

The Relationship between School Location and Student Participation in Decision Making in Kenya.

Authors

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Abstract

The study investigated the relationship between school location and student participation in decision making in boarding secondary schools in Nakuru County, Kenya. This study was therefore deemed necessary based on this gap in research. The study targeted the students and teachers in boarding secondary schools in Nakuru County, Kenya. The random sampling method arrived at 220 students and 30 teachers in 15 boarding secondary schools in the county stratified further to 6 rural and 5 urban schools were selected to respond to the student participation in the decision-making questionnaire. A null hypothesis was formulated. The t-test statistic was used to test the difference in mean. The p-value at .0366 led to the rejection of the null hypothesis .05 level of significance. The study found a relationship between school location and student participation in decision making in boarding secondary schools in Kenya. Rural schools are disadvantaged in terms of access to governance than their urban counterparts. Since the means for urban schools (2.22) was higher than that of rural schools (2.18), it was established that students in urban schools and greater access to decision making avenues than students in rural schools.

Key terms: Student participation, decision making, school location, boarding secondary schools.

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Introduction

OECD (2002) defines a school location as “the community in which the school is located, such as a village, hamlet or rural area (fewer than 3 000 people), a small town (3 000 to about 15 000 people), a town (15 000 to about 100 000 people), a city (100 000 to about 1 000 000 people), close to the centre of a city with over 1 000 000 people or elsewhere in a city with over 1 000 000 people”. Ntibi and Edoho (2017) assert that school location refers to a particular place in a physical environment (rural or urban) in relation to other areas where the school is sited. In Kenya, school location predominantly refers to the rural or urban setting of a school. Ellah (2017) poses that the School environment may be classified into urban, semi-urban and rural. This classification sometimes goes a long way to influence government distribution of social amenities like electricity, water, hospital and educational institution. It is common knowledge that most of these social amenities are concentrated in urban areas than rural areas.

The location of a school has various influences on different facets of education. Researchers between rural and urban schools have made distinctions. In a study in Malawi sough, Taniguchi and Yukiko (2016) sought to find out how community participation contributed to school management by comparing two high-achieving and two low-achieving schools in a rural area of Malawi. The study found out that communities and parents participate in schools if school management is effective and if a school demonstrates high levels of student achievement. Duma (2015), while studying student participation in school governance among principals in rural schools in South Africa, revealed that the process of involving students in the rural schools’ governance is difficult to manage because students and principals in most rural schools often hold each other at arm’s length, unsure of the role they should play. Alokan (2010), while comparing rural and urban schools on school violence, contend that statistics clearly show that violent acts such as murders and suicides

are much more likely to occur in urban school districts rather than in rural school districts. In fact, violent acts occur in urban schools at a ratio of 11.5 to 1 relative to those occurring in rural schools.

Studies report mixed results in terms of academic performance between rural and urban schools. Nwogu (2010) established that location was important in learning aspects of mathematics and basic science involving angles, with rural students exhibiting more learning drawbacks than their urban counterparts. Bosede (2010) revealed that there is no difference in the performance of students because of location. Similarly, results were reported by Bulala et al. (2014) from Botswana while studying location as a factor in the performance prediction in Botswana Junior School Certificate Agriculture Examinations by Continuous Assessment scores.

The study reported no significant difference in junior agriculture certificate examinations students’ academic performance in rural, urban, and urban secondary schools. Owoye and Yara (2011), while investigating school location and academic achievement of secondary schools in Ekiti State, Nigeria, established that there was a difference between students’ academic achievement of rural and urban secondary schools in senior certificate examinations. Based on the literature review on the influence of school location and academic performance, it is clear that the findings report varied outcomes. Some confirm that school location affects academic achievement, while others make no distinctions in achievement between students located in rural and urban areas. Others report findings in favour of urban schools, citing the poor facilities in rural schools as a factor in their poor achievement in academic scores.

Rural and urban schools have also been compared in terms of physical and human resource facilitation. The measure of such facilitation significantly influences academic achievement and school culture in the two locales. For

example, Boit (2012) asserted that higher qualified teachers prefer to serve in urban areas rather than rural areas and also that teachers do not accept postings to rural areas. This is because their conditions are up to the expected standard as their social life in the areas is virtually restricted as a result of inadequate amenities and facilities such as playgrounds that are without equipment, libraries without books, while laboratories are glorified ones. Also, Akiri (2008) supported the provision of education in rural areas if faced with difficulties and problems such as qualified teachers refusing appointments in isolated villages; villagers refusing to send their children to school because they rely on them for help; parents' hesitation in entrusting their daughters to male teachers; lack of roads, book and teaching materials. This would certainly influence the academic performance of the student in rural schools. However, the relationship between the differences as mentioned above in the provision of physical and human resources in rural and urban areas and student participation in decision making has not been studied in Kenya.

