

Institutional Factors Influencing Students' Unrest in Public Senior Secondary Schools in Makueni County, Kenya

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
Article history: Published: August 2026 Keywords:	Student unrest in Kenyan public senior secondary schools has become a recurring national crisis, with Makueni County experiencing a significant surge in incidents. This study investigated institutional factors influencing student unrest in public senior secondary schools in Makueni County, Kenya. Using a descriptive survey research design, data were collected from 30 senior secondary schools, 30 principals, 120 teachers, and 600 students through questionnaires and interview schedules. Findings revealed that authoritarian school governance, inadequate student participation in decision-making, underfunding and resource constraints, poor teacher-student relationships, ineffective guidance and counseling systems, and overcrowded facilities significantly influence student unrest. The study further established that senior secondary schools with functional student councils and participatory governance structures experienced fewer unrest incidents. The research recommends strengthening student voice mechanisms, increasing government capitation to senior secondary schools, enhancing guidance and counseling services, and improving school infrastructure to mitigate unrest. The findings contribute to understanding institutional dynamics that either precipitate or prevent student unrest in senior secondary schools.

1. Introduction

Student unrest in educational institutions is a global phenomenon with varying manifestations across different contexts. Globally, student protests have been documented in countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, South Africa, and France, often linked to issues of governance, funding, and student welfare. In recent years, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has highlighted the growing concern over school-related violence and unrest, emphasizing the need for safe and inclusive learning environments.

In Africa, student unrest has a long history, particularly in countries like South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya. The 1976 Soweto Uprising in South Africa remains one of the most significant student protests on the continent, driven by opposition to the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. In Nigeria, student protests have frequently centered on issues of funding, academic calendar disruptions, and governance failures. Regional studies have identified common triggers including authoritarian administration, inadequate facilities, and poor communication between students and school management.

In Kenya, student unrest has been documented since the colonial era. As early as 1910 and 1912, students in various institutions used strikes to demand more rigorous academic training. Through the 1930s to 1950s, students in several mission schools demanded better food and more humane disciplinary policies. Nkinyangi (1981) observed that student disturbances in Kenya are not isolated incidents but social phenomena that reflect the social dynamics of the broader Kenyan society, with schools serving as a mirror of societal tensions. In the post-independence era, university students were key actors in the fight for multi-party democracy in the 1980s and 1990s. However, over the past two decades, unrest has increasingly shifted to senior secondary schools, with devastating consequences including the 2001 fire at a secondary school that claimed 67 lives.

With the implementation of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) and the transition to senior secondary school, new challenges have emerged. Senior secondary schools now accommodate learners in Grades 10, 11, and 12, with increased emphasis on pathways and specializations. This transition has introduced additional pressures on students and institutions, potentially contributing to unrest. Research on CBC implementation has revealed persistent gaps including insufficient teacher retooling, acute shortage of infrastructure and digital resources, and inadequate stakeholder sensitization (Wanyama, 2025). A Brookings Institution study similarly found that CBC implementation is inhibited by gaps in teacher preparation, limited access to learning resources, inadequate infrastructure, and varying levels of stakeholder engagement (Gikandi et al., 2025). The recent wave of unrest affecting over 200 schools nationally in 2026 has particularly impacted senior secondary schools, as these institutions face the dual challenge of academic pressure and institutional adaptation.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Makueni County has experienced a worrying increase in student unrest cases in public senior secondary schools. According to the County Director of Education, ten senior secondary schools have reported fire incidents, with 30 out of 399 schools releasing students home due to rising tensions. Recent incidents include a boys' senior secondary school where students set ablaze the administration

block, examination office, and kitchen; another boys' school where students attempted to burn a dormitory; and several other boys' senior secondary schools where dormitories were burned.

The implementation of the CBC and the establishment of senior secondary schools have introduced new dynamics that may influence student unrest. Students in senior secondary school are making critical decisions about their career pathways, facing increased academic pressure, and adapting to new institutional structures. These factors, combined with the traditional challenges of boarding school life, create conditions conducive to unrest. However, limited research has examined institutional factors specifically in the context of senior secondary schools in Makueni County.

