



Successes and Challenges of Student Councils in Mitigating Student Conflicts in Secondary Schools in Kericho County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Several incidences of student conflicts have been witnessed in the different schools, which have caused widespread material losses and other social impacts. The objective of this study was to evaluate the Successes and Challenges of Student Councils in Mitigation of Student Conflicts in Secondary Schools in Kericho County, Kenya. The study was underpinned by the participative leadership theory. The study utilized the evaluation research design. The study targeted the following categories of respondents; students, teachers, school principals or head teachers, School boards of management, County director of education and Sub-County directors of education in Kericho county. Both probability and non-probability sampling techniques were used to obtain respondents. The total sample for the study included 384 students, 120 teachers, 19 school heads or principals, 19 deputy principals, 19 members of the school boards of management, 1 County director of education and 6 sub-county directors of education. The total sample for the study was 568 respondents. Data was collected through Questionnaires, Interviews and Focus group discussions. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented through frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviation. Qualitative data analysis utilized data coding and narrative analysis and presented in form of graphs, charts and tables. The study concluded that the councils are not as effective as they should because the leaders are not trained on skills of conflict mitigation. The student council which is formed with great influence from the administration has failed to assist in conflict mitigation because the students do not trust it. The study recommends that the administration in every school should ensure they offer proper training to the student council on conflict mitigation tactics.

Keywords: Conflict Mitigation, Participative Leadership, Secondary Schools, Student Councils, Student Conflicts

I. INTRODUCTION

Student councils have proven successful in promoting social change on a global scale. During the civil rights movement in the 1960s in the United States, for example, student unions in the state of Georgia actively participated in demonstrations aimed at altering the nation's political structures (Andrews, Beyerlein & Farnum, 2016). Students actively participated in the American resistance movement against the Vietnam War. The government was under more pressure to comply with civil rights actions due to the involvement of student leaders in these activities, which ultimately contributed to the achievement of racial equality in the United States.

Millions of people attended the largest demonstration against gun violence in schools, which was organized by high school students, in March 2018. The Marjory Stoneman Douglas high school student leaders organized the March on Our Lives, which was a huge success based on the amount of people who attended and the kind of worldwide exposure it garnered. The event received extensive media coverage, and students used it as a platform to demand change, which they felt was unachievable because of the government's insensitivity.

Student's councils led by radical white and black people in South Africa during the Apartheid era opposed racial segregation in higher education (Davies, 1996). The fight for equality began in South African universities when student leaders at the University of Witwatersrand staged protests against segregation policies that mandated that black and white students live in separate residences, eat in separate dining halls, and avoid social situations together. The demonstrations also targeted policies that limited black students' enrollment and restricted access to second-year courses in professions like medicine.

In Kenya, student unions have been useful in understanding the challenges affecting students. Effective students' unions have been key in helping in the students develop their leadership skills and other aspects of life. Student unions in Kenya have been important in nurturing of student talents and other skills that have helped students realize their full potential. Students for example have various clubs in their schools that allow students pursue their various interests as part of the extra-curricular activities (Yuen & Leung, 2010). Students through their clubs often elect their leaders who are able to lead them in various areas. Academic and non-academic clubs in schools can be used to demonstrate the capability of student leadership in Kenyan Schools.



Despite some successes of the student council, there are a number of challenges that bedevil the student councils and unions around the world. A study conducted in Ireland indicated that student unions in smaller schools were more effective than those in larger school due to the huge number of students who were deal with. This is a challenge because when dealing with large number the student council may have a difficult time addressing student issues to the satisfaction of everyone.

According to Kumwenda (2010), the elected students' leaders are disadvantaged by unclear definition of roles which hinder them from delivering thus, making them to lose morale. This is due to the minimal engagement of administration (Kumwenda, 2010). Lack of training is another challenge they experience because they lack insufficient knowledge on how to solve problems, give instructions, resettling conflicts, engaging effectively with the staffs and on how to conduct meetings (Bassam et al., 2018). This study evaluates the successes and challenges of student councils in mitigating student conflicts in secondary schools in Kericho County, Kenya.

1.1 Research Objective

Evaluate the successes and challenges of student councils in mitigating student conflicts in secondary schools in Kericho County, Kenya

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by participative leadership theory. Participation as a leadership theory was suggested in the classical Hawthorne experiments of the 1930s. The experiments represent that when small groups of workers feel their work environment is supportive, gain more satisfaction and work better (Crane, 1979). Another story explained the origin of participatory leadership as the idea of industrial democracy, stated by Rockefeller, gained currency in the late 1910s and translated to idiom of participatory leadership in leadership field (Kaufman, 2001).

Kurt Lewin is believed to be the main architecture of Participative leadership theory. The Participative leadership theory was mostly used in the 1930s and up to today it is still a famous theory especially in the management of an organization. Kurt Lewin developed the Participative leadership theory as he tried to study the behavioral conducts of the employees in relation to the democratic management of an institution. Basically, participative leadership theory elaborates more on how members of a given organization can work together to attain a certain goal (Davis, 2003). In an organization that is practically applying participative leadership theory, all staffs have equal chances to participate either directly or indirectly in the management process. Participative leadership theory is assumed effective because the role of management of an organization is distributed to various offices and therefore the information can be distributed easily through those offices in all departments (Hersey & Blanchard, 1993). This form of management also opts to treat all the employees equally thus making those who are at the lower status in an organization feel valued.

