

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Conversion effect of co-educational schools to single sex schools on female students discipline in Trans-Nzoia District, Kenya

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Provision of equal educational opportunities to girls and boys is a key objective of the government of Kenya. This study was conducted in girls' schools that were converted from co-educational schools in Trans-Nzoia District, Kenya. It sought to determine the effects of the conversion on girls' discipline. This is in light of the goal that education must prepare and equip the learner with skills, expertise and attitudes that enable him/her to play an active role in National Development. For meaningful realization of this goal, students' discipline needs to be enhanced in all learning institutions. Secondary schools in Kenya are broadly categorized into three: Boys only, Girls only and co-educational. Apparently, majority of indiscipline issues have been manifested in co-educational schools which consequentially have led to low realization of learning objectives. Studies have cited that girls in co-educational schools face many challenges that deny them the opportunity to benefit from the school system. In reaction, some co-educational schools have opted to be converted into single sex schools by gender. The target population of this study was 11 girls' secondary schools. Purposive sample technique of 6 schools (54%) out of 11 schools was used. Respondents comprised of 100%: Principals, Deputy Principals, Education secretaries, Heads of guidance and counseling departments, directors of studies and boarding mistresses, totaling 52. Two research instruments: Questionnaires and Interviews schedules were used to collect data. All principals, deputy principals and education secretaries were interviewed while teachers responded to questionnaires. Findings of this study revealed that the conversion from co-educational to single sex schools yielded positive effects on girls' discipline. Based on the findings it is recommended that other co-educational schools be converted to single sex schools as the conversion seems to enhance good girls' discipline that is helpful in the achievement of educational objectives.

**Key words:** Co-education, opportunity, discipline, conversion, single sex, gender.

## INTRODUCTION

Students' discipline is a matter of great concern to all educational stakeholders; it is vital for the smooth and effective running of educational programmes in schools (Achoka, 2003). Despite the existence of policy guidelines (Republic of Kenya, 2001) to facilitate enhanced discipline in schools, cases of indiscipline such as absenteeism, sneaking, defiance of authority, stealing, bullying, boy-girl relationship are still reported majorly in co-educational schools. These schools experience numerous

and complex disciplinary problems with their students (Afullo, 2005; Murimi, 1999; Kimotho, 2001; Rok, 2001). It is noted that disciplinary problems have negative impact on the realization of national objectives of education and vision 2030 (R.O.K, 2007; Chiriswa, 2002)). Seemingly, among the reported challenges affecting girls in coeducational schools include: high dropout rates resulting from boy-girl relationships, early pregnancies and early marriages (Achoka, 2009).

Accordingly, some co-educational schools have been converted to single sex schools to counteract the negative effects existing in co-educational schools (Itula, 2007). For instance, the Ministry of Education in the year 2000, changed Uthiru Mixed high school founded by St.

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Peter's Anglican Church to an exclusive Girls' School due to the spate of strikes across the country and the waning students' discipline in the school (ibid). However, the question of great concern to the nation is what effects does the conversion of co-educational to single sex schools have on the girl-child students' discipline? This paper highlights the effect of the conversion of co-educational schools to single sex schools on girl students' discipline in Trans-Nzoia district, Kenya. The paper is sessionalized as follows: Theoretical Framework, Literature Review, Methodology, Findings, Discussions, Conclusions, Recommendations and References.

### Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by Peter Senge's (1990), Change Theory. Senge which denotes that organizations that positively embrace change realize their goals and objectives through five disciplines: system thinking, personal mastery, building mental models, building shared visions and team learning. Conversion of co-educational schools to single sex schools is thus viewed as an organizational change aimed at enabling schools to realize institutional objectives such as good discipline among students. Thus, it shall be realized that stakeholders ought to embrace the system thinking discipline, in order to achieve organizational goals. This discipline facilitates team working in a systematic way in order to contribute to good discipline in students' behaviour. Affected members should also have mastery of what should take place, that is, the conversion of co-educational to single sex schools. Moreover, the stakeholders should change their skills and mind set in line with the envisaged change and, embrace team work so as to realize the desired results.

