

EXTENT OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN MANAGEMENT OF SCHOOL FINANCES AND PHYSICAL RESOURCES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN THARAKA-NITHI AND NAIROBI COUNTIES, KENYA

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Abstract

The recurrent student indiscipline in form of unrrests in secondary schools and their incessant desire to destroy school property probably reflects the feeling of alienation rather than of ownership of the schools they attend. By striking and destroying property, the students may be expressing their demands for involvement in the running of the schools. The objective of the study was to determine the extent to which students participate in management of school finances and physical resources in secondary schools. The study employed mixed method design, specifically triangulation method. The study targeted 214 public secondary schools, 214 head teachers, 2433 teachers, 81582 students and 13 Sub-county Directors of Education (SCDE) in Tharaka-Nithi and Nairobi Counties. Stratified random sampling, simple random sampling and purposive sampling were used in drawing the samples. The Krejcie and Morgan's table for determining large sample size was used to determine the sample size of students. The sample consisted of 38 secondary schools, 38 head teachers, 293 teachers, 753 students, 72 student leaders and 3 SCDE. Data collection instruments included questionnaires, interview guides and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide. Content validity was determined by seeking expert judgement from educational management. The instruments were submitted to experts iteratively for consideration and their suggestions on different items and sections used to refine them and increase validity. Cronbach's alpha was used to establish the reliability of the instruments. Cronbach's alpha was 0.923 for head teachers and teachers' questionnaire and 0.900 for students' questionnaire, which indicated a high level of internal consistency. The closer the alpha is to one (1), the higher the level of consistency. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Qualitative data was organized into themes and presented using descriptions and quotations. The study found that the extent of student participation in decisions relating to school budgets, school fees and planning and development of physical facilities were of low levels indicating reluctance by the school administration to involve students in the critical decision-making areas in secondary school management. The study therefore recommends that the Ministry of Education should provide a policy on student representation in the Parents' Associations, staff meetings and any other important committees in schools so that they can participate in decisions made there.

Key Words: Student Participation, Management, School finances, Physical Resources, Secondary School.

I.Introduction

According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), four core principles should guide the implementation of the right to education. These include non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to life, survival and development of the child to the maximum extent possible, and the right of children to express their views in all matters affecting them and for their views to be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity (United Nations, 1989). Accordingly then, children need to be effectively involved in their own learning. It is also important that education is designed to promote and respect their rights and needs. They should participate actively in shaping their own lives and learning in schools they attend. The right to education ought to be understood in terms of universality, participation, respect and inclusion. The aspect of participation involves children having greater influence on what happens to their lives. They should be given opportunities to participate fully in decisions affecting them in all spheres of life. This study argues that in

Kenya and perhaps many other countries, the aspects of participation, respect and inclusion have not been fully established in secondary schools, hence the prevailing indiscipline among students in many schools. It is rife with suspicion and mistrust between the teachers and head teachers on the one hand and students on the other.

A commendable progress has been made at all levels in the development of policies and regulation that promote the implementation of Article 12 of the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (Lansdown, 2001; United Nations, 2009). Most countries that are signatories to the UNCRC have made statutory provisions for children to participate in decision-making and some have developed structures that represent the views of students at various levels (United Nations, 2009). These include countries in Europe (Hannam, 1998) such as Norway, France (Carr, 2005), Sweden, United Kingdom and Northern Ireland (Alderson, 2000), Finland (Shatilova, 2014) where schools establish Student Councils through which students voice their views on matters that affect them. Closer home in South Africa, it is a requirement of the law that every public school should establish a governing body which should include learners' representatives from the eighth grade or higher. It makes provision for a representative Council of learners in each ordinary public school that offers instruction in the eighth grade or higher (Carr, 2005; Mabovula, 2009). This arrangement, however, presumes that the children of lower grades do not need to be heard or even be represented in the student governments.

