PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE ANXIETY: THE PERCEPTION OF KENYAN SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS ON STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

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ABSTRACT

Students' participation in school governance has been recommended as one of the solutions for the conflict often experienced in schools. However, much research on participatory governance has centered on students and teachers as the key respondents. Therefore, this study aimed at investigating the perception of Kenyan secondary school principals on student participation in school governance. The study objectives were: to assess the perception of principals on the emphasis placed on student participation in school governance, to assess the perception of principals on the existing modes of student leadership in schools, and to assess the perception of principals on students' representation in school governance bodies. A mixed methods research design was adopted for the study and the target population was public secondary school principals and deputy principals from the Central Rift region of Kenya. The total sample size of 406 respondents was made up of 202 secondary school principals, 202 deputy principals, and 2 Kenya Secondary Schools Heads Association (KSSHA) officials. Sampling was done using cluster, simple random and purposive sampling techniques; and data was collected using questionnaires and interview schedules. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics presented in the form of frequency tables and descriptive reports. The findings of the study showed that whereas majority of the school principals agreed that the emphasis placed on student participation in school governance was just right, the principals' approval of student representation in key governance bodies was low. The findings of this study will be useful to policy makers, development partners and capacity building agencies and institutions in education in coming up with policy directives and practices for effective student participation in school governance that will put into consideration the principals' perceptions.

Keywords: Student Participation, Principals' Perception, Participatory Governance, Representation, Student Leadership.

INTRODUCTION
Background to the Study

Participatory governance in schools is aimed at bringing down the level of conflict and turbulence in schools, which occurs when students feel that they have not been involved in decision making (UNESCO, 2007). In Kenya, for instance, numerous strikes characterized by violence and massive destruction of property have occurred in schools across the country. The number of secondary schools that experienced unrest in Kenya reached its peak in 2008, with more than 300 secondary schools across the country reporting incidences of unrest (GOK, 2008; Kaluoch, 2010; Iravo, 2011; Simatwa, 2012). The most recent wave of school strikes in Kenya took place in 2015, with several schools being reduced to ashes and facilities that had taken years to build being reduced to shells in a matter of minutes (Kiplagat and Oruko, 2015). Most students interviewed after such incidences of unrest attribute their actions

to lack of consultation in making decisions. As a result, there has been an increased emphasis for good governance in schools by adopting a structure that allows students to participate in school governance.

The emphasis on participatory school governance is not just for Kenyan schools, but for schools worldwide that desire peaceful co-existence amongst its members. As Moos (2008) argues, there is need for school principals to move away from the hierarchical and authoritarian forms of school governance to a system that emphasizes collaboration, participation and education for democracy. In support of this argument, Eacott (2011) emphasizes that there should be formal mechanisms put in place by the school principal to ensure student participation in decision making; especially on matters which affect the students directly. Reports by UNESCO (2007) and Plan International (2008) also found out that students worldwide want to be involved in making decisions about their schools, and be free to express their opinions on policy making. A study by Davies (2006) on School Councils in the United Kingdom (UK) showed that schools where school principals allow for students' participation in decision making have a stronger chance of success at effective school governance. This is because aggression diminishes when students feel supported and when their views are taken into consideration by their teachers and the school administration.

In Kenya, a National Baseline Survey on Child Participation in School Governance conducted by UNICEF (2009) in response to the spontaneous and widespread unrest in Kenyan secondary schools showed that there is dire need to involve all stakeholders, and more especially the students, in matters of school governance. The survey proposed that school principals should enhance the participation of students in school governance through representation of students in key decision making panels at both school and national levels. Other studies on students' participation as a possible mechanism of addressing student unrest and violence in Kenyan schools have also advocated for the prefect mode of student leadership to be replaced by the more representative mode of Student Leaders Council (SLC), for better participation of students in school governance (Muindi, 2010; Mule, 2011; Mugali, 2011; Tikoko & Kiprop, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

