



The Role Played by Students' Government in Managing Discipline in Public Secondary Schools

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed at assessing the role played by students' government in managing discipline in public secondary schools in Bukoba municipality, Kagera, Tanzania. This study adopted a mixed methods research approach supported with a convergent parallel research design. The participants were 120 (i.e., 15 HBs, 15 HGs, and 90 SLs). Data collection methods were questionnaires and interviews. Findings have indicated that, prevalent student's misbehaviours are the use of abusive words among students and to teachers and stealing of others' property; others are students' absenteeism in school without excuse, lateness to school, failure to complete assignments and exercises provided by the teacher, noisemaking in class, fighting and examination malpractices. In regard to the involvement of students' leaders in the formulation of rules and regulations, findings have established that, students' leaders are not given an opportunity to provide their views on the already prepared school rules and regulations, on co-curricular activities (sports, games or cultural trips), to formulate rules concerning the design of school uniforms or in the preparation of school rules and regulations. On the issue of the challenges encountered by students' leaders, findings show that, students' leaders are challenged with irregular meetings which interfere with academic calendars, lack of feedback from teachers, failure by the students to take instructions from their government. Other challenges failure to complete class assignments and exercises on time, lack of

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cooperation from students and lack of enough time to engage in private studies. On the strategies employed by students' leaders in alleviating indiscipline cases in public secondary schools, students' responses have shown that, students' leaders inflict corporal punishments to their deviant fellow students or verbal warnings or guidance and counselling groups. Based on the findings above, suggestions and recommendations are provided.

Keywords: Role; students' government; students' discipline; management; public secondary school.

1. INTRODUCTION

The discipline of students in schools all over the world needs more attention from various education stakeholders including teachers, parents, donors, organizations and the whole community (Emekako, [1]. Mlay [2] and, Liguluka and Onyango [3] argue that, students' discipline in schools is a pillar of effective teaching and learning which results in improved academic performance, upholds students' moral values [4] creates good school image leading to the production of quality education [5]

According to Nnebedum and Akinfolarin [6]. discipline is an act of behaving in accordance with values, beliefs, rules and the code of conduct of a certain society or the school with the purpose of not to compel individuals to obey without questioning, but to help them control themselves, develop love and trust relationships between individuals; discipline, therefore, is the determination and implementation of rules that enable individuals to respect rights and freedoms of each other [7].

Studies establish that, ineffective management of indiscipline cases in schools can cause negative consequences not only to teachers and students but also to the whole community [8,9]. For example, Moigua [10] argues that, students fail to follow specific instructions from the authorities, leave the classrooms without permission, become dishonest to authorities and friends, and vandalism of properties while Manasi and Andiema [11] are of the views that, students become violent leading to property destructions and loss of lives of some people.

Global studies indicate that, where students' governments have been involved in the management of students' discipline by the school administrations, the respective schools have experienced the great reduction of students' deviant behaviors. For example, In Austria, Slovenia, Switzerland and Finland, secondary schools very often, collect and incorporate students' voices in any decision made in schools including management of students' discipline

issues [12]. In Zambia, Mbonyonga [13] established that, students' councils were involved in the decision-making process about school route and on management of students' discipline. They were involved in the making of school rules, maintained discipline by enhancing good behaviour by initiating a campaign against vandalism of school property and graffiti. A similar case was in Kenya, where Ikiugu, Maithya, and Kisirkoi [14] submitted that, strikes in schools, failure to adhere to school rules and regulations, students' absenteeism, teenage pregnancy cases, drugs, vandalism, pre-marital sexes and mobile phones have decreased due to the involvement of students' councils in the management of students' discipline.

In Tanzania, studies continue to indicate that, indiscipline cases in public secondary schools are rampant and in all these instances, the management of the same was under teachers, parents and school boards. For instance, Liguluka and Onyango [3] (Ulanga district-Morogoro), Mpokera [4] (Dodoma Urban and Chamwino districts-Dodoma) and Beyanga [15] (Ngara district-Kagera). Despite, student's governments are a statutory requirement in every public secondary school and they were available, studies indicate that, the same were less involved in maintaining their fellows' discipline. For example, Simeo and Tangi, [16] in Ilemela district public secondary schools found that, teachers were not involving students' leaders in curbing student's indiscipline cases. This situation motivated the researcher to assess the role played by students' leaders in managing discipline in public secondary schools in Bukoba municipality, Kagera, Tanzania.

