Original Article

Students' Discipline Challenges Faced by Secondary Schools in Uganda after Covid-19 School Closures: A Qualitative Analysis of the Contemporary Perspectives in Lwengo District

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ABSTRACT

Following the unprecedented prevalence of indefinite discipline dynamics in schools, especially after COVID-19 school closures, this study explored the students' discipline challenges faced by secondary schools in Uganda, focusing on participants' contemporary perspectives. The study conceptualized students' discipline challenges in terms of Responsibility, Honesty, Determination, and Compliance with regulations. Damrongpant (2019)'s self-discipline model guided this kind of conceptualization. The study involved 9 students, 6 administrators, 9 teachers, 2 district officers, and 3 board of governors' members. A total of 29 participants were selected purposively for the study. The research instruments were an interview guide, a focus group discussion guide, and a documentary analysis checklist. Data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings of the study revealed that discipline challenges faced in secondary schools after COVID-19 school closures are conceptualized along personal, institutional, and community-based disruptions that came with the COVID-19 occurrence. It was therefore concluded that discipline challenges faced in secondary schools after COVID-19 school closures are conceptualized along personal, institutional, and community-based disruptions that came with the COVID-19 occurrence. The study recommends that school managers, such as headteachers, should regularly follow up closely on students' discipline, provision of urgent training to teachers and student leaders to enable them to acquire professionalism in students' discipline management, understand trauma-informed practices and foster a positive school environment. The study finally recommends the promotion of student empowerment programs, mediations, as well as positive behavioural interventions and support.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most pressing challenges in African secondary schools, Ugandan in particular, has always been that of the conduct and discipline of students, especially after the COVID-19 lockdown. Since the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools Worldwide have suffered a profound and far-reaching impact as a result of the pandemic disruption of the schools' programs (Sindiswa et al, 2022). Before the pandemic, for example, schools operated under a structured learning environment that emphasized discipline and adherence to rules (Darling-Hammond 2020). Besides, classroom interactions with teachers, supervision, and routine schedules played a crucial role in maintaining students' discipline. Indeed, the issue of discipline, especially among students, has long been a pertinent issue of concern (Miller, 2015). As Bloom (1987) historically put it, even in America, the decline of classical education resulted in a lack of discipline and morals among students. He further indicated that discipline is necessary for the cultivation of virtue and that education during then needed to focus on developing habits of self-control in institutions like the Rhoman school of Rhetoric, Stoic and Epicurean schools in Rome, Platonic Academy and Aristotle's Lyceum school in Greece as well as the house of life in Egypt considered students discipline a key factor to success. As such, managers of these schools always emphasise that students behave in a way that exhibits ancient virtue and intellectual excellence (Smith, 2008; Jones & Brown, 2010).

In Africa, historical evidence reveals that the South African Schools Act, 84 of 1996, section 8 highlights that the management of students' discipline calls on teachers to make children feel emotionally comfortable and physically safe so that learners can develop self-discipline and accountability in their actions (Naong, 2007). In Tanzania, discipline is also valued since the teachers' aim is to ensure that discipline is maintained and that school activities run without interference (Kadama, 2016). In Kenya, secondary schools are managed by the Board of Management, which manages the school on behalf of the patron and the minister. The headteachers and teachers are responsible for the day-to-day management of the discipline in the school (Ssekiziyivu 2013). The head teacher's management of discipline skills is very essential because the general school and classroom discipline is dependent upon him or her (Okumbe 2001). The headteacher thus plays an important role in managing discipline in that he monitors and maintains the behaviour policy and classroom activity, being felt around the school in all the activities happening, and dealing with staff who are all part of the management functions.

