

Students' Council Involvement in Decision Making and Students' Discipline in Secondary Schools in Tongaren Sub County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

There has been an increase of indiscipline cases in secondary schools' country wide. In some instances, students' unrest and strikes have been witnessed. This has been happening despite the enactment of Students' Council in 2009 as a way of managing students' discipline. In light of this problem, the purpose of this study was to assess the influence of students' council involvement in decision making on students' discipline. The study was founded on the Social Systems Theory and Path Goal Theory of Leadership. The study employed descriptive survey research design targeting a population of 11891 students, 720 members of the student councils, 24 deputy principals in 24 secondary schools and 1 Sub-County Director of Education. Stratified random sampling was adopted to select 12 schools in which 276 students, 84 members of the student council were sampled using simple random method while purposive sampling was used to select 12 Deputy Principals and 1 Sub County Director of Education. Questionnaires, interview schedules and document analysis were used to collect data from respondents. To ensure validity and reliability of instruments, a pilot study was conducted in two schools within the area of study. Data analysis involved both descriptive statistics such as frequencies. Weighted means and standard deviation while hypotheses were verified using the inferential statistical technique of independent samples t-test. The finding of this study was that schools in which student councils are involved in decision making there is high level of students' discipline.

KEYWORDS: *Decision Making, Involvement, Students' Council, Students' Discipline*

1. INTRODUCTION

Students' discipline management refers to the establishment of guidelines and procedures, and ensuring the same is followed to conform to the expected level of behavior. Students' discipline is a function of both home related and school related factors. Kiptonui (2012) argues that students' indiscipline in schools is manifestation of wider society. Students imitate what they see in media, family and society at large. Some of the school related factors affecting discipline include; teachers demographic characteristics, teaching-learning materials and physical facilities (Muratha, 2013)

Obiero, *et al* (2018) points out that the home based factors determining students discipline are; frequent fights between parents, drugs and substance abuse,

divorce and separation. Management of students' discipline should address both school and home based factors. These factors can be effectively addressed with students being involved. Ojwang (2012) identifies several causes of unrest in schools in Kenya which included drug abuse, decreased motivation among teaching staff, parental neglects and breakdown of traditional values.

Poor administration was also cited as a primary cause of students' unrest which is as a result of not involving students in formulating policies that affects them directly. This leads to dissent among students which may culminate to unrest. Kiptonui (2012) affirms the same by pointing that, school administrators and teachers are to open dialogue with

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their students and view them as young adults to listen to and understood.

There exists several ways and procedures used for management of students' discipline. These include guiding and counseling, use of punishment and suspensions (Ekombe, 2010). This is affirmed by Ngalya (2017) in the study conducted in Temeke Municipality, Tanzania, established that, ways commonly used in managing discipline in schools include ; punishment, guidance and counseling and strong disciplinary committee. This points out that most schools don't involve students directly in decision making regarding students' discipline contrary to what had been stated earlier, that management of students' discipline management does not entirely depend on teachers.

Previously, the prefect system was used in maintaining discipline, however in 2009; Kenya Secondary School Students' Council was established. Students' Council practice dates back to 19th century. An effective Students' Council serves to provide alternative leadership and increase the students' participation in administration of schools. It forms a basis where students can engage the school management in a more structured way. This allows few representatives to engage the school administration and avoid large crowds visiting the principal's office.

Indimuli (2012) defines a Student Council as a representative structure for students only, through which they can become involved in the affairs of the school, working in partnership with school management, staff and parents for the benefit of the school and its students. In essence, these members are students' leaders. Northouse (2016) defines leadership as the process where an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.

The selection procedure of Students' Council is a key determinant of how it operates and its eventual success or failure. The criteria used have a great impact on the students' discipline. It is therefore, important the right people are chosen to perform noble duty of representation. Obiero (2013) points out that, Students' Council plays a key role in the management of students' discipline and it is against this backdrop that appointment or election should be carried out carefully to ensure the right students gets the chance to serve fellow students.

There are several approaches being used by school administration to select students' leaders. These approaches include; direct appointment by teachers or administration, vetting interested applicants before

appointment and democratic elections by students themselves. However, Mncube and Harber (2013) argue that most schools in South Africa have adopted a democratic method of appointing the students leaders. Through this procedure, the interested candidates are given an open forum to campaign for elections.

Several studies point out the significance of students' council participation in decision making. The first step of involvement in decision making is by democratically choosing their representatives. The negative perception students have towards students' leaders can be changed through democratic elections.

Kamau (2017) suggests that negative attitude towards prefects can be changed if school administrators form Students Council with representative directly elected by the students. In such a situation students are more likely to be loyal and accept Students' Council as their leaders as opposed to where they are appointed by teachers.

