



ANALYSIS OF STUDENT COUNCILS IN MAINTAINING STUDENT DISCIPLINE KENYA SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A CASE OF MATUGA SUB-COUNTY, KWALE COUNTY

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess the role of student councils in enhancing discipline in public secondary schools in Matuga Sub-county in Kwale County. The study was guided by the following objectives: to establish the mode of selection of students' council in public secondary schools, and to examine the effects of students' council involvement in decision making process affects students' discipline in public secondary schools. This study adopted the descriptive survey design. The target population included prefects, students and administrators (principals and deputy principals) in public secondary schools. The study collected data through the use of structured questionnaires which were given to the sampled respondents. Validity was determined using spearman's correlation which yielded a reliability coefficient was 0.78. Descriptive statistics was used and data was presented in frequency tables and percentages. The study found that 68% of the respondents supported democratic selection of prefects while again 68% of the respondents strongly felt that prefects should be engaged in formulating school rules and regulation. Based on the findings of this study the researcher recommended that all public secondary schools should adopt the democratic selection of student leaders and also involve prefects in schools decision making. For further research, a study should be carried out on the effectiveness of having student council trained. Another study should be on how and to what extent student leaders can be involved in decision making on student discipline issues within the school.

Key words: Decision making, Student councils, Student's participation, Student's discipline

Introduction

A student council is a group of pupils within a school selected by their peers to represent them and their views (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2011). The procedures for creation and execution of secondary school students councils defines the students council as a representative structure through which students in an institution of learning can be involved in the affairs of the school, working side by side with school management, teachers, support staff and parents for the success of the school (MOE, 2009). Research has shown that young people want to be involved in participative decision making in their schools. For instance, in Britain, the first students' Councils were established in the 1920's. Other countries that have well established student councils include United States of America, Canada, Norway, Finland, Ireland, Tanzania, Uganda and South Africa (Alderson, 2000). In Norway, all secondary schools are by law obligated to constitute students' councils with the student leaders democratically elected mainly in tertiary institutions serving as a bridge between the students and the administration.

Student discipline in Kenya secondary schools has been a thorny issue for a long time. The Government of Kenya (GoK) is currently implementing several measures aimed at curbing the various cases of indiscipline in learning institutions particularly the use of guidance and counseling units in all secondary schools (MOEST, 2005). In spite of these efforts there have been several cases of student indiscipline reported in our secondary schools. Kenya has experienced incidents of unrest and indiscipline in schools and studies attributed this to non-participative decision making process in schools (Muindi, 2012). For instance, Saint Kizito Mixed Secondary School on the 13th July 1991 boys went on rampage in the night raping and maiming female colleagues (Onyango, 2003). In May 1997, Bombolulu Girls Secondary 57 students perished in a dormitory as a result of fire started by other students. In 1999 four prefects were burnt in a dormitory in Nyeri High School (Kindiki, 2004). In November 1999, a drugged and drunk student at Sagalo Institute of Science and Technology murdered the school principal (East African Standard, 13 November, 1999). In July 2001, Kyanguli Secondary School in Machakos a dormitory was set ablaze as students slept (Kindiki, 2004). Students of Kithangaini Secondary School in Machakos locked the head teacher in the office and walked 25 Km to report their grievances to the Machakos District Commissioner (DC) (Nzia, 2006).

Following the above highlighted cases it was important to increase students' participation in formulating rules and regulation in order to increase ownership of rules hence leading to lower indiscipline and unrest in schools. Their major role is to ensure students obey school rules and regulations (Kamau, 2017). Before the inception of the students' councils, prefects were hand-picked by teachers and helped school administrators in running the schools. This system presented a number of flaws that necessitated alternative means to curb misbehavior thus paving way for students' participation in selecting students' council (Gold, 2006). Currently all schools in Kenya are supposed to select their leaders rather than appointing them. The selection criteria is expected to be free and fair though can be interfered with since the teachers and head teachers have to vet the leaders before the students start campaigning for leadership position (Wildy,

Pepper, & Guanzhong, 2011). According to Mncube and Harber (2013) the vetting process carried out by the school management and teachers before students elect their leaders may hamper independent decisions from the students. This in turn affects the school discipline because of the interference.