1.1 Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to assess the role played by students' leaders in managing discipline in public secondary schools in Bukoba municipality, Kagera, Tanzania.

Specifically, the study sought to address the following specific objectives:

1. To identify prevalent student's misbehaviours,
2. To find out the extent of student's government involvement in the formulation of rules and regulations,
3. To analyze the challenges encountered by the student's leaders in handling students' disciplinary matters, and
4. To explore various strategies employed by students' leaders in alleviating indiscipline cases.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Prevalent Student's Misbehaviours

In Turkey, Çetinkaya and Koçyiğit [17] conducted a study on the "disciplinary cases at the high schools." The findings showed that, fighting, possessing or smoking tobacco products, disrupting the course flow, behaving rudely and disrespectfully, molesting, insulting and slandering friends with words and behavior, cheating, absenteeism without excuse, behaving inappropriately against national and moral values, not complying with the provisions of regulation of dress, information technology offenses, carrying tools for gambling, damaging school, taking and using others' belongings without permission, bringing and using wounding or killing tools in the educational environment, ruining the order in the dorm and using or keeping addictive substances were indiscipline cases occurring in schools. Amaewhule and Nukan-Adebayo [18]. conducted a quantitative study in Nigeria on the "perceived influence of students' indiscipline on academic performance in senior secondary schools." The findings of the study revealed that, truancy, examination malpractices, bullying, lateness to school and noisemaking were the common students' indiscipline cases. Beyanga [15] conducted a study in Ngara district, Kagera, Tanzania, on the "effects of indiscipline on students' academic achievement in public secondary schools." The findings of the study revealed that, abusive languages, love engagement affairs and theft cases were found to be indiscipline cases in schools.

2.2 Involvement in the Formulation of School Rules and Regulations

In Indonesia, Prasetyarini, Hikmat, and Thoyibi [19] conducted a study on "strategies to cope with students' discipline problems in senior high schools." The study established that, teachers

were not involving students in setting classroom rules. Ikiugu, Maithya, and Kisirkoi [14] conducted a study in Meru County, Kenya on the "impact of students' council's involvement in school policy formulation on school discipline in public secondary schools." The findings revealed that, students' councils were not involved by the school administration in the formulation of school rules and regulations concerning students' discipline. Ikiugu, Maithya, and Kisirkoi [14] conducted a study in Meru County, Kenya on the "impact of students' council's involvement in school policy formulation on school discipline in public secondary schools." The findings revealed that, students' councils were not involved by the school administration in the formulation of school rules and regulations concerning students' discipline. In Tanzania, Lumanija and Mkulu [20] conducted a study in Bariadi district council on the "roles of students' council involvement in management of discipline in public secondary schools." The findings revealed that, students' councils were highly involved in enforcing school rules and regulations.

2.3 Challenges Encountered in Handling Students' Disciplinary Matters

Mboyonga [13] conducted a study in Zambia on the "role of student representative councils in curbing students' riots in selected secondary schools." The major challenges which affected the efficacy of student councils were bureaucracy, adult domination, tokenism and teachers' oppositions; others included lack of feedback and training, and irregular meetings which interfered the academic calendar. In Tanzania, Kambuga and Omollo [21] conducted a study in Arusha region on the "students' leadership role and challenges in secondary schools." The study divulged that, students' leaders missed some lessons while attending their fellows' matters and failed to complete class assignments on time.

