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RESEARCH ARTICLE

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF THEIR PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: IMPLICATION ON DISCIPLINE, IN ELDORET EAST, UASIN GISHU COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Students' participation in decision making on disciplinary matters plays an important role in influencing discipline in secondary school. However, students' perception determines the level of participation. The purpose of the study was to investigate the perception of secondary school students in Eldoret East, Uasin-Gishu County, on their participation in decision making, and its influence on discipline. The study was guided by the following objectives; to determine the perception of secondary school students on their participation in decision making and discipline, to investigate students' involvement in decision making in secondary schools, to establish the constraints to students' participation in decision making in secondary schools, and to establish strategies used to enhance students' participation in decision making in secondary schools. This study used a mixed approach, using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The research instruments were questionnaires and interview schedules. The study sample comprised 369 form two students. The study used stratified and simple random sampling to obtain the sample. The sample also comprised 3 deputy principals and 3 teacher counselors who were purposively selected. The research findings showed that the students are involved in academic and co-curricular activities. The study established that perception and discipline are related. It was concluded that there is need to enhance students' involvement in school activities as this has a great influence on students' behavior.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, Youth participation in decision making is being advocated for by international bodies. For example, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) issued calls for proposals, on youth participation in decision making (UNDP, 2012). UNDP supports innovative and catalytic projects on youth to inform public policy-making, training youth as effective leaders, extending access to justice, opening space for youth empowerment and democratic governance. There were 37 proposals accepted, out of which 9 were in Africa, 8 in the Arab States, 5 in Asia and the Pacific, 8 in Central and Eastern Europe/Commonwealth of Independent States, and 7 in Latin America and the Caribbean. (UNDP, 2012). Participation in decision making gives students a unique opportunity to practice their rights, exercise a significant degree of autonomy, allow them to discuss their issues together with their teachers and always engage in some form of explicit or implicit form of conflict-resolution (Dewey, 2010). Students' participation has increasingly been advocated for by the education stakeholders in the whole world (Koliba, 2000). This aims at reducing the level of conflict and indiscipline experienced when the students perceive that their democratic space for participation in decision making is being compromised.

A study by Mulwa, D., Maingi, D., Maithia, R., and Migosi, A. (2015) showed that the principals are the major decision makers in secondary schools. It is important to note therefore that, without their participation in decision making in secondary schools, the students fail to own decisions made by educationists and therefore they do not become party to those decisions (Mulwa *et al.*, 2015). Students' indiscipline has been one of the greatest challenges in schools as identified by educationists, for example Steinberg (2010) and continues to be a great problem in secondary schools. This problem is common in almost all the secondary schools and it leads to dire consequences in learning and teaching process as observed by The Ministry of Education Science and Technology, (MOEST, 2017). Students' discipline therefore is considered to be an important component in the education sector. This has led to increased interest by researchers in determining what causes the indiscipline. Nyabisi (2014) in her study observed that, most schools have authoritarian experience, and students have little or no say in making the school decisions. They are rarely involved in deciding what is taught and how it is taught and decisions are made on their behalf (Mulwa *et al.*, 2015). Fletcher (2015) posits that democratic participation is engaging students as partners in every facet of education system for the purpose of strengthening their commitment to education.

The students become co-creators of classroom norms and outcomes for behavior. Schools that teach students the skills to participate actively in democracy are themselves institutions that reflect democratic principles not only in word, but also in deeds. Gardener (2014) posits that the latent curriculum is essentially experiential in character centering on the kind of relationships the students form with their peers, teachers, school leaders, community members and the school culture as a whole. According to Abra, (2015), the perception that people have is that students in secondary schools are not mature enough to make meaningful decisions. Consequently, opportunities provided for students' participation tend to be limited to roles of supervision over students peers. Abra (2015) observed that, schools that have democracy allow students to participate actively in decision making and make their students responsible in the way they behave. Students tend to agree with the decisions they are involved in, making them part and parcel of their daily living. When students are not involved in decision making, they tend not to own the decisions and might lead to indiscipline. Jeruto and Kiprop, (2011) in their study, in Kenya, encourage democracy in decision making in schools, as this reduces conflict in schools.