In a study conducted by Kegendo (2019) in Tharaka-Nithi and Nairobi counties in Kenya, it was established that majority schools had active Students' Council; however, they did not have a representative on the school BOM. It revealed that Students' Council participation was only limited to their welfare and not key areas such as management of school finances and hiring staff personnel. The other barrier hindering Students' Council participation in decision making on students' discipline is hierarchical and autocratic school management style (Morojele, 2011). Such leadership assumes that students are too young to make informed decisions.

1.1. Significance of the Study

From a practical and policy perspective, it was envisaged that the current study was to add more information to the data base of knowledge on influence of Students' Council on students' discipline management in secondary schools. This was likely to remain a permanent record and be used to advance knowledge by future researchers. It was anticipated that by using findings of this study, policy makers and education agencies were demonstrating a better understanding of the use of students' council in discipline management in secondary schools and consequently embrace it and make more informed decisions about the entity.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

2.1. Influence of Students' Council Involvement in Decision making on Students' Discipline

The objective of the study was to assess the influence of the Students' Council involvement in decision making on students' discipline.

2.2. Students' Council Responses on Involvement in Decision Making and Students' Discipline

Students who were members of the student governing council were required to rate their opinions against statements on a five-point likert scale, where; 1-Strongly Disagree, 2- Disagree, 3-Undecided, 4- Agree and 5-Strongly Agree.

The findings of their opinions were presented in Table 1

Table 1: Students Council Response on involvement in decision making

Statement	SD	D	UD	A	SA	Σf_i	$\Sigma f_i w_i$	$\frac{\Sigma f_i w_i}{\Sigma f_i}$
Whether involved in formulation of rules	1	23	20	27	9	80	260	3.25
Whether council hold regular meetings with school administration	13	12	20	31	4	80	241	3.01
Whether council is represented on BOM	44	19	16	1	0	80	134	1.68
Whether council hold their meetings regularly	0	12	14	41	13	80	295	3.69
Whether involved in designing school programs	12	16	18	24	10	80	244	3.05

Source: Field data, 2022

From table 1, the findings show that 36 (45%) of respondents agree that Students' Council is involved in the formulation and amendment of school rules while 24 (30%) disagreed. This finding indicated that only about half (45%) of the sampled schools were actively involving Students' Council in formulation of school rules and regulation. This could be one of the possible causes of low discipline among students in some sampled schools.

Response on whether Students Council regularly meet school administration to discuss students' discipline issues, 35 (43.8%) agrees while 25 (31.3%) disagrees. Generally, this implied most of school administrators within the area of study were not keen on holding dialogue with students' Council.

As to whether Students' Council was represented on BOM whenever students' discipline matters were being discussed, majority 63 (78.8%) disagrees and only 1 (1.3%) agrees. From the findings of the study, it was almost unanimous agreement from respondents that Students' Council was never involved in major decision making.

The study also sought to investigate whether the Students' Council holds meeting amongst themselves to discuss students' discipline, 54 (67.5%) agreed to the statement while 12 (15%) disagreed. This indicated that most Students' Council from the sampled schools were effective on having regular meetings amongst themselves. Though the agenda of such meetings were never sought, it was assumed Students' discipline was among them.

On whether students' council participate in designing school programs, 34 (42.5%) agreed while 28 (35%) disagreed. This revealed that fairly reasonable proportion (42.5%) of school involved students in the designing of school programs especially in co-curricular which in most cases had a bearing on students' discipline.

2.3. Student Responses on Students' Council Involvement in Decision.

The opinions of students who were not members of students' council was sought. Their opinions against statements on a five-point Likert scale, where; 1-Strongly Disagree, 2- Disagree, 3-Undecided, 4- Agree and 5-Strongly Agree.

The findings of their opinions were presented in table 2.

Table 2: Students' Response on Students' Council involvement in Decision Making

Statement	SD	D	UD	A	SA	Σf_i	$\Sigma f_i w_i$	$\frac{\Sigma f_i w_i}{\Sigma f_i}$
Whether involved in formulation of rules	28	66	65	83	27	269	822	3.06
Whether council hold regular meetings with school administration	16	119	24	72	38	269	804	2.99
whether council is represented on BOM	77	41	91	36	24	269	696	2.59
Whether council hold their meetings regularly	13	73	50	95	38	269	879	3.27
Whether involved in designing school programs	42	61	66	54	46	269	808	3.00

Source: Field data, 2022

The finding in table 2 shows that 110 (40.9%) of students had an opinion that Students' Council was involved in formulation and amendment of school rules while 94 (34.9%) disagreed. The response from students were in agreement with students, Council response indicating low involvement of students in amendment of school rules. This generally meant in most sampled schools, school rules were basically subjected to students from teachers without their input.

On whether students' council hold regular meetings with school administration, 100 (40.9%) of the respondents agreed while majority 135 (50.2%) had a contrary opinion. The responses from students were same as those from students' council in which majority indicated that they never held regular meetings with school administrators. This revealed that there was a disjoint between students and school administrators in some schools included in the study in which low could be been a cause of low discipline levels amongst some students.