In Uganda today, schools all over the country and particularly in Lwengo district, teachers are witnessing unprecedented discipline challenges among their students (Nakuya, 2021; Kamisha, 2022). This literature, however, focuses on the causes of discipline challenges among students in secondary schools, including family and parenting issues, social influence, school environment, virtual learning, and negative peer influence (Welsh, 2023). Literature, however, goes further to assert that after the two years of full reopening of schools, Parents, teachers, students, and the community as a whole started observing high indiscipline in secondary schools in different districts of Greater Masaka, including Lwengo District (Kisekka, 2022). The current study concentrated on exploring the students' discipline challenges in secondary schools due to the COVID-19 school closures. The urgency of this study followed the fact that this situation had started raising difficult questions that would leave schools in a very complicated situation, in line with disruptive students' behaviour in schools that was likely to stay forever. If not addressed, it was likely to increase the consequences of students' indiscipline, such as the high school dropout rate and increased strikes. Hence, there was a need to explore students' discipline challenges after COVID-19 school closures so that sustainable ways of addressing them could be devised. Hence, a great need for this study aimed at exploring the students' discipline challenges after COVID-19 school closures among secondary schools in Lwengo District. The study aimed to answer the following research question:

- What are the discipline challenges faced by secondary schools in Lwengo district after COVID-19 school closures?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Discipline is one of the most important things in everyone's life; it is the source of happiness for everyone. It leads to the right path, and the students' discipline policy is the foundation for adequate education in schools (Ibenegbu, 2017). UNESCO (2020) discussed that with the COVID-19 pandemic, schools faced increased challenges in engaging students, as they shifted from physical learning to virtual schooling, where discipline control was hard. The shift from physical learning to virtual schooling because of COVID-19 school closures created academic indiscipline in students (Sultan et al, 2020; Park, 2020; Bookser et al., 2021; International Conference 2021). The scholars confirmed that the discipline of students changed during online studying. The researcher agrees with the scholars' perceptions of virtual learning concerning students' discipline. However, the researcher discovers the gap in the studies concerning the approach on how to curb such learning indiscipline. The studies above used a literature review method, and they were not in Lwengo District, which is the Centre of focus of this study. In these conditions, schools and educators face a very different disciplinary landscape, featuring new expectations of students' misbehaviour.

The COVID-19 school closure is blamed for indiscipline in learning institutions, and common indiscipline cases include: school fires, secondary school dropouts on the rise, drug abuse, fighting, sexual immorality, vandalism, disrespect of other students and staff absenteeism, and stealing (Nakuya 2021; UNESCO 2021; Kemigisa 2022). The researcher agrees with Kisseka (2022), who asserts that after the reopening of schools, teachers are observing deviant behaviour in schools. Thus, there is a need for this study on student discipline in post-COVID-19 school closures to establish a new approach to handling indiscipline in secondary schools. Different authors have studied the discipline problems of students upon returning to school after the pandemic. The phenomenon of student discipline existed before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, during which there was the physical closure of educational institutions globally. Rahmawati et al. (2023) assert that discipline is one of the most important things in a student's life. It is crucial to follow discipline in schools and along

with education, students must learn discipline in school because without discipline, students' learning is very difficult.

Belgen (2022) argues that the reasons for discipline challenges are psychological, technological, social-emotional, familial, and academic. The researcher agrees with the scholar's view that during post-school closures, many indiscipline cases were caused by the circumstances mentioned above. However, the study adopted only one research design, which is qualitative, ignoring the mixed methods to cater for the numerical part of the study. Furthermore, the study is in Turkey, not in Uganda, particularly in the Greater Masaka districts, which may cause variation in understanding of similar phenomena. Kahondo (2022) stated clearly that there is a relationship between welfare and discipline in secondary schools. The study recommended that the welfare status should be considered by the school administrators and proprietors when examining the discipline among secondary school students. This study is in line with Kemigisa (2022), who contends that the cause of strikes in the four schools in the Greater Masaka Region during post-school closures was closely related to students' welfare.