Anurag (2013) in his studies observed that in India, students' indiscipline leads to their unrest. However, he later argues that the reason for this unrest is due to frustration prevailing among students. The misbehavior in schools, according to Asaba (2015), is brought by lack of enough time for listening to the learners in schools. Studies by Mulwa (2015), Jeruto and Kiprop (2011), Anurag (2013), among others, have shown that there is a relationship between students' unrest in schools and their lack of involvement in decision making, meaning that their perception on decision making is different from other education stakeholders. The constitution of Kenya (2010) chapter 11, part 7, and New Legal Framework place a strong emphasis on strengthening public participation in decision making. Teachers encourage their students to participate but do not let their classes out of control. Classes that are students' oriented tend to make students interested and happy. The students become curious, eager to learn, and willing to do whatever it takes to learn (Bogdan, 2011). Students who are given chances to participate in decision making in their schools tend to have strong bonds with their schools and this leads to fewer discipline problems (Perez, 2015). Many high school teachers confront a classroom full of students who are physically present but psychologically absent (Sun and Shek, 2012). Engaging students in decision making in schools is also good for their overall mental health (Education Corner, 2010). Studies have found that students who are disengaged from school are more likely to misbehave and engage in substance use (Steinberg, 2010). Most students might fail to participate in decision making because they perceive this as principal's and teacher's work and the students' task is to accept the decision made on their behalf (Mulwa *et al.*, 2015). Most studies done globally have shown that there is a relationship between students' participation in decision making and discipline. In Kenya, studies have shown the need to involve students in decision making in schools. Macharia (2015), in her study, show that Kenyan education has not realized the need to involve students in decision making. This is because principals and teachers are the main decision makers in schools, as observed by Nyabisi (2014). This has contributed to students' indiscipline, for students tend to own decisions they make than the ones made for them by their teachers and their school administration (Mulwa *et al.*, 2015). Eldoret East in Uasin-Gishu County, is no exception. Students feel and think that

they are inadequately involved in making decisions and the major decision makers are the school principals and teachers (Jeruto and Kiprop, 2011). The Ministry of Education Science and Technology, recommends; the election of the students' council by the students themselves, students to be represented in the Board of Management meetings by the student leader, students to participate in the National Holidays' celebrations, among other levels of participation. This is not fully exercised in secondary schools in Eldoret East, and this, among other reasons, has contributed to students' indiscipline in the public schools in this area (MOEST, 2017). The students' failure to think and feel that they can participate in decision making, among other reasons, make them not to participate. This makes them not to own decisions made in schools (Mulwa *et al.*, 2015), leading to indiscipline. This has justified the urgency with which this study needs to be conducted to provide solution to the current challenge facing educational institutions.

Statement of the problem: One of the objectives that need to be fulfilled in education is handling pro-social behavior among the students. Many educationists have a distorted view of what discipline actually is. They also lack a clear concept of what discipline is, and why we lack discipline in our secondary schools (Macharia, 2015). Though the unrest has been reported to take place in most of the regions, the school burning seems to have hit the Rift Valley region hard, with considerable increase of arson in the region (MOEST, 2016). The government under 'Devolution Working Paper Series' in the 2010 Constitution of Kenya, intends to involve the Kenyan citizen in decision making. Public participation in decision making is also found in the Kenyan constitution, Chapter 11, in Constitution of Kenya (2010). In the North Rift more than 10 schools were burnt (MOEST, 2016). In Uasin-Gishu County, 9 schools were set ablaze. Some of these schools formed the sample. Other forms of indiscipline as reported by the Ministry of Education Science and Technology include bullying, absenteeism, drug abuse, among others (MOEST, 2017). Studies conducted by Abra (2015), Nyabisi (2014), Anurag (2013), among others, have shown that there is a challenge of indiscipline in educational institutions. Secondary schools allow students to participate in decision making in school. Although there is students' participation in decision making in the school, as a way of dealing with the challenge of indiscipline in secondary schools, little is known about students' perception on their participation in decision making in school and its influence on discipline. This study therefore seeks to establish the relationship between students' perception on participation in decision making and discipline in secondary schools in Eldoret East, Uasin-Gishu County. A lot of research has been done on students' participation in decision making. These studies denote that secondary schools involve students in decision making, though there is the need to enhance students' participation. For example, Jeruto and Kiprop (2011), Mulwa *et al.*, (2015), Nyabisi (2015), did studies on students' participation in decision making, but all these studies dealt with general students' participation but not on perception of secondary school students participation in decision making, thus prompting an urgent need to undertake this study.

The objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are:

- To determine the perception of secondary school students on their participation in decision making and discipline.

- To establish the perception of students on constraints to participation in decision making in secondary schools in Eldoret East.
- To investigate students' involvement in decision making in secondary schools.
- To establish strategies used to enhance students' participation in decision making in secondary schools.

Research questions

From the above objectives, the research questions are:

- What is the perception of students on their participation in decision making?
- What is the perception of students on constraining factors to participation in decision making in schools?
- How are students involved in decision making in secondary school?
- What are the new strategies that can be used to enhance participation in decision making in schools?

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Rift-valley, Eldoret East sub-county, Kenya. It was also confined to public secondary schools in this region. The current study employed descriptive research survey design to collect information, measurement, classification, analysis, comparison, and interpretation of data. This study also used mixed method of research through combination of qualitative and quantitative approach. The study target population was 14280 students stratified into boys schools, girls schools and mixed schools. To begin with, stratified random sampling was used to establish the number of students to be drawn from each school category. This was done proportionately so that the final sample reflects the target population. Simple random sampling was used to select 92 form two students from girl's schools, 70 from boy's schools, and 207 from mixed schools to get the required sample size of 369. Form two students were selected using random numbers which were generated to get the required student sample. Stratified and simple random sampling was used to arrive at the sample. The deputy principals and teacher counselors from three purposively sampled schools, which include one boys' school, one girls', and one mixed school were interviewed, to give their response on how they involve students in decision making. Data was collected by use of students' questionnaire and interview schedule for deputy principals' and guiding and counseling teachers. The data was analyzed through Bivariate Analysis. Chi-square test was used to determine the relationship between students' perception on participation in decision making in secondary schools and discipline.

RESULTS

The results were presented as per the objectives

Students' perception of their participation in decision making and discipline

Students' perception towards their participation in decision making: The first objective in this study was to find out the perception of the students towards participation in decision making in secondary schools in Eldoret East. The following question was raised to achieve this objective: What perception do secondary school students in Eldoret East have towards their participation in decision making? To get answers to the question, secondary school students were requested to

respond to the items in the questionnaires on students' perception on participation. The following results were obtained from the students' response.

Table 1. Students perception on participation

Students' perception on participation in decision making	Percent	Frequency
Exclusion from meaningful decision making	55%	185
Should be involved in decision making	89%	301
Value and own decisions they make	73%	248
Feel their participation be taken seriously	88%	297

Table 2. Students' discipline

Students' discipline	Mean	Std. Deviation
Students respect each other in my school	3.74	1.33
Create a conducive learning environment	3.60	1.39
Students are focused in their studies and do well academically	4.02	1.03
In my school, students look for acceptable ways of solving their issues	3.47	1.41
Students are responsible and self-driven	3.72	1.17