The Participative leadership theory suggests that good leadership has to put into account, other individuals. This suggests that the managerial body at the top of the hierarchy will have to encourage those that are at the lower level to participate in the decision-making process thus helping them feel relevant (Kouzes & Posner, 2003). This suggestion is based on the belief that when the thoughts of different people are combining the best decision opt to be made. There are five main assumptions in the participative leadership theory. The first assumption is that participation in the decision enhances the appreciation of the work to be performed by the organization or a certain department (Davis, 2003). The second assumption is that giving people the mandate to be in leadership will catalyze their participation in the running of the organization. The other assumption is that the participative leadership theory will minimize competition among the staff and instead encourage teamwork (Hersey & Blanchard, 1993). There is also a fourth postulation which indicates that participative leadership theory will lead to better decision making because different minds have been involved in making a particular decision. The last assumption is that participative leadership theory boosts social commitment within an organization.

The main assumption of the participative leadership theory is that the process of decision-making in an institution should be the main focus of the group (Leithwood et al., 1999). The theory is further strengthened by three assumptions i.e. participation is likely to increase institutional effectiveness, participation as justified by democratic principles and that in the context of school management and governance, leadership is potentially available to any legitimate stakeholder including student council (Bell, 2002). Patterson (1993) points out that institutional management is likely to succeed if the bonding of staff is facilitated. The burdens of leadership become less if leadership functions and roles are shared among the stakeholders.



2.2 Empirical Review

According to Andrews, Beyerlein and Farnum (2016) student councils globally have been successful in leading social change. In the USA for instance in the 1960s during the civil rights struggle, students Unions in the state of Georgia were actively involved in protests with the aim of changing the Political systems in the country. Students were also actively involved in the opposition to the Vietnam War in the USA. The role of students' leaders in the civil rights activities increased the pressure that the government was facing with regard to the civil rights activities and thus helped in the attainment of equality of races in the USA.

In Apartheid South Africa, students' councils especially by black and radical white who fought against the racial segregation in university education (Davies, 1996). The struggle for equality was born in Universities in Southern Africa as early as 1936 when the students' leaders in the University of Witwatersrand Protested against segregation polices that required in students to live in separate residences, eat in separate halls, and not mix easily at social events (black males and white females). The protests were also against activities that restricted the enrolment of black students, and having restricted access to second year courses in fields such as medicine.

The students protest on South Africa took a different momentum in the 1960s. The emergence in 1968 of the South African Student Organization (SASO) as a black consciousness organization which maintained an exclusive black membership comprising African, Coloured and Indian people who rejected apartheid, however, decidedly changed the future of South Africa. The activities of SASO drew attention to the limited role blacks played in their own universities, emphasized black dignity and pride and from 1970 onwards students became involved in protest actions at several black universities. These actions included boycotts against state appointed university leaders, protests against the expulsion of student leaders and support for black people establishing a broad range of youth, women, community, and medical civil society organizations to build black solidarity. The activities of these student-maintained pressure on the apartheid regime and eventually in the early 1990s gave room for negotiation between the ANC and the apartheid leadership. In 1992, in an effort to strengthen the voice of students' leaders in the South African political struggle, black student and white students who supported the struggle for equality formed South African Student Congress (SASCO). The organization was made of black and white students who supported the ANC and piled more pressure on the government to give room for racial equality culminating into the independence of South Africa in 1994.

In Kenya, student unions have been useful in understanding the challenges affecting students. Effective students' unions have been key in helping in the students develop their leadership skills and other aspects of life. Student unions in Kenya have been important in nurturing of student talents and other skills that have helped students realize their full potential. Students for example have various clubs in their schools that allow students pursue their various interests as part of the extra-curricular activities (Yuen & Leung, 2010). Students through their clubs often elect their leaders who are able to lead them in various areas. Academic and non-academic clubs in schools can be used to demonstrate the capability of student leadership in Kenyan Schools.

According to Kumwenda (2010), the elected students' leaders are disadvantaged by unclear definition of roles which hinder them from delivering thus, making them to lose morale. This is due to the minimal engagement of administration (Kumwenda, 2010). Lack of training is another challenge they experience because they lack insufficient knowledge on how to solve problems, give instructions, resettling conflicts, engaging effectively with the staffs and on how to conduct meetings (Bassam et al., 2018). These challenges are addressed through training them to enhance effective delivery, creating a formal constitution that analyses the roles and responsibilities to be carried out by the student leaders, through the provision of conducive environment which students' leaders engages freely with the administration in an attempt to address conflicting issues.

There is still a tendency by school principals to have their preferred leaders as opposed to allowing students to elect leaders of their choice. A study conducted in Ireland shows that 79% of students' leaders were preferred by school heads as compared to a paltry 8% who were students Choices (Elain, 2003). This kind of intervention by school heads is likely to create discontent among students hence leading to students' unrest.

Student leaders being young people also face the challenges of peer pressure especially when students feel that their demands are not being addressed properly. Some of the student leaders can therefore give in to the pressure from their peers and end up leading riots (Obiero, 2012). In some cases, student leaders who are perceived by others as pro- school administration can be targeted for attack by the students themselves making the work of student council members a difficult and at the same time a risky one.



III. METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a descriptive research design to investigate the role of student councils in managing student unrest in secondary schools in Kericho County, Kenya. It involved describing the nature of student unrest, the structure and functions of student councils, and the successes and challenges faced by these councils. The research was conducted in Kericho County, which comprises six constituencies and 15 administrative divisions. The county has varied topography, with undulating terrain and a moderate climate. The study population included students, teachers, school principals, deputy principals, members of school boards of management, county director of education, and sub-county directors. Sampling strategies included both probability and non-probability sampling methods, and data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. The total sample size was 568 respondents. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process, ensuring confidentiality and voluntary participation of respondents.

