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Influence of Student Council Participation in Management on Student Discipline in Public Secondary Schools in Kenya

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Abstract:

This study explored the influence of the student council participation in management on student discipline in public secondary schools in Kenya. The study was prompted by increased cases of student indiscipline realized through recurrent student unrest blamed by the media and research mainly on inadequate student participation. The study applied descriptive survey design and data was collected by means of a survey questionnaire and checklist distributed among 13 principals, 13 deputy principals, 91 student council and 156 students. The findings revealed that the student council participation in management has had little influence on student discipline in public secondary schools in Kenya. The study established that indiscipline cases among students were increasingly experienced in public secondary schools as was indicated in the existence of; violent student unrests, stealing, fighting, bullying, speaking in mother tongue, and smuggling of prohibited electronic gadgets such as mobile phones to schools, truancy and use of vulgar language. The study attributed the findings to the tokenistic student council participation in management resulting from inadequate school management support. It was therefore concluded that if the student council participation in management was to influence student discipline to a greater extent, then there was need to expand student council participation in management to include adequate consultation and representation in key management organs such as the Board of Management meetings where critical student disciplinary issues are determined.

Keywords: *Influence, student council, participation, management, discipline, public secondary schools*

1. Introduction

Student council participation in management refers to informed and willing involvement of student council in the management in a public secondary school through; representation of students' views in management, consultation with school management, implementation of administrative instructions concerning students discipline and mentorship of students involve. Whereas, student discipline is the training especially of the mind and character of students in a public secondary school set up aimed at influencing them to observe school rules and regulations by maintaining punctuality, caring for school property and exhibiting etiquette. Research findings in social sciences and education argue for the strong relationship between student participation and student discipline with lack of student participation considered as a factor in declining student discipline in schools (Osher, *et al*, 2010).

Literature further suggests that student council participation can play a major role in improving student behavior and practices in public secondary schools world over (Osher, Bear, Sprague & Dayle, 2010; Keogh & Whyte, 2005; National Association of School Psychologists- USA, 2013). If properly organized and supervised, student council participation in school management offers opportunity for developing student morale, cooperation, prudent leadership and also increased discipline, self-direction and dependence (Mutiso, 2013; Tikoko & Kiprop, 2011; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2002). Adding credence to the argument, Kranzi and Zarthar, (2009), support the view that there is growing body of evidence that routinely taking children's views and experiences into account within the family, at schools and in other settings helps develop the children's self-esteem, discipline, social skills and respect for others. Organization development research on group dynamics has also indicated that student participation and involvement produces better solutions to problems and greatly enhance acceptance to decisions (French & Bell, 1999). In summary, Leithwood *et al*, (1999), state that participation will increase school discipline

Review carried out by Finn and Voelkl, (1993) found that attendance was less consistent and at risk when student council were less engaged in schools where participation was not rigidly enforced. Further findings established that students are less likely to drop off schools before graduation when they perceive their discipline policy as inclusive and fair. In support, Christie and Potterson, (1998) acknowledged that active involvement of student council in school discipline is viewed as central to having long lasting behavior change; they add that co-creating discipline solutions contribute to ownership for the students – a catalyst for long - term responsible behavior.

The Government of Kenya has shown commitment to ensuring that the voices of learners and young people are heard in line with article 12 of the U N Convention on the Rights of a Child, (1989), ratified by Kenya in 1990, the Children’s Act, (2001) and the Basic Education Act, (2013). These policy guidelines and legal frameworks therefore support and legalize student council participation in the management of crucial issues affecting student life in public secondary schools such as student discipline.

However several public secondary schools in Kenya have faced a number of challenges related to disruptive and antisocial student behavior blamed by media and research on inadequate student council participation in management (Kiprop, Kanyiri, & Tikoko, 2012). The indiscipline cases among the students in public secondary schools has been realized in form of disobedience to school rules and regulations indicated through poor time management, lack of etiquette and destruction of school property by students through violent student unrests (Osher, Bear, Sprague & Dayle, 2010). According to MOEST report, (2010-2013), the increasing number of discipline problems in public secondary schools in Kenya has been caused by the poorly perceived role of student leaders in management among the students body (Mukiri, 2014). Students view their leaders as puppets of school management, traitors and sell outs to the school management who handpicked them into office since students did not participate in electing student council into office (Duma, 2011). The situation has been made worse by the traditional approach by public secondary school management that requires student leaders to have unquestionable obedience to and trust in, the directives given by the school management (Mwei, 2013).