Nakuya (2021) asserts that the status of students' discipline in Lwengo Sub-county in Lwengo District was not good, and recommends a study on the new approach to use in schools to maintain the discipline of learners. Sultan et al. (2020) commented on how school discipline and students' misbehaviour have changed during the pandemic, adding that student misbehaviour never vanished during distance learning, although schools are finding that imposing discipline in the virtual environment is such a complicated and murky process. Hammerstein et al (2021) emphasized the effects of COVID-19-related school closures on students' achievement. The low morale and academic achievements in post-school closures are because of prolonged school closures that disrupted everyday life around the world. However, hardly

any of the authors above have assessed the issue at the stake of students' discipline during post-school closures. Hence, there is a need for this study on students' discipline in selected schools in the Lwengo district.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Theories assist researchers in situating and contextualizing their studies as a guide (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Different scholars have used different theories to investigate students' discipline. One of the theories used is the social learning theory, developed by Albert Bandura (1969). However, although this theory provides a framework for understanding how observational learning, modelling, and reinforcement influence students' behaviour and discipline in the post-pandemic context (Akers & Jennings, 2015), it does not provide clear boundaries for assessing discipline. In other words, the Social Learning Theory focuses more on how behaviour is copied from others but does not help measure discipline traits like responsibility, compliance with regulations, as well as self-determination. In the current study, therefore, Damrongpant's (2019) self-discipline model was used to underpin the boundaries for students' discipline, thereby informing the measurability of the concepts. The model indicates that students are a product of the development of self-discipline from the basic education system in a country. This model describes students' discipline to be indicated by honesty, responsibility, compliance with regulations, as well as self-determination. According to Damrongpanit's (2019) self-discipline analysis model, students' discipline is indicated by responsibility, which is measured by peaceful conflict resolution, class attendance, protection of university property, and punctuality. Honesty is measured by acceptance of personal mistakes and none of cheating on examinations. Determination is measured by attempts to complete tasks, and assignments, physical and emotional self-control and acquisition of knowledge, and lastly compliance with regulations measured by restraints

from drinking alcohol and drug abuse, restraints from physical and emotional abuse of others, restraints from destruction of university properties, and restraints from possession of illegal weapons.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed the interpretivist paradigm. The study used the qualitative approach. Besides, a descriptive multiple case study design was employed. Three schools were purposefully chosen from which 9 students, 6 administrators, 9 teachers, and 3 board of governors' members were also purposefully chosen. The justification for involving only nine teachers was that the researcher had reached the point of saturation where no new data was arising from the participants. The three chosen secondary schools were government/public School A, faith-based government- School B, and faith-based privately owned- School C, as summarized in Table 1. The study used interview guides, focus group discussion guides, and documentary review guides to collect data. Data was thematically analysed. This started with familiarization with the data by actively reading and re-reading through repeatedly to search for meanings and patterns, then coding started, in which features of the data that appeared interesting were assessed in a meaningful way. Coding was done in two phases; Open and focused coding. Open coding began by apprehending the meaning of words, phrases or sentences used by the participants by tagging or labeling, in order to capture the essence or feature(s) of the data. Focused coding was used to discover the most significant and frequent open codes and this helped to identify my main categories and subcategories. The main categories and subcategories that emerged were used as the basis for axial coding. With axial coding, categories identified through open coding were used to make connections between categories and sub-categories, even as relationships between these categories began to develop. The study ensured transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability to maintain data quality control.

Table 1: Summary of the Nature of Secondary Schools Involved in the Study

Sources	School A	School B	School C
Type	Government or Public secondary school	Government-aided faith-based	Faith-based, privately owned
Status	Registered	Registered	Registered
Age	4 years	20 years	60 years
Location	Kisekka sub-county	Lwengo sub-county	Kingo sub-county

Source: Field data

RESULTS

This study aimed to explore the discipline challenges faced in schools after COVID-19 school closures in Lwengo District, Uganda. However, it is important to provide the demographic information of the study participants across the three schools. Table 2 provides a summary of this demographic information. This information is important because it shows that in the current study, the researcher ensured triangulation. It also shows the experience of participants as well as their respective positions.

Table 2: Characteristics of the Interview Participants That Were Involved in the Study.