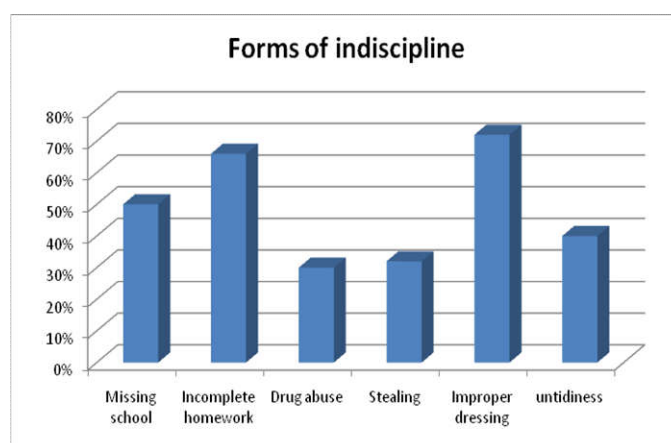


Figure 1. Forms of indiscipline in secondary schools

Table 3. Constraints to students' participation in decision making

Constraints to students' participation in decision making	Percent	Frequency
School principals and the teachers are the major decision makers	41%	138
Lack of enough avenues for participation	20%	68
Fear for victimization	16%	54
Students' counselors' failure to report students views	13%	44

Table 4. Areas of students' involvement in decision making

Areas where students are involved decision making	Mean	Std. Deviation
There is peer teaching in my class	3.47	1.26
Members of my class elect students councilors	2.83	1.49
The chair of the student council usually attend school board of management meetings	2.69	1.38
Students, who qualify in games, represent the school at all the levels	3.93	1.23
Girl guides and scouts represent our school during some public Holidays celebrations at the national level	2.47	1.31

From table 1, majority of the students, (89%), felt that they should be involved in decision making, followed by those that thought that participation in decision making should be taken seriously (88%), then those that felt that they value and own decisions that they make (73%), and lastly the students who felt that students in secondary school have been left out in decision making, (55%).

Table 5. Strategies to enhance students' participation in decision making

Strategies to enhance students' participation in decision making	Percent	Frequency
The school to have open forum	40%	134
Reward students who do well in academics and Co-curricular activities	32%	107
Teachers to take students' participation seriously	20%	67
The school to have suggestion boxes	8%	27

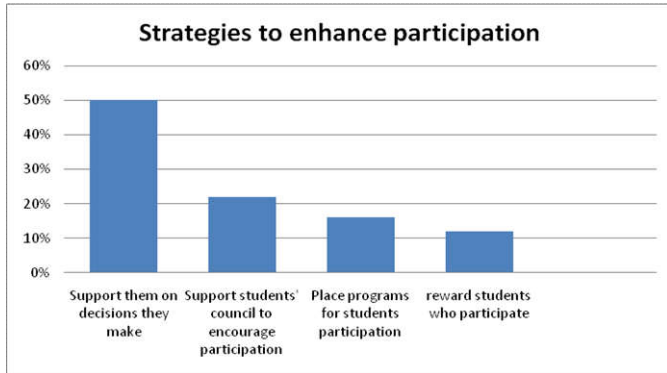


Figure 2. Strategies to enhance participation in decision making

From table 1, the findings showed that the students feel and think that they should be involved in decision making. Therefore, participation in making decisions in learning institutions, like secondary schools, should be taken seriously, as stated in The Constitution of Kenya (2010), on public participation. From the research findings, the students felt that they should be involved in decision making, they also thought that their participation needs to be taken seriously. It is evident that students in secondary schools are not fully involved in decision making as they ought to be, and that their participation in decision making needs to be enhanced. The study findings indicated that the students value and own the decisions that they make. When students own the decisions they make, they are likely to implement what they have participated in deciding. The secondary school students should not be left out in meaningful decision making, as their involvement is necessary in school.

Students' discipline: The study sought to establish students' level of discipline in secondary schools through a questionnaire. The students' response on discipline is summarized in table 2. From table 2, secondary school students' discipline levels vary in different areas of participation. Students focus on their studies and do well academically with a mean of 4.02, showed the highest level of discipline, followed by students respect each other (M=3.74), students are responsible and self driven (M=3.72), students create a conducive environment for learning (M=3.60), and students seek for acceptable ways of solving issues (M=3.47), in that order. From the findings the students seem to have an insight of how they can maintain discipline in their schools. Steinberg (2010) noted that students in secondary school are mature enough to make the right decisions on matters that concern them. The students indicated to be aware of the main reason why they are in the school: for academic pursuance. The students are self driven and responsible. They also indicated that they respect each other. These create conducive learning environment which is necessary for better academic performance.

