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Risky versus cautious group decisions: An explorative study of persuasive argumentation factors among teacher-members of Kenyan school disciplinary panels

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Abstract

The present study examined the persuasive argumentation factors leading to risky and cautious group decisions among teacher-members of disciplinary panels in Kenyan schools. The study was guided by the Persuasive Arguments Theory. The study is located within the qualitative research paradigm and was guided by the phenomenology design. The study sample comprised 14 teachers selected from three secondary schools. The semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. The trustworthiness of the qualitative data was ensured. Thematic framework was adopted to analyse data. The findings indicate that the persuasive argumentation factors namely, new information, credible information, perceived expertise source, age, teaching experience and seniority of panel members are responsible for shifts in decisions from pre-group risky decisions to post-group cautious decisions. It is recommended that school principals should make members of the school community a part of the disciplinary panels to make it broad based.

Keywords

Risky; cautious; decisions; persuasive argumentation factors; school disciplinary panels

Introduction

Behaviour problems have been on the rise in Kenyan schools for some time now (Aloka, 2020). Magai, et al., (2018) add that behavioural problems during childhood and adolescence are a common concern for parents and mental health stakeholders as they predict numerous problematic outcomes in adulthood in Kenya. Kindiki (2009) reiterates that secondary school students' in-disciplined behaviours have caused public concern and have continued to feature more prominently in the national agenda of Kenya. Onyango (2003) observes that such episodes seem to be a reflection of the violence being witnessed in the larger society of Kenya. These rising cases of maladaptive behaviours of students in schools were in part blamed on the gaps in communication or the ineffective communication systems between students and school authorities in most of the schools in Kenya (Aloka, 2012). Behaviour problems of



students may impact negatively on the students themselves, and affect not only the other students in school, but also the teachers and the school environment as a whole. Students' behaviour problems also interfere with their ability to fully attend to and engage in instructional activities, prompting a call for appropriate directions for addressing barriers to learning (Aloka, 2012). The behaviour problems among students are also thought to be a leading contributor to teachers' stress and attrition, as teachers are subjected to abuse or intimidation and experience unsafe working environments, lack sense of dignity at work, feel angry, humiliated and are depressed (Aloka, 2012; Yahaya, et al., 2009).

Teachers in the past responded to these problems by relying on reactive measures, such as corporal punishment, to address the behaviour problems (Marais & Meier, 2010). Pachomius, et al., (2020) reiterate that inculcating discipline among students in Kenya has been the subject of debate among scholars with some suggesting that disciplinary policies simply do not have different effects and that they do not prevent students' future misbehaviour. Schools have responsibility of ensuring the overall development of students by providing an environment that supports their adjustment to school and to life (Aloka, 2012). A supportive environment would make students fully realise their unique individual potential, and in their adult lives, contribute as citizens of their country, as well as be useful members of their families and communities (Aloka, 2012, 2020). The Kenyan Ministry of Education acknowledges the negative impact of student behaviour problems and has instituted several measures to redress the situation and ensure good behaviour in schools (Aloka, 2012). Therefore, each school is mandated to form a disciplinary panel or board consisting of teachers to help address behavioural issues among students. The Kenyan school disciplinary panels operate as a judicial system and the decisions concerning students' behaviour problems are made by a group of teachers. In other words, schools' decisions which should translate into action(s) and/or programme services on student behaviour development are to be made by a collection of individuals rather than just the school principal alone, in spite of the fact that the latter has overall authority over the school (Aloka, 2012).

Most vital decisions in organisations are made by individuals in small groups. In the last four decades, decision-making research has focused on processes within small social groups that lead to decision making. Most organisations over a long period of time have preference for decision making on critical tasks to be group-oriented rather than individually made decisions (Tindale & Winget, 2019). Bonito (2011) reiterates that most schools embrace group decision making, which involves the use of site-based councils, task forces and committees depending on the nature of the task at hand. Groups are believed to make superior decisions compared to individuals. Robbins and Judge (2011) argue for the benefits of group decisions, in that groups offer increased diversity of views, generate more complete information and that there is increased acceptance on decisions that are made by groups. Zarate (2009) adds that group decisions are implemented with great confidence in the school, hence the schools have continued to use small groups to make decisions. In small social groups, the dynamic interactions lead to choose shifts from pre-group to post-group decisions among members during meetings leading to group polarisation.

