RESEARCH ARTICLE

STUDENT COUNCILS PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KERICHO WEST SUB COUNTY, KENYA

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Manuscript Info	*Abstract*
 Corresponding Author **Sammy K. Chumba**	This study investigated the student councils participation in decision making in public secondary schools in Kenya. The study was prompted by student unrests in secondary schools often blamed to unequal decision making opportunities in schools. Data was collected by means of a survey questionnaires distributed among 180 student leaders and 84 teachers and an interview schedule distributed among 12 secondary school deputy head teachers in Kericho West sub county, Kenya. The findings revealed that inclusion of student councils views in secondary schools were mainly tokenistic and did not extend to core management issues. Students' councils were mostly allowed to participate in student welfare issues. It was concluded that student councils participation in secondary schools need to be expanded to include administrative issues. The recommendation of the study is that there is need for school management to implement significant student involvement in their schools.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid expansion of student enrolments in most African countries since the attainment of political independence coupled with inadequate resources to cope with the ever-increasing demand for educational provision has made school management a much more complex and difficult enterprise now than a few decades ago (Mabena, 2002). To ensure effective and successful management, the school head must not only be innovative, resourceful and dynamic, but also be able to interact well with people both within and outside the school (Fletcher, 2004).Staff, pupils, parents, members of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and many other members of the community, all need to be brought in some way or other into decision-making processes (UNESCO, 1995).

Meaningful student involvement is the process of engaging students as partners in every facet of school change for strengthening their commitment to education, community and democracy (Maitles and Deuchar, 2006). It evolves from a growing awareness among students and educators that young people can and should play a crucial role in the success of school improvement. A number of recent accounts have featured educators refuting the misconception that engaging students as partners in school change is about making students happy, pacifying unruly children or letting kids run the school. Research shows that when educators work with students in schools as opposed to working for them, school improvement is positive and meaningful for everyone involved (Love and Miller, 2003).

Students' involvement in governance is concentrated within elected students representatives within the school composed of prefects of various classes and departments within the school (Kenya Secondary School Student Councils Constitution, 2009). Student councils or student governments are not an entirely new phenomenon in Kenya and in the world at large. The US, the UK, Finland, Ireland, Norway, Singapore and South Africa have active student councils at high school level. The republic of Ireland has a union of secondary students formed in 2001, while Norwegian laws requires all schools to set up student councils elected by the students themselves (Critchley, 2003). Kenya Secondary school Students' Council - KSSSC (2010) noted that in Kenya the councils have been active in many tertiary education institutions. In all of the country's seven public universities; Nairobi, Kenyatta, Egerton, Moi, Jomo Kenyatta, Maseno and Masinde Muliro, student councils have served as training grounds for the country's top political and social leaders (Olembo, Wanga and Karagu, 2000).

The particular rationales underlying pupil participation in decision making are significant because they affect the nature of the experiences provided for students, the extent to which they are integrated into the curriculum as a whole and the ways they are linked to political processes in the wider society. Moves towards democratization of schooling in countries like the UK have been at best tentative and at worst tokenistic (Maitles and Deuchar, 2006) and this has contributed to democratic governance in schools.

The first national secondary school student conference bringing together representatives from across the country's secondary schools was held in May 2008. According to Kenya Secondary Schools Heads Association (KSSHA), the 2008 conference kick-started with a momentum to establish student governments at the classroom and school level in secondary schools across the country. The governments were hoped would create interactive forums between the students and school administrators where issues affecting them would be discussed before they degenerated into full-blown school riots. During the first secondary school students' conference, the learners articulated their needs and grievances so clearly impressing the ministry of education top brass including the minister for education himself. Nevertheless, the need to set up student governments at school level did not pick up as fast as expected in regions across the country (KSSSC, 2010).

KSSSC (2010) observed that in central Kenya, the idea was given a new impetus by a class time management concept dubbed "Operation 40-35-30," first mooted in May 2007 in a meeting of secondary school principals. The concept was driven by the need for effective teaching and learning and an even more, the urgent need to tame school unrest within schools in central Kenya. The head teachers in the region conceded that the wave of school unrest that ravaged the region's schools necessitated an urgent need to overhaul school administration in order to make it more inclusive and more democratic. The bottom-line of this overhaul was the realization that students were actually the major stakeholders in the education system and that any system that failed to incorporate their input risked collapse. The student councils put the power to demand better learning and teaching services in the hands of the students decentralizing it from school administrators and education officers.