Students are represented through democratically elected school boards that include teachers and parents. The school boards deal with discipline, finances, budgets, school fees, staff appointments, and use of school facilities. It is noted that Tanzania was one of the first African countries to provide for student participation in decision-making in the schools through representation in decision-making committees. The schools have Councils whose membership and functions are specified in the National Policy on School Councils (Carr, 2005). Student Council is therefore viewed as a vehicle through which students participate in decision-making at school. Prior to the new constitution 2010, all Kenyan public secondary schools were managed by Board of governors (BOGs) appointed by the minister for Education (Mutuku, 2011; Republic of Kenya, 1980). The BOGs had members drawn from various stakeholders but none from among the students. The Parent Teachers Association (PTA) is another body that participated in the management of the secondary schools but which had no student representative either. Thus, students remained unrepresented in the main decision-making bodies in schools. The student leadership was through the prefect system which was widely used in many schools as a control tool for teachers and administrations rather than a student representative body.

The governance of schools without structures that provide for student participation in decision making has seen secondary school educators in Kenya contend with student indiscipline for a long period of time (Charles, 1996; Njoroge & Nyabuto, 2014). It is manifested in different forms such as boycotting of classes, sneaking from school, failing to do cleaning duties and assignments, absenteeism, fighting, theft, drug and substance abuse, violent unrests, riots, strikes among others (Gikungu & Karanja, 2014; Ndaita, 2016; Republic of Kenya, 2011b). Unrests are the most noticeable form of indiscipline because in most cases they culminate in the destruction of property, disruption of school curricula, tension amongst students, anxiety and panic among different stakeholders, rape and injuries, and sometimes loss of life. Student unrest in Kenya is an old problem that has refused to go

away since the beginning of 20th century when the first case was reported in Maseno high school (Republic of Kenya, 2001b). It has been increasing in frequency and intensity with time.

The Ministry of Education further made student participation in the management of the schools they attend a legal requirement. Chapter 8 of Sessional Paper No.14 of 2012 lists several challenges that were facing the governance of the education sector and provides three policies to address the same. In section 8.11 the paper outlines several strategies that the government was to employ in order to implement the three policies listed in sub-section 8.10. Of relevance to this study is number (xiii) of subsection 8.11 which required the government to establish and strengthen Student Councils for educational and training institutions with effective representation (Republic of Kenya, 2012). Additionally, the Basic Education Act of 2013 Provides for student participation in management of school through Student Council representatives in the Boards of Management (BOM) (Republic of Kenya, 2013). In view of the foregoing it was of interest to carry out a systematic study to determine the extent to which student participate in decision making in secondary school management.

II. Research Objective

To determine the extent to which students participate in management of school finances and physical resources in secondary schools.

III. Research Question

What is the extent of student participation in management of school finances and physical resources in secondary schools?

IV. Literature Review

The Concept of Student Participation

Student participation in decision-making involves creating opportunities for children and young people to increase their influence over what happens to them and around them. It refers to the tasks of student representative bodies such as the school councils, student councils, student governments and the prefect bodies. It must involve participation of students in collective decision-making at school or class level and requires a dialogue between students and other decision-makers and not just consultation or a survey among students (Harber, 1995; Mager & Nowak, 2010). It is also referred to as pupils voice (Whitty & Wisby, 2007).

Genuine student participation in relevant aspects of the decision-making processes at school addresses the issue of democracy which implies the controversial process of challenging the current power imbalances in schools (Simovska, 2004). This will create what Haber, (1995) refers to as democratic schools and requires that they should shift the power and authority away from staff to students in terms of decisions concerning the running of the school and what is learned in the classroom. In participative decision-making, all members of the organization have the right to be heard, to express their views; feelings and offer knowledge and information (Owen & Valesky, 2011). Schools are organizations where students happen to be the main clients along with their parents, sponsors and guardians. As such, it is imperative that they participate in arriving at decisions taken in the school.

Student Participation in Management of the School Finances and Physical Resources

Allowing students to sit in Boards of Management (BOM) and Parents' Association (PA) meetings afford them the opportunity to participate in making decisions relating to school budgets, school fees and planning and development of physical resources among others. The literature indicates that there are countries that provide for student participation in budget decisions through student representation in governing bodies. For instance in South Africa, student participate in deciding the budget allocation for the students councils, fees paid by the parents with more than one student in the school, fund raising for council activities and bursary fund for students for post-secondary education among other things (Carr, 2005). This indicates that the student involvement in management of the school finances is a valuable thing and every school should afford the students the opportunity to participate. Walker and Logan, (2008) argue that student governors can influence policy and also inspire other learners to take part.

