



RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE NATURE OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING IN SECONDARY
SCHOOLS IN KENYA

Tikoko Jeruto Betty*¹, Dr Catherine Kiprop*² and Emily Bomett³

¹Teacher at Kabarak High School and Part Time lecturer at Kabarak University, Nakuru, Kenya

²Lecturer, Department of Education Management and policy Studies, Moi University, Kenya

³Department of Education Management and Policy Studies, Moi University, Eldore

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the nature of student participation in secondary schools in Kenya. The study was prompted by the recurrent student unrest in Kenya; often blamed in media and research to unequal decision making opportunities in schools. The traditional hierarchical authoritarian culture prevailing in the Kenyan society often influences decision making processes in schools hence the locking out of students in decision making. Data was collected by means of a survey questionnaire distributed among 150 secondary school learners and sixty teachers. The findings revealed that though there attempts to include views of students in school policy, such attempts were mainly tokenistic and did not include core management issues. It was also found that students were excluded from key decision making bodies such as the Board of Governors, Parent Teacher Associations and special management committees. In addition, preferred channels of harnessing students' views included notice boards, prefect body, assemblies, and class meetings. Though popular, these means of communication were found to be disproportional and unfair as communication was one way- a form of telling and instructing students - rather than encouraging dialogue and open discussion between student and school administrators. Further, it was found that communication channels that fostered dialogue and open discussion were unpopular and little used. These included the *baraza* system, student council, open forums and student parliaments. It was thus concluded that student participation in secondary schools was still wanting and needed to be expanded to include issues beyond student welfare issues.

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INTRODUCTION

Naidoo (2004) defines participation as the involvement of stakeholders in decision making. Participation is also about the situation of all stakeholders working together and making decisions in pursuit of common interest. Student participation therefore implies the inclusion of students at whatever level of schooling in decision making processes in their institutions. With regard to this study, it refers to student participation in decision making at secondary school level of education. According to Obondoh, (2009) decision-making and policy formation should take into account ingredients of participatory management as: mechanisms for consultations; consensus building; policy options/alternatives; open discussions; delegation and spread of authority; concessions and implementation process. Participatory decision-making is a crucial part of any democratic process in which members of a community dialogue across different viewpoints and manage conflict in order to make the best decisions possible.

In schools, teaching students the skills to make effective decisions can help prepare them as citizens who will participate in democratic society. Some authors (Osler and Starkey 1998, Warren 1998, Avery 1988, Hahn 1998, Gladden 2002, Bickmore 2001) advocate that students should practice problem solving, choice making, conflict resolution and critical reflection, all of which are aspects of participatory decision making in their classrooms. Though the advantages of including students in decision making have been discussed, researched and disseminated in the education sector in Kenya, exclusion of students from decision making still exists in secondary schools. Secondary school governance is characterized by authoritarianism and traditional modes of administration where decision making is vested in the school Principals and Board of Governors (Kindiki, 2009; Kipsoi *et al*, 2009). It has been noted that few head teachers have the capacity to handle the modern generation student and that school management must change (Otieno, 2011). Contributing similar views, Nasibi, (2003) adds that the Kenyan educator must appreciate the fact that in the last two decades there have been noticeable in the Kenyan society vast socio- cultural,

*Corresponding author: talaitikoko@gmail.com

political and economic revolution precipitated by the effect of techno- scientific developments which result from Kenya's increased contact with foreign cultures especially those of the western outlook. These changes call for corresponding changes in school management styles from the traditional bureaucratic to the modern participatory and bottom up techniques (Muluko *et al.*, 2009; Bakhda, 2004; Kiprop, 2009). But are the students involved?