S/N	Participants	Gender	Involved Number	Average Age	Average Years in school/ position
1.	Headteachers	Male	01	45	15
		Female	02		
2.	Teachers	Male	05	40	10
		Female	04		
3.	Students' leaders	Male	03	15	04
		Female	03		
4.	Regular students	Male	02	15	04
		Female	01		
5.	DEO	Male	01	54	07
		Female	00		
6.	DIS	Male	01	46	06
		Female	00		
7.	Members of the BOG	Male	02	45	04
		Female	01		
8.	Deputy headteacher	Male	02	40	08
		Female	01		

Source: Field data

From Table 2, the average age of head teachers was 45, then 40 for the teachers, 15 for the students, 54 for DEO, 46 for DIS, 45 for members of BOG, as well as 40 for the deputy headteachers. This means that the participants from whom data was collected were adequately experienced, had stayed for a reasonable time in their schools, and thus were well knowledgeable about the information that was needed to answer this study's objectives.

Data from interviews, focus group discussions, and documentary sources suggest that the participants from the three schools unveiled several discipline challenges which they have faced in their respective schools after COVID-19 school closures. In Table 3, we use four subthemes to present the students' responsibility-related discipline challenges faced in schools after COVID-19 school closures. These include: Intensive dodging of lessons, Abuse of school uniforms, Engaging in love relationships, as well as Disrespect of others' opinions. Also, from Table 3, four subthemes are used to present the students' determination-related discipline challenges faced in schools after COVID-19 school closures. These are: Pregnancy-related dropout, decline in performance, non-compliance with class work, as well as Escapism from school. Besides, four subthemes are also used to present the students' compliance with regulations-related discipline challenges faced in schools after COVID-19 school closures. These are; Property theft among themselves, Destruction of school property, Possession of banned items as well as Rampant alcoholism. Lastly, we use three subthemes to present the students' honesty-related discipline challenges faced in schools after COVID-19 school closures. These subthemes are: Excessive examination malpractices, Cases of homosexuality, as well as Disrespect of those in authority.

Table 3: Students' Discipline Challenges Faced in Schools After COVID-19 School Closures in Lwengo District, Uganda.

Boundaries of students' discipline	Students' discipline challenges faced in schools after COVID-19 school closures.
Responsibility	Intensive dodging of lessons Abuse of the school uniform Engaging in love relationships
Determination	Pregnancy-related dropout Decline in performance In compliance with classwork
Compliance with regulations	Property theft among themselves Destruction of school property Possession of banned items
Honesty	Excessive examination malpractices Cases of homosexuality Disrespect for those in authority

Source: Field data

All the subthemes about students' discipline challenges faced in secondary schools after COVID-19 school closures are described below, following the four domains of students' discipline as proposed by Damrongpanit's (2019) self-discipline analysis model.

Description of Generated Sub-themes About the Students' Responsibility-related Discipline Challenges Faced in Schools After COVID-19 School Closures in Lwengo District, Uganda.

We start by presenting four subthemes that emerged from the analysis of data about the students' responsibility-related discipline challenges faced in schools after COVID-19 school closures. These are described as follows.

Intensive dodging of lessons. This discipline challenge is used in this study to the act of avoiding attending classes or participating in assigned activities. This study involved skipping classes, being late, or engaging in disruptive behaviour to avoid engagement with the material or the learning environment. The analysis of data indicates that many students come to school but end up not engaging or entering classes for unknown reasons. Findings from school B, for example, revealed that

a large number of learners could stay in the dormitory or outside the classroom during study time, and teachers had also developed a tendency to be less concerned about this kind of dodging of classes by students.

The headteacher of school B, for example, informed us that;

> *Ever since our students reported back here after COVID-19, we have always witnessed excessive missing of lessons even when they are in school…in fact, our teachers have also not done enough to fight against this vice, which is getting worse here day by day. (Headteacher, School B).*

Our interpretation of the above arguments is that despite the occurrence of COVID-19 that led to school closure, schools and their involved stakeholders, such as teachers and administrators, have not done enough to see that the disciplinary behaviours of students, such as dodging lessons, are dealt with as expected.

Abuse of the school uniform. This subtheme is in reference to the inappropriate wearing of the uniform in a way that violates the school dress code.

