



Principals' Involvement of Students in Decision Making and Discipline in Public Secondary Schools in Baringo County, Kenya

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Abstract

The persistent student indiscipline in form of unrests in secondary schools and their never-ending desire to destroy school property probably reflects a feeling of disaffection rather than that of a sense of ownership of the schools they attend. The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of principals' involvement of students in decision making on their discipline in public secondary schools in Baringo County, Kenya. This study was anchored on Assertive Discipline Model as advocated by Canter and Canter (2001). The research employed descriptive survey research design. The study employed proportionate stratified random sampling technique. The target population was 121 principals, 920 class teachers and 242 students. Stratified proportionate random sampling was used to obtain 41 principals 292 teachers and 80 students. Questionnaires for teachers and students were used for data collection, while interview guide was used to gather data from principals. Reliability was determined through test-retest method and calculated using Pearson's correlation coefficient resulting in coefficient value of 0.8 and 0.72 for teachers and students questionnaire respectively. Content Validity was ensured through expert judgment. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics that included mean and standard deviation while inferential statistics included correlation analysis assisted by SPSS and presented in tables and graphs. The findings showed the existence of a positive relationship between the principals' involvement of students in decision making and students' discipline ($r=0.753$; $p=0.00$). Most of the principals used student involvement strategies such as allowing students choice of dressing code and choice of menu decisions. This study concludes that involving students in choosing time of study, food menus and the choice of entertainment, and management of students and welfare issues influenced student discipline reasonably. Thus the study therefore recommends that secondary school board of management should actively involve students in all areas of decision-making in school with particular emphasis on decisions relating to the welfare of the student. The study recommends future research on the influence of BOM governance on students discipline in secondary schools.

Key words: Decision-Making, student Involvement, Principals' Practices, Students' Discipline

Introduction

Discipline is a prerequisite for almost everything a school can offer to students (Jennifer & Gareth, 2015). Discipline is widely acknowledged to be essential for creating a peaceful school climate thus leading to sound academic performance. It is a basic requirement of successful teaching and learning in schools and necessary for effective school management and accomplishment of its goals (Odoyo, Odwar&Kabuka, 2016). Discipline links both the culture and the climate of a school. For a satisfactory climate to exist in a school, a certain level of discipline must exist among the students. In schools where discipline is a serious problem for example, when students bully each other, parents prefer to transfer their children to better schools. Since the well behaved students usually perform well, their transfer to another school can affect the overall performance of the former school. In Brazil, students' involvement in school management has been used in most of the Public Basic Education Schools where these school councils assist in decision making in the school (Ghanem, 2012).

School principals execute a cardinal role in the socialization process of students. In so doing, students benefit by learning to respect themselves and others, to regulate their own conduct, improve in time management, accommodate and appreciate diversity, and above all become worthy responsible citizens (Marais & Meier, 2015). School principals form a very important component of secondary school management and influence the extent to which students manifest desirable behavior patterns. In keeping with this assertion, Leithwood and Jantzi (2015) assert that a large part of any secondary school principal's job is to handle student behavior by adopting a multiplicity of measures and strategies. The authors assert that disciplinary management measures refer to a set of strategies and practices adopted by school principals to mitigate the impact of indiscipline among students. Student involvement in decision making refers to the work of student representative bodies such as school councils, student parliaments and the prefectural body. It is also a term used to refer to the process where students participate in school governance (Chemutai&Chumba, 2014). Student involvement in decision-making involves creating opportunities for children and young people to increase their influence over what happens to them and around them. It was, for many years, touted as one of the most important ways of minimizing or even eliminating student indiscipline and discontent in schools. It has since been implemented in most schools through the formation of Student Councils and enactment of laws to support the same but even with that, the mass indiscipline of students in Kenyan secondary schools has continued unabated. That is why Ndaita (2016) argued that there has been an increase in wanton destruction of property and lives lost. This has therefore created a big concern for teachers, head teachers and stakeholders.

The notion is principals are advised to adopt authoritarian and paternalistic, rather than democratic. It not only assumes that school students have a legitimate interest only in student-specific issues, but it also assumes that students have no right to decide for themselves the issues in which they want or do not want to be involved. For this reason many commentators have suggested that opportunities for student involvement should go beyond specifically student-related issues and extend to wider aspects of school life, as well as to society beyond the school. Effective involvement has been said, would go beyond student comment on aspects of their lives which are seen as safe or without

significant impact on the work of adults in the school, embedded at classroom level, at institutional level and at the interface between local, national and international communities (Aukot, 2017).