2. Statement of the Problem

The Ministry of Education in collaboration with Kenya Secondary Schools Heads Association (KESSHA) and UNICEF in 2009 implemented the Student Council in public secondary schools in Kenya to encourage a culture of dialogue and participatory democratic governance in the management of public secondary schools in the country in an effort aimed at curbing the increasing levels of student indiscipline (Tikoko&Kiprop, 2011; Gikungu & Karanja, 2014). However, in spite of these efforts, public secondary schools in Kenya have experienced an increasing trend of student indiscipline indicated through the recurrent incidences of student unrests resulting into massive destruction of property and loss of learning time all blamed by media and research on inadequate student participation in management (Mwei, 2013; Simatwa, 2012; MOEST-UNICEF Report, 2008-2009; Kiggundu, 2009). In the year 2016 alone, in a short period of between July- September, more than 120 public secondary schools throughout Kenya were burnt down at an estimated rate of 5 schools per day due student unrest (www.voanews.com, 1/18/2017). This trend compares well with the year 2008 when about 254 cases of secondary school unrests were reported nationally to the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (Gikungu & Karanja, 2014). It is in light of this therefore that this study seeks to explore the influence of the student council participation in management on student discipline in public secondary schools in Kenya.

3. Research Design and Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey design and was based in Kakamega North Sub-County of Kakamega County, Kenya. The study targeted all public secondary schools, principals, the deputy principals, form four student councils and the form four students in Kakamega North Sub-County. The sub-county has a total of 41 public secondary schools, 41 principals, 41 deputy principals and 1170 form four students of which 312 are form four student council members (Sub- County Education Officer’s Report, 2014). The study therefore sampled 31.7% of the 41 public schools in Kakamega North Sub-County to get 13 public secondary schools, 13 principals and 13 deputy principals. The study used 29.16% of the 312 student council from a stream each of the form 4 class from the 13 sampled schools to get 91 student councilors and 13.3% of the target population of 1170 form 4 students of a stream in each form 4 class was used to generate a sample size of 156 students. These samples totaled up to 273 respondents. The data was analyzed using the descriptive statistical technique.

4. Results and Discussions

The main objective of the study was to establish the influence of the student council participation in management on student discipline in public secondary schools in Kenya. This was achieved by asking the respondents to identify from a list of possible decision-making tasks that assess student discipline. These tasks were categorized into various areas namely; influence of student council participation in management on student discipline, common discipline problems among students, rating of level of student discipline and classification of cases of student discipline in public secondary schools in Kenya.

	Principal	Deputy/P	Students	Student/C
More influence	2 (16.7%)	4 (33.3%)	75 (52.1%)	24 (28.6%)
Little influence	10 (83.3%)	8 (69.7%)	69 (47.9%)	60 (71.4%)
Total	12 (100%)	12 (100%)	144 (100%)	84 (100%)

*Table 1: Influence of student council participation in management on student discipline
(Field data, 2016)*

The data from Table 1 revealed mainly that the student council participation in management has had little influence on student discipline in public secondary schools in Kenya; principals 10(83.3%), deputy principals 8(69.7%) and student council 60 (71.4%). Only a minority; principals 2(16.7%), deputy principals 4(33.3%) and student council 24(28.6) reported that student council participation has had more influence on student discipline in public secondary schools in Kenya. Majority principals 8(66.7%), deputy principals 8(66.7%), students 77(53.3%) and student council 53(63.1%) confirmed that disobedience to school rules was still the main disciplinary problem in public secondary schools.

