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An Investigation of Student Councils Involvement in Decision Making and Its Effect on Students' Discipline in Nandi North Sub-County

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of Student Councils Involvement in Decision Making and Its Effect on Students' Discipline in Nandi North Sub-County. This study was hinged on the Participative Leadership Theory (Yukl, 1994) which posits that involvement in decision making improves the understanding of the issues in schools. The study adopted mixed research methodology and targeted 43 school principals, 43 deputy principals and 559 student Council leaders. The sample size for students in this study was determined using Krejcie and Morgan formula. The respondents were selected through the use of stratified and simple random sampling techniques. Questionnaires, interviews and document analysis were used for collecting data relevant to this study. Validity was determined through expert opinion while reliability was determined through piloting and use of croncbach alpha. The analysis involved descriptive and inferential statistics namely; Pearson rank correlation. Data was presented in form of tables, figures and charts. Further, most (55.6%) of the student council leaders reported that students in their schools participated in BOM meetings. Similarly, majority of the student council leaders believed that student involvement in decision making through council members have helped solve indiscipline cases in school. The study findings indicated that there is a strong and significant relationship student council involvement in decision making ($r = .723$) and school discipline in secondary schools in Nandi North Sub-County. This implies that students should be involved in development and implementation of school rules and regulations in order to enhance student discipline. The study will be useful to the Ministry of Education to have information on the operation and effectiveness of students' councils since it is still a new policy. It also will yield data and information that was useful to policy planners and decision makers to follow up on policy implementation and evaluation on its role in improving the welfare of students.

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Introduction

Background of the Study

Student council is a representative structure for all students through which they can be involved in the affairs of the school, working in partnership with the management, staff, and parents for the benefit of the school and its students.. Present in most public and private schools across the United States, Canada, Australia, Singapore, Indonesia and Philippines. They are alternatively entitled Student Council, Student Government, Associated Student Body or Student Activity Council. They often serve to engage students in hearing about democracy and leadership (Fletcher, 2005).

In U.S.A., it was established in 1920 and has ever since fought for the interests of students and various improvements in the university community. The role of students' council is complex, for example it serves as the students' interest organization. Countries taking up the policy have seen tremendous success in school management. It has been in operation for example the Texas Student Council which has been in operation for many years. The student council safeguards the interests of the students. It came into

existence in 1937 and serves around 1300 members in Texas (UNESCO, 2008).

A report by Plan International (2008) on a study of more than 1200 schools in the United States (US), and a report by Davies (2006) on School Councils in the United Kingdom (UK) showed that schools where school management allow for students' participation in decision making have a stronger chance of success at effective school governance and improved student discipline. This is because aggression diminishes when students feel supported and listened to by their teachers and the school administration. Gatt (2005) also reports that some genuine progress has been seen in the improvement of school governance in Scottish schools when the school administration treats students with respect and involves them in decision making through Student Leaders Councils (SLC). This was made possible by the Scottish Schools Act ruled that school Principals should find out what students think by setting up consultation bodies such as the student council. The students, through the council, are fully involved in drawing up expectations, rules, rewards and sanctions that guide the schools in their daily operations.

In South Africa, legislation has made student councils mandatory in all secondary schools. The South African School Authority (SASA) has created a school governance landscape based on participation and partnership between the state, parents, students, school staff and communities; as well as devolution of power. Weber (2002), Sayeed (2002), Spillane et al., (2004) and Lewis and Naidoo (2004) all observe that South Africa has moved further than any other Sub-Saharan African (SSA) country in introducing student governance in its schools on a national level.

The student council project is aimed at allowing democratically elected students to form class and school councils that serve as a voice of students, and in many countries it has promoted youth activism, strengthens the youth role in the society and reinvigorated schools across the countries. Commission for European Communities (2008), also reports that student council projects have helped in solving many unrest problems which were scaring.