### Literature Review

Literature was reviewed from books, journals, internet and circulars to establish existing information on disciplinary problems in co-educational schools worldwide. The reviewed literature from United State of America, Britain, Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania and Zambia indicates that co-educational schools have more complex disciplinary problems compared to single sex schools (O'Reilly, 2000; Muya and Mwanzia, 2005), that have led to closure of the affected institutions (Datta, 1992). This therefore means that both western and African countries experience indiscipline problems and this necessitates the need to venture into ways of curbing this problem. In Kenyan schools, the second term has been characterized by students' unrest. As unrest and indiscipline prevail, parents, educationists, students and government officials point fingers at each other trading responsibility for the

mess. In the year 2007, unrests were reported in parts of Eastern, Nyanza and Rift valley provinces. During these strikes massive destruction of property including school buildings, important school documents and records, food stuffs were reported to have been set ablaze by rioting students (Mwanzia and Itula, 2007). The resultant effects on the institutions led to unachieved objectives. Literature reviewed revealed that discernible patterns in students strikes were observed in co-educational schools which are poorly equipped and many compared to single sex schools (Kereithi, 2000). A study in Vihiga district revealed that cases of indiscipline in secondary schools included absenteeism, drug abuse, students sneaking out of school and boy-girl relationship in co-educational schools (Cheriswa, 2002). For instance, at Cherang'ani mixed secondary school, although a prefect saved the school from arson attack by some students who had been expelled due to indiscipline. It should be noted that this was the third time in less than three years the school was being involved in such an incident (Oroni, 2001). Similarly, a study by Afullo (2005) in Bondo District, found out that boys' and girls' schools seemed to face ordinary disciplinary problems while co-educational schools experience more complex disciplinary problems. He observed that co-educational schools had increased cases of boy-girl relationships and girl-child pregnancies. Similarly, the principal of Sosio mixed secondary school in Trans Mara district reported that in the year 2004, the school lost six girls due to pregnancies (Ongiri et al., 2005). Studies done by medical researchers indicated that there were high incidences of teenage pregnancies in co-educational schools in Kenya (Kisotho, 2008).

In a nutshell, the magnitude of discipline in co-educational schools necessitate institutional change strategies if the schools are to meet their educational goals. Some changes that are reported in the literature include change in management, formulation of more rigorous rules and regulation to govern the schools and conversion of co-educational schools to single sex schools. This study was designed to ascertain the effect of conversion of co-educational to single sex schools on girl students' discipline in secondary schools in Kenya.

### METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the descriptive survey design methodology (Gall et. al., 1996). Since it enables the researcher to obtain pertinent information status of the phenomena, as well as facilitate data collection from a wide population in a short time (Kothari, 1990). Purposive sampling technique (Fielding and Fielding, 1986) was used in this study. The target population was 11(100%) girls' only secondary schools in Trans-Nzoia District. A sample of 6 (55%) schools was used for the purpose of data collection. Respondents comprised of 100% (Anderson, 1988; Kerlinger, 1983): principals, deputy

principals, education secretaries from the churches that sponsor the converted schools, heads of guidance and counseling departments, directors of studies and boarding mistresses totaling 52, see specific statistics in [table 1](#).

Two research instruments were used to collect data. These were Questionnaires and Interview Schedules (Gall et al. 1996). Validity and reliability of these instruments (Cohen and Manion, 1995) were done before field work. The questionnaires were structured in order to enhance the research objectivity (McNeill, 1990). The interview schedule used in this study was non-directive type. The purpose for this stance was to supplement data collected through questionnaires. Accordingly, questions on the interview guide corresponded to those on the questionnaires. The research tools were tested for validity by educational researchers from the Faculty of Education and Social Sciences and the Department of Educational Planning and Management of Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology. The focus in this test was on two aspects of the research items: Face and Content Validity. In the face validity, questions and statements were checked for their relevance to or consistency with the areas of student discipline. Some researchers such as Sprinthall (1997) refer to this approach as the surface appearance of the test. However, since face validity was limited to the general relevance of items, the need to address them specifically was pursued under the content validity (Kaplan and Saccuzzo, 1993). Thus, items were assessed to find out whether they were a fair representative sample of the specific domain of student discipline which they were designed to cover. Emerging comments from the tests were as much as possible, incorporated in the final tool.