For the statement on whether the Students' Council was represented in Board of Management meeting whenever students' discipline was being discussed, only 60 (22.3%) agreed to the statement while majority 118 (43.9%) disagreed. From the response, it was clear almost all the sampled schools never involved students in major decisions. This was contrary to the Kenya Ministry of Education regulation (MOE, 2013).

The other statement under investigation was whether council hold their meetings regularly to discuss students' discipline, 133 (49.4%) agreed while 86 (32.0%) disagreed. From the findings, their responses agreed with what Students' Council indicated that regular meetings were conducted. This meant that majority of Students' Council were operating in the right direction.

The last statement was whether involved in designing school programs. The response on this statement indicated that, 100 (37.2%) agreed while a further 103 (38.3%) disagreed. The results from students indicated some involvement, however, it was not satisfactory. This affirms the study by Mwangi (2013) that most school administrators never involved students in setting up of schools' programs.

2.4. Aggregation of Variables of Responses on Students' Council involvement in Decision Making

The responses of the both Students' Council members and students were aggregated in order to develop indices that could measure the levels of involvement of the Student Council in decision making. The index had values ranging from 5 to 25. Values above 15 indicate greater involvement by student council while values below 15, imply minimal involvement. The descriptive statistics for the index was presented in table 3 below

Table 3: Students' Council Involvement in Decision Making Index

School Category	N	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Std. Deviation
High level	233	16.2275	11.00	21.00	2.55706
Low level	116	12.0862	9.00	16.00	1.69690
Total	349	14.8510	9.00	21.00	3.02112

Source: Field, 2022.

The findings in table 3 indicated that schools with high level of discipline recorded a lowest value 11 and highest of 21, with a mean of 16.2275 and std deviation of 2.55706. While those ones with low level had lowest of 9 and maximum value of 16 with a mean of 12.0862 and std deviation of 1.69690.

From table 3 descriptive statistics measure show that schools with students of high discipline level a mean of 16.2275 which was above 15 an indicator that in those schools there was greater involvement of Students' Council in decision making. However, schools with a low students' discipline level had a mean of 12.0862 which was below 15 an indication that there was minimal involvement of Students' Council in decision making.

2.5. Hypothesis Testing

The study sought to verify the null hypothesis, H_0 'Students' Council involvement in decision making has no statistically significant influence on students' discipline in secondary schools in Tongaren Sub County'.

In order to verify the hypothesis, the study used the independent samples t-test statistic. The mean value involvement index for the high and low discipline school categories were compared and the results were presented in table 4

Table 4: t-test on Students' Council Involvement in Decision Making

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	35.105	.000	15.792	347	.000	4.14126	.26224	3.62548	4.65704
Equal variances not assumed			18.008	319.551	.000	4.14126	.22997	3.68882	4.59370

Source: Field data, 2022

From the table 4, a significant value of t was computed ($t_{(347)} = 15.792, \alpha < 0.05$). Hence the null hypothesis stating that, 'students' Council involvement in decision making has no statistically significant influence on students' discipline in secondary schools in Tongaren Sub County' was rejected.

A significant difference in the student council involvement in decision making between the categories of schools was established. The schools with students' high level of discipline had a significantly higher levels of involvement by the student council in decision making ($m=16.2275$, $sd=2.55706$), than the involvement of student council in decision making in low students' discipline level category of schools ($m=12.0862$, $sd=1.69690$).

It can therefore be concluded that the higher level of students' discipline in high level discipline schools can be attributed to high level of involvement of student council in decision making while the lower levels of students' discipline in low level discipline category of schools was as a result of low levels of involvement of the student council in decision making.

This agreed with the study by Mwangi (2013) which showed that where students were not fully involved in school governance and were excluded from key decision-making areas of the school' resulted to frequent unrest and strikes in schools.

Chemutai and Chumba (2014) opined that encouraging students' participation in decision making cultivates democracy and understanding. From the findings of study this seemed not to have been fully embraced among all sampled schools.

Mukisu (2018) concluded that regular meeting amongst Students' council and school administration fostered discipline. This study concurs with conclusion as regular meetings was one the indicators on Students' Council involvement in decision making.

Nandeke (2017) observed that there should be more involvement of students in the management of discipline. This appeared to have been embraced by most of the schools sampled for the study, however, a few with low level of students' discipline had not fully embraced.

3. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that schools with high levels of student's discipline had significantly higher levels of involvement by students' council in decision making. Hence, involvement by the students' council in decision making may significantly reduce levels of indiscipline in secondary schools.

4. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that students' council should be involved more in designing school programs and routine. They further should be involved in making major decisions concerning students' discipline. Finally, the school administrators should endeavour to adhere to Basic Education Act, 2013, to ensure students' councils are effectively involved in the running of the affairs of the school especially issues dealing with students' welfare.

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