental involvement in enhancing disciplinary measures in public secondary schools.

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