Table 1

Summary of Study Population, Sampling and Data Collection Instruments

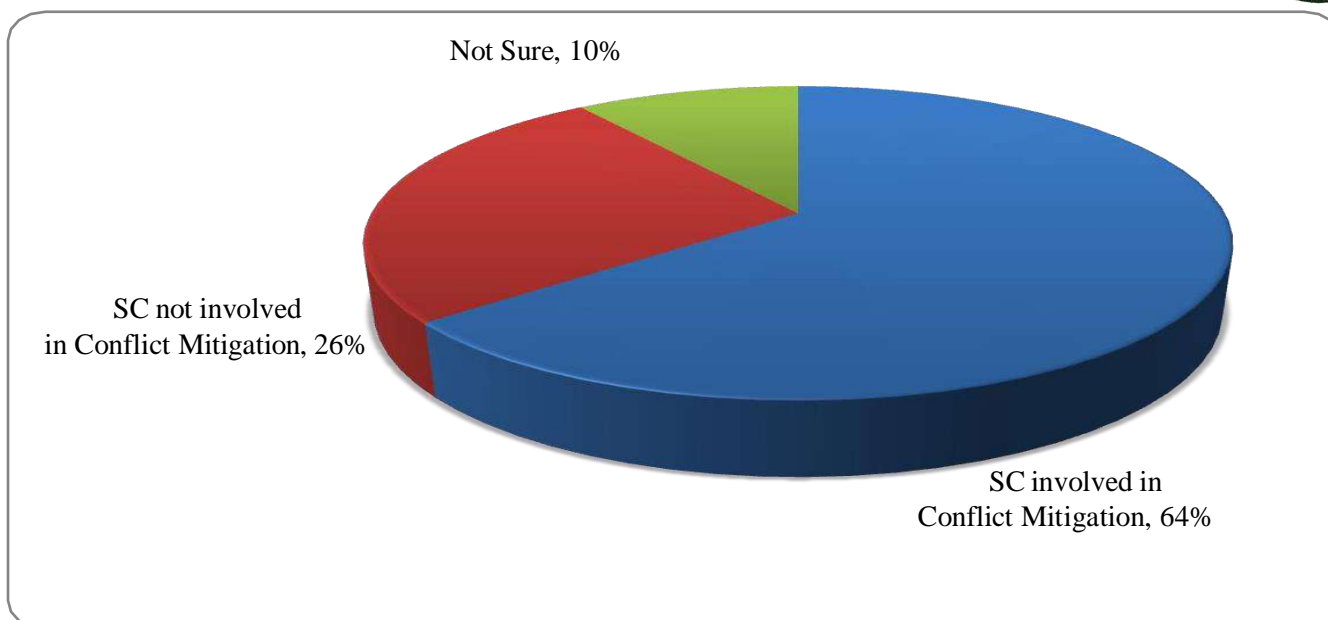
| Respondents | Total Population | Method of Sample Size Determination | Sample Size | Sampling Method | Method of Data Collection |
|-------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Students | 74,981 | Fischer et al.'s formula | 384 | -Stratified sampling random | Questionnaires and Focus Group Discussions |
| Teachers | 1219 | 10% | 120 | -Random Sampling | Questionnaires |
| Deputy Principals | 190 | 10% | 19 | - Purposive | Interviews |
| Principals | 190 | 10% | 19 | -Purposive | Interviews |
| Board of Management | 2470 | 1% | 19 | -Purposive | Interviews |
| County Director of Education | 1 | 100% | 1 | -Census | Interviews |
| Deputy Directors of education | 6 | 100% | 6 | -Census | Interviews |
| TOTAL | | | 568 | | |

The objective sought to evaluate the successes and challenges of student council in mitigating students' conflicts in secondary schools within Kericho County. Data was obtained from questionnaires distributed to sampled teachers and students. Also, the researcher conducted focus group discussions with students. School principals, deputy principals, board members, the county director of education and sub-county directors of education were interviewed.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Response Rate

The students and teachers were asked whether the student councils in their schools help in mitigating disputes involving the students. The results of the study indicated that 64% of the students agree that the student council helps mitigate conflicts in the school. On the other hand, 26% of the students pointed out that the student council is not actively involved in conflict mitigation, while the remaining 10% said they are not sure.

**Figure 1***Involvement of SC in Conflict Mitigation*

The results of the questionnaires show that majority of the students believe that the student council helps mitigate disputes. Thus, they have either been involved in a conflict that was resolved by a member of the student council or have witnessed such a scenario. From the results, 26% perceives that the student council is never involved in conflict mitigation. Considering that there are students who are totally against the student council because of how it is formed, they can perceive that as they do not involve the SC in such matters.

During the Focus Group Discussions with students, the majority agreed that the student council is actively involved in conflict mitigation. They argued that in several occasions, they have witnessed a member of the council help resolve the dispute between disagreeing students. In fact, there were many respondents who had once or severally been assisted by a student leader. The student leaders in the FGDs also agreed that they have been helping students mitigate disputes. One respondent, who is a school captain, said that:

“I am called upon almost every day to help students mitigate disputes. Most of the small arguments among the students do not reach the administration. They call us and we help them come up with amicable solutions instead of reporting the case to the teachers” (Respondent, Kericho County, 2018).

