Participatory Governance in Secondary Schools: The Students' Viewpoint in Eastern Region of Kenya

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Abstract
The purpose of the study was to determine the students' view on participatory school governance in secondary schools of the Eastern region, Kenya. Participatory school governance implies the involvement of stakeholders in the decision making process in schools. The objectives of the study were to identify the key decision makers in selected management tasks in secondary schools as perceived by students in Eastern Region, Kenya and to establish the students' opinion on their involvement in decision making in secondary schools of Eastern Region, Kenya. It was also meant to identify structures within the secondary school system which are used for students' involvement in decision making process in secondary schools of Eastern Region, Kenya. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The target population was 28441 students of the secondary schools of Eastern Region of Kenya. A sample of 720 respondents was selected through multi-stage sampling procedures. Data was collected by the use of a questionnaire and was analyzed by the use of descriptive statistical tools. The findings were that the key decision makers in curriculum and design were the teachers, principals and students. In students' management and welfare, it was the principals, teachers and Boards of Management while in school-community relations it was the principals. The students said that they should be involved in decision making and in their view, their involvement is very important. Though there is emphasis on the application of students' governance through the students' councils, students believe that since teachers' interfere with the process of electing their leaders, then the structure of governance is the prefects system.
Keywords: Decision Making, Participatory school governance

1.0   : Introduction
In order to ensure that many of the decisions are made and owned by the stakeholders within the school system, educationists have advocated for the decentralization of education. Decentralization refers to devolution of the centralized control of power and decision making from government into private initiatives at state, provincial, local government and school level (Uwakwe, Falaye, Emunemu & Adolore, 2008). The reasons for educational decentralization tend to be associated with four distinct objectives; democratization, regional or ethnic pressures, improved efficiency and enhanced quality of schooling (Winkler, 2002). Samad (2000) further points out that "the transfer of decision making authority to the school level promotes democratization in education sector, and gives broad opportunities for educational stakeholders in schools to participate in the management of educational programs and to a great extent eases the central government burdens"(p. 187).

In the United Kingdom, the policy and practice of decision making combines both decentralization of management decision making to schools and stronger centralization of control over curricular and the monitoring of educational standards (Samad, 2002). In the United States of America, the approach to decision making about education has been more piecemeal and decentralized. This could be attributed to the fact that educational services delivery is placed under the local governments unlike in the UK where it is under the national governments. In El Salvador and Nicaragua, real decision making power has been decentralized to school councils with the aim of increasing the voices of educational clients (Indriyanto, 2005). This has empowered parents, teachers, students and local communities to make important decisions for their schools. In Argentina and Chile, decision making authority has been transferred to sub-national governments, a policy which is usually part of a larger re-organization of governments (Indriyanto, 2005). In Malaysia, schools have "shifted from a traditional centralized system of education to a relatively decentralized system of decision making through self-managing or school-based management to develop school initiatives and meet changing needs since the early 1990's" (Samad, 2000, p. 183). Although in Indonesia, the idea of transfer of decision making authority to schools was introduced in 1974, in practice, the mission of the transfer of decision making authority which had been introduced is merely a political rhetoric or as other people would call it, 'decentralization centralism' governance (Indriyanto, 2005). In Africa, some countries such as Ethiopia, Nigeria and South Africa have devolved the school management decisions to regions, while in Tanzania and Uganda, decision making authority

has been transferred to the local school councils (Samad, 2000). In Kenya, there were reforms in educational management in the year 2005 and the policy of transfer of some decision making authority to the district education boards and the stakeholders at school level was adopted (Republic of Kenya, 2005).