It is either by wearing it with alterations, or in a way that is deemed inappropriate or unprofessional. Following the observations that we made in the involved schools, students never respected the appropriate school dress code. Many were seen with hanging shirts, putting on additional non-school uniform sweaters and jackets, and non-uniform shoes. During the interview with the school C headteacher, he informed us that;

> Many of our learners as you have seen hardly respect our school uniform…they had gotten used to unruly life and they come back to school with deviant behaviour whereby we keep on telling them to change but they don't…they don't listen to any advice from us may be because they think they are mature enough to do whatever they want. (Headteacher, school C)

The underlying meaning of this is that the virtue of decent dressing in these schools seems not to be at the forefront of their agenda. Descent dressing would have started with the school administrators and teachers, but if they also fail to be decent, then curbing it on the side of students may also be hard to achieve in the post-COVID-19 era.

Engaging in love relationships. This is in reference to the formation and maintenance of romantic affairs between students who are currently attending school. Evidence from the study participants shows an inclination towards sexual desires and other related habits, which intensified in their respective schools as a challenge after COVID-19. During the students' FGD with school B students, for example, they overemphasized the issue of coupling among themselves, which was too much, and that this had led to sexual desires that were likely to highly affect their studies. One of the students revealed that;

> You find that maybe one has been having a boyfriend during the COVID-19 period when we are at home, and now it becomes hard for that student to stay here at school without a boyfriend, and many have even been using

> sexual habits while at home. This is why love relations are very common now here at school. (Regular student, School B).

With such evidence from the teacher, we were forced to check students' record books to determine for whom these learners are handled. The fact was that schools hardly keep records of student's indiscipline cases, and as a result, they tend to remain with limited grounds to decide and appropriate action to be taken, especially when the students repeat indiscipline actions.

Description of Generated Sub-themes About the Students' Determination-related Discipline Challenges Faced in Schools After COVID-19 School Closures in Lwengo District, Uganda

In this sub-section, we present four subthemes that emerged from the analysis of data about the students' determination-related discipline challenges faced in schools after COVID-19 school closures.

Pregnancy-related dropout. This is about a student's withdrawal from school due to pregnancy, especially due to societal pressure, perceived limitations and practical difficulties associated with pregnancy and motherhood. The analysis of data obtained from the interview with DEO and DIS indicated that a large number of students went back home soon after joining schools after the COVID-19 break. The most common cause of this was pregnancies among the girl child, which had occurred during their stay at home. Further evidence also revealed that even while at school, many were impregnated by fellow students and staff and were forced to drop out of school, given the fact that they no longer fit in among fellow students. The DEO during his interview said that;

> Of course, COVID-19 has presented numerous challenges to our education system. One of the most pressing issues we have encountered is the significant increase in teenage pregnancies among our children, especially the adolescent

girls, and many have dropped out of school. (DEO, Lwengo district).

The data highlights the need for proactive actions in addressing these challenges. This finding indicated a decay of determination among young female students whose roots have been damaged by the occurrences brought about by school closures as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Decline in academic performance. This is about a reduction in students' academic achievement, often indicated by lower grades, test scores, or overall academic standing. From the interviews, teachers were not happy with the way their learners who used to achieve highly academically were no longer achieving after coming back from the COVID-19 break. The teachers were sure that the academic determination academically which the students had before COVID-19 had highly deteriorated, and this explained why the performance started being poor. One of the teachers said that;

> *According to what I have seen, many of our students seem to be struggling to grasp concepts that they would have normally understood before the pandemic closure of schools. You mark a paper, and you wonder what happened to reading books. This has highly reduced among many of our learners. (Teacher, School B).*

The interpretation of this subtheme is that however much teachers may put emphasis on supporting learners to academically achieve, the destruction that learners have faced during the time they were home has heavily /impacted their rate of understanding what is taught by the teachers.

In compliance with class work. In this study is used to refer to failing to follow the required instructions, assignments, or expectations outlined by the teachers or school for a particular subject. From the analyzed data collected from the study participants, students' failure to adhere to classroom rules, expectations, and assignments especially resulting in a lack of engagement and participation in academic activities, was reported. One of the teachers, for example, narrated that;

> *For sure, the COVID-19 break was a serious problem because many of our students hardly respond to our instruction as directed in class, refuse to complete our assignments as well and caused disruptions to the learning environment. It's likely to have lost respect for their teachers, as well as not seeing the value of education. Because you give work and one decides not to do it completely. (Teacher, School B).*

Findings in this sub-theme highlight a serious mismatch between the teachers 'world" with that of students. Teachers think that students are perhaps less determined and unserious, yet students feel determined, but the problem could be that the COVID-19 effects and exposures could have affected the rate at which they think and reason in class-related activities.