This implies that there was little improvement on student discipline in public secondary schools in Kenya upon the implementation of student council as the students were indicated to have still been involved in several indiscipline cases. Some of the indiscipline cases students engaged in as indicators to disobedience to school rules reported in the open ended questionnaires included; fighting, stealing, bullying, speaking in mother tongue, carrying of illegal electronic gadgets such as mobile phones into schools, truancy and students not doing manual work on time all arranged randomly.

The data collected from the open ended questionnaires revealed that the little improvement on the levels of student discipline in public secondary schools could be attributed to the tokenistic student council participation in management resulting from inadequate school management support. The student council participation was found to be limited mainly to less serious student indiscipline problems and did not expand to cover core management roles such as consultation and representation.

The data collected from the open ended questionnaires on perception of the respondents on the influence of student council participation in management on student discipline revealed that the student council participation in management was limited mainly to providing information to school management on issues student discipline. Student council was found to have been excluded from key roles of the school management such as consultation and representation in the Board of Management meetings when crucial student disciplinary decisions were being determined.

The findings therefore implied that the school management have ignored the fact that management of student discipline is at the epicenter of the success of any public secondary school and its management requires a collective participatory approach involving all stakeholders including the student council (Murithi, 2010). The data from the open ended questions further reported increase in the incidences of violent student unrests that had tormented the public secondary schools in the country in the previous years preceding the implementation of student council in the public secondary schools resulting into massive destruction of school property through arson by students.

These findings agree with those of the survey report by Ekombe, (2010) in which 85% of the respondents reported that they were dissatisfied by the current state of discipline in their school with only a minority 2% indicating that they were satisfied. The survey findings by Mukiri, (2014) supported this view point with the majority 6(50%), respondents reporting that student leaders have had only a little influence on student discipline in public secondary schools. Consequently, the student council has not comprehensively achieved the objective for which it was instituted; to influence student discipline in public secondary in order to reduce the high levels of student unrests that led to destruction of school property and in some selected cases loss of human life (Kahi *et al*, 2012)

4.1. Common Discipline Problems among Students in Public Secondary Schools

The study sought to identify the discipline problems that were most prevalent in public secondary schools in Kenya. This was critical for the study since the assumption has always been that when student council was being instituted by Kenya Secondary Schools Heads Association (KESSHA) and UNICEF in 2009, then student council participation in management should translate to reduced cases of student indiscipline in public secondary schools in Kenya. The findings were as presented in Table 2

	Principal	Deputy/P	Student	Student/C
1. Poor time management among students	3 (25.0%)	3 (25.0%)	60 (41.7%)	31 (36.9%)
2. Disobedience to school rules and regulations	8 (66.7%)	8 (66.7%)	77 (53.5%)	53 (63.1%)
2. Destruction of School property	1 (8.3%)	1 (8.3%)	1 (0.7%)	0 (0.0%)
4. Use of vulgar and abusive language	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (4.2%)	0 (0.0%)
5. Any other	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Total	12 (100%)	12 (100%)	144 (100%)	84 (100%)

Table 2: Common discipline problems in public secondary schools
(Field data, 2016)

The results in Table 2 indicated that the majority principals 8(66.7%), deputy principals 8(66.7%), students 77(53.5%) and student council 53(63.1%) reported the most prevalent discipline problem in public secondary schools to be disobedience to school rules and regulations. The respondents in the open ended questionnaires identified the school rules and regulations that were commonly broken by students to include; fighting, stealing, bullying, speaking in mother tongue, carrying of illegal electronic gadgets such as mobile phones to school, truancy and not doing manual work. The fact that the disobedience of school rules by students is still rampant in public secondary schools is an indication that student council participation in management has had little influence on student discipline in public secondary schools in Kenya.

The use of vulgar language was the least reported indiscipline problem at a minimal 6(4.2%) of the students acknowledging that it was an existing problem whereas the remaining respondents indicated anything about it. This finding agrees with the survey report by (Ekombe, 2010), in which only 5% of the respondents reported the use of foul language as indiscipline. The dismal rating in the use of foul language could be due to the fact that the vice is most likely committed away from the relevant authority such as school

management and student council. It could also mean that the school management and the student council have decided to turn a blind eye to it all together.