Group polarization refers to the change in an individual's decision from an earlier made pre-group decision to a different post-group one after taking into account the other group members' opinions and preferences regarding the task at hand (Sieber & Ziegler, 2019). Group polarisation is also defined as the phenomenon where individual members in a group make extreme decisions after group deliberations on a task (Chen, 2013). In a choice shift, there are two possible types of decisions, namely the risky decisions or the cautious decisions (Jagau & Offerman, 2018). Stoner (1961) reiterates that both risky and cautious shifts refer to changes in the direction of risk taking during group decision making. Reynolds et al. (2009) explain that risky shift occurs when individuals make average pre-group decisions and change to become extreme in their post-group decisions. Cautious shift occurs when individuals begin decision making from an extreme level but change to a safe position after group discussion (Reynolds et al., 2009). The group decision whether risky or cautious has its own implications.

One of the hypothesised explanations of choice shifts in decisions in small groups is through informational influence which occurs when individuals in a group listen to each other's arguments (Peng & Slaughter, 2011). The study is informed by the Persuasive Arguments Theory (PAT). According to this theory, individuals in a group make decisions on the basis of the weights in the arguments that are presented by other members in the group (Chen, 2013). Therefore, during group discussions, group members present their own arguments, and an individual member of the group analyses the arguments, before making their own final decision. Thereafter, choice shifts occur either to the risky option or caution among the group members (Chen, 2013). The persuasiveness of an argument is determined by its perceived validity and novelty. When an argument is valid, then it means the accurateness of the ideas that are presented by other members of the group as viewed by others (Chen, 2013). The novelty of an argument is with regard to how an individual perceives an argument as interesting, original and new, which may lead to a shift in final decisions (Chen, 2013). In summary, the PAT guarantees the power of persuasion and the logic of one's argument and the correctness of one's position.

Literature on group polarization in decision making exists in contexts but very few studies have focused on school settings. For example, Votruba and Kwan's (2015) study reported that individuals in groups change their decisions depending on level of persuasiveness of arguments that are presented by other individuals. In another study, Salerno et al., (2017) indicates that persuasiveness of arguments makes group members change their decisions. Similarly, Penczynski (2016) shows that individuals' decisions change upon receiving more informative and sophisticated arguments from the other members of the group. Westwood (2015) indicates that individual-level persuasion is the most responsible determinant of shift in decisions during group deliberations. It has also been reported by Zuber et al., (1992) that persuasive arguments lead to risky decisions after handling group tasks. Wayne (2011) reports that the credibility aspect of persuasiveness of arguments leads to change in pre-group to post-group decisions. Similarly, Etiënne et al., (2011) reiterates that persuasive messages influence a shift in decisions among group participants. In addition, studies by Sieber and Ziegler's (2019) and Tillman and Torsten (2019) all agree that quality arguments produced by individual group members is responsible for shifts in decisions. Moreover, studies by Kim et al., (2021); Scott (2020) and Blair (2020) all reported that persuasion of arguments leads to shifts in group decisions. Aloka (2021) also indicated that there is a tendency for individuals in groups to make risky choices in their decisions as compared to individuals for similar tasks. The above reviewed studies are on the persuasive argumentation factors with regard to scientific and accurate information, extent of deliberations in groups leading to changes in decisions, nature of information and sophistication of arguments, individual level of persuasion and how these affect shift in decisions.

Persuasive arguments also enhances shifts in decisions depending on age and teaching experience of the teachers. In agreement, Watanabe and Shibutani (2010) found that age as a factor influences nature of decisions since older persons make cautious decisions while younger people mostly make risky decisions. Similarly, Lizarraga et al., (2007) conclude that age determines the nature of decisions made by individuals in groups as the young members change their decisions easily while older persons are rigid in their thoughts. Moreover, Zakirov and Krasilnikov (2020) revealed that decision making in older adults tends to follow aspects such as risk-taking, reciprocity, high moral judgement. The study also reported that strategies, which older adults tend to follow during decision making, can be less rational not only because of light cognitive declines, but due to different sensitivity to some aspects of their choices. In addition, Peng et al., (2020) found that young adults' between-session performance improved greater than that of older adults regardless of their condition. Finally, Spiegel (2017) reported the impacts of the decision maker's experience in the manifestation of attention, categorisation, memory and emotion of other group members. The above reviewed studies focused on age in group deliberations, choice shifts on the basis of experiences of group members and finally how dynamic interactions are affected by the two factors.