In Kenya, the Basic Education Act of 2013 requires that students in secondary schools be represented in BOM meetings. Tikoko, Kiprop & Bomett (2011) found out that students were not represented in BOGs, PTA and major decision-making committees in secondary schools. This means that students were therefore not involved in decisions relating to school budgets, school fees and planning and development of the physical resources, although by the time of of Tikoko et al (2011) study; the Basic Education Act of 2013 had not been enacted and therefore there was no law requiring students to be represented in school management bodies. Njue, (2014) had similar findings that students were not involved in making decisions on school budget and school fees. This confirms what had been observed earlier by Lundy, (2007) that children did not participate in decision-making and if they did the participation was tokenistic. Pérez-Expósito, (2015) observes that student participation in school governance includes making decisions about the effective use of resources and school budget among other things.

Chemutai & Chumba, (2014) in their study of the Student Councils participation in decision-making in public secondary schools in Kericho West sub-county, found that student councils members were not involved in making decisions relating to school budget and school fees among others things. These are decisions that are made either in BOM, PA and staff meetings in secondary schools. It is not clear why students were not involved in those decisions yet the Basic Education Act of 2013 provides for their representation in BOM. However, researchers (Rudd, Colligan, & Naik, 2007) argue that students are still seldom consulted or heard despite the changes being witnessed in education system. With the enactment of laws that provide structures for student participation in decision making in schools, one would expect to find more involvement of students in decision making process.

V. Research Methodology

The study employed mixed method design, specifically triangulation method. The study targeted 214 public secondary schools, 214 head teachers, 2433 teachers, 81582 students and 13 Sub-county Directors of Education (SCDE) in Tharaka-Nithi and Nairobi Counties. Stratified random sampling, simple random sampling and purposive sampling were used in drawing the samples. The table for determining large sample size by Krejcie & Morgan, (1970), was used to determine the sample size of the students. The sample consisted of 38 public secondary schools, 38 head teachers, 293 teachers, 753 students, 72 student leaders and 3 SCDE. Data collection instruments included questionnaires, interview guides and

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide. Content validity was determined by seeking expert judgement from educational management. The instruments were submitted to experts iteratively for consideration and their suggestions on different items and sections used to refine them and increase validity. The questionnaires were further refined after the pilot study conducted in four schools in order to improve their comprehensibility, relevance and clarity. Cronbach's alpha was used to establish the reliability of the instruments. Cronbach's alpha was 0.923 for head teachers and teachers' questionnaire and 0.900 for students' questionnaire, which indicated a high level of internal consistency (reliability). The closer the alpha is to one (1), the higher the level of consistency. Any coefficient correlation of more than 0.7 is considered reliable (Fraenkel *et al.*, 2012).

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics while qualitative data were organized into themes and presented using descriptions and quotations. On the extent of student participation in decision making, the study used the following mean scale: 1.0 - 1.4 = Low participation; 1.5 - 2.4 = moderate participation and 2.5 - 3 = High participation. This meant that a mean of 1.4 and below was interpreted to be low level of student participation in decision-making. A mean of 1.5 to 2.4 meant that there was moderate extent of student participation in decision-making and a mean of 2.5 – 3 meant that there was high extent of student participation in decision-making.

