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INFLUENCE OF SCHOOLS' DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP PRACTICES ON STUDENTS' PARTICIPATORY DECISION MAKING IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN TIGANIA EAST SUB COUNTY, MERU COUNTY, KENYA

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Purpose: Globally, there is a concern on the way learners are being involved in decision making in their schools. The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of schools' democratic leadership practices on students' participatory decision making in public secondary schools in Tigania East Sub County, Kenya.

Methodology: This study was guided by the Participative Leadership Theory and the Normative Decision-making Theory. The study embraced mixed methodology and the concurrent triangulation with descriptive survey for quantitative data design. The target population was 479 which included: 25 principals, 250 teachers, 4 education officers and 200 students. The total sample was 199 participants. This included 11 principals, 110 teachers, 4 education officers and 74 student leaders. There were questionnaires for teachers and interview schedule for principals. The instruments were piloted in Tigania Central Sub County using 10 teachers and 6 BoM chairpersons representing 10% of the total sample. The piloting participants was not included in the final sample since they came from another sub county. Quantitative data was analyzed in descriptive and presented using tables, frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data was analyzed through thematic analysis presented in narrative form and verbatim citations.

Findings: The study established that schools' democratic leadership practices as independent variables were fully fulfilled and students' participatory decision making was present among schools in the study area. It was recommended that more research be done in Meru using various participants and the government establish if students participated fully in decision making processes.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: Participative Leadership Theory emphasizes participation in making decisions. It is quite democratic in nature. It emphasizes team members making decisions. Normative Decision-Making Theory shows the effectiveness of the decision-making process measures. The theories were validated as they showed participation and effective decision making. It was recommended that more research be done in the study area on the same subject.

Key Words: *Decision-Making, Democratic, Influence, Leadership, Participatory*

INTRODUCTION

This investigation looked at the effect of school leadership practices on learners' participatory making of decisions in Tigania East Sub County, Kenya. Institutional leadership participation began in the universities since the 13th Century in European nations. In Paris, the university became to be known as university of masters as lecturers shared leadership with students who were elected. In Bologna, university students organized federation of guilds particularly to control the curriculum (Perkin, 2013). Today's provision for learner contribution in making of decisions has roots in the university democratization all over Northern America, West Europe and areas of British Commonwealth in the nineteen sixties and beginning of nineteen seventies. Increased managerism in universities became a matter of democratization which involved the applying of management styles and tactics established in the world of business. The managerism was described first in the USA in the 1970s and the United Kingdom in the nineteen eighties, in Commonwealth universities and South Africa and finally in Continental Europe and Latin American institutions in the nineteen nineties and beginning of 2000s (Luescher-Mamashela, 2016).

An impressive improvement has been acquired at every level in the growth of guidelines that endorse the application of Article Twelve, United Nation Convention on the child Rights (Lansdown, 2017; UN, 2017). A majority of nations which are participants of the UNCRC have created legal requirements for students to be involved in the formation of decisions. A few countries in Europe and the United States of America have established means that represent the opinions of learners at numerous stages (UN, 2017).

Schools in America may want to keep social order like their English counter parts, training their learners on leadership as well as authority and responsibility. There are learners in US schools who have more influential responsibility in institutions authority as student councils. These play a role of official agencies who make decisions and make sure that these decisions are carried out (Wambua, Okoth, & Kalai, 2017). There is interest in participating leadership in reputable schools and this is growing as new types of leaderships are evolving bringing about decision making which is collective. Adetoro (2015) did an investigation in twelve universities in Nigeria's Southern part and the participants who were students and their lecturers were in agreement that learner participation in making of decisions was a crucial forecaster of management efficiency and owning of the decisions made through consensus. Participating authority includes sensitizing towards democracy while devolution of institution government is the diffusion of the process of making decision to comprise all the affiliates of the institution (Kalai, 2017).

Institution leadership is a complicated process which demands good leadership practices. One of these practices may involve the students' participatory decision making in the public secondary schools which can bring about smooth running of the institutions. Education is nowadays globally believed to be a fundamental human right and as the main means by which adults and children who are economically and socially marginalized may save themselves from poverty and get the ways to partake completely in their societies (United Nations, 2017). Many worldwide peoples' rights proponents including UNESCO as well as the Social and Cultural Rights, International Covenant on Economic, the Convention against Discrimination in Education, among others, have made an affirmation to this (Torres, 2016; UNICEF, 2015).