Description of Generated Sub-themes About the Students' Compliance with Regulations-related Discipline Challenges Faced in Schools After COVID-19 School Closures in Lwengo District, Uganda.

In this sub-section, we present four subthemes that emerged from the analysis of data about the students' compliance with regulations-related discipline challenges faced in schools after COVID-19 school closures.

Property theft among themselves. This subtheme is used in reference to illegal acts of taking someone else's belongings without their permission, with the intent to permanently deprive them of them. Participants reported increased taking of others' property without the consent of the owner, for example, uniforms, pens, books & money. One deputy headteacher in her interviews made it clear that although there had been property theft before the COVID-19 pandemic, the vice intensified after the school closures. To her, this case has both emotional and psychological effects, such as

destruct, loss of resources, as well as damaging relationships. In her words, she revealed that;

> *I cannot deny the fact that theft of property was here even before COVID-19, but what we are seeing in our schools ever since schools were opened is quite alarming. Many of our young learners have been emotionally stressed as a result of the excessive vice of theft of their property and pocket money by their fellow elder learners. (Deputy headteacher, School C).*

The interpretation of this sub-theme is that violence within schools is very acute and if not curbed, may result in more dangerous acts in these schools as students insult each other with minimal teacher intervention.

Destruction of school property. This refers to any acts that intentionally damage or demolish school buildings, furniture, equipment, or their assets. The acts are disruptive to the learning environment and cause financial burdens for the school as well as legal consequences for involved students. During the collection of data, I was informed that the rate at which school property was destroyed increased after COVID-19. Evidence from the study findings shows that vices such as breakage of laboratory equipment increased, trespassing in the school compound increased, as well as the loss of many valuable school property. During my interview with the headteachers, for example, it was revealed that many students were reported in cases related to the destruction of school property and necessary actions in terms of appropriate punishments have been given, but the vice has rather increased. The headteacher said that;

> *Like the other week, a student was throwing a stone at the mango tree down there and had to break the other mirror in the window. He was forced to go home and bring the parent who was requested to replace it, and it was done. It now not even been a month since another student pierced the tires of that school vehicle, and you*

> *wonder what is happening. (Headteacher, School A).*

This finding reveals the importance of offering support to learners to understand the essence behind compliance with school-set rules and regulations.

Possession of banned items. This subtheme is used in this study about having items by students in school environments that are explicitly prohibited by the school rules and regulations for being detrimental to the learning environment. Findings reveal that; the virtual lessons that had been introduced during COVID-19 enabled students to acquire gadgets such as phones and other electronics. Even after COVID-19, many students continued sneaking these gadgets into school which has not only taken away their attention to school requirements but also intensified indiscipline in the form of owning illegal property at school. One teacher, for example, said;

> *There was a day we carried out a sports check of students' property in the dormitory and we found out that our students had very many electronic gadgets that were not allowed in school. Some had phones, others had electronic games, others had radios, and some had other illegal items. This was an indication that they were not compliant with school rules. (Teacher, School A).*

Our interpretation of this sub-theme is that. The mechanism of checking students as they entered school seemed to be lacking.

Description of Generated Sub-themes About the Students' Honesty-related Discipline Challenges Faced in Schools After COVID-19 School Closures in Lwengo District, Uganda.

In this sub-section, we present three subthemes that emerged from the analysis of data about the students' honest-related discipline challenges faced in schools after COVID-19 school closures.