The test-re-test strategy was used to establish reliability of the questionnaires (Carmines and Zeller, 1979). Two schools from the target population were used from this test. These schools were not part of the research sample. Quantitative data from the first and the second test were used to establish their Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient using excel computer package. The calculated values for  $r$  were: Principals = 0.7; Deputy principals = 0.7; Education Secretaries = 0.6; Heads of Guidance and Counseling Departments = 0.7; Directors of Studies = 0.6; and, Boarding Mistresses = 0.7. since the result of coefficient were all above the set lower value of  $r = 0.5$ , the instruments were considered to be reliable (Smith and Glass, 1987). Consequently, these instruments were used for data collection. Sufficient care was taken to ensure confidentiality of the subjects' responses. Moreover, non of the respondents was forced to participate in the study.

Authority to conduct fieldwork was granted by the university graduate school, Kenya National Academy of Science and all other relevant officials. The principal researcher had two research assistants to enhance the data collection exercise which lasted three months. All

the principals, deputy principals and teachers totaling 49 responded to the questionnaires. As well, the six deputy principals and 3 education secretaries responded to interview schedules.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics while qualitative data were organized by: Respondents, Questions, and theme. Both qualitative and quantitative analyzed data were triangulated (Achoka, 2003: Strauss and Corbin, 1990: Anderson, 1988) for presentation as findings.

## FINDINGS

The principals, deputy principals, directors of studies, heads of departments and boarding mistresses totaling 49 (100%) reacted to the following statements in [table 1](#) on effects of conversion and girl-students' discipline. Respondents' reaction are presented in [table 2](#).

From [table 2](#), it can be observed that 29(59%) respondents agreed that absenteeism had reduced as a result of the conversion while 15(31%) disagreed. Only 5(10%) were undecided.

From the interviewed deputy principals, 4(67%) observed that absenteeism had reduced. While one of the deputy principal noted, "Student absenteeism is no longer a major problem in our school...." another one remarked, "...it is interesting that we now have put the issue of frequent student absenteeism behind us". However the remaining two deputy principals noted that the conversion had not positively impacted on the issue of absenteeism in their schools. All the 3(100%) education secretaries were undecided. This could be due to the fact that they do not stay with the students in school and /or they had not discussed this issue with their school principals.

In response to the effect of the conversion on cases of boy-girl relationships, 37(75%) of the respondents agreed that conversion had minimized cases of boy-girl relationships. On the contrary, only 10(20%) respondents disagreed while 2(5%) were undecided. All the 6(100%) deputy principles and 3(100%) education secretaries who were interviewed observed that boy-girl relationships had reduced after the conversion. One education secretary submitted that, "If we knew that conversion was such a good idea, we would have done it earlier than we have...."

Responding to the effect of the conversion on increase in theft cases, 13(27%) respondents agreed, 9(18%) were undecided and 26(55%) disagreed. From the interviewees' submissions, 7(77.7%) noted that the conversion had assisted students not to engage in theft cases. A deputy principal observed that, "We have taught our girls to be respectful and not engage in indiscipline behaviour such as theft." Nonetheless, 2(22.25) interviewees who happened to be deputy principals disagreed that the conversion had led to decrease in theft cases. One of them candidly asked, "...can you tell me

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics of the Research Sample.

<b>Participants:</b>	P	DP	DS	GCT	BM	ES	TOTAL
<b>Stats:</b>	6	6	12	12	13	3	52

**KEY:**

- P** – Principal,
- DP** – Deputy Principal,
- DS** – Director of Studies,
- GCT** – Guidance and Counseling Teachers
- BM** – Boarding Mistress
- ES** – Education Secretaries

**Table 1.** Statements on Effects of Conversion on Girl-Students’ Discipline.

<b>Serial Number (SN)</b>	<b>STATEMENTS</b>
1.	Absenteeism has been reduced.
2.	Boy/girl relationships are minimal
3.	Theft cases have increased.
4.	Students’ rudeness towards authority has reduced
5.	Students response to bells has improved
6.	Cases of students fighting have been reduced.
7.	Cases of students sneaking have reduced.

**NB:** Serial Numbers shall be reflected in table 2 by 2 letters, SN.

In addition, 6(100%) deputy principals who had answered the questionnaires were also interviewed together with the three (100%) education secretaries.

**Table 2.** Responses on Effect of Conversion of Schools on Girl-Students’ Discipline.

<b>SN</b>	<b>RESPONSES</b>		
	<b>A</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>D</b>
1.	29(59%)	5(10%)	15(31%)
2.	37(75%)	2(5%)	10(20%)
3.	13(27%)	9(18%)	26(55%)
4.	37(75%)	4(9%)	8(16%)
5.	37(75%)	5(11%)	7(14%)
6.	32(65%)	4(8%)	13(27%)
7.	30(61%)	3(6%)	16(33%)

**A- Agree                      U- Undecided                      D- Disagree**

any secondary girls’ school in Kenya where there is 100% no theft cases”?. The other one said, “Theft cases cannot miss in large organizations such as schools; of course we try our best to discourage students turning into thieves instead of learners....”