VI. Research Findings and Discussions

Student Participation in Management of School Finances and Physical Resources

The study sought to establish the extent of student participation in management of school finances and physical resources in secondary schools. The decision-making areas that were considered in this study were school budgets, school fees and planning and development of physical facilities. The views of head teachers, teachers and students on student participation in decision-making were sought on a five point Likert scale ranging from No participation to Extensive participation. The data obtained was transformed from five point Likert scale to three point Likert scale (low, moderate and high participation, respectively). The study used the following mean scale: 1.0-1.4 = Low participation; 1.5-2.4 = Moderate participation; 2.5-3.0 = High participation. The results are discussed in the sections that follow:

Head teachers' views on Student Participation in Management of School Finances and Physical Resources

The results of head teachers on student participation in management of school finances and physical resources are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Head teachers' views on student participation in management of finances and physical resources

Decision-Making area	N	Mean	LP		MP		HP	
			n	%	n	%	n	%
School budget	37	1.05	35	94.6%	2	5.4%	0	0.0%
School fees	36	1.11	33	91.7%	2	5.6%	1	2.8%
Physical facilities	38	1.55	23	60.5%	9	23.7%	6	15.8%

Key:

LP-Low participation; **MP**-Moderate participation; **HP**-High participation

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Results in Table 1 show that a large majority, 35 (94.6%) and 33 (91.7%) of the head teachers said that there were low levels of student participation in decisions relating to school budgets and school fees respectively. The means (school budget = 1.05 and school fees = 1.11) confirm that the levels of student participation in management of the school finances was low. Similarly, majority, 23 (60.5%) of the head teachers, reported low levels of student participation relating to planning and development of physical facilities in school. However, the mean of 1.55 indicate moderate level of student participation in decisions. This therefore implies that according to the head teachers, schools were moderately involving students in decisions relating to physical facilities.

Teachers' views on Student Participation in Management of School Finances and Physical Resources

The results of teachers on student participation in management of school finances and physical resources are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Teachers' views on student participation in management of school finances and physical resources

Decision-Making area	N	Mean	LP		MP		HP	
			n	%	n	%	n	%
School budget	282	1.13	252	89%	22	8%	8	3%
School fees	281	1.14	254	90%	15	5%	12	4%
Physical facilities	285	1.36	216	76%	34	12%	35	12%

Key:

LP-Low participation; **MP**-Moderate participation; **HP**-High participation

Results in Table 2 reveal that majority, 252 (89%) and 254 (90%) of the teachers reported low levels of student participation in decisions relating to school budget and school fees, respectively. Similarly majority, 216 (76%) of the teachers were of the view that student participation in decisions relating to planning and development of physical facilities was of low level. The means (school budget = 1.13; school fees = 1.14 and physical facilities = 1.36) indicate low student participation in the management of the school finances and physical resources.

Students' views on student participation in management of School finances and physical resources

The results of students on student participation in management of school finances and physical resources are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Students' views on their participation in management of school finances and physical resources

Decision-Making area	N	Mean	LP		MP		HP	
			n	%	n	%	n	%
School budget	736	1.13	672	91%	35	5%	29	4%
School fees	735	1.20	643	87%	35	5%	57	8%
Physical facilities	724	1.37	541	75%	98	14%	85	12%

Key:

LP-Low participation; **MP**-Moderate participation; **HP**-High participation

Results in Table 3 show that a large majority, 672 (91%) of the students said that they participated in low levels in decisions relating to school budgets. Similarly majority, 643 (87%) and 541 (75%) of the student reported low levels of student participation in decisions relating to school fees and planning and development of physical facilities, respectively. The means (school budget mean=1.13; school fees mean=1.20 and planning and development of physical facilities mean=1.37) indicate low levels of student participation in management of the school finance and physical resources.

The findings of this study therefore reveal that all the respondents (head teachers' mean = 1.05, teachers' mean = 1.13 and students' mean = 1.13) were in agreement that the level of student participation in school budgets decisions was low. Similarly, all the respondents (head teachers' mean = 1.11, teachers' mean = 1.14 and students' mean = 1.20) were in agreement that the level of student participation in school fees decisions was low.

In relation to management of school finances, the results were in agreement with the views of the Sub-County Directors of Education (SCDE) that were interviewed. In fact, one of the SCDE said, "Decisions on school budget, school fees and planning and development of physical facilities are discussed in Boards of Management and Parents' Association meetings and students are not represented in these bodies".