The position of a prefect is a position of responsibility and one which provides an important connection between pupils and staff (Powers and Power, 1984). The position of prefect forms a valuable part of a pupil's personal development opening their mind to new levels of responsibility and participation in a very positive way. Prefects are a tremendous help to the school and play a particularly important role in mentoring younger pupils (Patmor, 1999). They are delegated duties concerned with day-to-day life in school. These include coordination of co-curricular activities, dealing with minor cases of discipline and taking responsibility of students' welfare. They also carry out supervision of learning activities after school for junior pupils and checking attendants (Ozigi, 1995).

When adults think of students, they think of them as potential beneficiaries of change (Fullan and Stiegelbauer, 1991). They rarely think of students as participants in a process of school change and organizational life. Meaningful student councils participation authorizes students and school administration to form powerful partnerships to improve schools (Fullan, 1991). According to Institute for Policy Analysis and Research (2008), the government of Kenya needs to promote and institutionalize the practice of an enhanced and greater engagement among students, teachers, schools' management and parents. The election of student councils in place of the appointment of prefects should be encouraged. Despite the emphasis on democracy in the modern world, school administrators have remained autocratic in the way they manage their institutions. Students hardly have the opportunity to express themselves. Consequently, they are always looking for ways of releasing stress generated through continuous oppression in schools that dislike dialogue (IPAR 2008).

IPAR (2008) contend that when students are encouraged to take part in the administration of the school, they learn to cultivate democratic attitudes, right attitudes to work, a sense of belonging to both school and society. They also learn to be self-directing, responsible and law abiding. Proper school governance demands involvement of students in decision making through their representatives. Nevertheless, what is found on the ground is that students are not involved in decision making of what affects them. A study by Mwiria cited in Michiri (1998) found out that 71% of the school directors who were interviewed did not involve the students in decision-making. This is an indication that students' involvement in decision-making is minimal.

For the sake of the future of education, it is time for students to be more heard and it is time for principals and school administration to take action. Fletcher (2005) concludes by indicating that it is time for students to be partners in school change.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

There exist strong legal and moral imperatives for schools to actively facilitate student participation in school decision making. United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) which Kenya adopted on July 30.1990, provide an international human rights context for promoting the participation of children and young people in decision making In Article 12 and Article 13. In spite of these provisions, students have limited say in some school decisions and often only relatively few students are involved in the form of committees and student organizations (UNCROC, 2008). They are rarely involved in core decisions such as pedagogy or school organizations. Important decisions are made for and about them, yet they are not given meaningful consideration or opportunity for participation during the evaluation or assessment process. Fletcher (2003) observed that even in schools where students are asked to participate in the process; they are only given a token or passive volunteer assignments and tasks to complete.

The locus of decision making in schools rests mainly with the head teachers, BOM, PTA and teachers. This leads to learners' unwillingness or lack of interest in social decision making and also may lead to unrests in schools, poor performance and conflicts between learners and administration.
Mwiria and Ngethe (2007) analyzed the reforms related to governance, management and planning in Kenyan Universities focused more on students representations in governance with less emphasis on decision making process in Kenyan universities, the same can be applied in the secondary schools within Kericho West District. Scholars (Cook-Sather, 2002, Fletcher, 2005; Lee and Smith, 1993) advocate for more meaningful student involvement and believe that it has many benefits for both students and schools. It is against this backdrop that this study sought to investigate student council participation and decision making in public secondary schools in Kenya considering that students are important stakeholders in the school.

1.3 The Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were;
i)   To investigate the roles of student councils on school governance in secondary schools within Kericho West Sub County.
ii)   To examine the extent of student council involvement in decision making in secondary schools within Kericho West Sub County.
iii)   To evaluate the effects of student council participation in decision making in secondary schools within Kericho West Sub County.
iv)   To establish factors that hinder effective student council participation on decision making in secondary schools within Kericho West Sub County.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

The research design used in this study was descriptive survey design. The study targeted 28 public secondary schools in Kericho West Sub County with a population of 280 teachers, 28 deputy principals and 420 student leaders.