The foregoing literature has established the research gap in the literature in studies done comparing schools by location in terms of research variables such as academic performance, community involvement in school governance, provision of physical and human resources and school violence. It is clear that there is a dearth of empirical literature examining the relationship between school location and student participation in decision making in Kenya. Moreover, from the background of the study, the importance of student participation in decision making has been established in stemming the persistent student unrest and violence in Kenyan secondary schools. However, the relationship between school location and student participation in decision-making has not been examined yet. In addition, the socio-economic and cultural dynamics between the two environments make a difference in other variables such as academic performance

and school violence. Therefore, the aim of this study is to answer the question: Could there be a relationship between school location and student participation in decision making? It is thus important for this study to embark on such a study considering the fact that such a study has not been attempted in Kenya, and the findings could inform practice and theory in secondary school management in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the recent past, there have been calls for secondary school students to be included in the decision-making practices of schools in Kenya. The inadequate facilitation of students' participation in secondary schools decision-making processes has been cited in various forums as the cause of student unrest (Nyaga, 2000). Kyalo, K. D., Kanori, E., & Njagi, L. W. (2017) notes that the persistent waves of student unrest since independence continued to be witnessed, allowing students to be heard through their representatives. However, due to the authoritarian regime in most secondary schools in Kenya, students often fail to find a voice in important issues affecting them and resort to strikes, unrest and other forms of violence. Nyabisi and Mwelu,(2018) found that; school governance is still bureaucratic in nature, with power and authority being vested in the principal and student governance being mainly through appointed school prefects by the teacher while emphasizing on obedience to school rules and authority; as opposed to critical thinking, questioning of the status quo and awareness of individual and social rights.

The emphasis on student involvement in decision making in Kenya led to the establishment of Student Councils in secondary schools in 2009. The concept of student councils was mooted by the Kenya Secondary Schools Heads Association (KESSHA), the Ministry of Education and UNESCO. The aim was to allow students to elect their representatives democratically into the Student Councils so

that members of the Council would represent their views to school management in order to avert recurrent unrest ever. Duflo et al. (2015) attest that the student's inclusion in the schools' governance is a practical way of promoting democratic values and developing democratic school governance. Griebler and Nowak (2012) observe that the effects of student participation in student councils can be categorized into personal impact on students, effects on interactions and on the school as an organization. Students actually participating in councils, i.e. the student representatives, benefit most in terms of personal effects (e.g. increasing life skills, self-esteem, developing democratic skills) and in terms of improvements in peer relationships or student adult relationships.

Duma (2015) adds that the current trend in the international community recognizes the right of the child to access education and requires the student's right to participate in decision-making. Therefore schools need to maintain the integrity of shared governance and give students a voice on campus. Griebler and Nowak (2012) summarize the positive effects of participation in student councils as a better communication flow between members of the student council and teachers or administration, meaning that students know better what is going on in school and teachers or administration understand the student concerns better is essentially a benefit for the whole school and has been shown as a result of the student council. However, these studies did not study participation in decision making through student councils differ in terms of the school location.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to test the null Hypothesis to find out differences in participation in decision making between rural and urban schools, the t-test was used, and the results are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Independent Samples T-test on Student Participation in Decision Making by School Location.

School location	N	Mean	t-value	Df	Sig	Level of Sig
Rural	158	2.18	-.906	282	.366	0.05
Urban	126	2.22				

Based on the results in table 1, the null hypothesis is rejected at a 0.05 level of significance. The p-value at .0366 is greater than the table value at 0.05; hence the study concludes that there is indeed a significant difference in the levels of participation accorded to rural and urban students. The mean score for urban schools for student decision-making participation is higher (2.22) than that of rural schools (2.18). This means that urban schools students are given greater opportunities to participate in decision-making processes in their schools.

There is no significant difference in the participation of students in school location decision-making. The analysis of this hypothesis showed that there is a difference in student participation in decision making by school location. This led to the null hypothesis rejection. This agrees with Mncube (2008) findings, who found out that the learners' participation in decision-making is inhibited by, among other things, school location. Further, he found out that learner participation in decision making in rural schools was limited as learners were not given a chance to air their opinion and concerns. When sensitive issues were to be discussed, learners were needed to leave even when the proposed expulsion of a learner was the main issue. The finding also highlights the power struggles in rural schools that arise when principals overplay their roles.

In the same vein, Duma (2015) observes that the process of students' involvement in the rural schools' governance is difficult to manage since, in most rural schools, principals and students often hold each other at arm's length, unsure of the function that each should play. He further notes that some principals feel that excessive involvement of the student in school management violates their professionalism sense. They regard students as intruding and troublesome, thus reluctant to work with them; they are resistant to collaborate with students because they have become accustomed to functioning without student leaders being central to their work, and they feel that they have enough mounting professional strain without the additional pressures of entering into a partnership with students.

In studying the differences between urban and rural schools, Deberton et al. (1994) note large differences between rural and urban school characteristics. Urban schools are larger; they have more teachers, administrators and support staff and offer more courses and extracurricular activities. In addition, students from the two locations were quite different in ethnicity. The rural schools appeared to be homogenous; however, the urban

students seemed to have a greater mix of race and cultures. Due to this variance, more opportunities to participate in decision making are accorded urban students as school principals in urban schools would have to adopt participatory leadership styles in view of the varied student characteristics.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: There is a relationship between student participation in decision-making and school location. Rural schools are disadvantaged in terms of access to governance than their urban counterparts.

Recommendations: In light of the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- i) School Principals in rural schools should make intentioned steps towards involving students in decision making.
- ii) Sensitization programmes on how student participation in decision making should be conducted should be undertaken in rural based schools to enable the students, teachers and stakeholders involve students in various decision making avenues in their schools.

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