However, during one of the FGDs with students, a different perspective was revealed. The respondents argued that they do not share any information with the members of the student council, especially the captain and other major prefects. These positions are taken by students who are very loyal to the administration. In this case, they report to the principal or the deputy principal everything that happens. The students feel that they cannot tell these leaders to help them because they will take the matter to the administration even if it was not a matter requiring such actions. The students appeared to be very uncomfortable with the administration for not allowing them to democratically elect their leaders.

The interviewed principals agreed that the student council helps resolve many conflicts without even involving the school administration. The principals argued that whenever they have a strong student council with good leaders, they do not keep on solving small matters. The student council assists resolve the minor disputes. The student council leaders usually stand on the gap and help maintain sanity even when the teachers are absent. One of the deputy principals pointed out that:

“Whenever I have a strong school captain/president leading a strong team, I do not have to deal with gossip and stolen water issues. They handle them without involving even the matron. The student council really helps us and gives us space to handle major indiscipline cases such as sneaking, major theft and drug trafficking among others” (Respondent, Kericho County, 2018).

However, one sub-county director of education had a different opinion during the interview. The respondent argued that the student council has nothing special to help in mitigating conflicts. In his view, the student leaders are trained on how to become good leaders. They do not undergo any training on how to deal with conflicts. In this case,



therefore, they cannot be said to be mitigating disputes among students.

Conflict mitigation is either done by those who have learned the skills, or those who have a call to do so (Sheila, 2007). According to Schertzer and Stone (2016), there are people who have intrinsic arbitration call that makes them go out of their way to help people resolve their disagreements. These people do not have to be leaders. Sometimes they are only commoners who have no special positions in the society. In this case, the student leaders might not have that call. They can only become conflict managers if they are trained on the same. Being selected as a dining hall captain or dormitory counselor, for instance, has nothing to make a young student a peacekeeper. These responsibilities can only be perfected if the leaders are equipped with the right skills on how to help conflicting parties to come up with a solution amicably.

4.1.1 Successes of Student Council in Mitigation Conflicts

The teachers were asked to indicate whether they agree with the success of the student councils in mitigating student conflicts. The results of the study are indicated in Table 2.

Table 2

Success of Student Council in Mitigating Conflicts

| Success of student Council | Agree | Disagree |
|--|--------------|-----------------|
| Student Council relates well with the students, administration, teaching and non-teaching staff. | 57% | 43% |
| Student Council channels the grievances of the students to the administration. | 61% | 39% |
| Student Council acts as a role model to the other students. | 72% | 28% |
| Student Council members are friendly to other students including newcomers | 47% | 53% |
| Student Council has effective conflict mitigation skills | 12% | 82% |
| Student Council spends time with students and detects whenever there is tension or unresolved issue. | 54% | 46% |
| Student Council has effective communication skills which make it act like a bridge. | 53% | 47% |

4.1.2 Student Council Relationship with the Students, Administration, Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff

Majority of the teachers (57%) agreed that the student leaders relate well with their fellow students, the teaching and non-teaching staff. They know the language to use whenever they are talking to the other stakeholders in the school. As a result, they have a conducive environment to resolve any dispute that arise and is within their capacity to do so. During the FGDs with students, most of them agreed that the student council has a good relationship with the students, the teachers and the non-teaching staff. The leaders said that they agreed with the watchmen, cooks, gardeners and other members of the staff working in the school. They understand that they need the assistance of these adults. Therefore, they must ensure that they maintain good rapport with them so that they will be easily assisted when the time comes. Furthermore, the student leaders agreed during the FGDs that they trained to treat the other members of the staff properly. One student leader said:

“It is compulsory for us to greet the non-teaching staff. During the training that we had after winning the elections, the deputy principal announced that we must be doing that so that we can have the courage to approach these members of the staff whenever the need arises” (Respondent, Kericho County, 2018).

During the interviews with the principals, they argued that the student leaders know how to maintain a good relationship with their colleagues as well as the other members of the staff. Furthermore, the student leaders are among the bright students and the most disciplined. In this case, they relate with other people well. The principals cited that they rarely have rudeness cases involving the student leaders, especially with the members of staff.

The student council of Kenya is mandated to provide excellent leadership skills and act as a bridge between the administration and students as it helps reduce tension because student views are aired. The relationship between the student council, students, teaching and non-teaching staff is vital in proving the effectiveness of the student council law when it well embraced by an institution. Murage (2014) has proven that for a student council to be effective, they must have positive relationships with students and the school staff. Leaders elected to represent a school are a good example to other students on what action to take in case of conflict and what not to do. For a student council to be effective it must listen to students and engage them in solution-related conversations that will reduce or eliminate anticipated unrests. Subordinates are also vital in a school setting and the student council must link the two reducing any conflict-related issues.



4.1.3 Student Council channels the Grievances of the Students to the Administration

The results of the study indicate that 61% of the teachers believe that the student council is the one that channels the grievances of the students to the administration. One of the roles of the student council is to bridge the gap between the administration and the student. They take the complaints the students have to the administration. They also give the suggestions that the students have regarding conflicting matters.

During the focus group discussions with the students, they argued that they channel their grievances to the administration through the student leaders. The leaders report to the deputy on a weekly or daily basis. The frequently report to the administration, and can even go prior to the meeting to report an urgent matter. Therefore, the students can easily pass the information they want to the administration any time of the day.