Statement of the Problem

The involvement of student councils in school leadership is crucial given that they are charged with student's welfare, supervision of learning activities when teachers are away and co-ordination of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. Furthermore, they are charged with dealing with minor cases of indiscipline in schools. This implies that prefects act as a link between the students and the school administration. Enhanced student discipline is a key factor that characterizes an effective school system. However, secondary schools in Kenya have continued to witness student indiscipline which is mostly manifested through student unrest and violence. The rampant indiscipline cases in public schools questions the influence of students' councils in maintenance of discipline in public schools. It is therefore against this backdrop that the researcher investigated the role of students' council in enhancing discipline in secondary schools in Matuga Sub-County, Kwale County.

Objective of the Study

- i. To establish the mode of selection of students' councils and its influence on students' discipline in public secondary schools
- ii. To examine the influence of students' councils' involvement in decision making process affects students' discipline in public secondary schools.

Research Questions

- i. How are students' council selected in public secondary schools?
- ii. How does the involvement of students' council in decision making affect students' discipline in public secondary schools?

2.6 Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by the holistic approaches to school discipline. A holistic school discipline, according to Miller (2007), thrives on three critical elements namely balance, inclusion and connection. According to this theory all things have arisen mutually and mutually supportive, in the sense that they require one another as a condition for their existence. The discipline standards in schools that have been catapulted due to the involvement of student leaders such as prefects call for a balance, inclusion and connection from the various stakeholders in order to ensure that there is adherence to school rules and regulations.

Significance of the Study

This study provided insight to school administrators on ways of improving students' discipline in secondary schools. In particular, the principals, deputies and teachers of public secondary schools in Kenya may find the findings of this study helpful to establish the committed student councils as suggested by all the school stakeholders. Students leaders at all levels will benefit from this findings as they will be able to understand their roles in school management and discipline which will enhance the quality of learning in schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Selection Criteria of Student Leaders and its Effect on Discipline

Student leaders' selection criteria within secondary schools are a critical issue which the school management should have little or no voice to interfere with. The vetting of students to be elected by other students should be taken into considerations. It is important to consider the selection criteria of student leaders because it can have an impact on the students' discipline. Students are supposed to be set for direction to help them understand the activities and goals of a student council (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahistorm, 2004). Obiero (2013) averred that student leaders play an important role in the management of discipline in secondary school. Hence appointment/election should be watchfully done to ensure the right student leaders get to serve fellow students. Most schools have adopted a democratic method of appointing the school student leaders where they are given an open forum to campaign to be elected (Mncube & Harber, 2013).

Morapedi and Joita (2011) opined that student leaders are elected by students from the school for one year and expected to represent student views at the governance level of the board of trustees, and also participates in decision-making at a school level. The integrity of the selection process is based on the attitudes, skills, and experience of members of the selection panel, consideration should be given to including members who can bring success to the process. In South Africa, all learners from grade eight onwards are allowed to vote leaders who will serve in the Representative Council for Learners (RCL) (Doddington, Christine, Flutter, Julia & Ruddock Jean, 2000). The RCL is the body that represents learners on the matters that concern them. It is the link between the learners of the school and the school administration as well as the school governing body. The RCL then elect two learners who will serve on the governing body. Their term of office is only one year, whereas other stakeholders can serve up to three years. This implies that the term of office may come to an end before the learners adapt or familiarize themselves with the acts, procedures as well as the role that they are supposed to play in the school governing body (UNESCO, 2005).

According to Doddington et al., (2000) however policies pertaining to students' discipline is fraught with tensions and contradictions especially regarding the different notions of participation by fellow students. This suggests that the issue of learners being unable to

participate fully in the school governing body can be one of the causes of tensions. In Kenya, previously, the staff was solely involved in the selection of prefects with little or no students' participation (Otieno et al, 2000). Time has come to allow for more democracy in line with the changes in Kenya's political system. If the prefectorial system is to be of any credit to the students, then they should identify themselves with it (Otieno et al, 2000).