Most studies and reports on incidences of student unrest and violence in schools have largely attributed such incidences to non – participation of students in school governance (GOK, 2001; UNESCO, 2007; GOK, 2008; UNICEF, 2009). Specific studies on the participation of students in school governance as a possible mechanism of addressing student unrest and violence have advocated for the prefect mode of student leadership to be replaced by the more representative mode of Student Leaders Council (SLC), so as to enable effective participation and representation of students in school governance (UNICEF, 2009; Muindi, 2010; Mule, 2011; Mugali, 2011; Tikoko & Kiprop, 2011). However, the studies cited above have mainly centered on students and teachers as the key respondents. Thus, very little empirical literature exists on Principals' perceptions on student participation in school governance, especially in the Kenyan context. Development of such literature is important since meaningful student participation in school governance will not be realized without the school principals' support and approval.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were:
  i)   To assess the perception of school principals on the emphasis placed on student participation in school governance

ii)   To assess the perception of school principals on the existing modes of student leadership

iii)   To assess the perception of school principals on students' participation through representation in school governance bodies.

Theoretical Framework

This study was based on the Participative Leadership Theory (PLT) proposed by Yukl (1998). The PLT is a proactive approach to management based on the key principles of consultation, awareness, and empowerment. PLT holds the basic assumption that when those who implement decisions are involved in decision making, their understanding and acceptance of the issues is improved. Therefore, their level of commitment to the decision increases, thus reducing the level of conflict and competition. However, it is still within the leader's whim to give or deny control to the people in the decision making process (Coutts, 2010). Thus, the question of how much influence is given to others in the decision making process may vary depending on the leader's perceptions, preferences and beliefs (Kara and Loughlin, 2013). Mate (2013) observes that one major flaw of PLT is that it does not work well where those being consulted lack the necessary skills and knowledge to make key decisions, especially in technical decision areas. In the PLT, leaders are also forced to share all information; but as Ray (2012) observes, sometimes leaders may not need to share information of sensitive decision areas, especially if it is not imperative for everyone to be privy to such information.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Emphasis on Participatory School Governance (PSG)

Participatory school governance (PSG) has been advocated for by scholars who reject the notion that school governance should rest singularly in an individual school leader. According to Bush (2008) and Townsend (2011), school governance in the 21st century can no longer be left to the heroic individual leader (the school principal) alone. Consequently, participation by all the interest groups in the school, especially the students, is increasingly being favoured. Moos (2008) emphasizes that as part of the learning process, students have both a need and a right to be involved in the governance of schools. This involvement will require school structures in which students are consulted and given opportunities to experience leadership responsibly. Further studies from developed countries indicate that the increasing insistence on student participation in decision making in schools reflects the widely shared notion that enhanced school governance can only be achieved through flatter leadership and decentralized authority structures (Huddleston, 2007; Daly & Chrispeels, 2008 and Somech, 2010).

The implication here is that students should have a forum for presenting their views in school, with the ultimate goal of bringing down the level of conflict between the students and the school administration. While referring to the wave of unrest and violence experienced in secondary schools in Kenya in 2008, the Kenya Secondary Schools Heads Association (KSSHA) chairperson emphasized this need for students to participate in school governance by observing that this will make the students feel valued, thus bringing down episodes of unrest in schools (Muindi, 2010). This seems to be an acceptance that secondary schools should allow an all-inclusive governance style in which students, through their leadership, have a chance to participate in making decisions about school affairs. Kaluoch (2010) and Tikoko and Kiprop (2011) argue that this can only be accomplished by overhauling the power structure within secondary schools so as to incorporate student representation in key decision

making organs of the school such as the Board of Management (BOM), and the Parents Teachers association (PTA).

Modes of Student Leadership in Schools

Student participation in school governance can only be possible through some form of student leadership in schools. One of the most common forms of student leadership is the prefect system. This is a system where some students are appointed by the school administration to be in charge of the other students and to oversee aspects of students' organization such as checking lateness, reporting student misbehaviour, and ensuring order in the classes and dormitories. In some schools, prefects are also used to mete out discipline to other students. Prefects usually have their authority reinforced by some form of identification, like a difference in their school uniform or wearing of badges. According to Tikoko and Kiprop (2011), the prefect system creates a unidirectional flow of orders and communication and provides no channels for students to communicate with the school administration. Decisions on matters concerning students' welfare are made by the school administration, and then passed down to the students through the prefects. This results in resentment that has even led to attacks on school prefects by the other students; as revenge for the prefects being 'mouthpieces' of the school administration.

