

The Nature of Student Participation in Decision Making in Secondary Schools in Kenya

Tikoko Jeruto Betty, Catherine Kiprop and Emily Bomett

Abstract

This study investigated the nature of student participation in secondary schools in Kenya. The study was prompted by the recurrent student unrest in Kenya; often blamed in media and research to unequal decision making opportunities in schools. The traditional hierarchical authoritarian culture prevailing in the Kenyan society often influences decision making processes in schools hence the locking out of students in decision making. Data was collected by means of a survey questionnaire distributed among 150 secondary school learners and sixty teachers. The findings revealed that though there attempts to include views of students in school policy, such attempts were mainly tokenistic and did not include core management issues. It was also found that students were excluded from key decision making bodies such as the Board of Governors, Parent Teacher Associations and special management committees. In addition, preferred channels of harnessing students' views included notice boards, prefect body, assemblies, and class meetings. Though popular, these means of communication were found to be disproportional and unfair as communication was one way- a form of telling and instructing students - rather than encouraging dialogue and open discussion between student and school administrators. Further, it was found that communication channels that fostered dialogue and open discussion were unpopular and little used. These included the baraza system, student council, open forums and student parliaments. It was thus concluded that student participation in secondary schools was still wanting and needed to be expanded to include issues beyond student welfare issues.

Key words: Participation, Students, Decision making, Secondary schools.

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