2.4 Strategies Employed by Students' Leaders in Alleviating Indiscipline Cases

Magdalene, Michael, and Maurice [22] conducted a study on the "students' conceptions of role of guidance and counselling in discipline management in secondary schools in Kenya." The study found that, students were suspended and/or expelled from schools if they committed grievous offences. Further, they were excluded from class, knelt down, caned or did manual

work. Luti-Mallei, Gakunga, and Nungu [23] have recently conducted a study on the “impact of student leaders’ participation in school peer counseling programs on learners’ discipline in public and private secondary schools in Kenya.” Findings have revealed that, student leaders’ have been participating in school peer counseling programs. They also employed spies to gather information which would create an unpeaceful school environment. In Tanzania, Simeo and Tangi [16] conducted a study in Illemela district, Mwanza on the “strategies used by heads of secondary schools in managing students’ discipline for academic achievement.” The study revealed that, strategies employed by students’ leaders in alleviating indiscipline cases in public secondary schools, students’ responses have shown that, students’ leaders inflict corporal punishments to their deviant fellow students or verbal warnings or guidance and counseling groups and strong rules and regulations were enacted.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Approaches and Design

The study employed a mixed-methods research approach for data collection, analysis and interpretation. The mixed methods research approach combined both qualitative and quantitative methods. These methods were preferred because the weaknesses of one method were outweighed by the strengths of another; furthermore, respondents were exposed in a situation of describing their everyday experiences relating to the role played by students’ government in managing discipline in public secondary schools. These approaches were supported by a convergent parallel research design because it helped to collect extensive data from the participant and both quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously / concurrently, analyzed differently/separately and then merged together during interpretation and discussion for better understanding of the research problem [24]

3.2 Sample and Sampling Techniques

A sample of 120 informants participated in the study. These included: 15 HBs, 15 HGs, and 90 SLs. Table 1 below, summarises the total respondents who were involved in the study.

The study used simple random and purposive sampling techniques. Simple random sampling

technique was used to get 90 SLs. This technique was useful because it gave a chance for each and every respondent being equally included or excluded in the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 15 HBs and 15 HGs. This technique was used because the researcher wanted to get their personal experiences, feelings, thoughts, aspirations, attitudes and perceptions about the reality on the roles played by students’ government in managing students’ discipline in schools.

3.3 Instruments for Data Collection

A list of well-structured and close-ended questions were used to collect quantitative data from students’ leaders. This instrument was employed because it reduced bias and it helped to collect information in a very short time within a large group of people [25]. Semi-structured interview guides were used to gather qualitative data from HBs and HGs. Interviewees’ opinions were captured by using note books and a sound recorder during the session and it lasted for only 45 minutes. This instrument was opted for because it enabled the researcher to probe more information which would not have been collected from questionnaires.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

Quantitative data were coded and analyzed by the use of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program version 28.0 and interpreted in tabular forms by the use of means and standard deviations. Before, quantitative data were administered to the participants, they were all tested for internal consistencies using Cronbach’s Alpha. The results were as indicated in Table 2.

Reliability for qualitative data from semi-structured interviews were done through the technique of replicability where, audio recordings by smart phone and full transcriptions recorded in the note book were analyzed and presented in excerpts, direct quotes, and narrations.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Prevalent Students’ Misbehaviours

Findings regarding the computation of descriptive statistics on prevalent students’ misbehaviours are presented in Table 3.

Findings show that, students perceive that, prevalent student’s misbehaviours in public

secondary schools arise from use of abusive words among students and to teachers (M=3.86, SD=1.28) and stealing of others' property (M=3.79, SD=1.32). These findings are supported by the majority of HBs and HGs who argued through interview that, students at their schools steal other students' properties and use impolite languages to their fellow students as evidenced in the following narration:

"In the school I am studying, the prevalent misbehaviours exhibited by students are truancy, fighting, making noise in classes, lateness to school and failure to do exercises provided to them by the teachers." (HG-B, 14 May, 2023, 09:25 A.M).

4.2 Involvement of Students' Government in the Formulation of Rules and Regulations

Findings regarding the computation of descriptive statistics on involvement of students' government in the formulation of rules and regulations are presented in Table 4.

Findings show that, students' leaders are not given an opportunity by the teachers to provide their views on the already prepared school rules and regulations (M=2.63, SD=1.45) and also do not participate in the preparation of school rules and regulations (M=2.40, SD=1.36).