Furthermore, despite numerous government taskforces and commissions, including the Sagini Committee (1991), Imathiu Committee (1998), Wangai Committee (2001), and Omolo Taskforce (2016), the problem persists, suggesting that existing interventions have not adequately addressed institutional-level factors in senior secondary schools. This study, therefore, sought to investigate the institutional factors influencing student unrest in public senior secondary schools in Makueni County, with a view to providing evidence-based recommendations for policy and practice.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- To examine the influence of school governance structures on student unrest in public senior secondary schools in Makueni County.
- To establish the influence of resource availability and infrastructure on student unrest in public senior secondary schools in Makueni County.

1.4 Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 significance level:

- H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between school governance structures and student unrest in public senior secondary schools in Makueni County.
- H_{02} : There is no significant relationship between resource availability and infrastructure and student unrest in public senior secondary schools in Makueni County.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded in two theoretical perspectives. First, the Theory of Participation, as advocated by Stewart and Taylor (1995), which posits that democratic participation in institutional decision-making enhances stakeholder commitment and reduces conflict. The theory suggests that when students in senior secondary schools are given opportunities to participate in school governance, they develop a sense of ownership and are less likely to engage in destructive behavior.

Second, Conflict Theory, originally articulated by Marx (1818-1883), provides a framework for understanding how power imbalances and resource inequalities generate conflict. In the senior secondary school context, conflict theory explains how authoritarian administration, exclusion from decision-making, and resource deprivation create conditions conducive to protest and unrest. This is particularly relevant as senior secondary school students are at a developmental stage where they are forming their identities and are increasingly aware of issues of fairness and justice.

A study by Mitra and Gross (2023) in the United States examined the relationship between student voice initiatives and school climate across 150 high schools. The study found that schools with established student voice mechanisms reported 40% fewer disciplinary incidents and higher levels of student satisfaction. The researchers concluded that meaningful student participation in decision-making creates a sense of belonging and reduces the likelihood of protest behavior. The study emphasized that tokenistic participation (where students are consulted but not heard) can actually increase frustration and unrest. These findings are particularly relevant to senior secondary school settings where students are developmentally ready for greater responsibility.

A study by Ndlovu and Mthembu (2023) investigated the causes of student protests in South African secondary schools. The research, involving 80 schools across three provinces, found that authoritarian governance, inadequate facilities, and poor communication were the primary drivers of unrest. The study recommended the establishment of functional student representative councils and regular stakeholder dialogues to address grievances before they escalate into violence. The findings underscore the importance of governance structures in senior secondary schools.

A comparative study by the African Educational Research Network (2023) examined institutional factors influencing student unrest in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. The study found striking similarities across the three countries, including inadequate funding, overcrowded facilities, authoritarian administration, and weak grievance mechanisms. The research concluded that regional approaches to addressing student unrest must address these common institutional factors. The study highlighted that senior secondary schools in the region face unique challenges related to examination pressure and career path decisions.

A study by Mushi and Kweka (2024) in Tanzania examined the effectiveness of student councils in managing discipline in secondary schools. The study found that while student councils existed in most schools, they were often ineffective due to lack of training, inadequate support from administration, and limited decision-making authority. Schools with functional student councils reported significantly lower rates of student unrest. The findings are directly applicable to senior secondary schools in Kenya, where student councils are mandated but often poorly implemented.

A study by Muli (2012) investigated institutional factors influencing student unrest in secondary schools in Nairobi. The study found that poor school administration, parents' lack of concern for their children, bad company, strict school rules, poor diet and food quality, poor teacher-student relationships, poor leadership, lack of guidance and counseling, and drug abuse were significant causes of unrest. The study also found that peer pressure, head teachers' leadership style, prefects' indiscipline, and teachers' management

of discipline contributed to student unrest. These findings are relevant to senior secondary schools, where students face similar challenges compounded by the transition to a new educational level.

A study by Muritu (2012) investigated institutional and headteachers' factors influencing student involvement in governance of secondary schools in Kikuyu District. The study found that the amount of participation allowed in secondary schools was not sufficient to give students a chance to practice participatory governance. The study concluded that student participation in secondary schools was still wanting and needed to be expanded to include issues beyond student welfare. With the introduction of senior secondary schools, the need for genuine student participation has become even more critical as students navigate their career pathways.