United Nations Conventions regarding Rights of Children (2013) discussed the agreement of right to education. As usual in agreements, the key issue was the enactment. According to this Convention, there were four essential philosophies which should direct the enactment of the right to education. The principles were namely: the best interest of the kid, right to life, no discrimination and growth of the kid. Children have right to express themselves concerning all issues affecting them regarding the age and level of maturity. This presupposes that, kids should be actively concerned about their own education. Thus, it is likewise vital that education is calculated to enhance and reverence their human rights and requirements. Children must partake effectively in determining their own lives and education in the institutions they get education from.

Laudable improvement has been completed in every level concerning making policies and regulations that endorse the enactment of Object Twelve of UN Convention on Rights of the Child (Lansdown, 2017; United Nations, 2017). Greater number of states that are countersigners to the UNCRC have made legal necessities for students to be involved in making decisions. There are some countries in Europe and the United States of America that have made structures that characterize the opinions of learners in different stages (United Nations, 2017). Included are nations in Europe like France, Norway, UK, Sweden, Finland and Northern Ireland (Hannam, 2013; Carr, 2015; Alderson, 2014 & Shatilova, 2014). In these countries, institutions formulate learners' councils whereby they air their opinions on issues that disturb them.

In African countries, every community school must formulate a ruling body which should allow students' representation. A good example is South Africa whereby students are represented from the eighth grade or above. There must be representation in council of students in every public institution teaching eighth grade and above (Carr, 2015; Mabovula, 2014). This plan, nevertheless, assumes that those kids in lower classes should not be considered or have representatives in the learners' councils. In the case of Namibia, students' responsibility in the leadership of schools is clearly shown in the users' Guide to Education Code of Conduct for Learners have representatives by democratically chosen school boards that comprise teachers and parents who handle money, discipline and human resources among others (Government of Namibia, 2013).

Closer home in East Africa, Tanzania was among the first nations to establish learner involvement in formulating decisions in institutions by having representatives in committees that were involved in making decisions. The institutions form councils whose members and duties are stated in National Policy on School Councils (Carr, 2015). Learners' council is the channel by which they get involved in making decisions in schools.

However, due to the resistance from heads of institutions and teachers, the progress has been slow (Kamuhanda, 2014). For example, in the last three decades in Kenya, students' involvement in making of decision has been propagated by scholars in education (Kamuhanda, 2014, Ogot, 2013; Buhere, 2015; Kindiki, 2017, Jerutto, 2016). Advocates of learner involvement in making decisions had justification in their backing the notion on the principle that decisions made by schools touch the student in hidden and evident ways. Students are basically affected by decisions made in schools (Sushila *et al.*, 2014) and due to this, the endorsements by learners could be quite useful and if carried in the proper way, can work positively towards schools' progress. Involving students would do away with resistance predispositions of decisions imposed

upon them by school administrators. The acceptance of decisions would be influenced by their involvement in making the decisions. Calls for inclusivity of learners in making of decisions in institutions have led to various efforts by the Ministry of Education to put in place structures for inclusion. The most noticeable of this is the establishment of the Kenya Secondary School Students' Councils in 2009. The KSSSC was formed with an aim to involve learners in decision making and make secondary school governance more participatory in nature. In this kind of structure students are supposed to be engaged fully making decisions in schools to guarantee their views are included in the government of schools in Kenya.

In Kenya, from the early nineteen nineties, riots had been reported in learning institutions namely secondary schools resulting to lives being lost. The utmost notorious unrests included St. Kizito disaster on 13th July 1991 resulting to perishing of 19 girls. In Nyeri County, there was a strike in one high school on 24th May 1999 resulting to death of 4 student leaders. In Machakos County, there was fire in Kyanguli school on 25th March 2001 resulting to death 67 learners. Nonetheless, who precisely should take responsibility for these riots? Kamuyu (*East African Standard*, 2001) established that in a few cases, the institutional management has been unsuccessful in sorting out real grievances that the learners face. Learners as well as their parents are knowledgeable. Parents discourse numerous matters with their kids, enabling them know their rights. Movements on rights have entered into institutions nowadays and talked of liberty and right henceforth the learners are conscious of peoples' rights, exploitations, children misuse and so forth. Lack of discipline, excessive academic premium, peer pressure and drugs have a role in numerous riots (Mulwa & Maiyo, 2017).

Public secondary schools have to practice healthy processes that can enable learners to be part and parcel of the administration. The learners have a great role to play when it comes to the management schools. The right to education must be comprehended in relations to popularity, participation, esteem and inclusivity. The characteristic of involvement comprises kids having larger effect on what occurs to them. They must have chances to partake completely in matters touching them in every sphere of life. This investigation argued that in Kenya and possibly various other states, the characteristics of involvement, esteem and inclusivity have not been completely recognized in schools henceforth the predominant unruliness amongst learners in numerous institutions. It is common with doubt and uncertainty amid the educators and school heads on one hand and learners on the other hand (Mutuku, 2014).

