

Examining hindrances to Students Participation in Decision Making in Nakuru County, Kenya.

Betty Jeruto Tikoko
Kabarak University, Kenya.
Email: talaitikoko@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the hindrances to student participation in decision making in secondary schools in Kenya. The study was prompted by the frequent student unrests in Kenya. The institutionalization of the Student Councils in secondary schools was aimed at reducing the incidences of unrests by offering the students opportunity to present their grievances to the school administration for action before resorting to violent acts. The study utilised a survey research design. There are 87 boarding secondary schools in Nakuru County. 15 secondary schools were selected using simple random sampling to form the study sample. A survey questionnaire was used in collecting data; it was distributed among 300 secondary school learners. Data analysis involved descriptive statistical technique. The findings revealed that though students' councils have been instituted in schools, there are hindrances towards their successes, such as lack of support from the adults in the school community and the students not being taken seriously. Other hindrances included: suggestions from the students taking too long to be implemented; students are not taken seriously by the school administration; students participation in decision making seen as rebellion and the view that students have insufficient knowledge to deal with certain issues such as finance.

Key Terms: hindrances, student participation, decision making.

How to cite this article in APA.

Tikoko, B.J. (2021). Examining hindrances to Students Participation in Decision Making in Nakuru County, Kenya. *Editon Cons. J. Curr. Educ. Stud.*, 3(1), 325-330. <https://doi.org/10.51317/ecjces.v3i1.217>

Introduction

Huddleston (2007) defines student participation to be the inclusion of student representative bodies such as school prefects and student councils. This term is also used to enclose school life aspects as well as decision making thus, enabling students to informally contribute through individual negotiations as well as formally through purposely created structures. Christie and Potterson (1998) states that the participation of students in decision making is replete with tension and controversy. She claims that for democracy purposes, students constitute a large number of stakeholders, but their inclusion in the decision-making process is problematic. This is due to the argument on how different interest groups views and articulate the participation of students in the decision-making process. Several opponents of student addition in making decision base their affirmations on the viewpoint that students must always take instructions and behave in accordance with instructions. Aukot (2013) adds that the inclusion of students in administration is often viewed as problematic by education stakeholders such as teachers and parents due to the fact that students should be there only to be seen but not to be heard in the matters of conducting and running the school.

Most opponents of student participation in decision making base their arguments on the viewpoint that students must always accept instructions and act in accordance with the instructions they receive from parents and teachers. This view implies that policies must be designed by adults yet students are part of the decision-making body. Magadla (2007) presents another viewpoint that hinders student participation in decision making. This

viewpoint suggests that students can participate in decision making only to a certain degree. It argues that there are matters on which student inclusion is undesirable, such as disciplinary and professional issues.

Similarly, Squelch (1999) argues that being a stakeholder does not mean that one participates in every decision. Some decisions are best when left in the hands of professionals and parents. In agreement, Sithole (1998) is of the opinion that although students have a stake in the governance of their schools, their participation is limited because they are regarded by law as minors, which means that their duties that they cannot perform owing to their status.

The foregoing arguments are aimed at limiting student inclusion in decision making to peripheral issues if not dismissing the issue altogether as of no consequence. Opponents of student participation in decision making are supported by various research findings. Magadla (2007), for instance, found out that problems associated with student participation are insufficient knowledge of students to make contributions concerning issues such as financial issues. That sensitive issues require trust and maturity, which students' lack. The other problem identified is that students seldom make any comments or ask questions due to intimidation in the presence of parents and elders. Huddleston (2007) established that in the Czech Republic, one of the co-factors militating against the participation of students' increment is old school parents and children reluctant to offer students a voice. Aukot (2013) also agrees that though students have a stake in the governance of their schools, they have limited

participation since they are regarded by the law as minors which mean that there are duties they cannot perform due to their status.