The results of the study agree with the views of Nyaga (2019) that the student council is a channel that airs out student grievances to the administration. The council acts as a bridge for students as they are constantly involved in decision-making of the institution. Nyaga (2018) notes that the students' council offers opportunities for the easy access to what is happening in secondary schools for the administration as well as its stakeholders. The author also recognizes that the student council makes it easier for the administration to understand the students and have their needs catered to. The students' council acts as a bridge as not all issues can be taken to the head teacher by individual students.

4.1.4 Student Council Acts as Role Model to the Other Students

The results of the study indicate that 72% of the teachers believe that the student leaders act as a role model to the students. This helps in mitigating conflicts because the students will emulate the leaders. According to the majority of the interviewed principals, it is wrong to have any student leader fighting with their colleagues. Indiscipline among the student leaders leads to demotion. There is no student leader who likes being demoted. Therefore, they try their best to behave properly to avoid such cases. They do not fight with their colleagues. They try to resolve their disagreements amicably so that they will not lead to indiscipline. One deputy principal said that:

"The student council must show the other students how to behave. If you want to have discipline, start with the leaders. Our leaders do anything they can to avoid being in trouble since the outcome is fatal. Sometimes they even compromise their interests to avoid conflicts. The other students learn from them that fighting is unnecessary. Conflicts can be resolved peacefully, and as such leads to less indiscipline cases" (Respondent, Kericho County, 2018).

The student leaders are trained on the worth of decency as this marks the basis of emulation by the subjects. Whenever the leaders are hardly involved in the conflict, the cases of serious disputes reduce. Further, the leaders help the others resolve their disputes whenever any arises.

The results of the study agree that the elected representatives have high moral standards as they represent the whole institution. Students, according to the student council law, are provided with more autonomy by providing alternate leadership. Mukiti (2014) observes that student council leaders actively participate in making major decisions for the school, providing alternate leadership, and admiration from other students. Being looked up to helps give the student leaders a form of responsibility over other students. The leaders raise funds for school activities beneficial to the students as well as creating awareness of issues affecting the minority of the students. The leaders must ensure they promote justice and fairness to ensure that each student gets treated properly and receives the same time and resources as the other students, despite their background.

4.1.5 Detecting Tension among Students

According to 54% of the teachers, the student leaders spend time with the other students and are able to detect any tension and report it to the authority. The leaders are the eyes of the administration. During the interviews with the school heads, they argued that the student leaders have helped the administration many times prevent strikes as they detect the problems and report them. They have close friends who reveal to them what the students are planning. During the training that the leaders acquire, they are taught how to analyze the students' mood and detect a change in behavior. Therefore, they are always on the lookout for any suspicious behavior.

During the FGDs with student leaders, they pointed out that they have been taught how to check the moods of the students. Whenever they realize there is a different mood, they consult some of their friends and learn if there is something cooking in the minds of the students. They are supposed to report to the school administration anytime they notice a change in behavior. One student leader said that:

"We report any suspicion. We do not have to wait to confirm that there will be unrest. Any behavioral change means there is a problem, and we must tell the principal immediately. If we notice abnormal behavior at



night, we communicate with the watchman and he reports to the administration immediately” (Respondent, Kericho County, 2018).

Those student leaders who are friendly to their colleagues easily get information whenever there is a problem. The students tell them or they learn from the behavior. During the interviews with a board member, he said that most of the strikes that abort do so because the student leaders learn of the plan before its implementation. The board member cited several cases where the student councils reported very serious cases. One of BoM members pointed out that:

“The most recent case was last term when a group of form three students had planned to burn a dormitory. The school was saved by a student leader who learned of the malicious plot and secretly reported to the administration a few minutes before the plan was implemented. The student council has successfully assisted resolve conflicts that would otherwise escalate into chaos, strikes, and destruction” (Respondent, Kericho County, 2018).

In agreement with Murage (2014), the results of the study confirm that student council has helped detect unrests early, and thus has prevented major disruption in secondary schools. Students’ unrest arises when students feel that their issues are not properly handled by the school administration. The elected representatives mingle with their fellow students on a daily basis and can easily detect issues. Being friendly and creating open channels of communication enable students to detect tension among students (Murage, 2014). The position of influence mandated to the student representatives makes them ensure that once they detect tension, it does not escalate to cases of student strikes in secondary schools. Indiscipline cases in secondary schools are a result of various issues such as drug abuse, bad parenting, community, and government influences. Student’s council have the responsibility of following up on changes in student’s patterns of behavior. This is vital icon in ensuring early detection of tension among students. With early crisis detection the administration has an opportunity to correct the issues present whilst avoiding wanton destruction of property and class time.

4.1.6 Challenges of Student Council in Conflict Mitigation

The results of the study show the following challenges that the student council faces as it tries to mitigate conflicts in the schools in the county. The results are indicated in Table 6.2.

Table 3

Challenges of Student Council in Conflict Mitigation

| Challenges of Student Council to Conflict Mitigation | Percentage |
|---|-------------------|
| Lack of Proper Training | 24% |
| Interference from the administration | 23% |
| Students disrespect and fear the Student Council | 19% |
| Lack of power to command | 6% |
| Students overwhelmed by administrative duties | 4% |
| Lack of call to be peace keepers | 10% |
| Fear of being victimized by students | 14% |

4.1.7 Lack of Proper Training

Majority of the respondents (24%) pointed out that the challenge of the student council in mitigating conflicts is that they do not get the required training to handle such tasks. In most of the schools that participate in the study, the student leaders go through one-day training, or they are not trained at all. For the single training, the school heads pointed out that they give them the basic skills of being a good leader. They do not have enough time to train the leaders on the conflict management skills. In this case, therefore, the students are expected to resolve the conflicts without the know-how to conduct such responsibilities.