Furthermore, students' leaders are not allowed to make rules on co-curricular activities (sports, games or cultural trips) (M=2.29, SD=1.37), allowed to formulate rules concerning the design of school uniforms (M=2.26, SD=1.33) or given an opportunity to give proposals before school rules and regulations are prepared (M=2.24, SD=1.31). Findings from interview responses by majority of the HBs and HGs indicate that, student's government involvement in the formulation of rules and regulations students is not done in schools because the school rules and regulations available at schools are already set by the government as it is in the following quotation:

"We are not involved in the formulation of school rules and regulations. The reason is simple. This is because the government has already formulated the same and there is no room for more opinions." (HB-C, 15 May, 2023, 08:00 A.M).

4.3 Challenges Encountered by Student's Leaders in Handling Students' Disciplinary Matters

Findings regarding the computation of descriptive statistics on challenges encountered by student's leaders in handling students' disciplinary matters are presented in Table 5.

Table 1. Sample of the study

Respondents' Category	Sample Size	Percentage (%)
Head Boys (HBs)	15	12.5
Head Girls (HG)	15	12.5
Other Students' Leaders (SLs)	90	75.0
Total	120	100.0

Table 2. Individual item reliability scale results

S/N	Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No. of Items	Strength of Association
1.	PSM	.93	.93	8	Very good and acceptable
2.	ISG	.86	.86	5	Very good and acceptable
3.	CSLD	.86	.86	7	Good and acceptable
4.	SESL	.85	.86	5	Very good and acceptable

PSM=Prevalent Students' Misbehaviours, ISG=Involvement of Students' Government in the Formulation of Rules and Regulations, CSLD=Challenges Encountered by Student's Leaders in Handling Students' Disciplinary Matters, SAIC=Strategies Employed by Students' Leaders in Alleviating Indiscipline Cases

Table 3. Prevalent student’s misbehaviours (n=90)

Activities	Responses		Interpretation
	M	SD	
Use of abusive words to friends and teachers	3.86	1.28	Agree
Stealing of others’ property	3.79	1.32	Agree
Absenteeism in school without excuse	3.78	1.30	Agree
Lateness to school	3.70	1.19	Agree
Failing to complete assignments and exercises	3.64	1.24	Agree
Noisemaking in class	3.54	1.32	Agree
Fighting	3.51	1.22	Agree
Examination malpractices	3.43	1.26	Agree

Table 4. Student’s government involvement in the formulation of rules and regulations (n=90)

Activities	Responses		Interpretation
	M	SD	
Students’ leaders are given an opportunity to provide their views on the already prepared school rules and regulations	2.63	1.45	Disagree
Students’ leaders participate in the preparation of school rules and regulations	2.40	1.36	Disagree
Students’ leaders are allowed to make rules on co-curricular activities (sports, games or cultural trips).	2.29	1.37	Disagree
Students’ leaders are allowed to formulate rules concerning the design of school uniforms	2.26	1.33	Disagree
Students’ leaders are given an opportunity to give proposals before school rules and regulations are prepared	2.24	1.31	Disagree

Table 5. Challenges encountered by student’s leaders (n=90)

Activities	Responses		Interpretation
	M	SD	
Irregular meetings which interfere with academic calendars	3.78	1.36	Agree
Lack of feedback from teachers	3.76	1.31	Agree
Failure by the students to take instructions from the council	3.64	1.29	Agree
Failure to complete class assignments and exercises on time	3.63	1.29	Agree
Lack of cooperation from students	3.62	1.37	Agree
Lack of enough time to engage in private studies	3.61	1.34	Agree
Teachers’ oppositions	2.22	1.34	Disagree

Findings show that, students’ leaders encounter several challenges in school as they were analysed by the students. These challenges have been found to be that, students’ leaders have irregular meetings which interfere with academic calendars (M=3.78, SD=1.36, lack of feedback from teachers (M=3.76, SD=1.31 and failure by the students to take instructions from the council (M=3.64, SD=1.29). These findings are in line with the interview responses from the majority of HBs and HGs who argued that:

“We are not involved in the formulation of school rules and regulations. The reason is simple.

This is because the government has already formulated the same and there is no room for more opinions.” (HB-C, 15 May, 2023, 08:00 A.M).