Despite the foregoing arguments against student involvement in decision making, Njozela (1998) asserts that parent and teachers are not supposed to underestimate the students' contributions, especially when given a chance to develop their level of maturity and skills. It is, therefore, necessary for this study to investigate the hindrances faced by students and teachers in involving students in decision making, especially since such a study has not been attempted in Nakuru County. The inclusion and recognition of student bodies such as the prefects and the Kenya Secondary School Student Organizations in schools (KSSSC) by the education stakeholders were aimed at having students voices to some extent in matters pertaining to their education (Aukot, 2013).

Calls for the inclusion of students in the decision-making structure in schools have led to the inception of Student Councils in schools in Kenya in 2009. However, their involvement was limited to only a few issues, such as student welfare (Kimame, 2018). Nevertheless, the thesis of this study is that the involvement of students in decision making has encountered a number of obstacles that have hindered the realizations of the benefits of inclusion. These

hindrances have not been investigated, and it is in light of this that this study seeks to find out the hindrances that are faced by students in their involvement in decision making in secondary schools in Kenya.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted a survey research design and was based in Nakuru County, Kenya. The target population of the study was the students of boarding secondary schools in the County. The sampling unit was the school rather than the individual learner or teacher. There are 87 boarding secondary schools in the County. By means of simple random sampling technique, 15 schools were selected to form the study sample. Thereafter, using the same procedure, 300 students (20 from each of schools in the sample) were sampled to respond the questionnaire. Data analysis involved descriptive statistical technique.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study had the objective of investigating the hindrances faced by students in their participation in decision making. To achieve this objective, the respondents were required to respond to a questionnaire in which lists of possible hindrances to student participation in decision making were given. The respondents were supposed to indicate their responses on a 5 point Likert scale. Table 1 presents their responses.

Table 1 Hindrance to Student Participation in Decision Making

Hindrances	SA/A	D/SD	Total
Students have inadequate knowledge to deal with specific issues such as finance	43.2	56.8	100
Students do not have an interest in the daily running of the school	15	85	100
Adults are unwilling to allow students to be involved in decision making	100	0	100
Students views are not taken seriously	86.6	13.4	100
Students are intimidated by the school authority	87	13	100
Student participation is seen as rebellion	84.2	15.8	100
Unreasonable demands by students	57.4	42.6	100
Delay in effecting suggestions by teachers	70.9	29.1	100
Lack of forum to express a view	82.2	19.8	100

The results depicted in Table 1 above depict a high degree of agreement to most hindrances by the students. 43.2 per cent of the students strongly agreed that students have insufficient knowledge to deal with certain issues such as finance, while 56.8 per cent of them disagreed. This confirms Harber and Trafford (1999), who argue that the traditional exclusion of young people from the consultative process and bracketing out their views is founded upon an outdated view which fails to recognize the capacity of students to reflect on issues influencing their lives and education. Mabovula (2009) established that learners are not competent enough to deal with sensitive issues concerning school management since they lack maturity

and should be trained and workshopped. Moreover, respondents felt that learners did not participate meaningfully in the democratic process in their school due to a lack of meaningful participation, improper understanding, and they tend to give vent to their personal problems. The majority of the students (85%) disagreed that students are not interested in the running of the school. This implies that the students have a positive attitude towards their involvement in decision making.

All the students (100%) agreed that adults in their schools were reluctant to allow them to participate in decision making while 86.6% agreed that students' views are not

taken seriously. Those students who are intimidated by school students will learn democracy unaided. This attitude

school authority received 87% agreement by the students while 84% opined that student participation in decision making was seen as a rebellion by the adults. Wyse (2001) agrees that the children's right to participation is perpetuated by views that from interrelated strands. To start with, students are incapable of making informed and reasoned decisions. Secondly, students lack wisdom borne of experience and are prone to making mistakes. This means that student involvement in decision making is not encouraged by adults in the school community, and in point of fact, democracy and free expression is hindered due to fear and intimidation by adults on the students. Mutiki (2014) also agrees that students participation in decision making was hindered by the fact that Most of the time, they were under the control of the administration and when they attempt to exercise power, the members were threatened by the suspension.