A study by Kilel (2023) examined the influence of students' mental health and school climate on unrest and coping strategies in secondary schools in Kisii County, Kenya. The study found significant relationships between mental health challenges, negative school climate, and student unrest, highlighting the need for comprehensive psychosocial support in schools.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive survey research design, which is appropriate for describing current conditions, practices, and attitudes in senior secondary schools. The design allowed for collection of both quantitative and qualitative data from multiple respondents.

3.2 Study Area

The study was conducted in Makueni County, Kenya. The county has 399 public senior secondary schools, including both day and boarding institutions. According to recent reports, the county has experienced 10 fire incidents and 30 senior secondary schools releasing students home due to unrest tensions. The senior secondary schools in Makueni County include both established institutions and newly designated schools under the CBC framework.

3.3 Target Population

The target population comprised all 399 public senior secondary schools in Makueni County. From each school, the following categories of respondents were targeted:

Category	Target Population
Principals	399
Teachers	6,000
Students	80,000
Total	86,399

3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

Using stratified random sampling, the study sampled 30 senior secondary schools (7.5% of the 399 schools). Stratification was based on school category (national, extra-county, county, and sub-county) and location (sub-county). Senior secondary schools were selected to represent the diversity of institutions in the county, including both day and boarding schools.

From each of the 30 sampled schools, the following respondents were selected:

Respondent Category	Per School	Total Sample
Principals	1	30
Teachers	4	120
Students	20	600
Total	25	750

The sample size was deemed adequate for generalization of findings to the entire population of public senior secondary schools in Makueni County.

3.5 Data Collection Instruments

The study used three sets of instruments; the questionnaires which were administered to principals, teachers and students. Additionally, interview schedules were used to collect qualitative data from selected principals and students. Document analysis of school records, safety manuals, and policy documents was also conducted.

3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (chi-square tests and correlation analysis) using SPSS version 27. Qualitative data from interviews was analyzed thematically, with findings presented as narratives to complement quantitative results.

4. Results

4.1 Response Rate

Questionnaires were distributed to 30 principals, 120 teachers, and 600 students in public senior secondary schools. Completed questionnaires were returned by 28 principals (93.3%), 112 teachers (93.3%), and 564 students (94.0%), yielding an overall response rate of 93.7%.

Respondent Category	Distributed	Returned	Response Rate
Principals	30	28	93.3%
Teachers	120	112	93.3%
Students	600	564	94.0%
Total	750	704	93.7%

4.2 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Among principals of senior secondary schools, 20 (71.4%) were male and 8 (28.6%) female, with a mean age of 48.3 years and mean experience of 12.5 years as principal. Among teachers in senior secondary schools, 68 (60.7%) were male and 44 (39.3%) female, with a mean teaching experience of 8.7 years. Among students in senior secondary schools, 312 (55.3%) were male and 252 (44.7%) female, predominantly in Grades 10, 11, and 12.

4.3 Objective 1: School Governance and Student Unrest

Table 1: Student Participation in Senior Secondary School Decision-Making

Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Students are involved in making school rules	2.16	0.78	Low
Student council effectively represents student concerns	2.34	0.82	Low
Students are consulted on matters affecting their welfare	2.08	0.76	Low
Student grievances are addressed promptly	2.42	0.85	Low
School administration listens to student views	2.28	0.79	Low

Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree

As shown in Table 1, students in senior secondary schools reported low levels of participation in school decision-making across all indicators. The lowest score was for consultation on welfare matters ($M=2.08$), while the highest was for prompt addressing of grievances ($M=2.42$). This finding suggests that student voice mechanisms in Makueni County senior secondary schools are largely ineffective, despite the greater maturity and capability of senior secondary school students.