However, some schools have adopted an alternative mode of student leadership; that of the Students Leaders Council (SLC). According to Arthur et al (2008), a SLC is a group of student representatives usually elected by other students. The students, through the SLC, are fully involved in drawing up expectations, rules, rewards and sanctions that the school operate on. Studies conducted in the US, UK, Scotland, Elsalvador and South Africa have shown that schools that allow for students' participation in school governance, through the SLC, have recorded diminished aggression and conflict from students (Plan International, 2008; Davies, 2006; Gatt, 2005; and Lewis & Naidoo, 2004). In Kenya, the Ministry of Education in conjunction with UNICEF rolled out the student leadership programme in secondary schools in 2009, through the formation of the Kenya Secondary Schools Student Council (KSSSC). As part of the requirement for this programme, every school in Kenya was required to put in place a SLC, through which students could participate in school governance (UNICEF, 2009). Muindi (2010) reports that during the 2nd national KSSSC conference, students overwhelmingly voted to bring to an end the reign of school prefects and have elected SLCs in schools. The students argued that the prefect mode of student leadership promoted a master – servant relationship between the appointed school prefects and the other students; and was thus inconsistent to the principles of a democratic society.

Why Study Principals' Perceptions on Student Participation in School Governance?

The Focal role of the principal in school governance has been emphasized in studies by Hale and Moorman (2003), Gunn et al (2005), Murphy et al (2009), and Ryan and Rottman (2009). These studies have established that school principals play a central role in shaping the school's beliefs, internal processes, climates and relationships. Finnigan (2010) further identifies school principals as being responsible for re-conceptualizing and implementing educational policies in their schools. Therefore, in as much as the government may pass a policy on student participation in school governance, the school principals' definitions and implementation of that policy would be focal to its success. Consequently, student participation in practice is actualized in schools through the perceptions and action of the school principal; since the principal has the onus to determine the actual participants, the nature of participation and the decisions that are open to participation.

Although school principals may have a genuine desire to share governance, they still have to grapple with the challenge of how to successfully involve students while still maintaining the delicate power relationships and balance within the school (Singh and Manser, 2008). A study conducted by Sayeed (2002) established that in adopting student participation in South African schools, all stakeholders in their initial responses emphasized the importance of student participation in school governance. However, when interrogated at a more in-depth level, specific stakeholder's perceptions regarding student participation in school governance revealed that school principals do not necessarily value participation in itself for advancing democratic governance in the school. Consequently, unless the perceptions on student participation in school governance by all key education stakeholders, especially the school principal, are sought and taken into consideration, there is the inherent danger that government directives and policies on student participation would only serve hypothetical ends rather than broadening students' participation in school governance in any practical way.

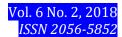## METHODOLOGY
Research Paradigm
This study was eclectic in nature, since it engaged the use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches in data collection and analysis in order to investigate principals' perceptions towards student participation in school governance. The approach was considered a more pragmatic option that would allow for a mixed methods approach to the design of the study. This was in line with Ayiro's (2012) argument that research is often multipurpose and the researcher can only address questions that do not sit comfortably within a wholly quantitative (positivism) or qualitative (interpretivism) approach through a 'what works tactic' that allows for use of both approaches in the study design and methodology.

Research Instruments
Data for this study was collected through questionnaires and interview schedules using the survey design. The questionnaires were self-administered and they were both semi-structured; containing both close-ended and open-ended questions. The interview guide contained open – ended questions with no pre-determined responses and was administered in face-to-face interviews. The validity of the research instruments was ascertained through seeking expert opinion on both content and construct validity. The questionnaires were also piloted to establish reliability. The test - retest technique was used in determining the reliability; with a resulting reliability coefficient of 0.82.

Sampling Techniques and Sample Size
The target population for this study was all the 426 public secondary schools in the Central Rift region of Kenya. The sample size of 202 Principals and 202 Deputy Principals was determined by use of the Krejcie and Morgan table of determining sample size from a given population. To obtain the sample, stratified random, simple random, and purposive sampling techniques were adopted. A sampling frame consisting a list of all the 426 secondary schools in the area of study was made and the schools were then stratified into three categories; National, County and Sub - County. This was followed by a random selection of schools from each stratum to proportionately make up the required number of 202 secondary schools, and subsequently the same number of school principals and deputy principals. Purposive sampling was adopted to select the two KSSHA officials who were interviewed for the study.