UNICEF in partnership with the government through the Ministry of Education conducted a survey in 2008 to establish the relevance of student participation in school governance. This survey has contributed to establishment of child friendly school (CFS) practices by empowering students to take part in decision making for a more cohesive school community. Student council is no longer a secondary school issue only but it has also been taken up by primary schools. UNICEF's then chief of education urged primary school heads to work together in establishing a children's government which has then been in operation. Since the council is elected by the students there are able to work and relate more closely with their peers than the teachers can. As such, the teachers delegate responsibilities to those student leaders who then help to enhance discipline and cooperation among students.

It is also encouraged that the management of each school to be responsible in ensuring that a fair and effective code of behavior and discipline that includes rules, ways of encouraging and affirming students' efforts, rewards, and sanction and implementation procedures be developed and implemented with the participation of staff, students and parents. It is the responsibility of the head of school to create the right climate within which the individuals in the school community can fulfill their responsibilities. The senior management is to ensure a participatory evaluation of the impact of the school code. Students should have the responsibility of applying themselves to a learning application of such life enhancing skills as self-control, conflict management, problem solving, decision making and effective communication. Students are also expected to be actively involved in class meeting, student council and in the development of school codes, as well as to take up leadership through the system of class prefect (Melissa, 2013).

A school policy on behavior and discipline should be carefully developed by and agreed upon by all stakeholders including parents. At classroom level, teachers can engage students in participatory process of developing classroom standards which are in conformity with the school rules. In Holy Spring High School, student council officer should have no major discipline referrals and not more than two minor discipline referral throughout the year and should maintain appropriate conduct within the classroom and positive school spirit (Bowen, 2014). Student representation is not only a secondary school issue but also in universities. Governance in higher education institutions, were noted to have been taking student representation and participation so much for granted.

According to Advocates for Children on effective discipline in Maryland, building a collaborative team is essential for successful discipline. Discipline reforms should engage as many partners as possible throughout all the stages of the reform process. A great step towards cultivating a safe supportive school environment and reducing problematic behavior is to include as many stakeholders as possible (Advocates for Children, 2013). Though this, many schools neglect the role of students in decision making especially at National level. A clear example is a complained voiced by the Kenya Student Council President, Clifford Kipchumba at a national conference in 2013. They complained of where the committee of experts wanted to change the system of education in Kenya without involving the students.

In Kenya, a National Baseline Survey on Child Participation in School Governance was conducted by UNICEF (2009) in response to the spontaneous and widespread unrest in Kenyan secondary schools, especially during the middle of 2008. The findings of the survey showed that there is dire need to involve all stakeholders, and more especially the student, in matters affecting student welfare in schools. The survey proposed that school management should enhance student participation in school governance through representation of students in key decision making panels at both school and national levels.

Roles of the students' council include; Provide a platform for high school students to express the challenges they encounter hence looking at the best ways to curb them, monitor the challenges that students encounter in their schools. They also create forum where students may ask questions or seek clarifications from stakeholders from the Ministry of Education on matters of importance, help students to share ideas, interests and concerns from their colleagues drawn from a wide range hence enhancing unity in diversity. It is also expected to encourage students to share their concerns with their teachers and the school principal (Parker, 2010).

According to Barasa (2007) a student council is usually elected by students. Standard of a good student council is that: it should have clearly defined powers and responsibilities as well as practice democratic principles in its operation. Its constitution is carefully and democratically conceived. It should be supported by the head teacher and faculty; it has prestige, serves the school willingly and enlists the suggestions from the student body. Participatory decision making process is recommended because individuals who participate are usually more satisfied with the decision that they have collectively made and they would enthusiastically support it. It also satisfies and motivates key players in the decision making process (Barasa, 2007). Student involvement in decision making is a concept of participatory management which is a tenet of the Human Relation Theory of Management.

According to Wanderi (2009), for many years after independence the Ministry of Education took up the responsibility of developing policies but at school level it has been the board of governors which has been in charge of decision making, while the school administration; the manager in this case the school principal designs an administrative and management system which has been mostly hierarchical. School Management and administration for many years has been authoritarian where power was rested on top management. The prefects' body had a hierarchical structure where authority was greatly abused by both the prefects and the principals.