During the FGDs with student leaders, they pointed out that they have never been taught how to resolve disputes. They only resolve disputes the way they think is appropriate. The student leaders cited cases that they did not know what to advise the conflicting parties. One student leader gave this example:

“There is a time a form two student came to me claiming that a form three student had snatched her boyfriend during the game festivals. She was very bitter and vowed to revenge. I called upon the other student who said that the boyfriend had approached her, and she did not know that he already had a girlfriend. However, she was not ready to let the boyfriend go as she had already fallen in love with him. It was very hard for me to deal with such a case. I personally do not have a boyfriend and no one has ever taught us how to handle such



cases” (Respondent, Kericho County, 2018).

The county director of education also agreed with the majority of the respondents that there is no proper training for the student leaders. The director pointed out that the school curriculum does not give the learners a chance to have detailed training that can equip them with the appropriate knowledge. The administration, however, can equip the leaders with basic knowledge of conflict mitigation through seminars and workshops that can be conducted on monthly basis.

According to Murage (2009) student council, play a very important role in the management of conflict in schools. In this case, therefore, it is crucial to have a democratic appointment that will facilitate the formation of the right students’ crew. It is important to ensure that they are inducted into their work via training. Also, the council should be encouraged and continuously trained on how to handle issues maturely.

Voting is the only way to elect a favorable candidate by the students. The elected leaders are not well trained for the roles in which they are given. Griebler and Nowak (2012), highlight that student leaders are elected by their fellow students to be used as an instrument to channel their grievances to the school administration. Once elected, the representatives are expected to perform without rigorous training from the administration. This becomes a grave issue as student leaders must be given basic training to deal with student issues and provide alternative solutions for them. The Ministry of Education Science and Technology (2016) observes that student leaders must have certain qualities to ensure they are able to properly represent other students and have several solutions towards their problems.

4.2 Interference from the Administration

The results of the study indicate that 23% of the respondents believe that the student council is unable to effectively mitigate conflicts because of the interference of the administration. During the FGDs with Students, they pointed out that the administration interferes with the formation of the student council. In their view, most of the people they would like to be their leaders are eliminated from the group that would campaign. Further, the administration has the final decision on who becomes the student leader. In this case, their colleagues who they believe could help them mitigate conflicts are not in the council. The members of the council are loyal to the administration and cannot effectively help the students.

Additionally, the students during the FGDs pointed out that the administration demands that the student council reports everything that happens without leaving anything behind. In this case, the student leaders are forced to report the cases they have solved between conflicting parties. In some cases, the administration calls the involved persons and even punishes those citing cases of indiscipline. Thus, the students decide never to share anything with the student leaders because they will ultimately report the case to the administration.

However, the school heads have a different opinion. When asked whether the interference with the formation of the council challenges conflict mitigation role in the student council, the principals said it helps. In their view, they interfere with the formation because they must help the students make the right decision. They ensure that the leaders who get to the office are good and can deal with conflicts effectively. They believe that they have the best selection for the school. Nonetheless, the students have a different opinion as they feel that the administration forces them to be led by leaders who they do not want.

The idea is paternalistic and authoritarian instead of democratic. It assumes that students have a legitimate concern in issues that regard learners, as well as assuming that the students possess no right in making personal decisions pertaining what they want to be involved in and those they should not. This reason explains why commentators have suggested that student participation opportunities should be stepped above student-related issues, extending to wider school-life aspects as well as to the community the outside school environment.

Learners perceive prefects as the administrations’ sell-outs, traitors and puppets. They are assumed to be part and parcel of the school system autocratic that are used in suppressing them; they, therefore loathe and despise them. The attitude has taken root because of a number of reasons such as the method of SC selection. The prefects get special privileges that the ordinary students do not acquire, such eating better food and sleeping in selected areas. They also get better meals. In addition, members of the SC bear the power to scare, report, and discipline other students. There are instances where they have much authority than the tutors (Republic of Kenya, 2001). This explains the basis for learners failing to share their conflicting issues or problems with the prefects. They have the faith that the leaders will betray that rather than helping.

Nasibi (2003) claims that negative outlook towards the student-leaders can get altered by having the administrators do the following: The administration should form learners’ councils having elected representatives by the student body. The councils must have their loyalty to the students instead of the teacher. The move will offer learners a voice on those in power, ensure that teachers play their role rather than transfer responsibilities to students



and be clear regarding the council duties in writing. Encourage the councils to stand firm in guiding fellow learners rather than being law enforcers. The councils must see that respect is extended to learners to create a basis for trust and in return get revered. They should also get perceived as the link existing between the administration and the learners' body, thus, an effective tool that creates comprehension administration and the administration.

The elected representatives liaise with the school administration and students. According to (Murage, 2014), the grievances raised by students sometimes are not considered when the administration interferes and considers their issues invalid. The interference by the administration aggravates the issues of unrest in secondary schools because students feel that their representation is hindered by the administration. Disputes and conflicts cannot be solved if the administration interferes with the channel of communication. The administration may act as a barrier between what students are saying and their elected representative creating chaos and confusion that lead to student unrests.