2.0 Statement of the Problem
With the constitutional review decade in Kenya between the years 2000-2010 which resulted into the Kenya Constitution, 2010, Kenyans are now able to enjoy the basic rights such as freedom of association, freedom of worship, right to life and education among others. The new constitution complemented earlier reforms in education and specifically the transfer of some decision making authority to the stakeholders at the school level, which was meant to address the challenges of management and governance. In the year 2008, more than 800 secondary schools went on strike in Eastern Region of Kenya (Juma, 2008). Even with new constitutional dispensation and the reforms in educational governance, students' strikes in secondary schools seem to be on the rise. There is little evidence of studies on decision making process in secondary schools in Kenya, especially after the implementation of the Kenya Constitution 2010 and educational reforms. Therefore it was found necessary to carry out a study on the school governance as perceived by secondary school students. The study was done with a view of making recommendations for an effective and more participatory decision making in secondary schools.

3.0 Objectives of the Study
The objectives of the study were:
1) To identify the key decision makers in selected management tasks in secondary schools as perceived by students in Eastern Region, Kenya
2) To establish the students' opinion on their involvement in decision making in secondary schools of Eastern Region, Kenya
3) To identify structures within the secondary school system which are used for students' involvement in decision making process in secondary schools of Eastern Region, Kenya.

3.1 Research Questions
The following research questions were formulated in line with the objectives to guide the study
1) Who are the key decision makers in selected management tasks in secondary schools of Eastern Region, Kenya as perceived by students?
2) What is the students' opinion on their involvement in decision making in secondary schools of Eastern Region, Kenya?
3) What are the structures within the secondary school system which are used for students' involvement in decision making in secondary schools of Eastern Region, Kenya?

4.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
The research design adopted for the study was descriptive survey research design. The target population for the study was the 12th grade (form four) students in all the public secondary schools in the 13 districts of Eastern Kenya. There were a total of 28441 12th grade (form four) students in the region in 596 secondary schools (Ministry of Education, 2013). A sample of 720 students was selected through multi-stage sampling. The sample size was determined by the use of sample size tables. Data was collected by the use of a questionnaire. Validity was determined through consultation with lecturers in education management while reliability was established through test-retest method where an acceptable value of 0.82 was obtained. The data collected from students was summarized and displayed into tabular form for further analysis. Data was further analyzed using descriptive analysis procedures. The descriptive analysis procedures included frequencies, percentages, summated ratings and Mean.

5.0 Results of the Study
The response rate was 82.2 % (592) with 57.1 being male students while 42.9% were females.

5.1. The key decision makers in selected management tasks in secondary schools of Eastern Region, Kenya as perceived by students
The students were required to identify the key decision makers in curriculum and instructional program, students' management and welfare, and school-community relations. The results were as discussed below.
5.1.1 Curriculum and Instructional Program
The table 1.0 indicates the decision makers as perceived by the students

Tables
TABLE 1: Decision Making in Curriculum and Instructional Program

Task Area	Parents	Boards of Governors (BoGs)	Principals	Teachers	Students
Planning the curriculum at school level e.g. getting students suggestions and forwarding them to be incorporated in curriculum by higher authorities	2.41	3.15	4.33	3.81	2.84
Evaluating the curriculum e.g. evaluating how far the school has attained its objectives	3.45	4.61	4.35	4.35	3.34
Determining subject areas for individual students	3.35	1.84	3.21	4.01	4.34
Determining methods of evaluating students' progress e.g. when and how to give continuous assessment	2.09	2.39	4.37	4.48	2.80
Total	**11.30**	**11.99**	**16.26**	**16.65**	**13.32**