In response to whether students’ rudeness towards authority had reduced as a result of the conversion, 37(75%) respondents agreed, 4(9%) were undecided while 8(16%) disagreed. While interviewing one education secretary he said, the conversion has worked as a catalyst to boost students’ good behaviour. His own words were, “...the girls have no reason to be rude to

their teachers or school workers....” A deputy principal submitted, “In co-educational schools you expect students to be rude to authority because that is how they try to exert gender superiority... you don’t expect that in a girls’ only school”.

A total of 37(75%) respondents agreed that students’ response to bells had improved after the conversion, 5(11%) were undecided while 7(14%) disagreed. Similarly, from the interviewees, 6(67%) agreed that the conversion had made girls to respond better to bells. However, 3(33%) interviewees disagreed. In response to whether cases of students’ fighting had

**Table 3.** Students' Disciplinary Problems Before and After Conversion by Severity.

Before conversion in order on severity	Frequency (%)	After conversion in order on severity	Frequency (%)
Boy girl relationships	45 (92)	Noise making	35 (71)
Sneaking	42 (86)	Use of cell phones in school	31 (63)
Drug Abuse	37 (76)	Sneaking	30 (61)
Defiance towards authority	35 (71)	Drug abuse	25 (51)
Bullying	32 (65)	Absenteeism	21 (43)
Stealing	27 (55)	Stealing	19 (39)
Fighting	25 (51)	Rudeness towards authority	17 (35)
Absenteeism	20 (41)	Fighting	16 (33)
Student unrest	12 (24)	Boy girl relationship	15 (31)

reduced because of the conversion, 32(65%) respondents agreed that they had reduced, 4(8%) were undecided and 13(27%) disagreed. During the interviews, one deputy principal retorted, "We don't allow our girls to fight unless they want to be expelled from school". And, another deputy principal submitted that, barbaric cases of fighting in school are not expected among our girls.

Responses on whether cases of students' sneaking had reduced showed that, 30(61%) respondents agreed. 3(6%) were undecided; and, 16(33%) disagreed. From the interviewees, 7(78%) principals noted that sneaking had reduced tremendously. One of them said, "...we are busy teaching our girls to be serious while at school. We tell them that hard work is equal to excellence...."

However, two deputy principals submitted that one or two girls sneak out of school during the year. One of them said, "...after students reported back from half term break, a form three girl sneaked out of school at night and came back two days later. She tried to insist that she had delayed because she did not have money for transport..."

Therefore, from the findings, majority of the respondents 29(59%) indicate that the conversion has reduced absenteeism which is a positive indicator towards students' discipline. One of the deputy principals noted that, "...nowadays girls do not absent themselves the way they used to do when the school was co-educational". Moreover, majority of the sample 37(75%), think that conversion had minimized boy-girl relationship which had been a big problem in the co-educational schools. For instance, one of the education secretaries observed that, "...those days before conversion, a month could not end before I receive reports from the schools concerning students who are on suspension due to issue of boy-girl relationships". The findings also suggest that, majority of the respondents 26(55%), disagree that the conversion has made theft cases to increase. Moreover, most of the respondents 37(75%) suggest that students' rudeness towards authority had reduced as a result of the conversion. Similarly, majority of the sample 37(75%), were of the view that students' response to bells had

improved. Moreover, most respondents 32(65%), noted that cases of students fighting have reduced, while on cases of students' sneaking out of school, majority of the sample, 30(61%), submit that the students were no longer aggressively involved.

### Students' Disciplinary Problems Before and After Conversion

In order to establish students' nine disciplinary problems before and after conversion in order of severity, only principals, their deputies, directors of studies, heads of department and heads of guidance and counseling departments totaling 49(100%) answered the questionnaire by generating issues as indicated in [table 3](#).

From table 3 therefore, the boy-girl relationship issue was the severest disciplinary problem before the conversion from co-educational to single sex schools. The least problem in severity was student unrest as noted by 12 (24%) respondents.