Over the last few years there have been increased calls for increasing the extent of inclusion of students in decision making in secondary schools in Kenya owing to the frequent occurrences of student unrests in the sector (Bahou 2011, 2006; Aukot, 2017; Wambua, Okoth and Kalai 2017; Kindiki, 2009). Proponents of students' involvement in decision making have justified their support for this idea on premise that decisions in a school affect the student in latent and manifest ways. Largely they are recipients of final decisions hence the recommendations made by students may be very constructive and if approached in the right manner would work positively (Pérez-Expósito, 2015). In this way, students rejectionist tendencies of decisions imposed upon them by school administrators would change to ownership and acceptance of decisions arrived at with their participation.

While many studies have demonstrated the importance of the principal making informed, supportive decisions regarding rules, guidelines, and procedures within the school (Bahou, 2011), research regarding the administrator's involvement with student discipline is inadequate. Hence, this study sought to investigate the influence of involvement on students in decision-making on students' discipline in public secondary schools in Baringo County, Kenya.

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on the Assertive Discipline Model as advocated by Canter and Canter (2001). This theory addresses significant issues with regard to management of students' discipline and which impacts students' educational attainment. According to Assertive Discipline Model theory, the teachers should design a discipline plan and formulate 4 to 5 rules with specific consequences by first identifying rules and expectations and presenting them to students, ensuring that they are understood. Additionally, Canter and Canter (2001) opine that, the parent should reinforce the rules by use of positive repetition instead of punishing the negative ones. Further, Assertive Discipline Theory recommends a five-step discipline hierarchy of intensifying consequences when infraction of rules happens. A student should be given a warning after the first infraction, while the parent should be called after the fourth infraction. The fifth sanction requires involvement of the school administration. However, according to the theory, the student awareness and input is emphasized. This theory is relevant for the current study since school as an organization is governed by rules and regulations or ethos which must be observed by all students. However, in order to secure compliance by majority of students, principals should endeavor to involve students in formulation of both rules and consequences. It is however, envisaged that through peer counseling, student mentorship and practice of open door policy, principals and teachers can influence the extent to which students manifest desirable behavior patterns.

Literature Review

A study by Fletcher (2009) shows that in the United States of America, involvement in school management proposals were viewed to sound radical and there was a growing awareness about their efficiency. In Britain, the involvement of students' involvement in the school management

has the major responsibilities to regularly monitor attendance, punctuality and group mentoring programmes (Allen, 2010). In Finland, the law provides for the student involvement in decision-making in schools. The constitution of Finland of 2012 provides for the children and young people to participate in decisions affecting their lives among other things. Students are given the right to participate in student association, student union and student councils (Shatilova, 2014). In Denmark, it is reported that the government underscored the importance of creating democratic schools (Bahou, 2011).

In South Africa, it is a requirement of the law that every public school should establish a governing body which should include learners' representatives from the eighth grade or higher. It makes provision for a representative council of learners in each ordinary public school that offers instruction in the eighth grade or higher (Carr, 2005; Ndaita, 2016). This arrangement, however, presumes that the children of lower grades do not need to be heard or even be represented in the student government.

In Namibia, the role of students in school management is outlined in the User's Guide to the Education Code of Conduct (Government of Namibia, 2013). Students were represented through democratically elected school boards that include teachers and parents. The school boards deal with discipline, finances budgets, school fees, staff appointments, and use of school facilities. It is noted that Tanzania was one of the first African countries that provided for student involvement in decision-making in the schools through representation in decision making committees. The schools have councils whose membership and functions are specified in the National Policy on School Councils (Carr, 2015).

Student involvement in decision making is recommended because participants are usually more satisfied with the decisions they have collectively made and enthusiastically supported. Ofori, et.al. (2017) avers that student involvement in decision making is a concept that values all components for acceptance and compliance. The student-teacher relationship is improved to the extent that they discuss freely matters affecting the school, Pérez-Expósito (2015) who aver that democratization is the extent to which all members share accountability and administrative processes. Mule, Kalai and Mulwa (2017) in a study on principals' characteristics that could influence their involvement of students in decision making observed that different forms of involvement in governance could be employed. These include student councils, peer supporters, peer mentors, school clubs and societies.

Alimi (2014), in a study done in Nigeria concluded that students' involvement in the maintenance of school discipline gives them the opportunity to solve their own problem, develop the right conduct, self-control, cooperative efficiency and fairness among other things. On the same vein, Mati, et al, (2016) observed that student involvement in disciplinary issues help them grow responsibly as well as making them accept the consequences of their own decisions and actions. This study therefore sought to determine the influence of student involvement in decision making on student discipline. According to Ndaita (2016) and Mati, et al. (2016) prefectural system is one of the most effective ways of involving pupils directly in the administration of the school because they are constantly in touch with other students. However, a de-motivated prefect body irrespective of being made-up of

the best student leaders will not be effective in its roles but rather will engage itself in disciplinary practices such as vernacular speaking against school rules and regulation. These have the effect of enhancing indiscipline in the whole school. Thus, where the administration does not have a system of motivating, supporting, and directing its prefect body, indiscipline will persist in the school.