RESULTS

Response Rate

Out of the sampled 202 school principals and 202 deputy principals, 163 school principals (N_1); and 189 deputy principals (N_2) responded to the questionnaires. This translated to a response rate of 80.7% for the school principals and 93.6% for the deputy principals. The results from the analysis of data collected from the respondents are presented in line with the three objectives of the study.

Objective 1 - The Perception of School Principals on the Emphasis Placed on Student Participation in School Governance

The school principals were asked to rate the emphasis placed on student participation in school governance, and to also indicate whether that emphasis would lead to loss of the school principals' authority. The findings are as shown in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1

Emphasis on Student Participation in School Governance

Emphasis	Frequencies	Percentages
Too Much	42	25.7
About right	91	55.8
Too little	30	18.4
Total	**163**	**100.0**

$N_1 = 163$

Table 2

Loss of School Principal's Authority as a Result of Student Participation

Loss of Authority	Percentage
Agree	69.90
Neither agree nor disagree	7.40
Disagree	12.70
Total	**100.00**

$N_1 = 163$

Table 1 shows that whereas majority (55.8%) of the respondents indicated that the emphasis on student participation in school governance was about right, there were still 25.7% of the respondents who indicated that the emphasis placed on student participation in school governance was too much. Table 2 shows that majority (69.9%) of the school principals were of the opinion that student participation in school governance would lead to loss of authority by the school principal.

Objective 2 - The Perception of School Principals on the Existing Modes of Student Leadership

To achieve this objective, the deputy principals were asked to indicate the existing mode of student leadership in their schools, whereas the school pprincipals were asked to indicate their most preferred mode of student leadership. The responses are presented in table 3 and table 4 respectively.

Table 3
Existing Mode of Student Leadership

Mode of Student Leadership	Frequency	Percentage
Appointed School Prefects	92	48.7
Elected School Prefects	50	26.50
Both Student Leaders Council and Prefects	6	3.10
Elected Student Leaders Council (SLC)	41	21.70
Total	189	100

$N_2 = 189$

Table 4
Preferred Mode of Student Leadership

Preferred Mode of student leadership	Frequency	Percentage
Appointed school Prefects	37	22.4
Elected school prefects	35	21.5
Both SLC and Prefects	30	18.4
Elected SLC	61	37.4
Total	163	100.00

$N_1 = 163$

Table 3 shows that 48.7% of the sampled schools had appointed school prefects, while 26.5% schools had elected school prefects. On the other hand, only 21.7% of the sampled schools had an elected SLC, while a further 3.1% schools had both the SLC and prefects. However, with respect to the preferred mode of student leadership, the results on Table 4 show a total preference by the school principals of 62.6 % for the prefect mode of student leadership as opposed to 37.4% support for an elected SLC as the preferred mode of student leadership.

Objective 3 - The Perception of School Principals on Students' Representation in School Governance Bodies.

The school principals were asked to indicate whether students in their schools were represented in key school governance bodies; and whether they were in approval of this representation. The governance bodies indicated were, the Board of Management (BOM), Parents Teachers Association (PTA), School Planning Committees (SPC), and Student Disciplinary Committee (SDC). The responses are indicated in table 5 and table 6.

Table 5
Students' Representation in School Governance Bodies

	Represented		Not Represented		Total
	F	%	F	%	
BOM	0	0.0	163	100	163
PTA	18	11	145	89	163
SPC	14	8.6	149	91.4	163
SDC	42	25.8	121	74.2	163

$N_1 = 163$

Table 6
Principals' Approval of Student Representation in School Governance Bodies

Governance body	A		N		D	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
BOM	49	30.1	7	4.3	107	65.7
PTA	79	48.4	6	3.7	78	47.9
SPC	58	35.6	13	8.0	92	56.4
SDC	144	88.3	0	0.0	19	11.7