Excessive examination malpractices. This refers to the various dishonest and unethical behaviours

that compromise the integrity of examinations and assessment processes within the school. The analysis of data reveals that the habit of cheating on exams intensified after the COVID-19 pandemic. It was discovered that students had taken a long time at their homes without coming to school physically, and this had caused them to lose the motivation to revise for exams, but instead resorted to cheating. During the interview with one deputy headteacher, we were informed that students started to use mobile phones and computers to cheat on exams. When we asked about the discipline challenges they were facing in the school, the deputy headteacher of school A said that;

> I think copying of exams has worsened ever since the schools were allowed to reopen after COVID-19. Students were exposed to gadgets like smartphones and smartwatches. We have received reports of copying of exams and take-home assignments directly copied from the artificial intelligence. (Deputy headteacher, School A).

This subtheme implies that education is starting to lose its holistic nature since learners simply look at passing exams as the most important thing.

Cases of homosexuality. This is in reference to students who identify as lesbians, gay, bisexual, or transgender. In other words, students experience attraction to the same sex or gender identity that differs from their assigned sex at birth. Study findings reveal that there are instances where students identified themselves with same-sex relationships, and this came with unique challenges and dishonesty in the school environment. Our interaction with students during their focus group discussion revealed that some students came back to school after COVID-19 with dishonest behaviours that had started putting every student at risk and tension while in school, one student who was filled with fear on his face, revealed to us that;

> One friend of mine had been forced into a homosexual action by an S.3 boy, and he had told him not to tell anyone if he still needed his life. It was not until my friend was feeling a lot of pain behind that he went to the office and reported it. The good thing the boy was expelled from school, but he said he had left many other allies who would continue with the vice further (Students, School A).

Our interpretation of this finding is that however much some of these acts are dishonest and dangerous to the students, accepting their presence in the school seemed to put the school administrators under tension, an inclination that maybe accepting them would put their jobs at risk.

Disrespect for those in authority. This refers to any behaviour that shows a lack of deference, courtesy, or obedience to individuals in positions of authority, such as teachers, administrators, or even prefects, while in the school environment. Analysis of data indicates that students' adherence to the directives of those in authority, right from prefects, teachers, and administrators, did not operate as expected. Student leaders indicated the fact that students never respected them. They would not do anything told to them by the prefects, not until the teachers intervened. In some cases, even teachers were disobeyed, especially by those teachers who knew that nothing they would do to them. During the group discussion with the student leaders, one of them narrated that;

> We are leaders, but sometimes those whom we lead overpower us. The school administration has not done enough to help us with this. Ever since we came back here after COVID-19, the discipline of students has not been good at all because you can tell a student, maybe to clean somewhere, and they refuse. When you report, it's like some teachers also fear them. (Student leader, School C).

The interpretation of this is that the rate at which some instances of indiscipline are for some schools was already beyond repair, and because of this, schools are likely to undergo serious problems,

especially in line with the kind of engagements they have with their students in class.

Cross-case Analysis for the Discipline Challenges in Secondary Schools after COVID-19 School Closures.

From the findings presented in this study across all three schools, my underlying interpretation of the cross-cutting agreements and disagreements from the three schools is that students tend to imitate behaviours that they see being modelled by others. In the context of regulation following, if students observe peers or significant individuals disregarding or not complying with the regulations, they may be more likely to do the same. The pandemic may have introduced new challenges and uncertainties that could have affected the modelling of regulation following behaviour. For example, the participants from the three schools agree that the overall disruption and stress caused by the pandemic may have influenced modelling behaviours, leading to a decreased adherence to school-established regulations by students.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore the students' discipline challenges associated with COVID-19 school closures in secondary schools in Lwengo District, Uganda. During data collection, the assumption was that the period during which students spent at home when the school had been closed changed their behavioural/discipline characteristics in one way or the other. What was not clear was the kind of students' discipline challenges that manifested during the post-pandemic period (See Table 3). The study therefore used Damrongpant's (2019) self-discipline model as the lens through which the understanding of the domains/boundaries of students' discipline, which the study employed, was ascertained. The discussion of the study's findings about discipline challenges faced in secondary schools after COVID-19 school closures is provided below in light of the existing literature as well as the theories that guided the study.