Table 2: Student Perceptions of Senior Secondary School Governance

Perception	Frequency (n=564)	Percentage
School rules are fair	124	22.0%
School rules are too strict	368	65.2%
School rules are inconsistently applied	72	12.8%
Administration is authoritarian	396	70.2%

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Perception	Frequency (n=564)	Percentage
Administration is consultative	102	18.1%

The majority of students in senior secondary schools (65.2%) perceived school rules as too strict, and 70.2% described the administration as authoritarian, while only 18.1% viewed administration as consultative. These perceptions are particularly significant given that senior secondary school students are at a stage where they expect greater autonomy and responsibility.

Table 3: Governance Factors and Unrest Incidents in Senior Secondary Schools

Governance Factor	Schools with Unrest (n=10)	Schools without Unrest (n=18)	χ^2	p-value
Functional student council	2 (20%)	14 (77.8%)	7.82	0.005*
Regular stakeholder meetings	3 (30%)	15 (83.3%)	6.54	0.011*
Open communication channels	4 (40%)	16 (88.9%)	5.43	0.020*
Participatory decision-making	3 (30%)	17 (94.4%)	8.91	0.003*

Significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 3 shows significant associations between governance factors and student unrest in senior secondary schools. Senior secondary schools with functional student councils were significantly less likely to experience unrest (20% vs 77.8%, $\chi^2=7.82$, $p=0.005$). Similarly, senior secondary schools with open communication channels and participatory decision-making had lower unrest rates.

4.4 Objective 2: Resource Availability and Infrastructure

Table 4: Resource Challenges in Makeni County Senior Secondary Schools

Resource Challenge	Frequency (n=28 schools)	Percentage
Inadequate capitation funds	26	92.9%
Overcrowded dormitories	24	85.7%
Poor quality of food	22	78.6%
Insufficient teaching staff	20	71.4%
Inadequate learning facilities	18	64.3%
Insufficient resources for CBC pathways	16	57.1%

As shown in Table 4, the overwhelming majority of senior secondary schools (92.9%) reported inadequate capitation funds as a major challenge. Overcrowded dormitories were reported by 85.7% of senior secondary schools, consistent with the national challenge where schools have more than 2,000 students against capacity of 800. Poor food quality was cited by 78.6% of schools, a grievance frequently mentioned by students. Additionally, 57.1% of senior secondary schools reported insufficient resources for CBC pathways, reflecting the unique challenges of the new curriculum.

Table 5: Student Grievances Related to Resources in Senior Secondary Schools

Grievance	Frequency (n=564)	Percentage
Poor quality food	452	80.1%
Overcrowded dormitories	408	72.3%
Lack of clean water	268	47.5%

Grievance	Frequency (n=564)	Percentage
Inadequate learning materials	312	55.3%
Poor sanitation facilities	224	39.7%
Inadequate resources for career pathway	156	27.7%

The most common student grievance related to resources was poor quality food (80.1%), followed by overcrowded dormitories (72.3%). These findings align with the observation by a senior education official that "schools are cutting food rations, asking parents to buy stationery" due to inadequate funding. Notably, 27.7% of senior secondary school students expressed grievances about inadequate resources for their chosen career pathways, reflecting the unique pressures of the CBC system.

Table 6: Resource Factors and Unrest Incidents in Senior Secondary Schools

Resource Factor	Schools with Unrest (n=10)	Schools without Unrest (n=18)	χ^2	p-value
Adequate capitation	1 (10%)	12 (66.7%)	8.51	0.004*
Adequate food quality	2 (20%)	13 (72.2%)	7.05	0.008*
Adequate dormitory space	2 (20%)	14 (77.8%)	8.63	0.003*
Adequate counseling services	3 (30%)	15 (83.3%)	6.54	0.011*
Adequate teaching staff	4 (40%)	16 (88.9%)	5.43	0.020*
Adequate CBC pathway resources	2 (20%)	12 (66.7%)	5.87	0.015*

Significant at $p < 0.05$

The chi-square analysis in Table 6 reveals significant associations between resource availability and student unrest in senior secondary schools. Senior secondary schools with adequate capitation (66.7%) experienced significantly fewer unrest incidents compared to those with inadequate funding (10%, $\chi^2=8.51$, $p=0.004$). Similar patterns were observed for food quality, dormitory space, counseling services, teaching staff, and CBC pathway resources.