Deputy Principals' Interview Schedule Results on Students' Discipline: The study sought to find out forms of indiscipline in schools from the school deputy principals.

The forms of indiscipline indicated by the deputy principals are summarized in figure 1. The deputy principals' interview schedule findings revealed that there is indiscipline in schools. This is contrary to the findings of the students' questionnaire on discipline, presented on table 2. These forms of indiscipline on figure 1 include; missing school (50%), incomplete homework (66%), drug abuse (30%), stealing (32%), improper dressing (72%), and untidiness (40%). The school deputy principals further revealed that they have put measures in place to make sure that the secondary school students are disciplined. One of them stated *"We encourage good behavior by rewarding students and discourage misbehavior through punishment."* Such measures include; rewarding the disciplined students and punishing the indiscipline. The form of punishment include; splitting firewood, slashing grass, cleaning classes and toilets, bringing parents, and suspending the indiscipline students. The rewards for good behavior include; tours, material gifts, monetary rewards, and applauses.

When asked about the level of discipline in the school, the deputy principals said that the students' discipline was average, and this depended on where the students came from, in terms of residence. One of the deputy principal stated that *"When you see a student from the informal settlement breaking a few rules, you should not be surprised. By obeying majority of the rules, they have tried."* The study further revealed that, the deputy principals involve the students in maintaining the discipline in school. Such ways include; students coming up with class rules, students' councilors reporting the indiscipline cases and even solving some, like controlling class discipline, and each student maintaining self discipline. It was noted that, when students are involved in school academic and extracurricular activities, their discipline improves. The deputy principals concurred that when the students come up with class rules they are careful not to break the rules they come up with. One of them stated that *"The students carefully obey their own rules more than they obey any other person's rules."* All the deputy principals concurred that involving the students in school activities makes them happy and even love their school more, as they feel important and part of the school. The deputy teachers were ready to involve the students as this made their work of maintaining discipline in school easier. From the above discussion, it is clear that students are more disciplined when they are part of the decisions made on matters concerning them.

Constraints to students' participation in decision making: The second objective of the study was to establish constraints to students' participation in decision making. To achieve this objective, the following question was raised. What are find out constraining factor to participation in decision making from the students. Table 3 has the results obtained through the students' questionnaire. The findings on table 3 show the constraining factors to students' participation in decision making. The major constraining factor to students' participation in decision making is, the school principals and teachers are the main decision makers (41%), followed by lack of enough avenues for students' participation in decision making (20%), fear of victimization (16%), students' councilors' failure to report the students views (13%), students lack of interest in participation in decision making (10%), in that order. A study by Nyabisi (2014) noted that the main decision makers in secondary schools are the school principals followed by the teachers. The students do not have much to say concerning major decision making in schools.

The findings reveal that students are given inadequate chance to participate in decision making. Students exist to be seen in school but not to be heard; not part of the decision making organ.

Students' involvement in decision making in secondary school: The third objective in this study was to investigate students' involvement in decision making. To achieve this objective, the following question was posed; how are students involved in decision making in secondary school? The responses from the students are shown on table 4. From the findings, the students are involved in decision making in different school activities. The secondary school students agreed to have students represent school at all levels. At the class level, the students teach their peers ($M=3.47$) in academics and issues concerning class discipline. At the school level, the students are involved in electing members of the students' council ($M=2.83$).