Despite societal changes, secondary school administrators still cling to the outmoded traditional and autocratic administrative styles that give little room for student involvement in decision making. Indeed, according to Rajani (2006) in Kenyan schools there is virtually no space for students to organize or speak about their concerns. As a result of this state of affairs, secondary school students have resorted to violence as a means of getting their views across to their administrators. Previous research that has been undertaken in this area has focused chiefly in establishing the causes of student unrest in secondary schools. Much of that research has established that the lack of communication and dialogue between students and their handlers is squarely to blame for this malady (Kindiki, 2009; Juma, 2008; Otieno, 2011; Nasibi, 2003). However, no research has been undertaken to investigate the nature of student participation in decision making in secondary schools. Such a study would be important in assessing the gaps in secondary school management with a view to finding lasting solutions to student unrest- a perennial problem that has plagued the secondary school sector for decades. In is in this regard therefore that this study was deemed relevant and was thereby undertaken.

Theoretical Justification for Student Participation in Decision Making

Proponents of participation of secondary school learners in decision making tend to fall into three general categories based upon the theoretical perspectives on democratic schooling they lean toward; namely the normative, instrumental and educational theoretical justifications. Normative justifications have their origin in ethical principles or social norms, which may or may not be promoted in legislation. Typically, these are rooted in the idea of children's and human rights –especially Article 12 of the United Nation Declaration of the Rights of the Child on the right to freedom of expression (but also, on occasions, Article 15 on the right to freedom of association and Article 19 and the right to protection from all forms of violence). A quite different kind of normative justification builds on the value of respect. According to this view, allowing students to become more involved in their schools is a way of valuing them as individuals – rather than according them rights as such. Proponents of this view are more likely to conceive of student participation in terms of teacher-led consultation rather than democratic decision-making powers (Rowe, 2003). Instrumental or pragmatic justifications focus on the benefits of student participation to the school as a whole and or to wider society beyond the school. At the school level, student participation has been associated with a range of benefits – including improved discipline, better teacher student relations, less exclusion and more positive attitudes towards school and school learning (Hannam, 2003). It has also been associated with more effective school management and decision-making

(Hallgarten *et al.*, 2004). Additionally, some forms of student participation are said to have the potential to impact positively on decision-making at a regional or national level, e.g., on curriculum or educational policy (Backman and Trafford, 2006). Educational justifications focus on the impact on individual student learning. Student participation has been associated with a range of educational outcomes, including general attainment and aspects of personal development and well-being, such as heightened self-esteem or self-confidence, an increased sense of self-efficacy and personal and collective responsibility. It is also associated with education for democratic citizenship. In fact, student participation in one form or another is often regarded as having a unique and essential contribution to make learning about democracy (Griffin, 1994).

The Nature of Student participation in Decision making

Despite the aforementioned benefits attributed to student participation in decision making, the same is often viewed as problematic to school administrators, parents and society at large. This is often due to the fact that students are viewed as minors, immature and lacking in the expertise and technical knowledge that is needed in the running of a school. Thus student participation in decision making is often confined to issues concerned with student welfare and not in governance issues. Such a stance is informed by the often conflicting viewpoints propagated by differing stakeholders in education depending on their background and world view. Basically there are three viewpoints that guide the nature of student involvement in decision making. The first is that students must remain passive and receive instructions from parents and teachers (Sithole, 1998). This view will mean that policies must be designed by adults and students are to follow them to the letter. In the Kenyan society, secondary school administrators subscribe to this notion owing to the cultural beliefs that often shape attitudes and practices in schools. In the African culture children are not allowed to make decisions with adults and are excluded from the consultative process (Harber & Trafford, 1999). The downside to this principle is that students thereby governed tend to resort to violence due to conflict between them and the authoritarian school structure. Thus this study addresses the gaps that arise from discrepancies between what is and what ought to be in modern day student management. The second viewpoint suggests that students can participate but only to a certain degree (Squelch, 1999; Magadla, 2007). In support of this view, Huddleston (2007) suggests that there is a tendency among some teachers and school leaders to define the issues which affect students quite narrowly. 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, e.g., playgrounds, toilets and lockers. Defining the limits of student participation in this way is however not only likely to give students the impression that the school's commitment is tokenistic and therefore not to be taken seriously, but it also severely limits the possibilities for experiential learning .The notion is 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. In Kenya however, though it is generally accepted that students

are excluded from decision making processes, it has not been established empirically the extent of their exclusion or inclusion in decision making process. The questions that this research therefore aims at addressing therefore are: Are students in secondary schools allowed to participate in key secondary school decision making bodies? What are the attitudes of learners to such inclusion? How are students' views harnessed by school administrators? Are such channels of communication collaborative and participatory?