2.1 The sampling Technique

Using stratified random sampling technique, these 28 secondary schools were stratified into co-educational, boys only and girls only. This was done to insure that all school categories have an equal chance of being randomly selected for the study. There are two boys' secondary school, three for girls' secondary school and 23 co educational schools. The two boys' secondary schools were used for the study and the three girls secondary schools were used for the study. Seven schools in the co-educational strata were randomly picked. A total of 12 schools were selected for the study. The researcher selected student leaders in form 3 and 4 to take part in the study. Fifteen student leaders were picked from every school selected to respond to the questionnaire. If student leaders in form three and form four were more than 15 in a school, then random sampling technique was used to get the required number of fifteen.180 student leaders responded to the questionnaire. The choice of the form three and four class was arrived at after considering the fact that most schools choose student leaders from form 3 and four classes. A total of 84 teachers were used as key informants in the study. This 84 was arrived at by calculating 30% of the total population of teachers. The teachers that responded to questionnaires are class teachers and heads of departments

2.2 Instrumentation and data analysis

The study used two data collection techniques; the questionnaire and interview schedule. Questions in the questionnaire that were used in this study were mainly closed ended questions. The researcher conducted interview schedules on the deputy head teachers in schools. The data from the questionnaire, and interview schedule were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The researcher used tables, frequencies, means, standard deviation and percentages. This assisted the researcher to summaries data for easy analysis.

2.3 Findings

2.3.1 Roles of student Councils in school governance

One of the major concerns of the present study was to determine the roles of student councils in school governance in public secondary schools in Kericho West Sub County. The study found out that both teachers and student councils respondents indicated that student councils have important roles to play in school governance in their schools .The student councils enhances school governance through ;representing students both within the institution and externally on local and national issues, resolving interclass conflicts ,monitoring and supervising school programs like preps ,cleaning etc ,reporting on teachers as well as students lesson attendance, report on indiscipline and minor disciplinary issues ,channel student grievances to the school administration and welcoming and inducting new students to the school. Majority of teachers and student councils disagree that student councils play the role of setting academic performance targets for their schools and also make recommendations on schools academic standards.

2.3.2 Extent of Student Council Involvement in Decision Making

The second objective of the study sought to establish the extent to which student councils are involved in decision making in public secondary schools within Kericho West Sub County. The study found out that student councils was excluded from key decision making areas of the school. Such included curriculum issues and administrative tasks for example Students' views were excluded when making decisions on the school budget, school fees, formulation of school rules, discipline of students and deciding on the nature of punishments. Similarly, decisions on the choice of textbooks, number of exams and nature of assignments, teaching methods, grading system and discipline of staff excluded student input. Teachers were categorical that student council's participation was unnecessary in the mentioned areas mainly due to lack of expertise on technical issues. However, it was established that student input was encouraged while making decisions on student welfare issues namely setting standards of cleanliness and type of co curricular activities.

2.3.3 Effects of Student Council Participation in Decision Making

On the effects of student councils involvement in decision making in their schools, the deputy head teachers suggested that they create the link between students, teachers and other stakeholders within the school. While teachers on their parts indicated that because of student councils involvement in decision making in schools, there is increased communication in schools, increased discipline levels, creates a sense of organization and responsibility between students and the school among other effects presented in the previous chapter. Student councils leaders who

participated in the study said that their involvement in decision making could lead to; better learning environment in schools, increased discipline levels, promotes effective school administration, enhances teamwork and self esteem, and improves peer relations among other benefits discussed in chapter four.

2.3.4 Factors Hindering Effective Student Council Participation in Decision Making

The deputy head teachers indicated that confidentiality was the main reason that they did not allow students to participate in decision making process within their schools. The teachers reported that; academic demands, limited intellectual capacity, lack of maturity and exposure, ineffective and unequal involvement, lack of interest in school matters and in-attendance to school meetings as some of the obstacles that hinders effective student councils participation in decision making in secondary schools. However the student councils representatives said that the main factors influencing their non – involvement in decision making were; lack of interest in school matters, dominance of teachers in decision making process, lack of support from fellow students, dominance of school head teacher in decision making process, excessive bureaucracy, limited intellectual capacity and a lot of class work assignments.