The principal appointed the head boy/ girl to command the prefect's body that overview students. The word of the principal and prefects was a good as a law. There was no opportunity for dialogue between the students and authority structure and this contributed to bitterness within the students' body leading to unrest in Secondary schools in 2004-2008 (Wanderi, 2008). The big question on the news was "what ails our schools?" An interview within the Management Magazine, Professor Mutahi the then Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education was questioned and then the System of Management was blamed for failing to meet the needs of the changing society.

Nairobi Chronicle (2006) also suggested that the ongoing unrest in Schools exemplified the changed Kenyan Society manifested in a national rebellion against failed authority and derelict facilities. The Ministry of Education was blamed for continually employing archaic techniques in the administration of education institutions (Wanderi, 2008). The unrest therefore, indicated that serious reforms were required especially in boarding school system (Kenyan Observer, 2008). One of the reforms was the formation of the Kenya Secondary Schools Student Council (KSSSC) formed in 2009 with a view to make school leadership and management more participatory. The mission was to represent the interest of the students and increase student involvement ratio, to improve school life through participatory governance and creation and continuation of viable and effective student services to preserve and protect the legends of democratic leadership and to support students and students' council in their academic leadership and community endeavor. Student participation in school management tends to improve learning and instills positive values in a child. Schools are being encouraged to involve their students in matters that affect their lives including students discipline and how they can channel their grievances. Many schools across the country, both secondary and primary have adopted this approach allowing students to exercise their democratic rights at a young age (Serem, 2012).

An inquiry by Muindi (2013) on student council and school discipline concluded that there was inadequate participation of students in school management and therefore called for immediate measures. He also noted that there was a relationship between performance and the type of school leadership. Discipline in schools is most essential in order to create an effective learning environment. Many schools are taking control and finding ways to confront the problem of indiscipline and school violence. Finding discipline procedure that works is a job that the students, parents and teachers should explore. In today's society, working together with the school and community will help teach children that working together as a team can effectively solve the problem. When students participate directly through their own (student leaders) on schools issues they become loyal since the gap between them and the administration is bridged (Kibet, 2012). Reaching success has been made through involvement by the formation of students' councils.

Statement of the Problem

In the past Kenyan secondary schools were plagued with endless student unrests and the rampant indiscipline cases between 2004 and 2008. It was characterized by open hostility to the prefects and the administration, violence, strikes, property destruction and even murder of prefects. All these were indications for serious reforms in the systems of management. It also manifested the ills of the then hierarchical and authoritarian leadership structure which was abused by the principals and the prefects' body. The word of

the principal was as good as law and the prefects were viewed as puppets to the administration and traitors of the student body. There was no opportunity for dialogue between the students and the authority structure (Wanderi, 2008). Nandi North Sub-County was not an exception of these. Various forms of violence ranging from destruction of school property, use of abusive language, fighting, student murder and uncountable strikes were experienced in a number of schools in Nandi North Sub-County. Change of this negative attitude towards the prefects and the administration was needed. Reforms to curb these problems was done by the Ministry of Education together with UNICEF and UNESCO through the introduction of student councils in 2009 to make school leadership and governance more participatory (Muindi, 2009). The present study therefore investigated on the student councils participatory role in leadership and its effect on student discipline in Nandi North Sub-County.

Objectives of the Study

The study was guided;

i. To find out the effect of student councils involvement in decision making on students' discipline in Nandi North Sub-County.

Theoretical Framework

This study was hinged on the Participative Leadership Theory proposed by Yukl (1994). The theory is based on the assumption that involvement in decision making improves the understanding of the issues involved by those who must implement the decisions. The theory further argues that people are committed to actions when they have been involved in the relevant decision making concerning those actions. Therefore, when people make decisions together, the social commitment to one another is greater and this increases their commitment to the decision, while reducing the level of conflict. Consequently, a participative leader, rather than taking autocratic decisions, seeks to involve other people in the decision making process. However, it is still within the leader's whim to give or deny control to the people in the decision making process. Thus, the question of how much influence is given to others in the decision making process may vary depending on the leader's perceptions, preferences and beliefs.