Statement of the Problem

Over the last few years there have been increased calls for greater inclusion of students in decision making in secondary schools in Kenya owing to the frequent occurrences of student unrests in the sector (Kamuhanda, 2003; Ogot, 2003; Buhere, 2008; Kindiki 2009). Proponents of student participation in decision making have justified their support for this idea on premise that technological and cultural changes in the Kenyan society have given rise to enlightened students. Consequently, there has been a movement away from the tradition- oriented and tradition- bound societal socio cultural values to values that promote criticism of the 'status-quo' and this, more often than not, is at variance with the new values the youth would wish to emulate (Fagbongbe, 2009). Calls for inclusions of students in the decision-making structure in schools have led to various attempts by the Ministry of Education to put in place structures for inclusion. The most prominent of this was the formation of the Kenya Secondary School Student Council (KSSSC) formed in 2009 with a view to making secondary school governance more participatory. In this new arrangement, students would be part and parcel of decision-making to ensure their interests are adopted in the administration of schools. However, the thesis of this paper is that despite this laudable move by the government, not much research has been conducted to find out the nature of student involvement in decision making in secondary schools since the formation of the student councils. It is light of this therefore that this study aims at finding out the nature of student participation in secondary school decision making process with a view to filling the knowledge gap between theory and practice in participatory secondary school management.

Research Questions

The main research question that guided the study was: What is the nature of involvement of secondary school students in decision making? However, the study was guided by the following specific questions:

- i) Are students represented in key decision making organs of secondary school governance in Kenya?
- ii) What perceptions regarding student participation in decision making bodies are held by students and teachers?
- iii) What channels of communication are used by secondary school administrators to include students' views in policy making?

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Koibatek and Mogotio Districts of Baringo County in Kenya. The target population of the

study was all students, teachers and head teachers found in Baringo County. The sampling unit was the school rather than the individual participant. Fifteen schools were sampled from a population of 87 secondary schools. From each school 20 students were sampled using the random sampling technique bringing the sample size to 150 students. Two teachers per school were purposively sampled from each school to participate in the study. Both groups of participants were required to respond to the questionnaire.

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. Best & Khan (2006) define the survey as a method that gathers data from a relatively large number of cases at a particular time. It is a method used in non experimental research such as this in which questionnaires or interviews are used to gather information and the goal is to understand the characteristics of a population (Johnson *et al* 2008). This was fitting to the study as it intended to collect views from the population on student participation in decision making in schools. The study was basically descriptive (describing conditions as they are at a particular time) hence the survey was the appropriate design. The design was also cross-sectional as it involved the collection of data at one point in time from a random sample representing some given population at a time (Jurs, 2005). In the case of this study the sample was composed of teachers and students.

Reliability

To ensure reliability, piloting of the instrument was done in three schools in Nakuru County. 60 questionnaires were distributed among the students and six teachers. 54 questionnaires were returned. The reliability coefficient was calculated using Cronbach coefficient alpha. A reliability coefficient of 0.77 was obtained and was deemed reliable. In addition, experts in the field of education administration were engaged to verify the content validity of the instrument. In view of their suggestions, rectifications were made on the instrument.

Procedure

The questionnaires were distributed in the sampled schools among the 150 students. Arrangements were made with school administration to have the questionnaires collected after an agreed period of one week. An 80% return rate was realized as 120 questionnaires were collected from the students. Loss of questionnaires and respondent absenteeism were to blame for the uncollected questionnaires.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first objective of this study was to establish the nature of student participation in decision making in secondary schools in Kenya. This involved describing the means by which students views and opinions were channeled to the administrative body. It also involved finding out whether students had representation in key decision making bodies in secondary schools namely: the Board of Governors (BOG), the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and staff meetings. Questions were therefore formulated in the questionnaire that sought information from the respondents on the level of

student involvement in these decision making bodies. Table 1 below presents the findings.