Many students (70.9%) reported that student participation in decision making was hindered by delay in effecting suggestions by the teacher, and a further 82.2 per cent decried the lack of forum to express their views regarding their school administration. This delay discouraged student participation in effective decision making and encouraged an apathetic attitude towards participation, yet according to Schweisfurth et al. (2002), educators play a very important role in laying the foundation for democratic citizenship, and that foundation acts as a catalyst for democratic citizenship in adulthood. Tihapi (2009) states that teachers generally take it for granted that secondary

contributes to the impassiveness felt in the students that all they suggest is not taken seriously. In support of this view, Brown (2002) wonders if students can acquire genuinely democratic participation skills in a situation in which, traditionally, their views is not considered, and they cannot make decisions or effect changes on important issues to their daily experience.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In view of the results discussed, the study concludes that student participation in decision making in secondary schools in Kenya faces various hindrances. Notable among them is the low opinion of adults in the school community towards such action. Unwillingness to allow student's room to air their views combined with the lack of quorum or space for students to participate in matters that affect their lives in school were some of the attitudinal challenges established. However it was also concluded that students can hinder their participation if their views were deemed unreasonable by the school administration.

The study therefore recommends thus:

- a) Training sessions and workshops to equip students with adequate skills to enable them to participate in decision making should be provided by school administration.
- b) Legal reforms in the education sector should be made to allow representation of student in the Board of Management of secondary schools. This would allow students' opinions on important matters in the schools.

REFERENCES

- Aukot, T. J. (2014). *Student participation in decision making and its implication in secondary school discipline in Turkana East Sub-county, Turkana County, Kenya*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Nairobi University.
- Brown, K. (2002). *Education for Democracy in an autocratic formal education system: Increasing Student Participation in Schools*. Kogan Page.
- Christie, P., & Potterson, M. (1998). *Final Report: schools development in South Africa to investigate Strategic Intervention for Quality Improvement in South African Schools: Diversity, Identity, and Equality*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books
- Harber, C., & Trafford, B. (1999). *Democratic management and school effectiveness in two countries: A Case of Pupil Participation*.
- Huddleston, T. (2007). *From Student Voice to Shared Responsibility: Effective Practice in Democratic School Governance in European Schools*. London. Citizenship Foundation.
- Kimame, L. (2019). *Influence of Student Councils in Curbing Frequency of Student Unrest in Public Boys' Boarding Secondary Schools in Elgon Sub- County, Kenya*. Unpublished Masters' Thesis. Kabarak University.
- Mabovula, N. (2009). *Giving voice to the voiceless through deliberate democratic school governance: South African Journal of Education (EASA)*. 29, 219-233
- Magadla, M. (2007). *The role of the learner in the school governing body: Perceptions and experiences of Principals, educators, parents and learners*. Unpublished MED Thesis: University of Kwazulu- Natal.
- Njozela, D. (1998). *Teachers' Implicit Mental Models of Learners cognitive and moral Development with reference to the inclusion of learners in the governing bodies of schools*. MED Thesis: University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.
- Schweisfurth, M., Davies L., & Harber, C. (2002). *Learning Democracy and Citizenship: International Experiences*. Oxford (UK): Symposium Books.
- Sithole, S. (1998). *The participation of students in democratic school governance*
- Squelch, J. (1999). *Decentralized school governance in South African Schools in Magdla M. (2007)the role of the learner in the school governing body: Perceptions and experiences of Principals, educators, parents and learners*. Unpublished MED Thesis: University of Kwazulu- Natal.
- Tihapi, T.J. (2006). *Secondary school learner's experience of citizenship in a democratic South Africa*. Unpublished Thesis MED, University of South Africa.
- Wyse, D. (2001). *Felt tip pens and school councils: children's participation rights in four English Schools*. *Children& Society*, 15(4), 209-218