Participation of Students' Councils in School Governance and its Effects on Discipline

Aggrawal (2008) says that while student representatives may not participate in matters relating to the conduct of examinations, evaluation of student performance, appointment of teachers and other secret matters, their participation should be ensured in all other academic and administrative decisions taken by these bodies. Though this view appears to support student participation in decision making, it however confines student involvement in decision making to specific areas of school life. Defining the limits of student participation in this way is however not only likely to give students the impression that the school's commitment is tokenistic and therefore not to be taken seriously, but it also severely limits the possibilities for experiential learning (about the nature of schooling and the education system as well as in different forms of public decision-making) (Huddleston, 2007).

The most effective school councils do not exclude anything from being discussed, apart from matters of personal confidentiality. If rigid limits are imposed on councils at the outset, students are unlikely to develop an enthusiasm for them (Huddleston, 2007). Hord et al (2009) further adds that student consultation relating to curriculum and examination reform is mandatory. Prefects are in a unique position to make positive contribution to the improvement of discipline and to the operation of a more effective school system.

The participation of prefects in decision-making should be considered part of the educational process. As appropriate to the age of students, class or school governments, organizations such as student councils and a student board of education may be formed to offer practice in self-governance and to serve as channels for the expression of student ideals and opinions. Baker (2007) states that prefect's involvement in decision- making, helps to develop their leadership skills and ability to plan. In the long run, such students can come up with ideas that might help the smooth running of the school. Sergiovanni (2005) also states that involving students in decision-making creates a sense of ownership to the students. The students feel that the school is part of them and therefore do everything possible to boost and maintain the reputation of the school. The morale of prefects in all activities is boosted when they are involved in decision-making.

According to Davidoff and Lazarus (1997) decentralization can be defined as means of distributing authority to the different agencies', groups and stakeholders. This is based on the notion that local communities understand their needs and are also in the best position to solve their problems. This shows commitment among education authorities that decision making about

schools should lie as close as possible to each schools in order that full knowledge of circumstances be taken into account. Bhengu (2005) argued that if decisions are made closer to the clients better decisions will be made and greater achievements will result.

The first right of enhancement means that the individual should have access to critical understanding and therefore new opportunities should be available to that person (Bernstein, 1996). The second right refers to the social, personal, intellectual and cultural inclusion of the individual into the school community but, most importantly, without losing his or her own identity (Bernstein, 1996). The third right is the right to participate in the operations whereby order is managed within the school environment Bernstein (1996). This right of pupil participation receives support from Mabeba and Prinsloo (2000); Schimmel (2003) and Effrat and Schimmel (2003). This would also go some way towards the suggestion that the challenge in Kenyan education is for educational leaders to move away from bureaucracies based on constraint and control and towards an environment that focuses on results and accountability. The history of corporal punishment is firmly positioned within the concepts of power, control and discipline. The abolition of corporal punishment in schools, for example, in England 1986 (Farrell, 2006); Western Australia 1987 (Farrell, 2006); South Africa 1996 (Morrell, 2001) and Canada 2004 (Farrell, 2006) within recent years is an important aspect of the changing philosophy of discipline.

One other crucial strategy that can support effective discipline practices in schools is the involvement of student leaders in achieving, maintaining and restoring of student discipline (Kibet et'al, 2012). Student leaders should be instrumental in inspiring and mentoring other students in the school to respect the school rules and regulations. It is always a good idea for the school administration to explain the school rules and why they are written, so that students are made to realize that breaking the rules will result in reprimand or some form of punishment. However, establishing a common set of rules that govern student discipline in a school is not easy because the school administration and students may have conflicting values. This can only be done through dialogue between the school administration and the students, through their student leaders. Thus, the recommendation is the inclusion of student leaders at various levels of decision making, including in the formulation of discipline policies. This would give the students a feeling of ownership since they will view them as their own creation and thus strive to obey them (Nyabisi, 2012).

In both developed and developing countries such as Australia, the United Kingdom and South Africa, studies have shown that where there is participation in management of the school, there is greater enjoyment, efficiency and more effectiveness, especially in relation to issues of specific concern to the students (Ghanem, 2012). However, there is still very little empirical literature that outlines the specific role of student leadership, as key stakeholders in the management of student discipline.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Instruments

This study adopted mixed method design involving both the quantitative and qualitative approaches. The data collection instruments comprised of questionnaires. Two questionnaires were developed for this study, one for the school administrators (the principals' and the deputy principals) and one for student leaders from each of the targeted schools. The research instruments were validated by experts in the field of education and research consultants. The reliability of the research instruments was tested through a pilot study using the test-retest technique. The results of the two tests were subjected to a Pearson Correlation, and a correlation coefficient value of 0.77 was obtained after the two tests. The analysis of the collected data was done using descriptive statistics and presented in the form of tables of frequencies and percentages.