Table 1: Student involvement in key decision making organs in secondary school governance (figures in %)

Decision making body	Respondents	Involved	Not involved	Total
BOG	Students	7	93	100
	Teachers	26	74	100
PTA	Students	17	83	100
	Teachers	14	86	100
Staff meetings	Students	4	96	100
	Teachers	29	81	100

According to the findings presented in Table 1 above, 93% of the students declared that they were not involved in meetings with the BOG. Seventy four percent of the teachers gave a similar response. Student involvement in the PTA scored 83% and 86% not involved for students and teachers respectively. With regard to student representation in staff meetings, 96% of the students and 81 % teachers responded that student were not involved. Involvement was understood to mean representation by student leaders in the said decision making bodies in order to present the student views for consideration in the formulation of school policy. This is especially necessary bearing in mind that management of secondary schools have been vested on the boards of governors and all aspects of school administration are under boards of governors (Kipsoi and Sang, 2008). Staff meetings are the forums in which teachers and administrators make resolutions on matters pertaining student welfare, discipline and curriculum implementation. Students being the main players in a school and recipients of final decisions, their input is necessary for the effective running of the school and for minimizing conflict. The absence of student representation in the BOG, PTA and staff meetings implies that students' views are not included in deliberations that will directly affect their studies and welfare. It also means that democratic practice in secondary schools is seriously lacking as students are not given voice in key decision making organs in order to prepare them for democratic citizenship in the future. Hart (1992) notes that students are the least listened to members of society as there is a strong tendency on the part of adults to underestimate the competence of children while at the same time using them in events to influence some cause; the effect is patronizing. In such a case where students are seen and not heard as in their exclusion in decision making bodies, it would seem that students are seen as decoration.

In Hart's (1992) ladder of participation, decoration, the second rung on the ladder, refers, for example, to those frequent occasions when students are the subject of discussion, decisions are made on their behalf but they are not given the chance to articulate their views. Student exclusion in representation and participation in decision making bodies implies the absence of democratic practice that goes against the theory of social justice underpinning this study which calls for equal opportunities to all without discrimination in terms of age. In terms of ensuring the students' views are included in school policy; these low levels of student involvement in decision making organs fails to ensure the full involvement of students in decision making process. The results above reveal overwhelming support for student participation in decision making as a majority of students (90%) and teachers (83%) agreed that students should be included in decision making

bodies. This is in line with recent developments in the secondary school management in Kenya where administrators and students alike have been calling for more involvement of students through representation in BOG and PTA meetings (Mwindi 2010). These perceptions imply that the traditional authoritarian culture is giving way to the modern trends of school management which embrace democracy and give students voice in important decision making bodies such as the BOG. An examination of the reasons given in support of student inclusion in decision making bodies reveal a variety of responses. A common reason given by both groups of respondents was that inclusion of students in decision making bodies would reduce student unrest probably because students' views would have been included in schools policy. When this is done, rebellion to unpopular decision by school administrators would not occur. Fagbogne (2002); Sifuna (2000) advise that constant companion related dialogues with students together with reasonable participation in the running of institutions as the most effective antidote against student unrest. The dialogues would take place in such meetings as BOG, PTA and staff meetings. Other respondents were of the view that if students were included in decision making bodies, a responsible citizenry would be created. This could be because students would have a feel of decision making which demands from the participant a high level of responsibility and accountability. Students would therefore acquire high level discipline and commitment to the decisions they helped shape. Other respondents felt that including students in decision making bodies is important as students are the main players in the system. This reasoning could have been informed by the respondents' knowledge of democratic theory in which majority rule carries the day. In support of this view, Mncube (2008) avers that education worldwide is becoming increasingly accountable to the public and therefore it can be argued that learners should play a role in policy making and implementation as they constitute a major shareholder group. Moreover, such participation encourages democratic culture. Emphasizing the need for the practice of democracy in schools, Carter, Harber and Serf (2003) suggest that some values, such as democracy, tolerance and responsibility, grow only as one experiences them. Therefore schools in Kenya need to practice what they seek to promote. Democracy does not develop by chance, but they result from explicit attempts by educators, and thus schools, to put in place arrangements and opportunities that will bring democracy to life. In terms of this study, these skills, values, and behaviors are obtained through active democratic involvement of all the stakeholders of the school in the decision making organs.