In Kenya, before the promulgation of the new Constitution public institutions were under Boards of Management (BoMs) who were selected by Education Minister (Mutuku, 2014). The BoM members were drawn from numerous participants but not from the students. The PTA likewise, was involved in the running of schools without any learner representation. Consequently, learners remained voiceless in the making decisions in the BoMs and PTAs. Learner leadership was by prefect body extensively practised in numerous institutions as a controller instrument for teaching staff and administrators rather than representing learners. Noting the gaps that existed in the leadership and organization of education in Kenya, there was a creation of *Task Force on Totally Integrated Quality Education and Training*. It suggested that strategies for the autonomous running of each educational institution that included every participant, is formulated as well as enacted (Republic of Kenya, 2016). Responding to this, administration passed the Children's Act Cap 586. This supported UNCRC as it necessitates kids to possess right to speak their opinions on every matter that affected them (Republic of Kenya, 2016; United Nations, 2015). This was destined to propel learner involvement in the process of

making decisions in every sphere of living, institutions included. Among investigators who have progressive urgings in favour of learners' involvement in decision making include: Manefield, *et al.*, (2015), Fletcher, (2015); Griebler and Nowak (2015).

Therefore, this investigation embarked on leadership practices pertaining students' input in making decisions in schools in Tigania East. From observations and data from the sub county education office, many of the institutions may not have active students' councils. This translated into the fact that there is poor participation of students in Tigania East in decision-making process (SCDE, 2019).

Statement of the Problem

The students' leadership participation was spearheaded by the Government of Kenya. This was to enable secondary schools be more participatory in nature. In this arrangement, the learners are supposed to be part and parcel of leadership in their institutions. However, the reality ground for this study was that, despite this impressive move by the government, schools in Tigania East, Meru County continue to experienced high number of school strikes, students' dropout rates to join *miraa* business, drug and substance abuse, school disconnectedness, as well as other indiscipline cases from students that lead to poor performance, that may be as a result of lack of ownership, engagement, cooperation due to lack of student involvement in decision making process (Meru County Education Office, 2018). If this situation was not addressed the schools and students in this sub county would continue to perform poorly, experience lack of representation, lack of belonging, lack of community, lack of school connectedness/or connectivity, lack of participation, and all these would continue to fuel student dropouts, absenteeism, lack of completion, transition, truancy, drug and substance abuse and poor performance. Bearing in mind the lacuna, therefore, this investigation aimed at finding out the effect of school leadership practices on students' participatory decision-making in schools in Tigania East, anticipating to fill this gap of knowledge. Outcomes of the proposed research may offer information to researchers on the outcome of school leadership practices on students' participatory decision making.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section begins with the theoretical framework of the two theories use in the study. These are the Participative Leadership and Normative Decision-making theories followed by the objective.

Participative Leadership Theory

Participative decision-making model was developed by Tannenbaum and Schmidt. The model shades light on school leadership practices. The participation management approach is one of the four management approaches from Likert. This of management style is also known as democracy leadership. It is characterized by the head vigorously engaging team members in recognizing objectives, developing policy, and making decisions generally. This theory emphasizes participation in making decisions. It is quite democratic in nature. It emphasizes team members in making of decisions. The learners' engagement created inspired trust among them and administration.

Normative Decision-Making Theory

Normative decision-making model was developed by Victor Vroom. The model anchors the students' participatory decision-making theme. The theory envisages the effectiveness of

decision-making measures including the decision-making factors, the circumstances and the gravity of the decision to conclude which of the five methods is most operative. This theory shows the effectiveness of the decision-making process measures. Regarding the school leadership practices, normative decision-making theory gave school leaders light on the choices to make in final decisions. The leaders can be free to allow input by the students' contributions and this prevents indiscipline.

Influence of Schools' Democratic Leadership Practices on Students' Participatory Decision Making

Regarding democratic management, the leader makes consultations, inspires contribution and uses power with, rather than power over learners. Heads of finest schools are democratic (Maicibi, 2015). Learners' discipline issues are witnessed worldwide. In US, Gottfredson (2017) established that in 6 middle schools of Charles Town, learners lost seven thousand nine hundred and thirty-two teaching days due to school suspensions in one academic year owing to misbehavior in schools. Weeramunda (2016) also did an investigation in Sri Lanka about discipline in schools and established that fierceness and learners' misbehavior is increasing. Some disturbances were witnessed in 1990, 1996 and 2004. (Garagae, 2017) conducted research in Botswana and established that discipline complications in schools reveal themselves in different like harassment, destruction, alcohol and abusing drugs, absence and reluctance in doing assignments.