In school contexts, the risky decisions on students' behaviour problems are those decisions that might lead to psychological harm of the students, lead to some days' absence from school and do not give students the opportunity to reform within the school environment. On the other hand, cautious decisions are meant to reform the students within the school environment and they consider other circumstances surrounding the misbehaviour. Choice shifts in group decisions leading to either risky or cautious are important aspects of the dynamics within small social groups (Chen, 2013). Different countries have adopted varying ways of addressing behaviour problems among students in schools. For example, the South African Schools Act (Department of Education 1996) recommended that each School Governing Body involve stakeholders, such as students, parents and teachers in developing a code of conduct for the student population (Mathebula & Ndofirepi, 2017). In the light of this, Representative Councils of Students (RCLs) have a responsibility to appoint a sub-committee responsible for discipline in public schools in South Africa. Though the sub-committee cannot impose discipline on students, it should nevertheless encourage them to commit to the code of conduct (Mathebula & Ndofirepi, 2017). Thus, in South African context, students are expected to sign a statement that they subscribe to the code in order to "promote and maintain discipline among students and promote the general welfare of the school ... orderliness and not disrupt the order in the school" (Department of Education, 1997, p. 13; Mathebula & Ndofirepi, 2017).

The Kenyan Ministry of Education has initiated several policies to help address the students' behaviour problems. Each of the Kenyan schools have disciplinary panels to help manage disciplinary problems among students. The school disciplinary panels comprise of teachers within the school who have terms of reference to address all behavioural issues among students. The members of the disciplinary panel are selected from various departments and the panels are chaired by the schools' deputy principals. The size and membership of the disciplinary panels depend on the school size and category, but on average, there are between four to eight teacher members. The school disciplinary panels have an overall goal of enhancing overall development of students. The school disciplinary panels utilise the set of school regulations in an attempt to address behaviour problems of students. During the disciplinary panel deliberations, there are dynamic interactions among the members because they operate as small social groups. The present study explores the persuasive argumentation factors responsible for co-operative risky and cautious group decisions among disciplinary panel members in Kenyan schools.

There are several reported cases of students' misbehaviours in Kenyan secondary schools. This is despite the interventions that have been implemented by school management boards. One such recommendation is the use of a school disciplinary committee which is mandated to handle all students' behaviour cases in schools. The members of the disciplinary committees are faced with risky or cautious decisions while making decisions on students' behaviour problems, each with its own implications on the students. From the previous reviewed studies, most of the studies have been carried out in fields such as business, psychology and other experimental circumstances but very scanty literature was available on education and schools in particular. Therefore, the present study was carried out in schools to provide findings on the education context that is greatly lacking in literature.

Goal of the study

The study explored the persuasive argumentation factors leading to risky and cautious group decisions among disciplinary panel members in Kenyan schools. Specifically, the study attempts to answer the question: What are the persuasive argumentation factors leading to risky and cautious group decisions among disciplinary panel members in Kenyan schools?

Methods

Research design

The study adopted a phenomenology design, which has a fundamental goal of making interpretations relating to a given phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). This design was relevant for the study because the phenomenon studied was particular to the members of disciplinary panels only and not all teachers.

Participants

The sample size comprised 14 teacher-members of disciplinary panels in three selected secondary schools in Rongo Sub-County of Kenya. The teachers were all graduates with first degrees, comprised of both male and female genders, had varying ages between 25 to 59 years and had years of teaching experience ranging from one to 35 years. There were three school categories from where data was collected. A sample size of 14 teachers for interviews was considered appropriate for the study because according to Mason (2010), a sample size of 6–20 participants is enough as a sample size in phenomenological studies. The 14 teachers were selected using purposive sampling technique. Drezner (2009) argues that purposive sampling is used when participants are selected on the basis of their perceived expertise on the phenomenon under investigation.

Research instruments

The semi-structured interviews, which are open-ended in nature, were used to collect data from teachers who are members of disciplinary panels. The interviews have questions which allow the interviewer to probe some aspects in detail for clarity (Fox, 2009). The semi-structured interviews were on persuasive argumentation factors that enhance shift in risky and cautious decisions among teachers in school disciplinary panels. Trustworthiness of the interview data was ensured according to the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The trustworthiness of the qualitative data was ensured by prolonged engagement with the research participants, detailed methodological description and the used of reflection and peer review of interview data.