In as much as the study established a high level of agreement for student inclusion in key decision making bodies, it was found that a certain number of respondents discounted the notion. Sixteen percent of the teachers and 10 % of students felt that students should not participate in meeting for the decision making bodies. The reasons advanced for such views centered on the view that students were too young to participate in such meetings which were viewed to be the domain of adults. Another reason advanced was the fact that students were too young to be included and therefore lacked the expertise to discuss technical issues normally done in such decision making bodies. It was therefore felt that students would be going against their purpose for being in school if they indulged themselves in such activities. This finding

reveals the paternalistic view that adults hold towards student participation in decision making organs of the school.

therefore, the data obtained from the respondents was analyzed and presented in Table 3 below:

Table 2: Perceptions to student participation in decision making bodies (BOG, PTA, Staff meetings)by students and teachers; figures in %.

Responses to the nature of student participation	Respondents	A/SA/A	Reasons agreeing	D/SD	Reasons disagreeing	Total
Students should be represented in decision making bodies	Students	90	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduces unrest Students main players Provide adequate solutions to student problems Raise responsible citizens Students to pass views for consideration Improve discipline Decision affects students greatly Create ownership of decisions hence greater cooperation Improved decision making 	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is not the students' duty Students lack experience Unnecessary exercise Students are too young Students have other fora to express views 	100
	Teachers	83		16		

Key:SA/A(strongly Agree/Agree) D/SD (Disagree/Strongly Disagree)

Table 3: Channels of communication between students and administration as perceived by student and teachers (figures in %)

Communication Channels	Respondent	Never	Sometimes	Frequent	Very frequent	ms	Total
Class meetings	Student	9.8	26.2	37.8	26.2	5.8	100
	Teacher	-	17.4	22.7	59.1	4.3	100
Form meetings	Student	30.6	43.3	19.1	7.0	6.0	100
	Teacher	-	23.8	71.4	4.8	-	100
Barazas	Student	55.3	35.2	7.5	1.9	4.8	100
	Teacher	36.4	45.5	18.2	-	4.3	100
Student parliament	Student	79.1	13.9	5.7	1.3	5.4	100
	Teacher	63.6	27.3	9.1	-	4.3	100
School working parties	Student	66.2	19.7	9.6	4.5	6.0	100
	Teacher	60	17	10	-	13	100
Research clubs	Student	50.6	26.9	12.2	10.2	6.6	100
	Teacher	33.3	38.1	19.0	9.5	8.7	100
Prefect body	Student	-	9.0	40.8	39.2	1.4	100
	Teacher	-	14.3	42.9	42.9	8.7	100
Student council	Student	50.3	25.2	16.1	8.4	7.2	100
	Teacher	60.0	35.0	4.0	1.0	-	100
Suggestion box	Student	11.0	9.0	40.8	39.2	1.4	100
	Teacher	-	31.8	40.9	27.3	4.3	100
Notice board	Student	7.5	11.5	50.4	30.6	7.2	100
	Teacher	-	8.7	21.7	69.6	-	100
Assemblies	Student	5	10	49.5	35.5	1.2	100
	Teacher	-	4.5	59.1	36.4	4.3	100

Having established the absence of student representation in key decision making organs of the school, the study further sought to establish the means of communication between school authority and student body. This was done by providing the respondents with a possible list of communication channels that could be in use in school. The list was obtained from popular literature on school administration and also based on the researcher's own experience as an educator. This step was informed by Sifuna's (2000) assertion that many school strikes are not the underlying cause but rather the spark which reflects the deeper feelings of malaise and frustration. He further points out that the essence of the problem is communication. Poor communication between head teacher and students lead to misunderstanding and generated into suspicion and indiscipline. In order to ascertain the levels of communication