3.0 Conclusions

The study has established that student councils in Kericho West Sub County play various roles that are student related like; acting as student representatives, mediated conflicts, supervise and monitor class work activities, maintain discipline in schools and channel student grievances to the school administration for further action. It was also evident that student councils in Kericho West Sub County are involved in making decisions concerning extra curriculum activities, and standards of cleanliness. However, student councils input are excluded in making major decisions in the school like majority of administrative and curriculum issues.

It was found out that there was positive effect of student councils participation in decision making in secondary schools. This resulted to student developing communication skills, cooperation and teamwork, interpersonal skills, social skills, problem solving skills, organizational skills, knowledge, self esteem, conducive learning. However, with perceived benefits resulting from student participation in decision making, their involvement is mostly in informal interactions, they are not actively empowered in making certain decisions that affect their wellbeing and participation is not all inclusive. The implication of this result is that there is little doubt that involving students, either through consultation or participation, as more than just recipients of education or subjects of research, is gathering momentum.

However, there is still much work to be done if we are to fully realize the potential of this movement and involve school students in decision making and/or research processes as full collaborators. The main factors hindering participation of students' councils in decision making were excessive bureaucracy, dominance of school administration (especially principals) in decision making, students' lack of interest in elective matters and lack of maturity and leadership qualities among students.

4.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the research, the following recommendations are made;
1.   The roles of student councils members must be clearly stated in a student councils constitution agreed by the school management and students. The councils should also be delegated roles relating to their academics like setting schools academic standards and making recommendations on their schools academic standards.
2.   The student councils input should be invited in taking decisions concerning curriculum e.g. teaching methods, choosing teaching methods, number of exams to be done, grading system etc and administrative issues such as school budgeting, school rule formulation etc and not only limited to decisions concerning school routine, and decisions concerning standards of cleanliness.
3.   Student councils need to be a visible group within the school and need to feel they are valued and respected and that they have a fundamental part to play in daily school life.

4.   It is important that responsibilities of members of the councils are shared and not lumped on the shoulders of the final year students (Form Four). As time and commitment from council members is of utmost importance to the successful operation of the councils.

5.0Tables

Table 5.1 Teachers' responses on the roles of student councils in school governance

Roles	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Total
Represent students both within the institution & externally on local and national issues	3(4%)	0(0%)	81(96%)	84(100%)
Resolve inter-class conflicts	8(10%)	0(0%)	76(90%)	84(100%)
Set academic performance targets for the school	70(84%)	1(1%)	13(15%)	84(100%)
Monitor and supervise school programs e.g. preps, cleaning e.t.c	3(4%)	8(10%)	73(86%)	84(100%)
Report on teachers lesson attendance	9(11%)	5(6%)	70(83%)	84(100%)
Report on students lesson attendance	7(9%)	9(11%)	68(80%)	84(100%)
Make recommendations on schools academic standards	70(84%)	1(1%)	13(15%)	84(100%)
Report on indiscipline and minor disciplinary issues	7(8%)	1(1%)	76(91%)	84(100%)
Channel student grievances to the school administration	3(3%)	0(0%)	81(97%)	84(100%)
Welcoming and inducting new students to the school	11(13%)	2(2%)	71(85%)	84(100%)

Source: Survey data (2012)

Table 5.2 Teachers' responses on the extent of student councils involvement in decision making

Decision making areas	N	Mean	SD
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions concerning the standards of cleanliness	84	3.8810	1.10208
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions type of co-curricular activities	84	3.8690	1.05030
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions concerning the school routine	84	3.4167	1.30068
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions concerning the kind of diet	84	2.7838	1.31695
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions concerning discipline of students	84	2.8690	1.43770
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions concerning school rules	84	2.4048	1.38075
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions concerning number of exams to be done	84	1.9405	.99821
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions concerning the nature of assignments	84	1.9286	1.09529
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions concerning choice of textbooks	84	1.9286	1.13844

The councils is active empowered to take decisions concerning nature of punishment	84	1.8690	1.01530
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions concerning grading system	84	1.7381	.89334
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions concerning school fees	84	1.7262	.99821
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions concerning teaching methods	84	1.7262	.89646
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions concerning discipline of staff	84	1.6429	.96496