From the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with the student leaders, it was clear that students were involved in very low levels in determining the amount of fees paid in their schools. In some schools, students were involved in discussing the school fees only when they complained about the type and quality of food given to them. This was done in the presence of their parents during the parents' meeting. Improvement of the school diet in school meant increasing the amount of school fees paid by the students and therefore parents had to be involved. In relation to student participation in decisions regarding school fees, one student leader during a focus group discussion with student leaders said,

"We are only involved in school fees issues when we complain about the poor quality food we eat in school. We are always told that improving on the quality of food will mean we pay more fees. These discussions are done during parents' meeting, so that the parents can decide either to add fees or not".

Students were of the view that they should be involved in management of school finances so that they can give their views too. There was a general feeling that students should be allowed to participate in decisions relating to financial support of the needy students or bursary allocation. They said the awards were based on academic performance which means that some needy students who were not performing well in their academics, because of missing many classes when sent home for the school fees could not benefit. In support of this argument one student leader during the FGD with student leaders said,

"We should be allowed to participate in decisions concerning the sponsorship of the students. In our school, it is based on academic grades which could be poor simply because the students are ever sent home for the school fees. They end up missing many lessons".

The findings of this study that student participation in decisions relating to the school budgets and school fees was low corroborate what has been reported by other researchers (Chemutai

& Chumba, 2014; Njue, 2014; Tikoko & Kiprop, 2011). These authors (Tikoko & Kiprop, 2011) did their study before the enactment and operationalization of the Basic Education Act of 2013 while Chemutai & Chumba, (2014) and Njue, (2014) did their study before operationalization of the Basic Education Act of 2013. One would have therefore expected to find more student participation in decision-making in their secondary schools in the current study in the wake of the new dispensation of the Basic Education Act of 2013.

Lundy, (2007) had earlier concluded that children's views were not sought or listened to or, were afforded tokenistic opportunities to participate and engage with adults. This has not changed yet, despite the provisions of the structures in schools that provide for student participation in decision making. Ryan (2006) notes that school budget is one of the areas that members of school community (including the students) need to be involved in. Pérez-Expósito (2015) observes that student participation in school governance includes making decisions about the effective use of resources and school budget among other things.

Literature indicates that there are countries that ensure student participation in budget decisions through student representatives in governing bodies. For example, in South Africa, students are involved in management of school finances in different ways. Some Student Councils participate in organizing fundraising functions, deciding the amount of funds to be allocated to them in the school budget, deciding a sliding scale of payment for parents with more than one child in the school while others were involved in the establishment of bursary fund for students from the school for their post-secondary education, among other things (Carr, 2005). One of the positive responses Carr, (2005) found with regard to student participation in the school governing body meetings was that, the students had excellent accounting skills to help with finances. In Kenya, it is reported that students made contributions to the Task Force that was reviewing the fees structure of secondary schools (KSSHA, 2014). This can be done at the institutional level too. They can be involved in decision concerning the amount of schools fees to be paid in school and especially in relation to different vote heads, raising funds for different projects in school and the management of such funds, allocation of bursary to the needy and bright students, amount of fees paid by the parents with more than one child in school among other things.

In relation to student participation in decision making on planning and development of physical facilities, the students and the teachers were in agreement that the participation was low while the head teachers reported moderate participation. The head teachers may have tried to give rosy responses portraying themselves as democratic. Considering that students were not represented in BOM and PA's meeting where decisions on physical facilities are made, the responses of the students and teachers may be portraying the true state of affair. These results were also in agreement with the findings from the FGDs with the student leaders where they unanimously agreed that the participation was low. Similar findings were reported by Nwankwo, (2014), who found that student participation in decision on infrastructural facilities was very low, in a study done in Nigeria.

VII. Conclusion

The study observes that the extent of student participation in decisions relating to school budgets, school fees and planning and development of physical facilities were of low levels. The school managements were reluctant to involve students in the critical decision-making areas in secondary school management.

VIII.Recommendations

The study recommends that the Ministry of Education (MOE) should establish an enforcement structure to ensure that all schools comply with the policy guidelines of student representation in Boards of Management (BOM). The Ministry of Education should also provide a policy on student representation in the Parents' Associations, staff meetings and any other important committees in schools so that they can participate in decisions made there.

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