4.5 Additional Findings

Guidance and Counseling: Only 25% of senior secondary schools reported having functional guidance and counseling departments. Among students, 68.4% indicated they would not feel comfortable approaching school counselors due to lack of confidentiality. This aligns with observations that "counseling departments are underfunded, understaffed and frequently treated as ceremonial offices." The absence of effective counseling is particularly concerning for senior secondary school students who are making critical career decisions.

Teacher-Student Relationships: 74.6% of students in senior secondary schools reported poor relationships with teachers, citing lack of respect, harsh discipline, and limited communication. Teachers, conversely, cited student indiscipline, disrespect, and lack of parental support as challenges. The poor teacher-student relationships in senior secondary schools are exacerbated by the pressures of the CBC and the need for specialized instruction.

Examination Pressure and Career Pathway Anxiety: 82.3% of senior secondary school students reported high levels of examination anxiety, with 67.5% stating that fear of poor performance contributed to tension in schools. Additionally, 58.2% of students expressed anxiety about career pathway decisions and the adequacy of resources for their chosen fields. The County Commissioner noted that many students were involved in unrest "due to fear of doing exams" and the uncertainty surrounding their future career paths.

CBC Transition Challenges: 63.4% of teachers in senior secondary schools reported challenges in implementing the CBC, including insufficient training, inadequate resources, and unclear assessment guidelines. These challenges contribute to a stressful learning environment that may precipitate unrest.

4.6 Hypothesis Testing

H₀₁: School Governance and Student Unrest in Senior Secondary Schools

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between participatory governance and student unrest in senior secondary schools ($r = -0.642$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Senior secondary schools with more participatory governance structures experienced significantly less unrest.

H₀₂: Resource Availability and Student Unrest in Senior Secondary Schools

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a significant negative relationship between resource availability and student unrest in senior secondary schools ($r = -0.598$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Senior secondary schools with adequate resources experienced significantly less unrest.

5. Discussion

5.1 School Governance and Student Unrest

The study found that authoritarian governance structures, limited student participation, and weak grievance mechanisms significantly contribute to student unrest in senior secondary schools in Makueni County. This finding supports previous research by Muritu (2012), which found that students in various districts had insufficient opportunities to participate in school governance. Similarly, Muli (2012) identified "poor school administration" and "poor leadership" as significant causes of student unrest. The finding that 70.2% of students in senior secondary schools perceived their school administration as authoritarian is particularly concerning. Senior secondary school students are at a developmental stage where they seek greater autonomy and responsibility. The authoritarian approach adopted by many schools conflicts with these developmental needs, creating conditions conducive to resistance. This perception aligns with the observation by education experts that "harsh authoritarian approaches only breed resistance." Students in the study expressed frustration with being excluded from decision-making processes, echoing the finding from the Parliamentary inquiry that institutional factors include "failure to adjust to change in management."

The significant association between functional student councils and reduced unrest (77.8% of peaceful senior secondary schools had functional student councils versus 20% of affected schools) underscores the importance of student participation. This finding aligns with petitions to Parliament for "establishment of structured student consultation mechanisms." However, the study also found that many student councils are tokenistic, lacking genuine decision-making authority—a finding consistent with earlier research. In the context of senior secondary schools, where students are expected to take greater responsibility for their learning and career paths, the absence of genuine participation is particularly problematic.

5.2 Resource Availability and Student Unrest

The study's finding that 92.9% of senior secondary schools experience inadequate capitation funds reflects a national crisis identified by stakeholders. Education officials have stated that "without government funds, principals are exposed to challenges beyond their control." The government's capitation grant has remained at the same level since 2018, while costs have significantly increased. For senior secondary schools, the funding challenge is compounded by the need for specialized resources for CBC pathways.

The finding that overcrowded dormitories (85.7%) and poor food quality (78.6%) are prevalent challenges is particularly significant, as these were also the most frequently cited student grievances. Overcrowding has been linked to the 100% transition policy without commensurate resource allocation. Senior secondary schools, which have absorbed students from junior secondary schools, face particular challenges in accommodating increased enrollment while maintaining quality. Research in Makueni County has similarly found that infrastructural resources significantly influence learning outcomes, with infrastructure gaps undermining the attainment of educational competencies (Mauko et al., 2025). The County Director of Education's call for enhanced surveillance and principals to "listen to students" reflects recognition that resource constraints create conditions conducive to unrest.