Other challenges students’ leaders encounter include failure to complete class assignments and exercises on time (M=3.63, SD=1.29) and lack of cooperation from students (M=3.62, SD=1.37). These findings are in support by the interview responses from the majority of HGs who reported that:

“My fellow students’ leaders fail to complete various assignments

provided by their teachers simply because they are burdened by leadership obligations.” (HG-A, 16 May, 2023, 08:15 A.M).

They also lack enough time to engage in private studies (M=3.61, SD=1.34). These findings are supported by the interview responses from the majority of HBs and HGs who indicate that:

“Students’ leaders encounter several challenges in my school. They lack sufficient time to take private studies and some of students bully them.” (HoS-F, 16 May, 2023, 08:20 A.M).

4.4 Strategies Employed by Students’ Leaders in Alleviating Indiscipline Cases

Findings regarding students’ responses on various strategies employed by students’ leaders in alleviating indiscipline cases are presented in Table 6.

Findings in Table 6 above show that, students’ leaders employ various strategies in alleviating indiscipline cases in public secondary schools. Students’ responses have shown that, heads of public secondary schools use corporal punishments to discipline their fellow students (M=3.89, SD=1.27). The findings above are also supported by the assertion by the majority of the HGs who argued that, among the common strategies used by the same in alleviating indiscipline cases at schools include infliction of corporal punishments to students as indicated in the following quotation:

“Some students do not adhere to our instructions. We were allowed by our teachers to discipline defiant students by giving several strokes or other heavy punishments in order to deter their bad

behaviours.” (HG-G, 16 May, 2023, 08:25 A.M).

Another HG added:

“We use guidance and counselling groups to students with bad behaviours.....” (HG-H, 16 May, 2023, 08:30 A.M).

Findings show that, some HBs and HGs use verbal warnings to defiant students (M=3.78, SD=1.34). This finding is supported by interview responses from the majority of HBs and HGs who argued:

“I sometimes give several warnings to the defiant students before further actions are taken. If they rectify their bad behaviours, they are encouraged to continue in that direction; but when they fail, I involve teachers.” (HB-I, 16 May, 2023, 08:35 A.M).

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Prevalent Student’s Misbehaviours

Findings from students’ responses have shown that, prevalent student’s misbehaviours in public secondary schools were the use of abusive words among students and to teachers and stealing of others’ property. These findings are in line with the findings of Çetinkaya and Koçyiğit [17] who reported that, insulting and slandering friends with words and taking and using others’ belongings without permission were indiscipline cases occurring in schools. This study is also supported by the one of Beyanga [15] who also reported that, abusive languages and theft cases were some of the indiscipline cases prevailing in schools. Furthermore, other students’ misbehaviours included students’ absenteeism in school without excuse, lateness to school and failure to complete assignments and exercises provided by the teacher. These findings concur with those of Ndaita [26] who reported that,

Table 6. Strategies employed by students’ leaders in alleviating indiscipline cases (n=90)

Activities	Responses		Interpretation
	M	SD	
Use corporal punishments	3.89	1.27	Agree
Use verbal warnings to the defiant students	3.78	1.34	Agree
Motivational programs spotting the best-disciplined students and propose them to be awarded by the administration	2.35	1.50	Disagree

prevalent students' misbehaviours at schools were noise making and failing to complete assignments; others were sneaking out of school and stealing another students' property. Mwangi and Kirimi [27] and Matimba and Mwansa [28] have recently found that, students' misbehaviours in secondary schools have been, among others, truancy, rudeness among students and teachers and fighting; others have been failing to complete school work and theft. Other findings include noisemaking in class, fighting and examination malpractices. These views are in line with the findings of Amaewhule and Nukan-Adebayo (2019) who reported that, examination malpractices, fighting, lateness to school and noisemaking were the common students' indiscipline cases. These findings are also supported by those of Atunde and Aliyu [29] who reported that, bullying among students and teachers and cheating in examinations were the most prevalent misbehaviours in schools.