Sabitu (2014) did a study on students' assessment role in promoting discipline in Osun state, Nigeria and concluded that courses and seminars should be adopted in cultivating morals among students. In Uganda Kiggudu (2009) observed that although schools had written rules and regulations, students did not participate in their formulation. Adored school management entails involvement of students in governance through their representatives, the prefects (Njue, 2014).

Under the current Constitution in Kenya, the Cabinet Secretary is responsible for the overall governance and management of basic education. At institutional level, public secondary schools in Kenya are currently managed by Boards of Management (BOM) appointed by County Education Board (CEB) (Republic of Kenya, 2013). The composition of the BOM has representatives from various stakeholders, including one representative of the Student Council who should be an ex officio member. The law therefore, recognizes the importance of involving students in decision-making in school. The constitution of Kenya (2010) also advocates for participation of citizens in decision-making process.

The other body previously involved in management of the schools in Kenya was the Parents Teachers Association (PTA), currently referred to as the Parents' Association (PA) in the Basic Education Act of 2013 (Republic of Kenya, 2013). According to the Sessional paper No.14 of 2012, PTAs were not provided for in the legislation (Republic of Kenya, 2012). Currently PA is now provided for in the Basic Education Act of 2013, and it consists of every parent with a student in the school and a representative of the teachers in the school. The executive committee of this body has a parent representative from each class and two teachers and none from among the students. This creates a gap where students are not considered as important in participating in making decisions that affect them. Yet, the Task Force on Realignment of Education Sector to the Constitution of Kenya, 2010 also recommended for student representation in the PTA meetings (Republic of Kenya, 2012b). It is not clear why this recommendation was not considered for implementation.

In Kenya, Musyoka (2011) indicates that involvement of students in management of secondary schools draws a lot of public acclaim but it is given lukewarm support by principals who are central drivers to its implementation. At the end of their study Chemutai&Chumba, 2014 concluded that, student involvement in decision making refers to the work of student representative bodies such as school councils, student parliaments and the prefectural body. It is also a term used to refer to the process where students participate in school governance Issues relating to the discipline of students have captured the ears of parents and other educational stakeholders. This study aims at finding out the extent to which principals' of student involvement in secondary school decision-making influence the discipline in public secondary schools in Baringo County.

Research Methodology

The target population comprised of 121 secondary schools; 121 principals, 974 teachers and 268

student leaders public secondary schools in Baringo County. The study adopted descriptive survey research design to assess institutional practices influencing student discipline in public secondary schools in Baringo County. The descriptive survey is a commonly used method for gathering information about people attitudes, opinions, habits or any of the variety of education or social issues (Orodho 2009). This research design was deemed suitable for the study, as the researcher aimed to establish and report the happening on the institutional practices influencing student discipline in public secondary schools in Baringo County, Kenya.

This study used stratified proportionate sampling in selecting sample sizes for the study. Proportionate stratified random sampling is the most effective in this study since, there are three subgroups in the targeted population thus subjects from each subgroup are well represented. The target populations were grouped into three (student representatives, class teachers and principals) study sample. According to Best and Kahn (2012) a sample size of 30 percent is representative. Thus this study, sampled 30% of the target population for Principals/Deputy principals, teachers and students, while purpose sampling used employed in sampling student leaders.

Study Findings

Students views on Involvement of Students in Decision-making

The student leaders' views on involvement of students in decision-making were sought using a 5-point Likert scale and responses presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Student Leaders views on Involvement of Students in Decision-making

Statement	Strongly agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Mean
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
i) We are involved in choosing time to study	13	17.6	14	18.9	6	8.1	20	27.0	21	28.4	2.78
ii) We are consulted on the choice of dressing code	8	10.8	8	10.8	9	12.2	22	29.7	27	36.5	2.29
iii) We are involved in deciding on choice of entertainment	12	16.2	22	29.7	5	6.8	19	25.7	16	21.6	2.93
iv) We are involved in choosing place to go during field trips	16	21.6	19	25.7	10	13.5	20	27.0	9	12.2	3.17
v) We are involved in choosing of menu	9	12.2	9	12.2	9	12.2	21	28.4	26	35.1	2.37

The findings indicated that student leaders were not involved in choosing time to study. Though some student leaders acknowledged involvement in deciding the time of the preps and weekend programme, majority of the student leaders were of the view that the extent of involvement was low. Similar findings were reported by Kilonzo (2017); in a study where majority of the respondents said that the Student Councils were not involved in deciding the time of the preps. This agrees with Tikoko and Kiprop (2011) that student consultation and decision-making is often limited to aspects of school life that affect students only and which have no immediate relevance to other stakeholders. Students may be excluded from examinations, evaluation of student performance, appointment of teachers and other secret matters, among others. Though this view appears to support student involvement in decision making, it however confines student involvement in decision making to specific areas of school life.