4.2.1 Fear of Being Treated as Social Outcasts

The results of the study indicated that student leaders fail to resolve disputes properly and refuse to channel them to the administration because they fear being victimized. During the focus group discussions, the student leaders argued that they sometimes have to cooperate with the students as they do not want to be treated as traitors. Sometimes they have the information that there will be a strike, or something heinous such burning the dormitories or harassing another student is planned. However, they argued that they cannot afford to be treated as social outcasts. They are threatened that something bad will happen to them if they dare report the matter to the administration. With fear, they keep quiet and wait for the students to implement their evil plans. One student leader said:

“Last term I knew they had planned a strike. In fact, one of my best friends was a ringleader. I overheard them discuss it, and when they learned that I already know it, they told me to dare report and I will face it rough. I could not betray them as I will remain with them in the dorms. Thus, I decided to keep quiet (Respondent, Kericho County, 2018).

During the interviews with the school heads, the majority agreed that the student leaders are unable to resolve disputes because they fear to be labeled as traitors. There is a small group or clique of students in every school that is feared by everyone including the student council. No one dares to go against the clique. Thus, sometimes the student council fails to resolve disputes where one party belongs to that clique for fear of victimization. Sometimes the groups have no recent history of doing anything bad, but they are feared. The clique gets new embers every year after admission. Thus, it does not end. It carries a history of years back that it harassed a student leader who was against its members. The history makes the current leaders cooperate as they do not want to make the new history of being harassed.

Student leaders are in constant fear of being treated as social outcast. The student leaders must ensure the support the straight and narrow path that student may likely oppose. Strong leadership skills by elected leaders are portrayed in such circumstances where they must support what is right despite what the students want. Some decisions made by the school administration may not favor what students want and may lead to a strike. However, the school's students' council must ensure they do the right thing by supporting the solution that provides the best. Student leaders are an easy target, especially when a school decides to strike. Being treated as social outcasts can have devastating effects on a student leader and they may not be interested in having such a position (Nyaga, 2018). The school administration has the work to encourage student leaders to perform even in desperate situations. The challenge occurs when a student leader quits or fails to perform their stated duties because they fear their remedies will not be favored, by their fellow students.

4.2.2 Students Fear or Disrespect the Student Council

The results of the study indicated that sometimes the student council is unable to resolve disputes because the students do not want to share with them their problems. During one of the interviews, the principal indicated that they are very uncomfortable with the term “President” which refers to the previously called head boy. The term president makes the head of the student council to seem to have more power than everyone in the school. He is referred to as the “President of Secondary School A”. Thus, the term makes him be above everyone else. It intimidates the teachers and the students.

During the FGDs, students argued that they fear the student council leaders especially those ones at the top. They are very much respected and adored by the administration. The administration keeps reminding them that they must respect the student leaders. Consequently, the students fear them as they do not want to make a mistake and be on the wrong side of the law. Accordingly, the students are unable to share their conflicts with the student leaders.

On the same note, sometimes the student council is unable to resolve disputes among the student because they



are not given that platform by the students. When the administration interferes with the formation of the student council, the students do not respect the council. They feel that the council is a puppet of the administration. They do not allow them to help them solve their disputes. During the FGDs, the students argued that they do not trust the student leaders with their personal matters as they will report to the administration.

The prefect system has existed for a long time in most schools. The students have despised effects and termed them as an enemy to the institution. Additionally, several cases of student unrests have been caused by students hating on student leaders as they said they received special treatment from teachers and the administration. Mukiti (2014) agrees that students disrespect the student council, with Murage (2014) also supporting the author. The student council replaced the prefect system where the elected representatives engage and participate in major school decisions. However, students do not show much support for them as they feel they are puppets for the school administration. This causes fear and disrespect to the elected student leaders.

4.2.3 Lack of Call to Mitigate Conflicts

Conflict management skills should either be learned through training or long-time experience. On the other hand, some people are intrinsic born to be peacekeepers. They easily convince conflicting parties to stop fighting and give working suggestions. However, as the results of the study indicate, not everyone in the student council has a call to resolve disputes. In fact, as one of the deputy principals interviewed argues, some students do not even have any leadership values within them. Some of the students' desire to join the student council because of the privileges attached to the post. For instance, they are given free shirts. They do not queue when going for meals or have a personal room for sleeping, separate from the other students. The privileges attract the students to

the post. Instead of having the intrinsic motivation to leadership, most follow the extrinsic motivation. Consequently, they cannot even make two fighting parties talk.

During the Focus Group Discussion, the respondents argued that some members of the student council do not qualify to be conflict managers. They cited several cases where the student leaders took sides. They supported their friends or those in their class even if they were on the wrong side of the bargain. One student gave this example:

"I remember one time a form four took my bathing water. The head girl was there and she witnessed it. When I asked the student to give me my water back, the head girl said that I am just a form two, and I should queue again and get water afresh. It was very unfair. As a leader, she should have ordered her classmate to return my water" (Respondent, Kericho County, 2018).

The principals agreed that there have been problems with the student leaders who do not have the natural call to solve disputes. If they do not get the required training as leaders to resolve disputes, it becomes very hard for them to handle conflicting parties. In fact, they end up worsening the situation as the party that is unfairly treated during the wrong mitigation methods retains a grudge.

The student council law gives student leaders the mandate to participate in school board meetings so as to contribute and highlight the needs of the students. Also, they should promote dialogue between staff and students as well as promoting peace within the school environment (Ministry of Education Science and Technology, 2016). Equally, several factors may inhibit how they address issues to the administration resulting to conflict among students and the school management. Student leaders are a bridge between the school administration and the student, and if that bridge is broken down by relevant authorities, disputes are not aired according to Griebler and Nowak (2012). So, students will result to strikes to create awareness on their grievances. Occasionally, his results to destruction of school property, learning time wasted, and in worse cases loss of student lives.