Results presented in Table 3 above indicate that the most frequently used channel of communication used in secondary schools were class meetings and prefect body. Both groups of respondents were of this view. Reports from the students indicated that 37.8% of them felt that class meetings were frequent, 26.2% very frequent. They also reported 40.8% frequent, 39.2% very frequent for the prefect body. Teachers were of a similar view with 22.7 % reporting that they were frequent and 59.1% very frequent. Majority of the students (40.8% frequent, 39.2 very frequent) supported the view that prefect body was most frequently used channel of communication. Similarly, majority of teachers (42.9% frequent, 42.9 % very frequent) reported a similar view. These views seem to suggest the most popular channels of communication used in the schools is the prefect system. This implies that democratic culture is not being developed in schools due to the fact that the prefect system is colonial and

has a servant-master mentality (Gitonga 1987). It has also been known to uphold the traditional authoritarian belief

38.1% sometimes used) of the students and teachers respectively observing that they were infrequently used.

Table 4. Responses on aspects of student participation in decision making (students and teachers' views- figures in %)

Responses on the nature of student participation in decision making	Responses	Strongly agree/ agree/Agree	Disagree/ strongly disagree	Total
Channels in place ensure that student views are included in school policy	Students	52	48	100
	Teachers	95.5	4.5	100
All students have a chance to give their views to the school authority	Students	30	70	100
	Teachers	100	-	100

system in which students are seen and not heard (Fagbongbe, 2009). Similarly, Juma (2008) has blamed the misunderstandings between students and their teachers to bias as prefects support the administration. Moreover prefects are usually handpicked by teachers and not elected by students, a fact that contravenes the democratic practice. Sifuna (2000) has criticised the prefect system for encouraging blind obedience to school authority. He adds that this needs to be changed because it creates unidirectional flow of orders and communication and provides no corresponding channels for the student to communicate with their teachers and the school administrators.

Notice boards and suggestion boxes are also used frequently with the majority of students (50.4% frequent, 30.6% very frequent) of students and teachers (21.7% frequent, 69.6% very frequent) confirming their frequency. Despite their popularity these channels of communication have inherent disadvantages in so far as democracy is concerned. According to Kindiki (2008) notice boards are not effective in enhancing democratic school culture because communication is one way and does not take feedback from students. Students are thus given directives without being given a chance to negotiate, question or seek clarification on issues addressed. Moreover their effectiveness is in question because they can go unnoticed or be ignored by mischievous students. Similarly, suggestion boxes, though being a popular channel of communications in the schools due to the fact that it assures students of anonymity and protection from victimization, goes against democratic ethos by its very nature. There is lack of dialogue, negotiation and face to face interaction in which democracy thrives. It also thrives on secrecy which is undemocratic because democracy encourages dialogue and openness. This lack of dialogue gave students no opportunity to develop an argument or gain an understanding of why a particular issue was important for their learning (Veale, 2005). Moreover, suggestion boxes can be abused by malicious students who can use it to make wrongful allegations against the staff because they are assured of anonymity.

The most infrequently used channel of communication was student parliament. This is clearly indicated by the responses whereby a great majority 93% of the students (79.1% never used, 13.9 % sometimes used) pointed to their infrequent use. Teachers also gave a similar opinion (63.6% never used, 27.3% sometimes used). Moreover, research clubs received a similar observation with a majority of respondents (50.6% never, 26.9% sometimes used and 33.3 % never used,