Class teachers View on Involvement of Students in Decision-making

The class teachers' view on involvement of students in decision-making was sought using a 5-point Likert scale and responses presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Class teachers View on Involvement of Students in Decision-making

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Mean
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	
i. Students are involved on the choice of time to study	10	3.9	50	19.4	50	19.4	88	34.1	60	23.3	2.46
ii. The students are consulted on the choice of dressing type	8	3.1	29	11.2	14	5.4	197	20.2	10	3.9	3.24
iii. The students are involved in deciding on choice of entertainment	20	7.8	102	23.3	56	21.7	44	33.3	36	14.0	2.77
iv. The students are involved on choice of where to go for field trips	32	12.4	138	53.5	70	27.1	38	14.7	28	10.9	3.23
v. Students make choices on their menu	34	13.2	26	10.1	22	8.5	66	25.6	136	52.7	1.85

The class teachers' view on involvement of students in decision-making indicated that they were not involved in choosing time to study and students make choices on their menu. Sometimes students were consulted on the choice of dressing code, involved in deciding on choice of entertainment and choice of where to go for field trips. Tikoko and Kiprop (2011) observed the levels of student involvement in decision making are debatable. This agrees with Kariuki et al. (2015), participation of the Student Council in decision making process is recommended because when individuals

participate in decision-making, they are more satisfied with the decision that has been collectively made and concluded that managing students' behavior requires a concerted effort of the parents, teachers and the school principals as the key.

When the students participate in selection of their leaders, they are more acceptable to the students' body and the students are always willing to support them in performance of their duties and responsibilities. This enhances student discipline in schools. Nayak(2011) observed that group self-discipline is achieved when students are allowed to select their leaders democratically. The students know their peers well and they know those with leadership qualities, who can effectively represent them in school management. The next section presents the study findings on the influence of involvement of students in decision making on students discipline.

Influence of Involvement of Students in Decision-making on Student Discipline

Pearson's product moment correlations were used to examine whether there exists a relationship between variables.

Table 3: Correlation between Principals' Levels of Involvement of Students in Decision-making and Student Discipline

		Discipline	Decision Making
Discipline	Pearson Correlation	1	.750.753
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
Decision Making	Pearson Correlation	.750.753	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000.000	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Findings of the study showed that there was a significant relationship between involvement of students in decision-making and student discipline ($r=0.753$, $p =0.00$) implying that involvement of students in decision making influence students level of discipline up to 75.3% as shown in table 3. This indicated that an increase in involvement of students in decision-making there was an increase in student discipline. The findings of this study are consistent with those of Alimi, (2014); Mugambi and Gitonga, (2015); Ndaita (2016) and Mati, Gatumu and Chandi (2016) who found that indiscipline cases among students had reduced significantly since the introduction of the Student Councils in secondary school. The findings are also in agreement with the report of KSSHA, (2014) where it was noted a 78% drop in strikes after the schools started embracing Student Councils. Therefore, there is no doubt that Student Council is the right system of student leadership in secondary schools and all schools should embrace it. It is effective in maintenance of good student discipline and enhancing academic performance in school (UNICEF, (2010).

Findings from interviews indicated that involvement of students in decision-making led to students developing positive attitude towards school, student leadership obeyed by other students, students became more responsible and self-driven, and students are more attentive, organized and participative among other things. These are the indicators of good or enhanced discipline of the students.

Conclusion

Involving students in decision-making led to students developing positive attitude towards school, student leadership obeyed by other students, students became more responsible and self-driven, and students are more attentive, organized and participative among other things. These are the indicators of good or enhanced discipline of the students. This implies that Student Council is an effective system of student leadership and it has impacted positively on student's discipline. The study concluded that involving students in choosing time of study, food menus and the choice of entertainment, and management of students and welfare issues influenced student discipline reasonably.

Recommendations

Students should be engaged in formulation of rules and regulations and decision-making process on matters that affect them even though they are key stakeholders in schools. Their involvement should not be seen to cause undue pressure to the school management, administrators, teachers and parents. When students are treated or seen as minor, immature and inexperienced to make independent decisions on matters of the school and are viewed as problematic. This renders them passive, as decisions that concern them are made on their behalf either by their teachers, parents or administrators including the BOM. The study therefore recommends that secondary school managements should actively involve students in all areas of decision-making in school with particular emphasis on decisions relating to the welfare of the student.

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