Procedure

Ethical clearance was first obtained from the National Council for Science, Technology & Innovation, Kenya. Thereafter, permission to access the selected secondary schools was sought from the principals. Arrangements were made so that data was collected during the days that the disciplinary panel had meetings to deliberate on students' disciplinary issues. On the day of data collection, the aim of the study was explained to the members of the disciplinary panels, after which their consent was sought. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured. Each interview took approximately 30–45 minutes and the responses were tape-recorded.

Data analysis

The qualitative data was analysed thematically. The process of thematic analysis involves transcription, reading over transcripts, coding, identification of themes and finally report writing (Braun & Clarke,

2006). Thematic analysis was adopted for the present study because it enabled a rich and detailed account of the interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Research results

The study explored the persuasive argumentation factors leading to risky and cautious group decisions among teacher-members of school disciplinary panels in Kenya. The findings indicated that the owner of the information presented is also associated with the persuasive argumentation leading to risky and cautious group decisions among group members. The themes with regard to the persuasive argumentation factors responsible for shifts in risky and cautious group decisions are new information, credible information, perceived expertise source and age, teaching experience of the group members.

Theme 1: New information

The theme of new information was reported by some members of disciplinary panels as a persuasive argument factor. The findings of the study indicated that, new information on the basis of behaviour characteristics of the student offender made panel members shift decisions from initial risky to final cautious decisions. In one school, there was a disciplinary case of a female student reported to have been engaged in truancy from school for unexplained reasons. It was reported that the girl had been warned several times and that it was not the first time that her case was presented to the school disciplinary team for deliberation. However, during the disciplinary hearing process, one panel member brought new information regarding the traumatic experiences that the girl was undergoing after having lost her parents through a road accident. The new information on the emotional state of the girl made the teachers shift from original pre-group risky to post-group cautious decisions so that the student could be counselled in school. Two interview excerpts from participants reflecting the change in decisions due to persuasive arguments from new information:

The initial decision I made on the behaviour problem of the female student was that she should be expelled from school because she was a habitual offender. Since the school regulations stipulated that truancy should not be condoned, I made the decision that the female student be expelled from school. However, at the disciplinary panel group deliberation, I changed my decision due to the information that was presented by one of the panel members which indicated that the girl had psychological and emotional challenges which resulted from the loss of both parents. It was reported that the girl was an adolescent and also head of a household at their home since she was the first-born child. I therefore changed my decision, so that she could be reformed within school through psychological counselling. (Teacher 3)

I had initially decided about the case that the girl needed suspension because it was not the first time we were involved in the case of absence from school without permission from the administration. I changed my decision after getting some information which we had not got before that the student has psychological problems being that she lost both parents and she has to take care of other younger siblings at home as well as attend school. My decision shifted to the recommendation of reforms within school through psychological counselling. (Teacher 4)

From the interview excerpts, it can be concluded that new information was one of the persuasive argumentation factors which operated among teacher-members of school disciplinary panel groups. The new information persuasively led to the shifts in the panel members' decisions from the originally risky

to final cautious decisions after deliberations. Therefore, new information enhanced persuasive argumentation, which caused the shift in decisions.

Theme 2: Credible information

Credible information was information that was perceived to be true and factual in relation to the behaviour problem presented. The findings of the study indicated that perceived credible information that was brought by some members of disciplinary panels led to shifts in risky and cautious group decisions. In one disciplinary hearing meeting, credible information was shared by the school deputy principal who gave the panel members new perspectives of looking at the disciplinary problem presented to the members. The case involved a Grade 12 male student who had been involved in a case of sneaking out of school at odd hours to unknown places. Before the disciplinary hearing, most panel members had recommended risky decision of expulsion for the student for causing disturbances to the proper school management. However, at the disciplinary meeting, the chair of the school disciplinary hearing committee (deputy principal) informed the teacher-members that the male student had three months to do final matriculation exams. The deputy principal also informed the members that the student was staying with his grandmother at home. Interview excerpts from the two members of the panels regarding shifts in decisions due to the credible information presented by the deputy principal:

I had made a decision that suspension should be given to the male student because of the offence of sneaking out of school. I made this decision so that the student could learn a lesson from sneaking out of school. At the school disciplinary panel group meeting, there was some evidence availed by the deputy principal that the male student was in Grade 12 and was just about to do matric examinations in that year. This made my decision to change because sending the student away at the critical time would make them leave school. I realised that there was need to provide within school reform that could assist the student to realise their goals of completing school. (Teacher 6)

The behaviour problem presented was a serious one because it could cause other problems to other students in school. I got other true information about the boy that he was almost finalising school in that year. My earlier decision of sending the student away would have been detrimental to the student. The information that was availed by the deputy principal made me change my decision in support of reformation within school so that the student could be assisted. (Teacher 13)

From the interview excerpts, it can be concluded that credible information from some panel members made shifts in decisions that were made by some members. The respondents changed their decisions because of the credibility of the messages that were availed by the panel member who was a senior member of the school management team.