In the Republic of Kenya, discipline in institutions is similarly problematic. Ngotho (2015) established that discipline issues are demonstrated in form of bullying, truancy, drugs, cheating in exams, school unrests among other ways. A story carried in *Daily Nation* in November 2011 showed that impersonations and use of phones in cheating during 2011 Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education exam were detected in numerous areas of the country which led to withdrawing of results for 2,927 learners (*Daily Nation*, 2012).

The Sub County Director of Education in Kisii Central inspection report showed cases of unruliness in schools were witnessed such as Kisii school, where a total of twenty-five learners were locked at police station demonstrating because of authoritarian principal, whom they said was corrupt and had no time for parents, workers and fellow teachers. Cardinal Otunga school went on rampage wanting transfer of their principal due to authoritarianism in his management (Barongo, 2016).

Oyedeji as well as Fasasi (2016) established that, as a few managers make decisions without consulting juniors, there are others who want to inspire participating in creation of decisions. This tendency flourishes in universities of Nigeria, private as well as public, where learners hardly make decisions regarding academic and managerial issues. In the meantime, a belief exists that scholars' decisions are less endangered to favouritism than decisions by the management alone, which may have deep impacts on its academic and managerial successes (Fajana, 2002). Additionally, Ajayi (2015) says that the necessity of scholar's participation in making decisions in universities may not be over emphasized due to its spillover effect on the overall academic achievement of scholars. Ejiogu (2015) opines that educational managers are anticipated to be armed with the academic information and professional skills to empower them to handle changes in teaching and learning circumstances, joined with the managerial demands

for efficiency. This is the reason in the USA and United Kingdom higher education systems formal student participation in university making of decisions becomes an established feature of university leadership in student affairs governance and also with respect to certain features of teaching and learning as well as institution-wide strategy and planning (Luescher-Mamashela, 2016). Syamala and Usha (2014) studied mentorship practices among students in India. Their concentration was on the types of mentoring strategies. The researchers failed to address democratic leadership which is vital for mentorship. This study examined democratic leadership as it paves way for participatory leadership.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study used Participative Leadership and Normative Decision-Making theories. The investigation employed mixed methodology and the concurrent triangulation with descriptive survey for quantitative data design. This involved simultaneous data gathering but separate scrutiny of quantitative and qualitative data was done. The target population was 479 which included: 25 principals, 250 teachers, 4 education officers and 200 students. The total sample was 199 participants. This included 11 principals, 110 teachers, 4 education officers and 74 student leaders. The Yamane's formula was used and teachers were randomly sampled as the principals were purposively sampled. Questionnaires were used for teachers and interview schedule for the principals. Quantitative data was analyzed in descriptive and presented using tables, frequencies and percentages. Qualitative data was analyzed through thematic analysis presented in narrative form and verbatim citations.

Table 1 Sampling grid

Category of Population	Total Population	Sampling Procedures	Sample Size
Student Leaders	200	Purposive Random sampling	74
Teachers	250	Random Sampling	110
Principals	25	Purposive Sampling	11
MoE/TSC	04	Census sampling	04
TOTALS	479		199

Source: the researcher, 2022

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data was set according to the research objective. This research examined how schools' democratic leadership practices were implemented on students' participatory decision-making in public secondary schools in Tigania East Sub County, Meru County, Kenya. Two levels of analysis were employed namely: descriptive and thematic.

Descriptive Statistics Analysis

Under the descriptive statistics, frequencies and percentages were established from variables based on five-point Likert scale seeking to examine disaster management training among secondary school principals and deputies. Table 2 provides the statistical analysis with reference to the variables.