According to the students' responses, teachers were the major decision makers in curriculum and instructional program with a weighted mean of 16.65, followed by the principals with 16.26 while the Parents were the last with a weighted mean of 11.30 (Table 1.0). Since there were four items, one could score a maximum of 20 (4x5) points and a minimum of four (4x1). The mid-point for this scale was set at 12 (4x3), with scores below 12, (4-11) indicating that the people concerned were viewed to be less involved in decision making while scores of 12 and above (12-20) indicated that the people were the key decision makers. The key decision makers in curriculum and instruction as per the students' response therefore were the teachers, principals and the students in that order. Boards of governors and parents were viewed not to be key decision makers in curriculum and instructional program. Probably because of their position, teachers and principals were viewed as major decision makers by the students. The fact that teachers did attend to lessons five days in a week makes the students perceive them as the key decision makers in curriculum and instruction programmes. This is supported by a study conducted in Nepal which found out that students in Nepal were interested in participating in decision making and perceived teachers as willing to involve them but head teachers had less interests in exploring the children's' right (Dhakal, 2008). The principals were also indicated as key decision makers in curriculum and instruction. This could be attributed to the fact that they are basically teachers, the only difference being that they are the link between the schools and higher authorities. From the students' responses, they (students) were found out to be key decision makers too. This could be attributed to the fact that majority of them are allowed to determine their future professions through choosing subjects that will drive them to their desired careers. This is supported by researchers who found out that teachers and students were aware of the pupils' rights to participate in deciding the subjects they studied (Shumba, Maphosa & Shumba, 2008). This fair involvement in decision making could be attributed to the fact that the students are the direct beneficiaries of the curriculum and instructional programs, and therefore need to take part in what affects their education. This is collaborated by the argument that the involvement of the students in curriculum issues is likely to increase their interest in education and improve achievement, which in turn make their schools more marketable (Mncube, 2008). There are also school managers who belief that being closest to the students makes them know how best to meet the needs of the students hence tend to make them (students) make more decisions.

5.1.2 Participation in Decision Making on Students' Management and Welfare

The students' response on participation in students' management and welfare was as shown in table 2.0.

TABLE 2.0: Participation in Decision Making on Students' Management and Welfare

Task Area	Parents	Board of Governors	Principal	Teachers	Students
Determining the size of classes	2.07	3.76	4.54	3.45	1.86
Determining the non-formal curriculum	1.72	2.06	3.72	4.04	4.14
Determining entertainment and recreational activities	1.73	2.38	4.00	3.60	3.67
Determining school rules and regulations	2.39	3.59	4.80	4.33	2.25
Determining how responsibilities should be delegated to students	2.21	2.71	4.40	4.30	2.55
Disciplinary action against students	2.18	3.38	4.64	3.88	2.00
Organizing boarding facilities	2.70	3.51	4.43	3.65	1.99
Determining type of food provided for lunch and supper	1.83	2.93	4.49	3.19	1.91
Total	**16.83**	**24.32**	**35.02**	**30.44**	**20.37**

From the students' response, it was found out that the principals were the most involved with a mean score of 35.02, followed by teachers with 30.44. Parents were the least involved with a weighted mean of 16.83

(Table 2.0). Since there was a total eight items, the maximum and the minimum that one could score was 40 (8 x5) and 8 (8x1) respectively. The mid-point was fixed at 24 (8x3), thus those who scored 24 and above (24 to 40) were treated as key decision makers while those who scored less (8 to 23) were treated as less involved. Therefore the key decision makers in students' management and welfare as per the students' responses were the principals, teachers and boards of governors. The students identified the key decision makers in students' management and welfare as the principals, teachers and boards of governors (BOGs). The principals and boards of governors (BOGs) were earlier the main decision makers in almost all areas of school management, including students' management and welfare. This was authenticated by the Basic Education Act of 2012 which necessitated the appointment of BOGs for secondary schools by the Minister of education and the consequent delegation of powers to run the schools. The principals being the secretaries and chief executives of the BOGs had the powers to make decisions in school management. The teachers on the other hand have their immediate supervisor as the principal and by extension they have authority to make decisions in students' management and welfare, either through legitimate power acquired through their training, employment or age.