Theme 3: Perceived source expertise

Perceived source expertise was information obtained from perceived expert members of the school disciplinary panels. The findings of the study indicated that information which was considered to be from an expert source was treated differently by the disciplinary panel members and considered to be of more value as compared to others. Such information induced varying shifts in disciplinary decisions on cases presented. In one case that was presented in a disciplinary hearing, there was a female student who was reported to be in possession of a phone contrary to the school rules and regulations. It was reported that, initially, teachers in

the disciplinary panel felt that the girl deserved severe punishment. However, the senior teacher of the school, who was also the vice-chairperson of the school disciplinary committee, reported to the members that she had done other investigations which revealed that the girl did not own the phone but that another student had hid the phone in her bag. Two interview excerpts from teachers in the committee who handled the behaviour problem are presented as follows:

I was initially of the opinion that the offending student needed more severe punishment because they were in possession of a phone contrary to the school rules. The other version that was brought up by the senior teacher made me change my decision to a less severe punishment because we got to know that the phone belonged to another student and not the accused student. (Teacher 10)

This disciplinary case was very tricky to me because at first I thought of a different punishment which was harsh because it was reported that the girl had a phone in her bag in the hostels. However, the senior teacher had done other prior investigations which revealed that the phone belonged to another student who happened to have hid it in her bag and that the accused was very innocent in the case. My decision changed completely and I pardoned the girl. (Teacher 7)

From the interview excerpts, it can be concluded that perceived expert source influenced shifts in decisions from the original perceived risky to final cautious decisions. The panel members regarded the perceived expert sources within the disciplinary panels as vital in the decision-making process.

Theme 4: Age and teaching experience

Age and teaching experience of the teachers was also another factor which led to risky and cautious group decisions. The findings of the study reported that shifts in decisions occurred when the older teachers with more experience in teaching gave evidence on a case that was under deliberation. The older teachers with great experience in decision making as members of the disciplinary panels were respected by other members because of their expert knowledge and wisdom. This often led to shifts in disciplinary hearing decisions among the younger teachers who tended to make initial risky decisions that changed to cautious ones in the disciplinary panel hearings. In one disciplinary hearing case, a Grade 11 male student was accused of assisting another student in Grade 12 in the end of term examinations. It was reported that information from the more experienced and older panel members influenced shifts in decisions during the disciplinary hearing meeting. Two interview excerpts from respondents on the shifts of decisions because of age of the members of the panel who gave the information are presented as follows:

Within our disciplinary panel group, we have very experienced members of the disciplinary panels who have served for a very long time. The case that we dealt with was very tricky because a male student was accused of assisting another student in Grade 12 to cheat in exams. However, during the meeting, the older members felt that it was the senior student who deserved the punishment because he failed to give best moral leadership to the student. This changed my decision completely, more so that it came from older panel members. (Teacher 5)

I had initially made up my mind that we needed to give the boy some harsh punishment for having assisted another student to cheat in examinations in school. Later, we got informed by the more experienced panel members that it was in order to punish the older student for failing to be the best example to the other student. I

later changed my decision to a risky one which entailed writing a warning letter to the younger student. (Teacher 11)

From the findings, it can be concluded that changes in decisions among young teachers from risky to cautious ones can be attributed to the persuasive nature of arguments that were presented by the older teachers in the disciplinary panels. Therefore, age and experience can be regarded as persuasive argument factors which are responsible for shifts in decisions among members during disciplinary hearings.