4.2. Rating of the Level of Student Discipline in Public Secondary Schools

The study sought to establish the opinion of the respondents on how they rated for the state of student discipline in their schools. This was important in examining the perception of the respondents on whether the student council participation has had an influence on student discipline in public secondary schools or not. The findings were as reported in Table 3

	Principal	Deputy/P	Student	Student/C
More disciplined	0 (0.0%)	3 (25.0%)	17 (11.8%)	7 (8.3%)
Less Disciplined	12 (100%)	9 (75.0%)	127 (88.2%)	77 (91.7%)
Total	12 (100%)	12 (100%)	144 (100%)	84 (100%)

Table 3: Rating of level of student discipline
(Field data, 2016)

The findings from the data in Table 3 revealed that the respondents indicated that the students in public secondary school in Kenya, were mainly less disciplined; principals 12(100%), deputy principals 9(75.0%), students 127(88.2%) and student council 77(91.7%). Only a minority; deputy principals 3(25.0), students 17(11.8%) and student council 7(8.3%) reported that the students in their schools were more disciplined. The respondents were in agreement that there was less improvement in cases of students who engaged in disobeying school rules in comparison to before the implementation of the student council as a legal framework for student representation in public secondary schools in the sub-county. In some schools, the respondents reported an increase on cases violent student unrests leading to destruction of school property through student arson.

4.3. Classification of the Cases of Student Discipline in Secondary School

The study sought to establish from the respondents how the level of the students discipline would be categorized in public secondary schools in the sub-county either as serious or less serious cases. The classification was to establish the level of awareness of the respondents' on whether the student council participation has had an influence on student discipline. The findings were recorded in Table 4

	Principal	Deputy/P	Student	Student/C
Averagely serious cases	8 (66.7%)	11 (91.7%)	125 (86.8%)	77 (91.7%)
Less serious cases	4 (33.3%)	1 (8.3%)	19 (13.2%)	7 (8.3%)
Total	12 (100%)	12 (100%)	144 (100%)	84 (100%)

Table 4: Classification of student discipline
(Field data, 2016)

From the findings of Table 4, it was deduced that the discipline problems experienced in public secondary schools could be classified mainly as averagely serious; principals 8(66%), deputy principals 11(91.7%), students 125(86.8%) and students 77(91.7%). These findings therefore confirmed that the student council participation has had little influence on the discipline of students in public secondary schools in Kakamega North sub-county. The averagely serious cases of student discipline identified were such as violent student unrests that led to massive destruction of school property were reported to have been on the increased in public secondary schools in the country. This finding could be associated to the data findings in a different objective in the same study that confirmed that the student council participation in management has had little influence on student discipline as a result of the tokenistic student council participation due to the inadequate school management support.

6. Conclusion

The student council participation in management was found to have had little influence on student discipline in public secondary schools in Kenya. The study established that students commonly disobeyed school rules as was indicated in the existence of several indiscipline cases such as violent student unrests, stealing, fighting, bullying, speaking in mother tongue, and smuggling of prohibited electronic gadgets such as mobile phones to schools, truancy, failure to do manual work on time and the use of vulgar language all arranged. This research finding was attributed to the tokenistic student council participation in management resulting from inadequate school management support. The study found out that the student council was inadequately consulted and represented in key school management organs such as the Board of Management meetings where crucial disciplinary cases are determined. The study realized that there is a huge gap to improve student council participation in management if their participation would have more influence on student discipline in public secondary schools in Kakamega North sub-county.

7. Recommendations

The literature review in this study suggests a strong relationship between student participation in management and student discipline in public secondary schools. School management should seek to evolve collective discipline strategies that strive to develop an all-inclusive participatory approach that brings into play all school stakeholders, incorporating student council because the students are

the main beneficiaries of a disciplined school. There is also need to sensitize the student council about the crucial role they play in the success of improving the level of student discipline in public secondary schools in Kenya. Other than implementing the disciplinary policies passed down to them by school management, the student council could mentor their peers resulting into a more disciplined generation of students.

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