Students and parents were not key decision makers in students' management and welfare. This is collaborated from other studies done earlier such as those which found out that students played very little or no role in school management in Kenya while others found out that there was limited participation of students in decision making (Kenya Female Advisory Organization, 2003). As long as all the stakeholders are not adequately involved in decision making, and especially in matters that concern them, the challenges will still remain. Students particularly must be involved in decision making in management and welfare issues, since these area directly affects them, if this is not addressed, then the number of school strikes will continue rising. Students should play an active role, for example in determining; school rules and regulations, how responsibilities should be delegated to students, disciplinary action against them, type of food provided for supper and lunch and in organizing boarding facilities.

5.1.3 School Community Relations
The results of the participation in school community relations was as shown in table 3.0

TABLE 3: Participation in Decision Making in School-Community Relations

Task Area	Parents	BoGs	Principal	Teachers	Students
Determining the school-community relations e.g. visiting orphaned children's home	1.68	2.27	3.05	2.68	2.06

There was only one item in school-community relations hence the maximum any stakeholder can score is 5 and the lowest is 1. From table 3.0, it can be seen that principals were the most involved in making decisions on school-community relations with a mean score of 3.05, followed by teachers with a mean score of 2.68. Parents were the least involved with a weighted mean of 1.68. The mid-point of this scale was set at 3 (three), meaning that any group that had a mean score of 3.0 and above (3 to 5) was assumed to be a key decision maker while scores of less than three (1 to 2) were treated as less involved. Therefore the key decision makers according to the students were the principals. The students indicated the principals as the only key decision makers in school-community relations. This is a reflection that the school-community relations is not considered as important and most likely there has not been any deliberate effort to enhance it. The students are likely to have indicated the principals as the main decision maker in school community relations because whenever outsiders visit their schools, most of them end up at the principal's office, although he/she may not necessarily be enhancing the school community relations.

5.2 The students' opinion on their involvement in decision making in secondary schools of Eastern Region, Kenya
The results of the students' opinion on their involvement in decision making process was as shown in table 4.0 .

TABLE 4.0: Whether Secondary School Students should be involved in Decision Making

Response	Number	Percent
Yes	554	93.9
No	36	6.1
Total	**590**	**100.0**

Most of the respondents (93.9%) indicated that secondary school students should be involved in decision making while 6.1% (36) were against it (Table 4.0). It is clear that students would want to participate in decision making in schools. It is only a negligible numbers that belief that secondary school students should not participate in decision making process in secondary schools.

The students were further required to rate the significance of their involvement in decision making in secondary schools of Eastern Region of Kenya. The results were as indicated in table 5.0.

TABLE 5.0: Students' Perception on the Significance of their Involvement in Decision Making

Significance	Number	Percent
very significant	210	35.6
Significant	295	50.0
not significant	70	11.9
very insignificant	15	2.5
Total	**590**	**100.0**

35.6% (210) of the students perceived the involvement of students in decision-making as very significant, 50.0% (295) perceived it as significant, 11.9% (70) perceived it as not significant and 2.5% (15) perceived it as not very significant (Table 5.0). 85.6% (505) perceived the involvement of students in decision making as either significant or very significant. Failure to involve students in decision making could therefore be a cause of unrests in many schools as evidenced by the overwhelming numbers that perceive it as either significant or insignificant. Therefore educational institutions must practice participatory decision making style where the students and by extension all other stakeholders' input should always be sought. This finding is fully supported by the argument that people would always want to experience a sense of control of their lives (Dewey, 1916). In support of the importance of participation of other stakeholders in the decision making process in secondary schools, it is argued that this strengthens a commitment to and understanding of democracy (Landsdown, 2001). The participation in the decision making process, especially by the students is said to improve academic performance and reduce the frequency of school strikes (Karanja, 2010).

Some of the reasons given by those who perceived the involvement of students in decision making either as very significant or significant were that Involvement of students in decision making makes them be part and parcel of the school and make them own it. They also argued that decision making in any organization is about team work hence all stakeholders should participate. Others indicated that involvement of students in decision making prepares them for adult life, makes them confident especially when they are verbally required to give their input in a group and develops their problem solving capacities. A few argued that since students are very creative, at times they come up with original ideas that may be very useful to the school. Only 14.4% (85) of the respondents perceived the involvement of students in decision making as either not significant or very insignificant in their schools. The only valid reason given for the answer was that primary duty of students in secondary schools is to study hence there is no need to involve them in management matters.

