



## Relationship between the roles of Students' Councils in Strikes Management Strategies: Case of Public Secondary Schools in Central Kenya

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### ABSTRACT

*The ministry of education has compelled public secondary schools to constitute students representative councils in order to involve learners in decision making process and to provide a forum for students' voice in school management so as to effectively address students' problems. However, despite the constitution of students' councils and their representation in the schools' Board of Management, school strikes continue unabated and the relationship between school administrators and students remains unenthusiastic in public secondary schools in Central Kenya. The purpose of this study was to find out the relationship between the role of students' councils and students strikes in public secondary schools. The objectives of the study were to; establish the roles of the students' council presidents and assess their attitudes towards strike management strategies used by administrators in secondary schools. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design and was guided by Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs. The target population consisted of 847 students' council presidents in public secondary schools. The researcher employed simple random sampling technique and Gay's sampling formula of 10% was used to determine the sample size, therefore 10% of 847 yielded a sample size of 85 respondents. Data was collected using questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, aided by computer software SPSS version 21. Analyzed data revealed that the student council presidents were largely unaware of their functions relating to strike management strategies and that they felt left out in the strategies employed by their schools ( $\bar{x}=3.30$  on a scale of 1-5). The study further established that the student council presidents' attitudes towards strike management strategies used by administrators were negative ( $\bar{x}=1.71$ ) on the scale used of 1-5. It had been hypothesized that there was no statistically significant relationship between strategies used in strike management and the role of SC presidents. To test the hypothesis, regression analysis was done, which yielded a coefficient of the role of student council presidents in strike management strategies was 0.106 and a t-statics of .330 with a p-value of 0.746. The null hypothesis was thus accepted and it was concluded that the role of student council presidents' does not significantly influence strike management and thus has a non-significant positive relationship with strike management in schools. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that there is need to strengthen students' councils and sensitize the presidents on their roles in strike management strategies in secondary schools. This implies the need to enforce adherence to the implementation of the student council policy with a view to compel schools to actualize the democratization of management practices in secondary schools in order to incorporate students concerns in decision making processes.*

**Key Words:** Student councils, student council presidents, strikes, strategies, decision making.

### INTRODUCTION

All over the world democratization is increasingly gaining ground as a key characteristic educational reform; an important aspect of the reform process is the involvement of learners



in decision making process in schools (Bhengu, 1996). New legislations have been enacted to transform schools in accordance with democratic values and practices through the student representative councils (Lazarus, 1998). For a very long time governance of educational institutions has been a top-down model. This is now being abandoned in favour of more democratic models, based on the notion of shared leadership (Harris, 2004). Teachers, students, parents, members of the Parents-Teachers Association (PTA) and many other members of the community, all need to be included in some way in the decision-making processes in schools (Harris, 2004). Terms like transparency, equity, stakeholder, involvement, negotiations and consultation have been introduced to ensure that students in schools are not deprived of their rights and also to ensure that every learner receives fair treatment in all social structures (O'Donnell, 1994). It is therefore obligatory for schools to protect, promote and fulfill the rights of all learners and embrace the fact that learners have a democratic right to due process and to participate in decision-making in matters affecting them. Learners also have a right to have their views heard about matters concerning them (Education Labour Relations Council, (ELRC), 1999). It is therefore obligatory for schools to protect, promote and fulfill the rights of learners, since learners too have a democratic right to due process and to participate in decision-making in matters affecting them (Ngcobo, 2009). O'Gorman (2003) underscores the importance of student councils (SC) as a core for promoting democratic principles in a nation and adds that SC this is not a new feature; rather it has been practice in higher institutions of learning and universities. Students have been mandated to elect their leaders to represent their concerns with the college or university management. It not until recently this have not been the case in secondary schools where student leaders have traditionally been appointed by the school administration much to the disappointment of the student population who have persistently felt that the administrative decisions are insensitive to their needs (Maitles & Deuchar, 2006). Prefects have mostly been appointed by school authorities for their academic ability and conformity to the philosophy of the administrators. Student councils on the other hand, differ primarily in that students elect the members. They aim to represent students' issues and are a voice for students within the school

According to Stoker (1998) there are several benefits of involving students in the running of education institutions. Effective participation of students in governance makes it easier for them to accept decisions whose making they had a hand. Additionally, students are more likely to understand the motives for an otherwise objectionable policy and to appreciate that the motives were not malicious. Obondo (2000) observes that if students are involved in making decisions about salient issues concerning their lives, they are more likely to develop positive attitudes towards school goals and objectives. Obondo further asserts that students' representatives have also been noted to have the capacity to diffuse potential conflicts. This, they can do through regular meetings with their members and administration, designing mechanism for regular communication, thereby restraining their colleagues from unnecessary conflicts. The extent of student involvement in decision making is debatable with often conflicting viewpoints propagated by differing stakeholders depending on their background and world view.