After the conversion noisemaking was listed as the severest disciplinary problem in the converted schools while, boy- girl relationship was the least severe problem as attested to by 15(31%) respondents.

Besides the questionnaires, all the deputy principals 6(100%) and 3(100%) education secretaries responded to open ended question on students' discipline before and after the conversion. All the respondents, it was noted that some cases of indiscipline before the conversion have reduced after the conversion. Most importantly, after the conversion however, some other disciplinary problems have emerged. For instance, possession and use of mobile telephones while at school.

One deputy principal noted that, "...we now have a challenge of girls being in possession of mobile phones and using them while they should be concentrating on their studies...because of improved technology. All the interviewees agreed that noise making was the severest problem in converted schools; while cases of students suspension and expulsion were very rare.

## DISCUSSION

The information captured from the respondents indicate that as a result of the conversion of co-educational schools to single sex schools, absenteeism had reduced. This finding is supported by O'Reilly's (2000) works in which it was ascertained that students' absenteeism and boy-girl relationships reduced in a city high school in Montreal-Canada, after separation of boys and girls. These issues of absenteeism and girl-boy relationships can be appreciated among secondary school students because the adolescence stage make them vulnerable to such behaviours (Achoka, 2009). As they pass through the adolescence, different challenges in their physical, emotional and psychological challenges emerge propelling them towards the opposite sex. From co-educational to single sex schools become handy in that it gives the girl-child an opportunity to pursue her studies with minimum distraction from contemporary boys. This enhances the goal to increase opportunities among women and youth by 2012 as envisaged in the vision 2030 in providing quality and competitive education for all gender. Not surprisingly one of the education secretaries noted that, "...girls are now focused because conversion has given the girl-child an opportunity to live in an independent environment...without disruptions from boys which used to make them compromise school discipline and become victims of school dropouts".

Other malpractices such as rudeness towards authority, fighting and stealing reduced tremendously after the conversion. Moreover, the girls' response to school bells improved after the conversion.

However, this study also revealed that after the conversion, other disciplinary problems emerged among the girls' schools. These problems include noisemaking, use of cell phones and drug abuse. It should be noted that the issue of drug abuse in Kenya is severe. To have it emerge among our teenage girls' students is a question of serious concern. This calls for the intervention of NACADA to try and curb the situation before it gets out of hands. Meanwhile issues of indiscipline among secondary school learners have made school managers restless, struggling to prevent the menace among students. The sooner these issues are resolved the better for the students and all the education stakeholders in this sector so that the rampant indiscipline cases commonly associated with co-educational schools (Affulo, 2005; Ongiri et al. 2005; Kigotho, 2008) do not spill over to girls' only secondary schools.

Although the Ministry of Education has banned students from carrying mobile phones to schools the problem persists in our girls' secondary schools in Trans-Nzoia District, Kenya.

Also, the findings of this study are in line with Senge's (1990) change theory which suggests that organizations that positively embrace change should involve all stakeholders in order to realize desired goals.

This principle cannot be over emphasized in this study because one's discipline is a part and parcel of his or her culture which is nurtured in homes and families. Our cultures are further enhanced by technological advancement. For our schools to better operate such that the learners excel all round, all educational stakeholders therefore should learn to pull together.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study addressed effects of conversion of co-educational schools to single sex schools on girl students' discipline. The findings strongly point to the understanding that the conversion has positively affected girl students' discipline by minimizing cases such as boy-girl relationships, students' absenteeism and rudeness towards authority among others.

It was also realized that other critical indiscipline issues are emerging among our girl students'. Such cases include the emergence of drug abuse and defiance of Ministry and school regulations not to have and use cell phones in schools. This finding enhanced the understanding that schools are not independent of the cultures of the larger societies in which they are embedded, hence a conclusion supported by this study's theoretical framework that positive change should be supported by all stakeholders.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that more co-educational schools be converted to single sex.

Schools to enhance girl students' discipline.

With the inception of free primary education and free tuition in secondary schools, many co-educational secondary schools are springing up from the primary schools within the same locality. Stakeholders should therefore come up with modalities of starting separate girls and boys secondary schools.

It is also recommended that a similar study should be done to illuminate the change in behaviour on boys after conversion from co-educational to single sex schools in Trans-Nzoia District, Kenya.

Furthermore a similar study should be done in other localities in Kenya to ascertain the effect of conversion of co-educational to single sex schools on:

- Students' behaviour.
- Students' academic performance.

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