Similarly, a great majority of the respondents felt that student councils were hardly used. Students reported to the lack of usage of student councils (50.6 % never used, 26.9% sometimes used). Teachers reported a similar view with 60.6 % reporting that they were never used and 35.0 % reporting that they were sometimes used. The high percentage of respondents reporting on their irregular use of student parliament, student council and research clubs could be an indicator of their absence in the schools yet these channels of communications have the potential of presenting the students with a chance to practice democracy in its truest sense. School councils for instance are seen as a driver of democratic schools. In the push for the democratization of schools student councils are seen as a barometer of progress (Baginsky and Hannam, 1999; Rudduck *et al*, 1996) and often presented as a panacea for many of the criticisms of an over-prescriptive and hierarchical schooling system (Rowe 2003; Muindi,2010). Student councils serve as a concrete example of democracy (Inman and Burke, 2002; Baginsky and Hannam, 1999; Rowe, 2003). Their absence in schools in Kenya therefore implies a lack of democratic practice needed in schools in order to avert student unrest. The councils promote democracy by marshalling a participatory approach to school management by directly involving the learners thus serving as the bridge between students and school authority. Further, in true democratic spirit, the student leaders in the council are elected by students and are allowed to sit in administrative meetings where they are given opportunity to air their views. This ensures that no decision is made in schools without the consent of the student leaders. A majority of students (89%: 55.3 %N, 35.2S) responded that *baraza* were infrequent in their schools. A large percentage of teachers (82.9%: 36.4% N, 45.5% S) concurred. Yet, according to Griffin (1994), the *baraza* system is a democratic way of including students view in decision making where the students and the staff meet every week and discuss matters that concern them. The students point out the problems that they are experiencing and whether or not they are happy with the administration. Anybody is free to ask any question provided that he does so in a polite way using parliamentary language. No one can victimize anyone who criticized them in *baraza*. Matters discussed in *baraza* are taken with great seriousness and the school administrator may be forced to give answers if anything agreed on in *baraza* is not implemented. The *baraza* gives student the opportunity to express themselves while at the same time eliminating the gap between the students and the administration. It therefore ensures order in the school and more importantly, allows students a chance to give views openly to the school

administration. To sum up the findings, respondents were required to give their opinion on whether the channels of communication outlined in Table 4 above ensured that students' views were included in school policy. Opinion was divided on this issue as 52% of the students believed that they did while 48% reported that they did not. In contrast, majority of the teachers (95%) felt that the communication channels were adequate in ensuring students' views were included in school policy. This implies that whereas schools had in place mechanism of communication, their efficacy was in doubt as far as students were concerned. Teachers however were of the opposite view probably because they believe that students were asking too much of the administration. Their attitude could be informed by the traditional authoritarian mentality that believes that students should be seen and not heard. Teachers could also be guarding their authority believing that there are limits to student involvement in decision making.

Conclusion

The first objective of the study was to establish the levels of student involvement in key school governing bodies. Such included the BOG, Staff meeting and the PTA. Involvement was taken to mean representation by student representatives in the said bodies. From analysis of quantitative data, the findings indicate a complete lack of student representation in the governance bodies. The Education Act (2003) does not give provision for the inclusion of students in key decision making bodies such as the BOG nor the PTA. These decision making bodies are left to the administrators and parents who make decisions on behalf of the students. The decision to involve students is thus left to the discretion of individual administrators who in most cases believe that students should only be allowed to participate in specific tasks such as cleanliness and setting achievement targets and not in core administrative and curriculum matters. The study found out that the most frequent means of student participation in decision making were class meetings, prefect body, suggestion boxes, assemblies and notice boards. These were the means of communication through which the administration obtained the views of the students and considered them for inclusion when making school policy. However, important channels of communication that foster discussion and open dialogue in schools were infrequently utilized. These included *barazas*, school working parties, research clubs and student councils. According to related literature, these were the most promising in terms of fostering democratic culture among student due to the fact they encouraged dialogue, enhanced teamwork and independent thought.

Recommendations

It was found out that students were not represented by fellow pupils in important decision making organs of the school. These included the BOG and PTA. The reason put forward by this exclusion is that the Education Act does not provide for such inclusion. The Ministry of Education should therefore amend the Education Act to allow student representation who should voice the concerns of the student community. As a result of this, students will be given a chance to practice democratic skills of representation. Their views will also be included in making school policy, hence demystifying the roles of these decision making organs as forums where adults make decisions on behalf of the students. Social justice will

therefore be achieved. There is need also to sensitize students that as citizens in waiting, they needed to influence policy on important issues. Such concerns include teaching methods, choice of school texts and nature of assignments. In addition the students' contribution on administrative matters should be welcomed. These include school budgeting, physical planning of the school, school rule formulation and student discipline. They should be allowed to sit in committees that deliberate on every aspects of school life in order for them to learn values of total inclusion, participation and empowerment; all of which are core elements of democratic culture.

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