Magadla (2007) observes that student participation in decision making in schools is often viewed as problematic to school administrators, parents and society at large. This is often due to the fact that students are viewed as minors, immature and lacking in the expertise and technical knowledge that is needed in the running of a school. Thus student participation in decision making is often confined to issues concerned with student welfare and not in core



governance issues. Aggrawal (2007) adds that while student representatives may not participate in matters relating to the conduct of examinations, evaluation of student performance, appointment of teachers, their participation should be ensured in all other academic and administrative decisions. Though this view appears to support student participation in decision making, it however confines student involvement in decision making to specific areas of school life. Huddleston (2007) in defining the limits of student participation observes that confining student involvement in decision making to specific areas of school life is likely to give students the impression that the school's commitment is tokenistic and therefore not to be taken seriously. Meaningful student involvement is the process of engaging students as partners in every facet of school change for strengthening their commitment to education, community and democracy (Maitles & Deuchar, 2006). It evolves from a growing awareness among students and educators that young people can and should play a crucial role in the success of school improvement.

This situation has been particularly evident in a number of countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America where schools have welcomed Student Councils (SCs) in their governing bodies (Jonston, 1997). In South Africa, the South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996), mandated that all public schools must have democratically elected School Governing Bodies (SGBs) comprised of principals, teachers, non-teaching staff, parents and learners, the latter applicable only in secondary schools. Though the South African Schools Act calls for active involvement of all stakeholders in all aspects of school decision-making processes, research has shown that some principals allow little or no subordinate participation in school decision-making processes, because such involvement is perceived as unproductive (Heystek, 2001). In Kenya calls for inclusions of students in the decision-making structure in schools have led to the Ministry of Education putting in place structures for inclusion. The most prominent of this was the formation of the Kenya Secondary School Student Council (KSSSC) formed in 2009 with a view to making secondary school governance more participatory. In this new arrangement, students would be part and parcel of decision-making to ensure their interests are adopted in the administration of schools. Students' council that was adopted in 2008 with the understanding that providing students with an avenue to voice their concerns in decision making, the escalating problems prevailing in secondary schools such as student unrest, violence, and rebellion against authority would be effectively addressed. However, public secondary schools in Central Kenya indications are that schools are yet to feel the benefits of the student representative councils as schools continue to be ravaged by uncontrolled incidents of unrest accompanied by violence, arson and wanton destruction of property. This raises concerns as to the relationship between the role of students' councils and student's strikes, and thus the need for this study.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Students' unrests and strikes have been a common phenomenon in public secondary schools in Central Kenya. Schools have consistently experienced escalating incidents of wanton destruction of property, arson and violence against teachers and school administrators. In view of this concerns have been raised pertaining to role of students' representative councils as amicable channels of presenting students' grievances in a democratic and civilized manner to the school administration. The implementation of student councils in schools have undoubtedly been championed as a viable alternative that would allow student involvement in decision making through the application of democratic principles in schools. Despite the fact that student councils oversee and plan the welfare of students, complaints persist over



unsatisfactory provision of services to students leading to strikes. The success of student councils in execution of their designated duties and assisting in provision of the much needed student services in secondary schools has been uncertain, as evidenced from the observed regular protests by students. This necessitated the need for this study which was to assess the relationship between the role of students' council's president and student's strikes. Moreover, strategies employed to manage strikes have not been informed by empirical research. Studies on students' unrest largely failed to explore the role of student councils in strike management in public secondary schools. This study therefore provides paradigm shift from opinion based evidence to research based policy formulation and implementation in relation to strike management strategies in public secondary schools in Central Kenya.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The history of student leadership in secondary schools has been a journey; it has evolved from the traditionally appointed student leaders that included prefects and captains to the present democratic process of Student Representative Councils (SRCs). Muli (2007) points out that the SRCs consists of hierarchical structure akin to the prevailing national political establishment consisting of popularly elected, councilors, ministers with the student council president at the apex. According to Oyaro (2005) the process of selection prefects was heavily influenced by the school administration which resulted in the feeling that the leadership of the student appointees was not reflective of the preferences the general student population. This arrangement had been a major source of conflict between the school administration and the student population who frequently engaged in strikes in an attempt to air their grievance. Whitehead (2009) adds that SRCs were undoubtedly a viable alternative of governance in the secondary schools as opposed to prefect system. The students elect their leaders through popular suffrage and in some cases the elected leaders are confirmed and sworn into office by the teachers. SRCs system allows adequate participation of students in the running of school. The elected students are involved in decision making process, policies and issues relating to students' welfare in schools. Meyer (2002) argues that the purpose of SRCs is to; develop positive attitudes and to practice good citizenship, promote harmonious relations throughout the entire school, improve student/teacher relationships, improve school morale and general welfare, provide a forum for student expression and plan special events or projects. Several scholars throughout the world have investigated the status of student representative councils in secondary schools.