5.3 Structures within the secondary school system which are used for students' involvement in decision making process in secondary schools of Eastern Region, Kenya.

The results on the students' perception of the structures used by for students' involvement in decision making process in secondary schools were as in table 6.0

TABLE 6.0: Structures used in Schools to Involve Students in Decision Making

School Structure	Number	Percent
Prefects	374	63.4
Students' Council	82	13.9
Students/Teachers meetings (Barazas)	108	18.2
Any other	26	4.6
Total	**590**	**100.0**

From the table 6.0, the most commonly used structure for students' involvement in decision making was the prefects system where 63.4% (374) of the students reported it as the most commonly used in their schools. Students' council where student leaders were elected by their peers was not very common as it was only selected by 13.9% (82) as the structure for students' involvement used in their schools. Other structures accounted for 4.6% (26) only. The prefects system in schools has been associated with authoritarian administrators who would not wish to involve others in decision making process. This seems to be the case as per the students' responses. One of the other structures that were specified was the use of suggestion boxes where students were required to write their inputs and drop it in the box, later collected by either teachers or prefects and passed to the authorities for action. These findings are collaborated by a study which found out that prefects system was the main structure used in students' participation in decision making process in Kenya (Jwan & Ongondo, 2000). Another study also found out that prefects and students' councils were the main structures used in students' participation in decision making in Kenya, and the prefects were selected by the teachers based on their performance and good conduct (Ouma, 2007). Such student leaders are seen as spies who cannot be trusted to communicate students' wishes. It has been pointed out that most schools in English-speaking African countries have some form of prefect system (Sifuna, 2000). The basic role of the prefects normally is to act as agents of social-control, checking lateness, reporting misbehavior to teachers and generally acting as messengers of staff. The structure in many schools with the prefects system have a unidirectional flow

of information and provides no corresponding channels for the students to communicate with their teachers or even the principal.

Students' councils, whose members should be elected by the students themselves, are the most democratic way of making school decisions. They should also act as a forum where complaints can be voiced and grievances settled or a means by which students would have a better idea of what happens in schools. There is a wide variety in the way students' councils can be organized, with some being 'safety valves' where the principals or teachers listen to students' problems and explain them away. Thus students' councils in a democratic structure are able to air the students' ideas, opinions, ideas and grievances to the relevant authorities. A major argument against students' councils is that they can easily breed chaos in schools. There have been reported cases of student councils that have become so powerful that they literally have attempt coup against school administrations (Aduda, 2010).

In an attempt to improve communication and involve students more in decision making in Kenya, other structures such as students open forums 'barazas' and the suggestion boxes have been designed. Open forums were strongly proposed by some educationists through which students were required to raise any issues with the school principal and necessary reactions were given. Sifuna (2000) argues that provided such structures are in bureaucratic machinery, they are just meant to make the system run but they do not add any value (Sifuna, 2000). Due to ineffective structures, there are times when students feel they cannot tolerate the oppressive and dictatorial nature of their schools. When such a time comes, the students will riot regardless of the consequences of their actions. This could be the situation in secondary schools in the Eastern Region of Kenya, and the outcomes are regular student strikes.

6.0 Conclusion

In the opinion of the students, the principals dominated the decision making process. Students' actual involvement in the decision making process was not adequate and they wished to participate more. This gap between the actual and desired rate of participation in decision making by the students could be the cause of strikes in many secondary schools in Eastern Region, Kenya. The necessary structures for participatory decision making process had also not been established. From these findings it was concluded that decision making process in secondary schools of Eastern Region, Kenya was not participatory.

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