$N_1 = 163$

The data in table 5 shows that all the 163 Principals attested to the fact that students were not represented in their BOMs. Further, only 18 principals indicated that students are represented in PTA meetings and only 14 of the schools had students represented in the SPCs. A total of 42 Principals indicated that students are represented in the SDCs. Table 6 shows that majority of the principals (107) disagreed that students should be represented in the BOM. The findings show a mixed reaction on the approval of student representation in the PTA, with 79 principals agreeing that students should be represented in the PTA and an almost equal number of 78 principals disagreeing. A total of 58 Principals agreed that students should be represented in SPCs, while 92 Principals disagreed. A higher majority of 144 principals agreed on students' representation in the SDC.

DISCUSSION
Emphasis Placed on Student Participation in School Governance
School principals perceive that the emphasis placed on student participation in school governance is just about right; although they also perceive that this would lead to loss of authority for the school principal. These findings reflect the observation by Sayeed (2002) that all stakeholders in their initial responses emphasize the importance of student participation in school governance; but a more in-depth interrogation of specific stakeholder's perspectives reveals that the principals do not necessarily value student participation in itself. This is because the school principals perceive that such participation would result to loss of power and control by the principal.

However, the KSSHA officials interviewed in this study had a contrary opinion to this. One of the KSSHA officials interviewed argued that:

> *...Oh no! How can a Principal lose their authority? Principals only need to know how to exert their authority positively in light of the incorporation of student leadership in schools. This feeling that Principals will lose their authority if students are bought on board in school governance is so wrong.*

Existing Modes of Student Leadership
The existing mode of student leadership in majority of secondary schools in Kenya is still the prefect system as opposed to the SLC, as shown by the total of 75.2% of schools that had a form of prefect leadership. This is contrary to the recommendations of the National Baseline Survey on Child Participation in School Governance conducted by UNICEF (2009) that all schools should put in place an SLC through which students can participate in school governance. Further, majority of the school principals still prefer the prefect system over the Student Leaders Council, as a mode of student leadership through which students can participate in school governance.

Some of the reasons given by the interviewed KSSHA officials for this preference is that appointed prefects keep the administration informed on what is happening in the school, as

opposed to elected student leaders who tend to 'side' with the students. Further, the interviewed respondents argued that the other students are more likely to fear and obey appointees of the school administration, and that elected student leaders would want to question all decisions made as opposed to prefects who faithfully pass down directives by the school administration to the other students.

Student Representation in Governance Bodies
Students still remain largely unrepresented in key governance bodies of the school, especially the Board of Management. Additionally, majority of the school principals do not approve of students' representation in the BOM and the SPCs; but approval for representation in the PTA is split almost in the middle. The SDC seems to be the only school governance body that the principals approve of for students representation. These findings are contrary to the report by Kaluoch (2010) that students should have a say in the day to day governance of school affairs by being represented in all decision making bodies in the school.

The KSSHA officials interviewed for this study seemed to emphasize this disapproval of students' representation in all school governance bodies by arguing that it should be determined when students should be and when they should not be represented. In explaining this, one of the KSSHA officials observed that:

> *Some of the issues discussed in the BOM, PTA, and SPC are too sensitive and call for a lot of confidentiality. Such issues are not meant for the students' ears… otherwise, there will be a lot more trouble in our schools than we currently have…*

This point of view seems to be echoed by the immediate former Cabinet Secretary of Education in Kenya who in his address to the Kenya Secondary School Heads Association on June 20th 2017 strongly asserted that there should be no more student representation in school management boards, as this makes the students the principals' bosses (Sanga, 2017).

CONCLUSION
Recommendations of the Study
Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:
   i)   There is need to for both state and non-state educational stakeholders to sensitize and train student leaders on acceptable forms and levels of participation in school governance. This will create awareness in the students that their participation does not usurp the school principal's authority.
   ii) School principals should encourage a culture of tolerance and cooperation between the school administration and the students by embracing the SLC mode of student leadership and other forms of democratic participation in the school.
   iii) There should be clear policy guidelines to mark out the boundaries on which areas of school governance students can participate in. This will enable the school administration to put in place mechanisms to ensure that students' effectively participate in the defined areas of school governance.

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