In the USA, students elect class presidents to serve for a maximum term of one academic year with the option of seeking re-election. The presidents are mandated to ensure that concerns relating to the class are presented for debates at the student council's forum. Additionally, the president has the responsibility of presiding over cabinet meetings and consolidating class activities (Brady, 2005). A study by Bukaliya (2012) in Zimbabwe investigated the effectiveness and relevance the SRC had been in addressing student concerns in public secondary schools. Findings established that the SRCs were not effective in rendering the services for which they were elected. In particular the study found out that the SRCs rarely held any consultative meetings with respective stakeholders of the students. Students' grievances were obtained through suggestion boxes, but unfortunately, these had not been deliberated upon. The most dominating challenge was lack of funds and this made the majority of the SRC's objectives unattainable. For ease of coordination, office space should be availed to the SRC where they receive students' issues and sit for their meetings. A qualitative study conducted by Adriaan (2011) that used interviews and observations was



undertaken in two provinces of South Africa. The investigation considered the responses of focus groups of teachers, and school administrators in the two provinces regarding the issues of both the actual or theoretical involvement of learners in school governing bodies (SGBs). It established what barriers exist to learner participation. The study also found out that the issue of training learners for active involvement in school management was lacking. The findings suggest that, despite being afforded a full role in school governance by the education policy, learners do not always play their part in school decision-making. The study concluded that while learner participation in SGBs in South Africa offers considerable potential for both school improvement and for contributing to the deepening and consolidation of democracy in South Africa, much work still has to be done.

A study by Chemutai and Chumba (2014) on student council participation in decision making in public secondary schools in Kenya revealed that inclusion of student councils' views in secondary schools were mainly symbolic and did not extend to core management issues. Students' councils were mostly allowed to participate in student welfare issues. It was concluded that student councils' participation in secondary schools need to be expanded to include administrative issues. The recommendation of the study is that there is need for school management to implement significant student involvement in their schools. A similar study by Jeruto and Kiprop (2011) investigated the extent of student participation in secondary schools in Kenya. The study revealed that though there were attempts to include views of students in school policy, such attempts were mainly tokenistic and did not extend to core management issues. Students were only allowed to participate in student welfare issues but were deemed to be immature and therefore unable to participate in administrative issues such as managing funds and budget or in curriculum issues such as instructional methods or examinations. 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.

Obiero (2012) examined how student leaders are involved in decision-making at Kenyatta University. The research findings indicated that student leaders were involved in decision making through participation in the various boards and departmental committees. It was found that there was satisfaction among the student when their ideas were implemented. It was also found that by involving the leaders, they form a link between the student body and the administrators. Although the student leaders are the voice of the students most of the decisions the students made had to be vetted by the university authorities as they were seen to lack qualification to have a final say on decisions made in the university.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was guided by Abraham Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs (1968). Maslow's theory accounts for both biological and physiological needs. This is based on the belief that all individuals have numerous needs. Maslow developed a hierarchy of needs with the basic physiological needs at the bottom and self-actualization at the top. This theory guides this study since most of the strikes in schools are caused by failure to manage and satisfy the above needs such as lack of water, food, shelter, feelings of inferiority, lack of focus where students become dissatisfied and cause chaos in schools. In a school set up stakeholders need to understand that unsatisfied needs serve as a factor to arouse students' behavior. When a need has been minimally fulfilled, it then ceases to be a motivator of behavior. Needs that have gone unsatisfied for a long time serve to cause behavioural response such as frustration, conflict and stress. In conclusion when institution stakeholders



satisfy the needs of the students there will be a conducive environment for teaching and learning and academic performance will be realized.

## METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. According to Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) descriptive survey allows a researcher to gather information, summarize, present and interpret the data without manipulating the variables. This design was appropriate for the study because it enabled assessment of the relationship between the roles of students' council in strike management strategies in public secondary schools in Central Kenya. Data was collected using a self-scoring questionnaire administered to the sampled respondents. The return of the questionnaires was 100%. That collected data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with aid of the computer software SPSS version 21.

### Target Population

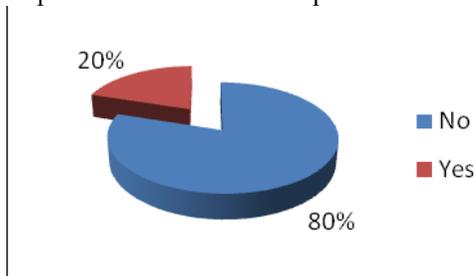
The target population consisted of 847 students' council presidents in public secondary schools in Central Kenya. The researcher employed Gay's formula of 10% to determine the sample size. Accordingly a sample of 85(10%) of the presidents of the SCs were selected by simple random sampling. The students' council presidents were selected because they are the ones who are mandated to amicably represent the views of the students and ward of strikes.

### Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The researcher used simple random sampling technique and sampled 85 schools using Gay's 10% formula. The president of the student council from each of the sampled schools was purposively selected for the study. Accordingly the study used a sample of 85 respondents.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study sought to establish the roles of the student council presidents' in strike management strategies in public secondary schools. To address this objective the respondents were provided with a dichotomous (Yes/No) item which sought to find out whether the school administration involved the SC presidents in strike management strategies. The responses of involvement of presidents in strike management are provided in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Involvement of SC Presidents in Strike Management Strategies**

The respondents were asked to indicate whether the school administration involved the SCs in the strike management strategies adopted by their respective schools'. The results revealed that a majority (80.0%) of the student presidents indicated that they were not involved in strike management strategies adopted by their schools'. The remainder (20.0%)



indicated that they were involved in the strategies adopted by their respective schools'. The respondents were provided with a further five items on a likert scale ranging from strongly agreed (SA), agreed (A), were undecided (UD), disagreed (D) or strongly disagreed (SD), to find out the roles played by the student council presidents in strike management. The findings are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Roles of Student Council Presidents' in Strike Management Strategies**

		SD	D	UD	A	SA	n	$\bar{x}$
1.	Calming unruly students	9	19	42	15	1	85	2.80
2.	Resolving interaction conflicts	8	25	35	15	2	85	3.06
3.	Engaging students as partners in every phase of change	2	10	51	20	2	85	2.16
4	Enhancing governance by representing the student population	10	44	23	8	0	85	2.34
5.	Growing awareness among students and educators	0	14	40	18	13	85	3.35
<b>Aggregate mean <math>\bar{x}</math>=3.30, n=85</b>								

Data presented in Table 1 indicates that the presidents of SCs were largely undecided as to whether the school administration involved then in calming unruly students ( $\bar{x}$ =2.80). The presidents were also undecided in their involvement in resolving interaction conflicts ( $\bar{x}$ =3.06). The SC presidents disagreed that they engaged students as partners in every phase of change ( $\bar{x}$ =2.16) and on enhancing on enhancing governance by representing the student population ( $\bar{x}$ =2.34). Lastly, on whether the presidents were involved in growing awareness among students and educators they were unaware ( $\bar{x}$ =3.35). The computed aggregate mean score of the roles of student council presidents' in strike management strategies were 3.35 indicating that the SC presidents were largely unaware of their roles relating to strike management strategies.

It had been hypothesized that there was no statistically relationship between strategies used in strike management and the role of SC presidents in secondary schools in Central Kenya. To test the hypothesis, regression analysis was done. The computed coefficient of the role of SC presidents in strike management strategies was 0.106. The t- statics for this coefficient is .330 with a p-value of 0.746 which is greater than 0.05. This p value confirms the non-significance of the coefficient of role of SC presidents in strike management strategies ( $\alpha$  = .05). The null hypothesis was thus accepted and it was concluded that the role of SC presidents does not significantly influence strike management and thus has a non-significant positive relationship with strike management in schools. The findings are presented in table 2.



