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Factors Establishing Student Council Involvement in Decision Making in Guidance and Counselling Programmes in Public Secondary Schools in Kwale County, Kenya

By

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to find out student council involvement in decision making in public secondary school programmes of Kwale County, Kenya. The study investigated how the student council members are involved in management and decision making of key school programs to fill the knowledge gap between theory and practice. This study was of a descriptive research design. The target population was a total of 924 executive student council members in the 77 public secondary schools of Kwale County while the sample size was 147 respondents. Purposive sampling was employed because of the small size of population and the need to study its characteristics intensively. Student council members from 21 schools were selected on the basis that, representation of boys and girls in the student council was not uniform but was a factor of intervening variables such as student leadership abilities, school culture and school administration attitudes. The data collection tool was a close-ended questionnaire based on five point Likert scale. Data analysis was done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences and MS Excel spreadsheet software. The results were presented in frequency tables and percentage. Study revealed that the highest proportion of the student council members perceived non-involvement in administrative programs. Extreme financial budgeting, construction of physical facilities and employment of school workers whereby students mainly perceived they are never involved. Further, the study established that majority of the student council members suggested lack of adequate involvement in academic programs decision making by the students. To a large extent, the study indicated that students perceived non-involvement in deciding guidance and counseling programs. Also, the study established inadequate involvement in co-curricular decisions by the student councils. This is acute in games clinics, determination of training time and also in writing and directing of plays and songs. Study findings showed that student councils members were not adequately involved in administrative, academic, co-curricular and guidance and counseling programs decision making. In all cases there was however a notable indication that the student council is somehow involved in all the four program areas being investigated. The school administrators therefore need to involve student leadership in all the four key areas of the study in promoting achievement of school goals. Further research needs to be done on how non-involvement of the student council in decision making impacts on cohesion and the general school climate. In conclusion, student council perception of involvement in school programs decision making was below average.

Key words: Kenya, Student Councils, Guidance and Counselling, Public Secondary Schools, Kwale County

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Introduction and Background to the Study

The United Nation Convention on the rights of the child in Part 1 Article 3 (1) states that in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration (Hammarberg, 1990). The child in particular shall be expected to have the opportunity to be heard in any administrative proceedings whether directly or through a representative. This would create more space to engage students in implementing crucial decisions affecting them. Student's council has been established in the administration and control of school in Tanzania for some time now, while in Kenya it is only efficient in some schools (Ndung'u & Kwasira, 2015). This means that productive and relevant participation of students is important for effective service delivery and thus quality education.

The need to involve students in making decisions has evolved into student councils where they have been voicing their opinion in deciding the leaders who give an effective link with school administrators for purposes of dialogue and ensuring smooth service delivery by complementing the school management system (Mutua, 2014). The objectives and goals of the secondary school system can be attained by systematic, productive and inclusive management especially in its decision making processes (Akpan & Archibong, 2012).

Previously it has been established that student councils are able to present their views to the school management and thereby get feedback, although such involvement being limited to some aspects rather than all areas of management (Anjichi, 2016). This may also depend on the administrative experience of the principal as the more the years of principal administrative experience, the more they seem to not only involve the student council but also motivate it towards positive management.

However, although student council leadership has been instrumental in terms of roles performed, such role and those of administrators including the teaching staff has been a source of contradictions hence requiring an analysis on the level of student council member's engagement in the process of making decisions in school programs (Jared & Thinguri, 2017). Research indicates that a lack of school managers to adequately include students in determining their leaders is a recipe for unrests and unruly behavior in schools in Kenya (Mwangi, 2006; Mulwa, 2004). It has been noted that although students form a substantial proportion of the stakeholders, their inclusion in decision making is superficial due to perceptions from various groups that they are neither professionals nor mature enough to perform administrative roles (Kiprop, Tikoko & Kanyiri, 2012).

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In addition, some students view the student council as a mechanism for the managers to extinguish their voice and stifle their involvement in the governing of the institutions (Indimuli, 2012). There had been cases where student councils have become so powerful to the extent of making an attempt to overthrow school authorities, yet the gap between the actual and desired rate of student engagement in the process of making decision in school programs holds the key to successful achievement of a school's goals and objectives (Kimosop, Mulwa & Kasivu, 2015). This study intended to find out the extent of student councilmembers involvement indecision making in school programs of public secondary schools in Kwale County, Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

Students' participation in decision making has partly been explored by secondary schools yet the concept of participatory decision making permeates virtually all facets of our life today. Chemutai and Chumba (2014) in a survey of public secondary schools determined the level at which student councils were involved the process of making decision within Kericho West Sub County. It was found out that student councils left out in the making of decision in key areas of the school management. Despite the existence of Student councils, adequate students' participation is still lacking as the Basic Education Act (Republic of Kenya, 2013) provides for a lone student representative in the Student council as an ex-officio member of the Board of Management, the key entity in making decisions. However, students' involvement in the administration of schools is crucial since most decisions made in the school affect them in one way or another.