4.2.4 Solutions to Enhance the Effectiveness of the Student Council in Conflict Mitigation

The respondents were asked to suggest how the student council can be strengthened for it to mitigate conflicts effectively. Most the respondents agreed with the following solutions.

4.2.4.1 Involving Students in Decision Making

Increasing the rate of students' involvement in decision making is an effective way of reducing the challenges of mitigating conflicts among the student council. Student councils can increase students' participation in decision-making by improving the dialogue between students and the staff (Gogos, 2019). In this case, the student councils act as the mediator between students and the staff (Bubb & Jones, 2020). According to Kosgei et al. (2017), students' participation in schools' running is linked to fewer riots and better academic performance in schools (Kosgei et al., 2017). This means that involving students in school management reduces students' unrest as they participate in schools' daily running. Kosgei et al. (2017) further claim that students are co-interested parties in improving their



academic programs. The introduction of the student council in schools has led to an increased involvement of students in decision making. However, there is a need to strengthen student involvement so that they can feel their views effectively.

The student council should create a stronger bond with other students to ensure all students, if not most, participate in decision making. From the leadership perspective, students' participation in schools' life contributes to the orderly and efficient operation in secondary institutions (Gogos, 2019). Therefore, when the teachers and student council improve student involvement in the daily process, it can lead to co-operation, communication, and better understanding, helping resolve personal and social differences among students between students and teachers (Kosgei et al., 2017). This is why most schools embrace the student's council system, enabling most students to participate in decision making (Bubb & Jones, 2020). A democratic and open approach and freedom to decide who they want in the council is crucial. This will be one of the best methods for students' council to increase their effectiveness in mitigating conflicts and reducing students' unrest.

4.2.4.2 Training the Students' Council with the Necessary Leadership and Conflict Mitigation Skills

The respondents pointed out that the student council body's efficiency can improve by training the student leaders to resolve conflict. These skills include mutual respect, commitment to diversity, co-operation within an institution, justice, and equity. The training should allow both the trainers from internal and external, especially from the institutions that promote democracy (Nyaga, 2018). According to Muthui et al. (2019), the impact of leadership training, particularly on nurturing leadership skills, helps the students' council acquire the skills to promote order and discipline in their daily operations (Bubb & Jones, 2020). Training also strengthens the school council by empowering them to become other students' role models in action and conflict mitigation. The student council maintains discipline. Therefore, the main elements of leadership skills and conflict management will be acquired through training.

The training that comprises promotion of order and discipline in schools' daily operations, nurturing leadership skills, and conflict management skills improve the student's council effectiveness in improving discipline, which leads to decreased chances of student unrest and demonstrations. Muthui et al. (2019) found a positive relationship between student council training and a decrease in the students' unrest, which leads to better academic performance. These skills help leaders to know how to deal with and prevent truancy, alcohol abuse, and other indiscipline cases, which reduces conflict among the students or teachers. Leadership training should promote diplomacy and morality among students and encourage the students to participate in community service.

Additionally, the respondents agreed that the students' council should also acquire conflict mitigation skills, such as mediation in conflict management. This will help them to develop an understanding of disagreement in various contexts and learn approaches to resolving them in a non-violent means (Muthui et al., 2019). Through these skills, the council will be able to reduce the rate of fights between students. The untrained school council ignores the importance of their relationships with other students (Bubb & Jones, 2020).

4.2.4.3 Development of a Constitution that Explains the Role and Responsibilities of the Student Council

The respondents agreed that there is a need to adjust the existing law governing the student council. The policy makers should develop a formal constitution that explains each leader's roles and responsibilities within the student council. Consequently, student council leaders will be empowered (Muthui et al., 2019). Students should make the constitution with the administration's help to increase student council effectiveness. The student council helps school administration better the school climate, which helps create an excellent learning environment. They also help the school maintain stability and general work and achieve good results (Bubb & Jones, 2020). Although there was a formation of the student council, their capacity to perform supervision roles is unclear (Bubb & Jones, 2020). The areas in which the school council is needed to help the school administration in supervision, and the methods and manners through which the management should be carried out, is not emphasized.

School leaders' typical role is to supervise both the administration and student council. A constitution that explains the student council's functions can help build teamwork (Bubb & Jones, 2020). Consequently, the creation of co-operation increases their effectiveness as they will identify and strengthen their strengths and weaknesses (Muthui et al., 2019). Division of student leadership roles and team building in the learning institutes show the students to play their roles better without straining (Muthui et al., 2019). When the student council understands their responsibilities, their productivity, and work efficiency increase per student leader (Bubb & Jones, 2020). Thus, understanding each student council's role may increase their productivity, leading to decreased indiscipline cases and unrest.



V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

The study concluded that the student council has assisted many schools in Kericho County to remain stable as the leaders help in mitigating conflicts and reporting the grievances to the administration. However, the councils are not as effective as they should be because the leaders are not trained on skills of conflict mitigation. The student council which is formed with great influence from the administration has failed to assist in conflict mitigation because the students do not trust it.

5.2. Recommendations

The study recommends that the administration in every school should ensure they offer proper training to the student council on conflict mitigation tactics. The results of the study indicate that the student council fails to resolve conflicts effectively as it does not have the necessary skills to do so. Conflict mitigation skills are not covered in the school syllabus. Therefore, the school administration should ensure that it facilitates the student council so that it can acquire the necessary skills. There should be a refresher course every term to remind the student council on how to mitigate conflicts.

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