**Table 2: Regression, role of Student Council Presidents in Strike Management Strategies**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.085 <sup>a</sup>	.007	-.059	.64423		
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
	(Constant)	1.370			1.11	.002
1	Involves student president	.106	.322	.085	.330	.746

These findings concur with Huddlestone (2007) who point out that school administrators have set limits to student participation in school management, he observes that student involvement in decision making is confined to specific areas of school life, whereas school's commitment to democratization remains tokenistic and therefore not to be taken seriously. Arguing in the same vein Maitles and Deuchar (2006) assert that meaningful student involvement as partners in every facet of school life is far from realized; the strengthening, commitment and nurturing of democratic principles in school management structures have remained rigid and continues to adhere to the old traditional structures. Magadla (2007) observes that student participation in decision making in schools is often viewed as problematic to school administrators, parents and society at large. This is often due to the fact that students are viewed as minors, immature and lacking in the expertise and technical knowledge that is needed in the running of a school. Thus student participation in decision making is often confined to issues concerned with student welfare and not in core governance issues. Perhaps these may be among the variables contributing to low involvement of SC presidents in strikes management strategies.

The second research objective sought to assess the attitudes of the SC presidents towards the strike management strategies used by administrators in public secondary schools in Central Kenya. The respondents were provided with five statements on school administration and students' strike management strategies and asked to indicate whether they strongly agreed (SA), agreed (A), were undecided (UD), disagreed (D) or strongly disagreed (SD) with the statements. Their responses were used to compute a mean score for each statement and a global mean score for all responses. Their responses are presented in Table 3.



**Table 3: Attitudes of the SC Presidents' towards the Strike Management Strategies**

	SD	D	UD	A	SA	n	$\bar{x}$
1. The administration blocks and suppresses any negative behaviour among students	73	12	0	0	0	85	1.14
2. The administration examines and reconciles differences between students and authorities	69	6	10	0	0	85	1.31
3. The administration has opened up channels of communication and feedback	50	12	8	15	0	85	1.86
4. The administration involve parents on key issues affecting students	42	11	4	13	16	85	2.26
5. The administration encourages creative solutions to problems	39	10	7	13	7	85	1.99
Aggregate mean $\bar{x}$ =1.71, n=85							

Table 2 clearly shows that the responses of the SC presidents on attitudes towards the strike management strategies employed by school administrators in public secondary schools in Central Kenya. Majority of respondents strongly disagreed that the administration blocks and suppresses any negative behaviour among students ( $\bar{x}$ =1.14) and that the administration examines and reconciles differences between students and authorities ( $\bar{x}$ =1.31). They disagreed that the administration had opened up channels of communication and feedback ( $\bar{x}$ =1.86) and that the administration involved parents on key issues affecting students ( $\bar{x}$ =2.26). Lastly they also disagreed that the administration encouraged creative solutions to problems ( $\bar{x}$ =1.99). The computed global mean score of the attitudes of the SC presidents' attitudes towards the strike management strategies used by administrators was largely negative ( $\bar{x}$ =1.71) on the scale used of 1-5. These findings suggest that the SC presidents felt that the strike management strategies employed by their schools were not effective. This apparent lack of zeal towards the strike management strategies is unlikely to persuade the students to adhere to decisions unilaterally arrived at by the school administration; consequently the envisaged benefits of the student councils in school management are unlikely to emanate from such a system. This is in agreement with Obondo (2000) who observes that if students are involved in making decisions pertaining salient issues concerning their lives, they are more likely to develop positive attitudes towards school goals and objectives. Additionally, students' representatives have also been noted to have the capacity to diffuse potential conflicts and influence student behaviour when they strongly believe in an administrative decision. Similarly, Maitles and Deuchar (2006) observed that in secondary schools student leadership have persistently felt that the administrative decisions are insensitive to their needs. These findings could be among the variables contributing to the negative attitudes of the SC presidents towards the strike management strategies in public secondary schools in Central Kenya.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of the study indicate that public secondary schools in central Kenya largely failed to involve SC presidents in strike management strategies that impacted negatively on strike management. The study further revealed that the relationship between strike management strategies and student involvement was statistically significant in secondary schools in central Kenya. Lastly, the study established that the SC presidents had a negative attitude towards the strike management strategies employed by the schools.



## RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that there is need to strengthen students' councils and sensitize the SC presidents on their roles in strike management strategies in schools. This is likely to foster harmony between the school administrations and the student population in secondary school students in Kenya. This implies the need to enforce adherence to the implementation of the student council policy with a view to compel schools to actualize the democratization of management practices in secondary schools in order to incorporate students concerns in decision making processes.

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