In the education system, secondary schools are considered to hold a key position. They provide to the youth much needed functional education that prepares them for successful and important entry into the society as well as for pursuing higher learning. In 2009, the Kenya Secondary School Student Council (KSSSC) was founded by the Kenyan government through the Ministry of education. This was done to transform the governance of secondary schools to take up a more participatory approach. Notwithstanding, the governments commendable gesture, more studies are needed to establish how far or the level at which students are engaged in the process of making decisions within secondary school since student councils were formed.

Misoloh (2011) conducted research on effects of involving administration on academic accomplishments of learners within public secondary school in the Kenyan District of Rarieda. The study recommended that teachers, learners, and guardians should be actively engaged in the daily activities of the institution for them to productively take part in increasing the academic heights of the institution. Kibet (2014) did an investigation within secondary school in Kaloleni Sub-County, Kilifi County in coastal Kenya. The study sought to establish the degree of student engagement in making decision in those institutions. The overall problem is that continuous conflicts between the school managers and the students have not been well understood in Kenyan schools.

A study that investigated the engagement of students councils in the process of making decisions within public schools in the Kenyan Sub-county of Kericho, realized notwithstanding the democracy of the 21st century, administrators of schools have retained all the powers as they

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manage the school and students have been left without a say in it all (Chemutai & Chumba, 2014). This necessitates similar studies determine the level at which students engage in the process of making decisions in secondary school in other Sub-Counties with an aim of addressing the identified knowledge gap between the theory and the actual practice in regards to participation in secondary school administration. It is against this backdrop that investigation on the level of student involvement in making decisions in public secondary schools in Kwale County, Kenya is important.

Increased engagement of students in management and the undertaking of making decisions in Kenyan secondary schools has been advocated since the establishment of student council system in 2008 especially to deal with the frequent occurrence of strikes in school has disrupted the education sector (Anjichi, 2016). However, such attempts to involve student views in school policy needs to be revisited in regards to involvement making key decisions for school program areas of administration, academic guidance and counseling, co-curricular and student welfare (Jeruto & Kiprop, 2011), hence the study sought to address the gap. This necessitated study to determine the degree to which student council participate in making decisions within programs in public secondary schools in Kwale County of Kenya with an aim of addressing the identified knowledge gap between the relevant hypothesis and the actual practice of participation in the secondary school administration.

Objective of the Study

- i. To establish student council involvement in decision making in guidance and counseling programmes in public secondary schools in Kwale County.

Literature review

Student Council decision making in Guidance and Counseling programmes

Including the participation of students in teaching, curriculum and learning techniques is often viewed as one of areas that is explored the least. It's pointed out by Bannan (2003) that the curriculum of the school and the criteria for evaluating it is usually advised in-depth by regional bodies or governments, evidently with little room left for engaging students and teachers. Nevertheless, the truth is, the curriculum as consumed in the classroom and the techniques of learning as utilized introduces various chances for student's engagement –be it marking and methods of evaluation or any other form of projects or assignments within the school. This equally relates to a student deciding on topics of discussion in class or even councils in school. The most productive school councils don't prohibit the debate of anything, aside from confidential and personal matters. If from the onset the council experiences rigidity, no enthusiasm will be developed by the students for them.

A school curriculum is an idea. It has to be expressed in documents for it to be easily communicated. These documents are the curriculum guides including syllabi, schemes of work, teaching guides, the circulars from the quality assurance and standard department of MOE, exam regulations issued by KNEC among others. Other documents in Kenya include legal provisions in education, such as Education Act, KNEC Act and University Act as well as educational

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reports, such as Ominde Report, Gachathi Report among others. Also included in the case of Kenya are such documents as the school equipment order book and other recommended order books, and even past examination papers and administrative circulars from MOE. There is need to ensure articulation among the documents produced so that it is easy to know the curricula the schools are supposed to be following. Assessment that curricular as intended are always different from curriculum as implemented. This difference has been pointed out by several curriculum workers is nearly always very wide and disturbing. Thus to know what the schools are actually doing, one has to visit physically (Oluoch, 2006).

Curriculum Development and Implementation begins with the conception and formulation of a curriculum development project through try-out stage. In curriculum development, many people in authority, teachers and parents including the students have to be persuaded about the new curriculum for it to be implemented since their acceptance is crucial. Curriculum development and hence curriculum implementation is a team effort, involving all curricular workers within the jurisdiction of the project from the headquarters authorities and staff, through to the field officers to the principal and the teachers and the students. It is important therefore that curriculum development project leaders work out strategies and machinery that would make persuasion successful (Oluoch, 2006).

Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (2008) reported that all activities and subjects are included in the curriculum by the school and may also comprise of the period allocated for each activity and subject. According to Oluoch (2006), school curriculum is equated to the aggregate syllabi offered in a school which contains the formal course of study followed in a school. It refers to the deliberately planned activities to encompass the following elements; curriculum objectives, learning activities in which desired learning will be expected to take place and student assessment.

While Vroom and Yetton (1973) model originated from situational decision making background, Hoy and Tarter (2007) improved it to a simplified yet comprehensive normative theory of shared decision making that synchronizes with Vroom and Yetton (1973). It suggested conditions under which subordinates would be included in making decisions, regularity, essence, reason and system of inclusion. For instance in curriculum challenges, where the curriculum is typically made by the department, teachers may be intent that the program is received well by the students but the principal does not agree with the direction the teachers are taking yet they are the professionals. The principal must work with the teachers first to achieve consensus and then help reach a majority decision. The students' council in this case is left out of the decision making process. This shows a gap thus necessitating the study.

Theoretical Framework

Normative Model of Leadership and Situational Decision Making

Situational attributes are needed by normative theories. Each situation requires demands tailor made actions. A situation that requires a particular style of leadership to be effective might demonstrate utterly unsuccessful in a separate situation. Also, Vroom and Jago (1988) and Vroom and Yetton (1973) in carrying out a study on normative model, attempted to discern how

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a leaders behavior is affected by different situations. These studies established that overall, the participation levels are different among people. About 30 years ago, it was noted by Vroom and Yetton (1973) that it is sensible to discuss about participative conditions compared to autocratic ones unlike participative leaders compared to autocratic ones (whilst the two kind of differences exist). What is of great intrigue is the response of manager in certain types of conditions (Vroom & Yetton, 1973; Vroom & Jago, 1988). A number of these absolute rules of decisions are circulated widely between managers (i.e. being further participative when juniors have cognition and competence in the area of challenge or decision than in conditions where they are not).

Research design

The study adopted a descriptive research design which basically presents the current state of affairs.

Results and discussion

Level of Student Involvement in Guidance and Counseling Programmes

The third objective of this study was about establishing student council involvement in decision making in guidance and counseling programmes in secondary schools of Kwale County. Guidance and counseling secretaries were expected to respond to the ten questions formulated in the questionnaire relating to the guidance and counseling functions. Table 1 presents the

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Table1: Student Councils Involvement in Guidance & Counseling Programmes

Guidance & Counselling Programmes	Never	Hardly	Sometimes	Frequently	Always	Total
I am involved in peer counselling programmes.	32.7	25.2	24.5	10.2	7.4	100.0
The school makes sure that I am involved in group counselling programmes.	38.8	21.7	15.0	8.2	16.3	100.0
I am involved in preparation of guidance and counselling schedules every term.	34.0	17.7	15.0	20.4	12.9	100.0
The guidance and counselling department equips me with problem solving skills.	53.7	27.2	3.4	0.0	15.7	100.0
I am guided in career paths/courses to pursue after school.	10.9	41.5	23.8	10.2	13.6	100.0
I channel problems with school administration through the guidance department.	55.1	12.9	13.6	14.3	4.1	100.0
I am involved in identifying students with problems.	22.5	29.9	30.6	5.4	11.6	100.0
I am trained to guide and counsel fellow students.	8.2	21.1	43.5	23.1	4.1	100.0
I am involved in identifying guidance and counselling materials.	35.3	23.8	21.8	14.3	4.8	100.0
I am involved in determining teacher counsellors.	49.7	25.2	6.1	12.2	6.8	100.0
Average	34.1	24.6	19.7	11.8	9.7	

Source: Field Data, 2018

Findings in Table 1 highlighted that 32.7% and 25.2% of the student councils showed that students were never or hardly involved in peer counseling programmes respectively as compared to 10.2% and 7.4% who said they were frequently or always involved respectively. On whether students were involved in group counseling programmes, 38.8% and 21.7% of the students councils stated that they were never or hardly involved in that order as compared to 8.2% and

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16.3% who indicated that they were frequently or always involved in that order. As per whether students were involved in preparation of guidance and counseling schedules every term, 34% and 17.7% of the students councils stated that they were never or hardly involved respectively while 20.4% and 12.9% showed that they were either frequently or always involved in that order. On regards guidance and counseling department equipping the students with problem solving skills, 53.7% and 27.2% of the student councils said that they were never or hardly involved comparing to 15.7% who stated that they were always involved. Pertaining guiding students in career paths or courses after school, most of the student councils 41.5% said they were hardly involved comparing to 13.6% who stated that they were always involved.