More study results also revealed a pattern where students are frequently absent, arrive late or drop out altogether. This issue became more pronounced among students and teachers who revealed that after the COVID-19 pandemic, the period saw a lot of disruptions to daily routines, emotional stress, and socioeconomic factors that made it harder for students to consistently attend school. In other words, after schools reopened post-COVID-19, many students struggled to consistently and regularly attend school. This finding conflicts with those of Kadama (2016), Kabungu (2018) and Moore (2020), who instead put it clearly that teachers and parents are the ones to have the task of inculcating virtues of sound behaviour and self-control and developing their students in all aspects of life through their collaboration more especially during post-COVID-19 School Closures. The finding, however, agrees with Glasser's (1998) choice theory, which assumes that every individual has the power to control him or herself, and has limited power to control others.

Findings still revealed that some students from the studied schools still identified themselves as lesbians, gay, bisexual, or transgender. In other words, students who experience attraction to the same sex or gender identity that differs from their assigned sex at birth were existing in these schools. More specifically, the current study findings revealed that there are instances where students identified themselves with same-sex relationships, and this came with unique challenges and dishonesty in the school environment. As such, some students came back to school after COVID-19 with dishonest behaviours that had started putting every student at risk and tension while in school. Such behaviours are in line with those cited by (2021), UNESCO (2021) as well as Kemigisa (2022) such as rampant sexual immorality happening in secondary schools, school fires, secondary school dropout is on the rise, drug abuse, fighting, vandalism, disrespect of other students and staff absenteeism and stealing.

More findings show that there are various dishonest and unethical behaviours that compromise the integrity of examinations and assessment processes within the studied school. Study results revealed that the habit of cheating on exams was extremely intensified after the COVID-19 pandemic. It was discovered that students had spent a long time at their homes without coming to school physically and this had caused them to lose the morale of revising for exams but instead resorted to cheating. This finding is in line with Hammerstein et al (2021)'s study, who in their study emphasized the effects of COVID-19-related school closures on students' achievement and specifically passing via cheating on exams. To them, low morale, persistent cheating on exams, and low academic achievements in post-school closures were because of prolonged school closures that disrupted the everyday lives of learners around the world.

Finally, study findings also revealed that students exhibited acts that intentionally damaged, defaced, or demolished school buildings, furniture, equipment or assets. These acts are disruptive to the learning environment and cause financial burdens for the school as well as legal consequences for involved students. More specifically, the rate at which school property was destroyed increased after COVID-19. Evidence from the current study findings shows that vices such as the breakage of laboratory equipment increased, trespassing in the school compound increased, as well as the loss many of valuable school properties. This finding disagrees with Sadik and Ponfua's (2018) views on others' perceptions of the students' discipline. To them, vices such as breaking laboratory equipment and trespassing in the school compound are only a sign of what is expected of adolescents, and they should only be dealt with by helping the students to live in the school in peace and harmony.

In summary, the current study's first objective and those of other studies clearly show that the majority of the discipline challenges faced by these schools after COVID-19 school closure are not mutually exclusive. Besides, schools are recommended to strive to create a supportive environment that addresses students' discipline challenges, although in some cases, the challenges may go beyond what they could engage with. Also, the discussion points out the absence of psychosocial support structures in many schools, which has made it harder to manage student behaviour. Schools simply report a feeling of being overwhelmed and under-equipped to deal with students who displayed signs of trauma or stress, yet students, claim to be ignored in their hard situations. As such, the discipline challenges after COVID-19 are mainly deeply rooted in both personal and systemic disruptions.

CONCLUSION

The study makes the following conclusion;

The discipline challenges faced in secondary schools after COVID-19 school closures are conceptualized along personal, institutional, and community-based disruptions that came with the COVID-19 occurrence. Discipline challenges are not simply because students intentionally want to behave that way, but rather a keen eye should be put on the need to appreciate the fact that the disruptions that students undergo force them into some of the discovered discipline issues, despite the fact that they go against what is expected by the authorities in schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study makes the following recommendations;

School managers, such as headteachers, should regularly follow up closely on students' discipline. In so doing, discipline management support systems should be enhanced in schools, including counselling services, prefects, and parents' engagement. Focus should be put on restorative justice approaches aimed at repairing and strengthening relationships with students rather than punitive measures like corporal punishments, suspensions, and expulsions.

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