Theme 5: Position of seniority

The position of seniority is with regard to the administrative posts that the teachers held within school, such as deputy principal, senior teacher and boarding teacher. The findings of the study indicated that, within the disciplinary panels, there were members who also hold administrative positions within the school, and the information from these members enhanced shifts in decisions during disciplinary hearings. There were incidents when shifts in decisions occurred from risky pre-group decisions to final cautious post-group decisions due to the information that was availed by senior members of school administration. It was reported that there was a case in which a male student in Grade 10 was accused of assaulting a support staff in the school dining hall. This behaviour problem was considered to be a serious one as the school had zero tolerance on such behaviour among students and staff. According to the school rules, such offences attract suspension of the offending student. However, during the disciplinary hearing, the boarding teacher reported that it was mistaken identity and that the boy who actually assaulted the support staff was already identified by the school prefects. Thus, the information that was presented by a senior member of staff among teachers in the school made other teachers change their decisions. An excerpt from interview transcripts from one participant is presented below:

In our disciplinary meeting today, we had a disciplinary problem of a boy who was reported to have fought with a support staff in school. We had initially made our decision that we [would] expel the accused student with immediate effect from school. Little did we know that the boarding master had new information that this was the case of mistaken identity and that the actual offender had been identified by the boarding master and the school prefects. Later, I changed my decision about the accused boy and we pardoned him. (Teacher 8)

From the finding above, it can be concluded that position of seniority among the disciplinary panel members was an influential factor which caused shifts in decisions among other panel members. Therefore, position of seniority is regarded as a persuasive argument factor among disciplinary panel members.

Discussion

Risky and cautious decisions due to persuasive argument factors are evident among teachers in group decision making in school disciplinary panels. The findings of the study indicated that the persuasive arguments due to new information on the basis of behaviour characteristics of the student offender made panel members shift decisions from initial risky to final cautious decisions. In agreement, Craig and Blankenship (2011); Clark et al., (2012); Clark and Wegener (2013); Clark and Evans (2014) and Bansah (2016) all reiterate that the source of message influences attitudinal change among participants during group decision making hence shifts in decisions. Moreover, Feng and MacGeorge (2010); Briñol and Petty (2009) and Zhu (2009) argued that persuasive arguments

in group decision making enhances shifts in individual members' decisions, and that, information from an expert source is treated differently by the disciplinary panel members and considered to be of more value compared to others. This finding supports Wayne (2011); Etienne et al., (2011); and Albarracina et al., (2012) who agree that, persuasive arguments on the basis of new information is responsible for shifts in pre-group to post-group decisions. Similarly, Scott (2020) and Okuhara et al., (2020) all reported that, the message from an expert in a group setting is likely to lead to shifts in decisions of other members. However, the finding is contrary to Blair (2020) study which found that arguments are not persuasive in many group contexts when they are used.

The study findings also indicate that age and teaching experience influence shifts in decisions from pre-group risky decisions to post-group cautious decisions due to the information that is availed by senior and more experienced members of school administration. This finding supports Zakirov and Krasilnikov (2020); Peng et al., (2020) and Spiegel (2017) which reported that age affects the nature of decisions that are made in group deliberations. In agreement, Lizarraga et al., (2007); Watanabe and Shibutani (2010) reiterate that age is a factor which influences the nature of decisions since older persons make more cautious decisions while younger people make more risky decisions.

Conclusions and implications

The study concludes that in school disciplinary panels, group polarization exists leading to both cautious and risky decisions from different members. In the present study, there were shifts from pre-group risky to post-group cautious decisions among the teacher-members of the school disciplinary panels. Moreover, older teachers make cautious decisions while younger ones tend to make risky decisions during disciplinary panel hearings in schools. Thus, the nature of decisions made in group deliberations as to whether risky or cautious ones is dependent on the source of information, age and expertise of the individual members involved in the decision making. The findings of the present study has great implications to the composition of membership of disciplinary panels in secondary schools because if the disciplinary panels ended up with only risky decisions on the offending students, then this may make students drop out of school. The findings of the study have implications for the school principals on the establishment of disciplinary panels. Since the study findings indicate that most initial decisions were risky but after disciplinary hearing deliberations, shifts occurred to risky decisions, it is important to reconsider the composition of the disciplinary panels. The study recommends that school principals should make members of the school community a part of the disciplinary panels to make it broad based so that accurate information on student offenders could be availed during disciplinary hearing meetings. This would also ensure balanced disciplinary panel members who are capable of effectively making decisions on various disciplinary cases of students. The present study had one limitation in that decision making was examined from the lens of group polarization among the members of school disciplinary panels, but the study did not focus on other factors which lead to risky and cautious decisions. However, it is important to note that the study objective was still achieved by focusing on group dynamics to ascertain the nature of disciplinary decisions for students in secondary schools. Future studies could investigate gender differences in decision making among teachers in secondary schools.

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