The study also found out that 55.1% of the student councils never channeled their problems through the guidance department as compared to 14.3% who indicated that they frequently channeled their problems through the guidance department. On whether students were involved in identifying students with problems, 22.5% and 29.9% of the student councils were never or hardly involved in that order as compared to 5.4% and 11.6% who said they were either frequently or always involved respectively. Also, the study found out that majority 43.5% of the student councils stated that they were sometimes trained to guide and counsel fellow students as compared to 29.3% and 27.2% who showed that they were not trained or trained respectively. On whether students were involved in determining teacher counselors, the study found that majority 49.7% of the student councils were never involved comparing to 12.2% and 6.8% who said they were either frequently or always involved. On average, the findings showed that majority 34.1% of the student councils were never involved in guidance and counseling programmes and those who cited that they were hardly involved were 24.6% giving a total of 58.7%. Only 19.7% indicated that they were sometimes involved. However, those who perceived adequate involvement added up to 21.5% which comprises 9.7% always involved and 11.8% who alluded to frequent involvement. It means student council members generally perceived less involvement in guidance and counseling programmes.

Abubakar (2013) noted that student involvement in guidance activities is usually low and that counselors should improve the methods of providing guidance and counseling in order to encourage student participation. It also concurs with observations by Rutttoh (2015) that since guidance and counseling activities are not usually done as scheduled in schools, therefore their integration and monitoring should be enhanced.

Summary

The study findings indicated that the student council appeared largely sidelined in deciding most of the elements in guidance and counseling programmes except when channeling problems to the school administration through the department and also when determining their teacher counselor. They were also somehow recognized when they were trained to guide and counsel fellow students. To a large extent, students perceived non-involvement in deciding guidance and counseling programmes.

The study indicated that most of the student council members perceived inadequate involvement in co-curricular decisions. This is acute in those who perceive non-involvement in

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games clinics, determination of training time and also in writing and directing of plays and songs is challenging.

Conclusion

Student council involvement in decision making in school programmes in public secondary schools in Kwale County is inadequate since it was established that the student councilmembers had generally a perception that the level of involvement in administration, academic, co-curricular and guidance and counseling was below their expectations. In the context of this study, Inuwaand Yusof (2012) suggested that involvement of students in decision making is critical to promote progress towards desired goals as noted in the literature review.

The student's council played a central role in enhancing discipline in the school System through its capacity to organize activities to make students productive and Democratic, thus resolve conflicts amicably and promote a child friendly Environment necessary for academic excellence. The school administration was key to the successful operation of the students 'council by exposing it to capacity building programs. Moreover, the school administration does not nutured leadership skills of the students' council, thus not promoting its operation for the good of all school stakeholders.

Since the inception of student's council leadership model in public secondary schools, ugly incidences which could foment conflict, strikes, demonstration, and wanton destruction of school property and lose of student lives have declined significantly. Moreover, a peaceful co-existence of all school stakeholders and a child friendly environment necessary for academic excellence has been witnessed in most schools.

Recommendations

Student council members indicated the need of more involvement in issues regarding school uniform design as they were of the opinion that they were ignored in decision making on this attribute of their welfare. In addition, the determination of the meals on their menu needs their input peradventure it would enhance their sense of belonging and therefore improvement of the school's general climate and cohesion. The school administration has an opportunity to engage students through in general administrative roles beyond issues pertaining to discipline in order to stimulate adherence to school routine and therefore promote discipline. Finally, in co-curricular activities, students need their voice to be heard in hiring of the coaches and the timing of practice or training as these areas appear inadequately addressed.

Suggestions for Further Research

Further studies need to be done on how to involve students in curriculum implementation especially in connection to issues of timetabling, setting, marking and grading of examinations. There is an apparent detachment from decisions made in the past and this may be having impact on general school climate and cohesion thus affecting achievement of the broad goals of education. In addition, it is necessary to establish the students' sense of belonging in schools as it may have relationship with indiscipline and performance since negative attitudes may be a result

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of ignoring the type of input students may have when implementing decisions in such situations as purchase of text and subject books, choice of coaches of co-curricular activities among other indicators. Finally, the training of principals on participatory decision making should be encouraged in order for school managers to acquire knowledge on channels of communication that students can use to provide feedback since power relations between adults and children are the main hindrances to student involvement in decision making. The knowledge gap on such channels of communication needs to be explored further as suggested by the Normative Model of Leadership (Vroom & Jago, 1988).

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