Table 2 Schools' democratic leadership practices on students' participatory decision-making

Statements	A (1)	SA (2)	U (3)	D (4)	SD (5)
There is always student engagement in your school to enhance students' participatory decision making	28 36.36 %	49 63.64 %	0 0.0 %	0 0.00 %	0 0.00 %
You can say that your school has free flow of communication among the learners to enable students' participatory decision making	29 37.66 %	47 61.04 %	01 1.30 %	0 0.00 %	0 0.00 %
It is true to say that diverse opinions and ideas are always tolerated and reduce/prevent indiscipline occurrences and enhance students' participatory decision making	30 38.96 %	46 59.74 %	0 0.00 %	1 1.30 %	0 0.00 %
Your school has inspired trust and respect for students which enable fair students' participatory decision making	25 32.47 %	52 67.53 %	0 0.00 %	0 0.00 %	0 0.00 %
It is believed that schools' democratic leadership influences students' participatory decision making	11 14.29 %	65 84.42 %	0 0.00 %	01 1.30 %	0 0.00 %

Source: the researcher, 2022

From the table, it was acceptable that the students were engaged in schools in Tigania which propelled participatory decision making amongst the students. There were 28 (36.36 %) who agreed and 49 (63.64 %) who strongly agreed making a total of hundred percent in agreement which was termed excellent. Again, there was a free flow of communication amongst the students which enhanced participatory decision making in schools. There were 29 (37.66 %) of the participants who agreed to this as another 47 (61.04 %) who strongly agreed with only 1 (1.30 %) undecided.

The findings showed toleration of diverse opinions and ideas always which reduced indiscipline and enabled participation in decision making. This was as per 30 (38.96 %) who agreed to this as 46 (59.96 %) strongly agreed with only 1 (1.30 %) in disagreement. Yet schools had inspired trust as well as respect for students as agreed by 25 (32.47 %) and strongly agreed by 52 (67.53 %) of the participants. It was agreeable that schools' democratic leadership influenced students' participatory decision making as demonstrated by 11 (14.29 %) who were in agreement and 65 (84.42 %) in strong agreement with an insignificant 1 (1.30 %) in disagreement. The findings in the descriptive statistics were in line with the findings of Maicibi (2015) who studied democratic management and found that school heads of finest schools were democratic. The heads made

consultations and encouraged those involvements and used power with, rather than power over learners.

Thematic Analysis

The researcher prepared and organized data collected from the field interviews. There were 11 principals and 4 MoE/TSC officers interviewed during the qualitative data collection. The data was prepared and organized, reviewed and explored several times and then initial codes were created. These codes were reviewed and combined into themes. The themes were presented in a cohesive manner as seen below in the narratives.

From interviews, it was agreeable that school democratic leadership was exercised which boosted students' participatory decision making. Similarly, the principals were giving students opportunities to get involved in school major decisions as one of them said,

“These days are tough days as we lead our schools. We may not treat students the way we were treated when we were once learners. I have embraced democracy in my leadership by making sure that all students are represented by their leaders and participate in our major decisions to avoid friction between the learners and the administration” (PR1)

Democracy has been practised among most schools in leadership styles. There has been significant participation of students during making school decisions. Democratization is the order of the day in schools to ensure that students don't riot any time they wish as one principal noted,

“We have to change our styles of leadership nowadays and make sure that we democratize our systems. Students must be listened to and be allowed to be part and parcel of the school decision making process. This will minimize student unrests in schools” (PR2)

There has been strong student engagement amongst schools to ensure full participation of students while schools made decisions. There has been much consultation among students by school administrators as one principal said,

“Often times than not, we have engaged our students in discussions every time we want to change directions in our school. I believe by so doing, we paralyze any forces and grudges that may be accumulating among them. They become part and parcel of whatever we are doing as administrator” (PR3)

Many principals were found tolerating diverse ideas and opinions from students and all other stakeholders. This was a fruit of democracy in schools. Listening to students was imperative irrespective of whatever they had to say as one principal observed,

“As leaders, we must listen to everybody in the name of stakeholder. The key stakeholders in schools are the students. We have to tolerate all views and ideas that students give to us. We then weigh and consider all voices and we come together for discussions” (PR4)

There was inspired trust and respect to students which enabled them respect and embrace their leaders. Students need to know that they are liked and they are respected by their teachers. This kind of approach was necessary as they were allowed to participate in making decisions that affected them as one principal said,

“When you have trust in your students, they feel liked and appreciated. We trust them to the extent of inviting them when we are making decisions that will affect them in the future.

*Respecting them means that they will also respect you and you dilute any grudges by so doing”
(PR5).*

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings, it was concluded that school democratic leadership practices, students’ councils’ practices and setting rules and regulations as independent variables were fully fulfilled and students’ participatory decision making was present among schools in the study area. However, there was room for improvement and further research.

Recommendation for Practice

Though school democratic leadership had been practised well in the study sub county, the principals should be able to monitor and evaluate the extent to which the institutions practiced democracy

Recommendation for Policy

Regarding students’ democratic leadership, the Ministry of Education through the County Director of Education ensure that there was democracy always in schools

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