5.2 Involvement of Student's Government in the Formulation of Rules and Regulations

In regard to the involvement of students' leaders in the formulation of rules and regulations, findings have established that, students' leaders are not given an opportunity by teachers to provide their views on the already prepared school rules and regulations. This finding agrees with the findings of Ikiugu *et al.*, [14] who reported that, students' councils were not involved by the school administration in the formulation of school rules and regulations concerning students' discipline. Contrary views are provided by Fekadu [30] who reported that, students were involved in the formulation of the school rules and regulations concerning students' discipline. Findings continue to show that, students' leaders do not participate in the preparation of school rules and regulations. This finding is supported by the findings of Akech *et al.*, [31] and Prasetyarini *et al.*, [19] who reported that, teachers were not involving students in setting classroom rules. Contrary to the findings above, Lumanija and Mkulu [20] reported that, students' councils were highly involved in setting and enforcing school rules and regulations. Furthermore, students' leaders are not allowed to make rules on co-curricular activities or allowed to formulate rules concerning the design of school uniforms. This observation concurs with that of Vasquez and Javillonar [32] who reported that, students' leaders were not involved in the

choice of school uniforms and design the situation which led to the violation of school uniform policy at schools. They are not given an opportunity to give proposals before school rules and regulations are prepared. This finding is contrary to that of Maingi *et al.*, [33] who reported that, students were involved in the formulation of school rules the situation that led to high levels of students' discipline.

5.3 Challenges Encountered by Student's Leaders in Handling Students' Disciplinary Matters

On the issue of the challenges encountered by students' leaders, findings from students have shown that, students' leaders are challenged with irregular meetings which interfere with academic calendars and lack of feedback from teachers. These views are in line with the findings of Kuria and Muthui [34] and Mboyonga [13] who reported that, encounter teachers' oppositions; lack of feedback from teachers and irregular meetings which interfered their academic calendar. Students' leaders are also challenged with failure by the students to take instructions from the council. This finding is supported by the findings of Nekesa [35] and Murage [36] who reported that, the challenges experienced by the students' council in maintaining discipline among students were lack of cooperation from their fellows and failure by the students to take instructions from the council. Other challenges students' leaders encounter include failure to complete class assignments and exercises on time, lack of cooperation from students and lack of enough time to engage in private studies. These findings are in line with those of Murage *et al.*, [37] and Kambuga and Omollo [38] who reported that, students' leaders missed some lessons while attending their fellows' matters, failed to complete class assignments on time and lack of teamwork among students and students' leaders. These observations are also supported by Chumo *et al.*, [39] who reported that, students' leaders performed poorly because they used much of their time dealing with indiscipline cases among students' drug abusers.

5.4 Various Strategies Employed by students' leaders in Alleviating Indiscipline Cases

On the last aspect of strategies employed by students' leaders in alleviating indiscipline cases in public secondary schools, students' responses have shown that, students' leaders inflict corporal

punishments to their deviant fellow students or verbal warnings or guidance and counselling groups. These observations are supported by Luti-Mallei *et al.*, [23] who reported that, student leaders' have been participating in school peer counseling programs. They also employed spies to gather information which would create an unpeaceful school environment. Other observations were made by Paul [40] who found that, students' leaders were given permission by teachers to punish their indisciplined fellow students [41,42].

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Involving students' leaders in setting school rules and regulations concerning their fellow students would have great advantages not only to students but also to the whole school. School heads should make sure students' leaders are involved in setting school rules and regulations. This is because findings from the study have indicated that, students' leaders are not given an opportunity by the teachers to provide their views on the already prepared school rules and regulations or participate in the preparation of school rules and regulations or given an opportunity to give proposals before school rules and regulations are prepared. Furthermore, school administrations should abandon the use of corporal punishments at schools. Based on these findings, it is suggested that, students' leaders should use several other strategies in alleviating students' discipline including motivational programmes spotting the best-disciplined students and propose them to be awarded by the administration so as to inspire defiant students to becoming good children like their fellows.

ETHICAL APPROVAL AND CONSENT

Before collecting data, the clearance and permission letters were first sought from the Directorate of Post graduate Studies (DPGS) of the Open University of Tanzania and the Bukoba Municipal Director. Thereafter, the researcher made visits to schools and explained the purpose of the study. Confidentiality and anonymity, openness and honesty were ensured by not allowing respondents to disclose their identities or school names. They were also asked to indicate their willingness in participating in the study signifying respect and consideration of their freedoms and rights by the researcher.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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