Sample and Sampling Procedures

This study adopted both stratified and simple random sampling techniques to obtain the required sample. In the first stage of sampling, all the 27 public secondary schools in Matuga Sub-County were stratified into three categories; Boys, Girls and Mixed school. Schools were then randomly selected from each stratum to proportionately make up the 24 schools required (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). The 24 principals, 24 deputy principals and 24 student leaders from the sampled schools constituted the respondents for the study. One student leader from each of the 24 schools was included in the study for purposes of triangulation. This gave a total sample size of 72 respondents.

RESULTS, DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The first objective of the study was to establish the mode of selection of students' councils and its effects on students' discipline. The results are presented in Table 1

Table 1: Mode of selection of the students' councils.

Variable	Principals	Deputy Principals	Student Leaders	Average %ge
All prefects in my school are selected by students	16(66.6%)	19(79.2%)	14(58.3%)	68.0%
Only disciplined students are selected prefects	21(87.5%)	20(83.3%)	15(62.5%)	77.1%
Academic performance is key in selecting prefects in my school	16(66.6%)	17(70.8%)	20(83.3%)	73.6%
Personal characteristics is considered in prefect selection	17(70.8%)	18(75.0%)	15(62.5%)	69.4%

To be selected a prefect one must have ability to command others 16(66.6%) 20(83.3%) 17(70.8%) 73.6%

Source: Field Data

The results obtained in Table 1 shows that majority of the respondents 49(68.0%) indicated that student leaders are elected democratically while 32% indicated that the student leaders are appointed by the school administrators. This implies that school administrators have not fully embraced democracy insofar as election of prefects is concern. However, an overwhelming 77.1% of the respondents agreed that only disciplined students make it to the list of prefects. It was also revealed that 73.6% of the respondents indicated that academic performance was central to prefect selections. Likewise, 69.4% of the respondents agreed that personal characteristics were a plus in selecting prefects. Finally, a whopping 73.6% of the respondents opined that for one to be selected a prefect he/she must have an impeccable ability to command others.

Table 2: Students councils' participation in school decision making

Variable	Principals	Deputy Principals	Student Leaders	Average %ge
Student leaders are allowed to punishment students	12(50.0%)	13(54.1%)	11(45.8%)	50.0%
Prefects are consulted in formulating school rules and regulations	20(83.3%)	17(70.8%)	12(50.0%)	68.0%
Student leaders are involved in solving disputes	20(83.3%)	19(79.2%)	11(45.8%)	69.4%

Source: Field Data

The results obtained in Table 2 indicates that with regard to meting out punishment to other students for breaking school rules and regulations, 50,0% of the respondents agreed that student leaders should mete out punishment to other students. However, a total of 50.0% of the respondents disagreed that student leaders should mete out punishment on other students. Although it is evident from these findings that student leaders can be allowed to mete out punishment to other students, the percentage majority of the respondents that agreed to this (50.0) is significantly lower than for the other statements on student discipline. On formulation of school rules and regulations, a majority of the respondents (68.0%) agreed that student leaders should be involved in coming up with the rules and regulations that govern their schools. Only 32.0% of the respondents disagreed. On student leaders solving disputes among students, majority of the respondents (69.4%) agreed that student leaders can solve disputes that arise

among the students. Only 30.6% of the respondents disagreed. These findings indicate that student leaders can be instrumental in solving disputes among other students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the conclusions of the study it has been revealed that majority of public secondary schools were selecting student leaders democratically as opposed to appointing them. However the study has further revealed that some students were not satisfied with the prefects meting punishment. This study recommended all public secondary schools to select prefects democratically in a free and fair manner. The study also recommended prefects involvement in formulating school rules and regulations. This will make the students own them and follow them with ease. In the long run enhancing discipline among students in schools.

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