Research Methodology

This study adopted mixed research methodology which is an approach to inquiry that combines both qualitative and quantitative forms. The study was conducted in 13 sampled public secondary schools. Data was collected by the researcher using questionnaires, interviews and document analysis techniques. This study therefore was conducted through survey research design. It was intended to investigate the influence students' council participation in decision making and its effects on students' discipline. The target population consisted of all school principals, deputy principals and student Council leaders in Nandi North Sub-County. The target population consisted of 43 principals, 43 deputy principals, and 559 student council leaders as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Target Population.

Variable	Target Population
Principals	43
Deputy Principals	43
Students Council leaders	559
Total	645

The sample size for students in this study was determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula as quoted by Kasomo (2001). The formula is given as:

$$n = \frac{X^2 * N * P(1 - P)}{(ME^2 * (N - 1)) + (X^2 * P * (1 - P))}$$

Where

n=Sample size

X²=Chi Square for the specified confidence level at

1 degree of freedom= (3.841) from tables

N=Population size

P=Population proportion (.50 in the table)

ME=Desired margin of error (expressed as a proportion=0.05)

$$= 3.841 \times 559 \times 0.5 (1-0.5) / 0.05 \times 0.05 (559-1)$$

$$+ 3.841 \times 0.5 (1-0.5)$$

$$= 536.77975 / 2.35525$$

$$= 228$$

In order to sample the schools involved in the study, 30% of the target population was used. The choice of 30% is based on Mugenda and Mugenda (2003). Further, the schools were stratified into divisions as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. sample size for targeted schools.

Division	No. Of schools	Sample size (30%)
Kipkaren	17	5
Kosirai	12	4
Kabiyet	14	4
Total	43	13

In each of the sampled schools, the principal and deputy principal were purposively selected to participate in the study. Student council leaders were selected by simple random sampling technique. The sample size of this study is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Sample size for the respondents.

Variable	Sample size
Head teachers	13
Deputy head teachers	13
Students council leaders	228
Total	254

The researcher adopted the use questionnaires, interviews and document analysis as tools for collecting data. The selection of the tools has been guided by the nature of data to be collected, time available as well as the objectives of the study. The overall aim of the study was to investigate and describe the influence of students' council's influence on students' discipline. The researcher was therefore concerned with views, opinions, attitudes and practices. Such information can be got from the above instruments.

Research Findings

The objective of this study was to find out the effect of student councils involvement in decision making on school discipline in Nandi North Sub-County. To achieve this objective, the respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a five likert scale questions in the questionnaire on the influence of student councils

involvement in decision making on student discipline. The results of the analyzed data are presented in Table 1.

Table 4 shows that 69(31.7%) student council leaders agreed with the statement that students frequently participate in B.O.M meetings, 52(23.9%) student council leaders strongly agreed with the statement, 46(21.1%) student council leaders strongly disagreed with the statement, 27(12.4%) student council leaders were neutral on the statement while 24(11.0%) student council leaders disagreed with the statement. The study findings showed that most (55.6%) of the student council leaders in secondary schools in Nandi North Sub-County reported that students in their schools participated in BOM meetings enhancing student discipline. In a similar study Kibandize (2012) observed that rules and regulations were enforced through prefects' bodies, councils, disciplinary committees, teachers and involvement of parents. He recommended that best results could be obtained through involvement of student councilors in the development and implementation of school rules and regulations.

However, 81(37.2%) student council leaders strongly disagreed with the statement that students in their schools were involved in developing school rules and regulations, 55(25.2%) student council leaders strongly agreed with the statement, 50(22.9%) student council leaders agreed with the statement and 21(9.6%) student council leaders were undecided on the statement while 11(5.0%) student council leaders agreed with the statement. The study findings shows that 48.1% student council leaders believed that students in their schools were involved in developing school rules and regulations. This shows that students in secondary schools are involved to a small extent in developing school rules. School rules are an important function that needs student council involvement. However, it seems that most secondary schools in Nandi North sub-county do not involve students on formulating school rules. This is supported by Kindiki (2009), who found out that the level of discipline in secondary schools in Kenya is very low and this was attributed to the fact that school administration rarely discussed implementation of rules and regulations to students hence there are poor channels of communication. Ineffective communication results in conflict, chaos, misunderstanding and lack of confidence in school administration.