Source: Survey data (2012)

Table 5.3 Student council responses on extent of student councils involvement in decision making

Decision making areas	N	Mean	SD
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions concerning the standards of cleanliness	150	4.2955	1.03185
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions type of co-curricular activities	150	3.3333	1.29983
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions concerning the school routine	150	3.8409	1.27710
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions concerning the kind of diet	150	2.5227	1.47481
The councils is active empowered to take decisions concerning discipline of students	150	1.7273	1.13978
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions concerning school rules	150	2.9318	1.45777
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions concerning number of exams to be done	150	2.3485	1.29582
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions concerning the nature of assignments	150	2.1515	1.35063
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions concerning the choice of textbooks	150	2.4091	1.31900
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions concerning nature of punishment	150	2.5985	1.32998
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions concerning the grading system	150	2.0985	1.31265
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions concerning school fees	150	1.7273	1.13978
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions concerning teaching methods	150	2.3258	1.36195
The councils is active and empowered to take decisions concerning discipline of staff	150	1.9924	1.26308

Source: Survey data (2012)

Table 5.4: Teachers responses on the effects of students council participation in decision making

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Develops a sense of responsibility	84	3.00	5.00	4.5357	.64838
Develops a sense of organization	84	2.00	5.00	4.4405	.78158
Better acceptance & compliance with rules	84	2.00	5.00	4.4167	.60536
Develops cooperation and teamwork	84	3.00	5.00	4.4167	.68033
Develops self – esteem	84	2.00	5.00	4.3571	.83078
Improves school management	84	2.00	5.00	4.3214	.80900
Develops interpersonal skills/social skills	84	2.00	5.00	4.2857	.82974
Develops democratic skills and citizenship	84	2.00	5.00	4.2500	.80473
Improves student-adult relationships	84	1.00	5.00	4.1548	1.14591
Develops communication skills	84	1.00	5.00	4.1071	1.09784

Source: Survey data (2012)

Table 5.5: Students' councils responses on the effects of student councils participation in decision making

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Develops a sense of responsibility	150	2.00	5.00	4.3182	.62172
Develops sense of organization	150	1.00	5.00	3.9167	.99650
Better acceptance and compliance with rules	150	2.00	5.00	4.3485	.78132
Develops cooperation and teamwork	150	2.00	5.00	4.5455	.60989
Develops self-esteem	150	1.00	5.00	4.2727	.71078
Improves school management	150	1.00	5.00	4.2273	.95383
Develops interpersonal skills/social skills	150	3.00	5.00	4.2348	.69743
Develops democratic skills and citizenship	150	1.00	5.00	3.8409	1.15137
Improves student-adult relationships	150	1.00	5.00	3.5606	1.32075
Develops communication skills	150	2.00	5.00	4.3712	.63493

Source: Survey data (2012)

Table 5.6: Teachers responses on the factors that hinder effective student councils participation in decision making

Factor	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Academic pressures and class demands	84	2.00	5.00	4.1310	1.05030
Limited intellectual capacity	84	1.00	5.00	4.0119	1.22714
Lack of maturity and exposure owing to tender age	84	1.00	5.00	3.9405	1.22574
Ineffective and unequal involvement	84	1.00	5.00	3.9048	1.16804
Most of them lack interest in school matters	84	2.00	5.00	3.7500	1.18092
Most do not attend school meetings as they are too busy doing class assignments	84	1.00	5.00	3.3690	1.47084

Source: Survey data (2012)

Table 5.7: Students council's responses towards factors hindering effective student councils participation in decision making

Factor	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Lack of interest in school matters	150	1.00	5.00	3.9015	1.13150
Dominance of teachers in the decision making process	150	1.00	5.00	3.8485	1.31628
Lack of support from fellow students	150	1.00	5.00	3.8333	1.14696
Dominance of school head in the decision making process	150	1.00	5.00	3.7652	1.27728
Excessive bureaucracy	150	1.00	5.00	3.4091	1.17190
Limited intellectual capacity	150	1.00	5.00	3.3712	1.16832
A lot of class assignments	150	1.00	5.00	2.6894	1.50892

Source: Survey data (2012)

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