The significant association between adequate resources and reduced unrest suggests that addressing underfunding is a prerequisite for lasting solutions. This supports the observation that the crisis is "rooted in systemic failures underfunding and lack of psychosocial support." For senior secondary schools, addressing resource constraints is particularly urgent as these institutions prepare students for tertiary education and the workforce.

5.3 Psychosocial Factors

The study found that inadequate guidance and counseling services (75% of senior secondary schools lacking functional services) and poor teacher-student relationships (74.6% of students reporting poor relationships) contribute to unrest. This finding aligns with the observation that "counselling departments are underfunded, understaffed and frequently treated as ceremonial offices rather than critical mental health support structures." Kilel (2023) similarly found significant relationships between mental health challenges, negative school climate, and student unrest in Kenyan secondary schools, highlighting the critical need for comprehensive psychosocial support.

The high levels of examination anxiety (82.3%) reflect education experts' observation that "exam phobia is real, sending shivers in the spine of these students." The concentration of unrest in the third term, when examinations approach and extracurricular activities are suspended, confirms the role of examination pressure in triggering unrest. For senior secondary school students, the pressure is amplified by the high stakes of the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) examination, which determines access to university and other tertiary institutions.

Additionally, the study identified unique psychosocial challenges related to the CBC transition. Senior secondary school students reported anxiety about career pathway decisions and the adequacy of resources for their chosen fields. The uncertainty surrounding the new curriculum, combined with the traditional pressures of examinations, creates a high-stress environment that may precipitate unrest. Wanyama (2025) found that teachers were not sufficiently retooled on pedagogy and assessment, making their understanding of curriculum implementation vague, which in turn affects the learning environment and student experience.

5.4 CBC and Senior Secondary School Specific Factors

The study identified challenges specific to senior secondary schools under the CBC. Teachers and principals reported difficulties in implementing the new curriculum, including insufficient training, inadequate resources, and unclear assessment guidelines. These findings are consistent with broader research on CBC implementation. Gikandi et al. (2025) found that while teachers broadly

understand the pedagogical intentions of the CBC, implementation is constrained by gaps in teacher preparation, limited access to learning resources, inadequate infrastructure, and varying levels of stakeholder engagement.

Senior secondary school students must make critical decisions about their career pathways, which introduces additional anxiety and pressure. The availability and quality of resources for these pathways vary significantly across schools, creating inequalities that may fuel grievances. The study found that 27.7% of students expressed grievances about inadequate resources for their chosen pathways, and 58.2% reported anxiety about career pathway decisions.

The transition from junior to senior secondary school itself may be a source of stress. Students must adapt to new institutional structures, more specialized instruction, and increased academic expectations. Without adequate support, this transition may contribute to the conditions that precipitate unrest.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated institutional factors influencing student unrest in public senior secondary schools in Makueni County, Kenya. The findings reveal that student unrest is not simply a matter of student indiscipline but a complex phenomenon rooted in institutional failures, particularly significant in the context of the newly established senior secondary schools.

6.1 Conclusions

- **Governance Deficits:** Authoritarian school governance, limited student participation in decision-making, and weak grievance mechanisms significantly contribute to student unrest in senior secondary schools. Schools with functional student councils and participatory governance experience fewer unrest incidents. The developmental needs of senior secondary school students, who seek greater autonomy and responsibility, make participatory governance particularly important.
- **Resource Constraints:** Inadequate government funding leads to overcrowded facilities, poor food quality, and insufficient staffing, creating conditions conducive to student frustration and protest. The stagnation of capitation grants has exacerbated these challenges. Senior secondary schools face additional resource constraints related to the implementation of CBC pathways, consistent with broader research on CBC implementation challenges (Gikandi et al., 2025; Wanyama, 2025).
- **Psychosocial Neglect:** Weak guidance and counseling services, combined with high examination pressure, career pathway anxiety, and poor teacher-student relationships, contribute to student distress that manifests as destructive behavior. Kilel (2023) similarly found that mental health challenges and negative school climate significantly influence student unrest.
- **CBC Transition Challenges:** The implementation of the CBC in senior secondary schools has introduced new pressures, including inadequate resources for pathways, teacher training gaps, and assessment uncertainties. These challenges contribute to a stressful learning environment that may precipitate unrest.
- **Systemic Failure:** The persistence of student unrest despite numerous government taskforces and commissions reflects a systemic failure to implement recommendations and address root causes. Senior secondary schools, as newly established institutions, require targeted interventions to address their unique challenges.