The students also indicated an aspect of participation in the school administration when they attend school board of management meeting ($M=2.69$). At the county level, the students indicated to have been involved ($M=3.93$). These students who qualify in games and music festivals represent the school in the county secondary school games and music festivals. These games include ball games and athletics. Though there is an indication of participation, a mean of ($M=2.5-3.4$) showed that the respondents were not sure whether; there is peer teaching in their classes, members of the class elect school councilors, and the chair of the students council usually attend school board of management meetings. The respondents disagreed that the girl guides and scouts represent their school during some public Holidays celebrations at the national level, with a mean ($M=2.47$).

Strategies used to enhance students participation in schools

Strategies from the students' questionnaire: The fourth objective of this study was to establish strategies used to enhance students' participation in decision making in secondary schools. To achieve this objective, the following question was posed; what are strategies used to enhance students' participation in decision making? An open ended question was used to establish, from the students, ways of enhancing their participation in decision making, in secondary school. Table 5 shows the students' responses on strategies that can enhance participation in decision making in school.

The majority (40%) of the students suggested that open forum to be organized in school as a way of enhancing students' participation in decision making, followed by rewarding the students who do well in academics and co-curricular activities (32%), then the teachers to take students' participation seriously (20%), and lastly, the school to have suggestion boxes (8%). The students suggested that their participation in decision making can be enhanced through having open forum where the students can freely air their issues. However this can be done when the students are sure that their views will not lead them to victimization, as students are likely to highly participate in the open forum if their meaningful suggestions are taken positively. The findings on table 5 indicate that rewarding students that participate in academic and extracurricular activities will enhance their participation in decision making. Reward encourages eliciting of a behavior by the participant with an aim of getting the reward.

When teachers take students' participation seriously, they are likely to increase their participation for their meaningful suggestions have a high chance of being implemented. The result of the findings revealed that to a small extent, (8%), suggestion boxes enhance students' participation in decision making.

Guiding and counseling teacher interview schedule on strategies to enhance participation: The study also used interview schedule to gain more insight to the strategies that secondary schools can use to enhance participation in decision making. Three guidance and counseling teachers participated in this study. Each teacher represented one type of school: either boys, girls, or mixed school. The findings of the study are indicated on figure 2. From the results of the interview schedule, the guiding and counseling teachers admitted that the secondary schools through their office use different strategies to enhance participation in decision making. These include: supporting meaningful decisions the students make (50%), empowering student councilors to support students' participation (22%), putting in place programs like peer counseling, for students' participation (16%), and lastly, rewarding students who participate in school activities (12%). The guidance and counseling teachers also revealed that students' participation in decision making can be enhanced. From the study findings, the students have been involved in extra-curricular and academic activities but the participation needs enhancing. When asked whether the secondary school students are involved in school activities, one of the guiding and counseling teacher (from a mixed school) stated that, *"The students in secondary school have been involved in many ways which include peer teaching and coming up with reasonable school rules."*

The guiding and counseling teachers were asked whether the students have ever suggested the ways they can be involved in decision making and stated that they have ever requested to be involved in counseling their peers, councilors to punish the indiscipline students, students creating class rules and planning for innings and outings. These outings are both in academic and co-curricular activities, and include: symposiums, games, academic tours, debates, and bench marking. The guiding and counseling teachers observed that some of these requests were met while some like students punishing fellow students were discouraged. One of them (from a girls' school) stated that, *"If students councilors are given the power to punish others, they might go beyond limits for they might lack knowledge on how to punish the peers."* From the findings of this study, the guiding and counseling teachers noted that the students were more willing to participate when they realized that teachers were supportive on students' suggestions on participation in school activities.

Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it was concluded that involving the students in decision making needs enhancing. The findings indicated that there is students' indiscipline in secondary schools in Kenya. The findings further showed that the teachers are aware of various ways of enhancing students' participation. However, the school administration and teachers need to put in place measures to support the students' participation, like having open forum, introducing suggestion boxes for students' participation, and implementing reasonable students' suggestions.

The study findings indicated that the students suggested strategies of enhancing their participation. The study concludes that the students feel that their involvement in school activities is important. When encouraged, as found out from this study, students' involvement in decision making has a great impact on students' discipline in secondary schools.

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