Further, 107(49.1%) student council leaders strongly disagreed with the statement that students consulted by the principal on matters of importance, 50(22.9%) student council leaders disagreed with the statement, 45(20.6%) student council leaders agreed with the statement and 13(6.0%) student council leaders strongly agreed with the statement while 3(1.4%) student council leaders were undecided on the statement. It emerged from the study

Table 4. Effects of student councils involvement in decision making on student discipline.

Effects	SD		D		N		A		SA	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Student councilors frequently participate in B.O.M. meetings enhancing student discipline	46	21.1	24	11.0	27	12.4	69	31.7	52	23.9
Student councilors involved in developing school rules and regulations reducing disciplinary cases	81	37.2	11	5.0	21	9.6	50	22.9	55	25.2
Students consulted by the principal on matters of importance enhancing student discipline	107	49.1	50	22.9	3	1.4	45	20.6	13	6.0
Student involvement in decision making through council members have helped solve indiscipline cases in school	17	7.8	35	16.1	14	6.4	44	20.2	108	49.5

findings that majority (72.0%) of the student council leaders in secondary schools in Nandi North Sub-County were of the view that students were not consulted in their schools by the principal on matters of importance. Street and Temperley (2006) support this observation by pointing out that the student, who holds a central place in the school, is often forgotten or taken for granted when important decisions are being made. Such lack of student participation in decision making leads to the students opposing decisions made by the school administration, resulting in conflict that is often manifested as student indiscipline or student unrest in schools.

Similarly, 108(49.5%) student council leaders strongly agreed with the statement that student involvement in decision making through council members have helped solve indiscipline cases in school, 44(20.2%) student council leaders agreed with the statement, 35(16.1%) student council leaders disagreed with the statement, 17(7.8%) student council leaders strongly disagreed with the statement while 14(6.4%) student council leaders were undecided on the statement. The study findings showed that majority of the student council leaders in Nandi North Sub-County believed that student involvement in decision making through council members have helped solve indiscipline cases in school. Magadla, (2007) suggested that students should fully participate in decision making in order to enhance student discipline.

On interviewing the deputy principals, it emerged that student councilors usually participated in matters pertaining the student discipline and welfare but were not involved in other matters like financial management and teacher transfers. Further, it emerged that the student councilors were consulted on emerging issues in the school that concern the students. One of the deputy principals indicated that:

".. we consult on any issue touching on the students, that's the biggest achievement we have made. The student leaders are informed first, and then they inform the student body. And in the same way they forward issues from the student body to the administration."

This implies that the school administration usually involve students on matters affecting the student body. It also emerged that student involvement in decision making process has reduced indiscipline cases in schools as indicated by most of the deputy principals.

Further, it was reported by one of the deputy principals that:

"...through expanded administrative councils, student councils have helped to disseminate information affecting the school community. Their commitment to involvement has helped to show solidarity within the school community and beyond..."

Conclusions

The study findings showed that most of the student council leaders in secondary schools in Nandi North Sub-County reported that students in their schools participated in BOM meetings but were less involved in developing school rules and regulations.

Further, majority of the student council leaders in secondary schools in Nandi North Sub-County were of the view that students consulted were not consulted in their schools by the principal on matters of importance. Such lack

of student participation in decision making leads to the students opposing decisions made by the school administration, resulting in conflict that is often manifested as student indiscipline or student unrest in schools.

Majority of the student council leaders in Nandi North Sub-County applauded the student involvement in decision making through student council leadership. It was noted that students' involvement in leadership make the students to air their views without any fear enhancing student discipline.

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