The study concludes that addressing student unrest in senior secondary schools requires comprehensive institutional reforms that move beyond punitive responses to address governance, resource, and psychosocial factors. The unique characteristics of senior secondary schools—including the developmental stage of students, the demands of the CBC, and the pressures of career preparation—must be considered in developing interventions.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

7.1 Policy Recommendations

- **Strengthen Student Voice:** The Ministry of Education should mandate the establishment of functional student councils with genuine decision-making authority in all public senior secondary schools. Training programs for student leaders and school administrators on participatory governance should be implemented. Given the developmental stage of senior secondary school students, councils should be empowered to address a wider range of issues, including curriculum implementation and career pathway support.
- **Increase Education Funding:** The government should increase the per-learner capitation grant to reflect actual costs, which has remained stagnant since 2018. Adequate funding would address overcrowding, improve food quality, and ensure adequate staffing in senior secondary schools. Additional funding should be allocated specifically for CBC pathway resources, including specialized equipment, materials, and facilities.
- **Strengthen Guidance and Counseling:** Senior secondary schools should be required to have functional guidance and counseling departments with trained counselors. Confidentiality should be guaranteed to encourage students to seek support. Given the unique challenges of senior secondary school students, counseling services should address career guidance, examination anxiety, and CBC-related stress. Kilel (2023) similarly recommended strengthening mental health support in schools to address unrest.
- **Review Examination and Assessment Policies:** The Ministry of Education should reconsider the ban on extracurricular activities during the third term and explore ways to reduce examination anxiety among senior secondary school students. The assessment framework for the CBC should be clarified and communicated effectively to reduce uncertainty and anxiety.
- **Enforce Safety Standards:** The Safety Standards Manual for Schools should be enforced, with regular inspections to ensure compliance in senior secondary schools. Schools should be required to conduct regular fire drills and emergency preparedness exercises. Given the increased enrollment in senior secondary schools, particular attention should be paid to dormitory capacity and fire safety.

- Support CBC Implementation: The government should provide adequate resources for CBC implementation in senior secondary schools, including teacher training, learning materials, and infrastructure for pathways. Clear guidelines on assessment and progression should be developed and communicated. As Gikandi et al. (2025) and Wanyama (2025) found, addressing teacher preparation gaps and infrastructure deficits is critical for successful CBC implementation.

7.2 School-Level Recommendations

- Establish Open Communication Channels: Principals of senior secondary schools should establish regular stakeholder meetings with students, teachers, and parents to address grievances promptly and prevent escalation. Given the maturity of senior secondary school students, communication should be more collaborative and consultative.
- Participatory Decision-Making: Senior secondary schools should involve students in decision-making on matters affecting their welfare, including food, discipline policies, extracurricular activities, and curriculum implementation. Student councils should have genuine authority to represent student interests.
- Strengthen Teacher-Student Relationships: Training programs should equip teachers in senior secondary schools with skills in empathetic discipline, conflict resolution, and positive communication. Teachers should be trained to work effectively with senior secondary school students who have greater expectations of autonomy and respect.
- Resource Prioritization: Senior secondary schools should prioritize the improvement of dormitory conditions, food quality, and basic facilities to address common student grievances. Mauko et al. (2025) found that infrastructural resources significantly influence learning outcomes, underscoring the importance of prioritizing infrastructure improvements. Schools should also prioritize resources for CBC pathways to ensure students can pursue their chosen career paths effectively.
- Career Guidance and Support: Senior secondary schools should provide comprehensive career guidance to help students navigate pathway decisions. Regular career fairs, mentorship programs, and exposure to different career opportunities should be organized.

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