



STUDENT COUNCIL EMPOWERMENT AND STUDENT DISCIPLINE IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN KISII COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Background: Student councils were introduced in Kenyan public secondary schools to promote student participation and shared responsibility in school governance. However, their formal existence does not necessarily translate into meaningful participation in school management. Limited empirical evidence exists on whether empowering student councils to participate meaningfully in school management is associated with improved student discipline. This study examined the influence of student council empowerment for participation in school management on student discipline in public secondary schools in Kisii County, Kenya.

Methods: A mixed-methods approach was employed using a descriptive survey design. The study involved students, student leaders, teachers, and deputy principals in public secondary schools in Kisii County. Quantitative data were collected using structured and semi-structured questionnaires, while qualitative data were obtained through interviews and document analysis. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression, while qualitative data were analysed thematically.

Results: Student council empowerment was very strongly and positively associated with student discipline ($r = .890, p < .001$). Regression analysis further showed that empowerment significantly predicted student discipline ($\beta = .857, p < .001$). Qualitative evidence indicated that leadership training, participation in decision-making, consultation, administrative support, and institutional recognition strengthened student councils' capacity to represent students, mediate conflicts, communicate school expectations, and support positive behaviour.

Conclusion: The findings indicate that meaningful student participation in school management depends not only on the existence of student councils but also on the extent to which they are empowered to exercise their responsibilities. Schools should therefore strengthen student leadership development, provide clearly defined mandates, and create structured opportunities for student councils to participate in decisions concerning student welfare and discipline.

KEYWORDS: Student Council Empowerment; Student Participation; School Management; Student Discipline; Student Leadership; Participatory Governance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Student discipline remains a fundamental concern in educational systems because the ability of schools to maintain orderly, safe and supportive learning environments affects students' behavioural development, participation and academic engagement. Traditionally, discipline has often been approached through authority-based mechanisms in which school administrators and teachers establish rules and impose sanctions for violations. Increasingly, however, educational scholarship has questioned the effectiveness of predominantly punitive approaches and has emphasized preventive, restorative and participatory approaches that promote responsibility, dialogue and student ownership of school norms (Ingersoll et al., 2021; De Groot & Lo, 2022). This shift has brought student voice and participation in school governance into greater focus, particularly the proposition that students may be more likely to comply with institutional expectations when they have meaningful opportunities to contribute to decisions affecting their school lives.

Globally, student councils have emerged as one institutional mechanism for facilitating such participation. In countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Finland and Australia, student representative structures provide platforms through which learners can express their views, participate in aspects of school governance, contribute to welfare initiatives and engage with school authorities on issues affecting students (Kenny et al., 2020; Skalicky et al., 2020). The underlying proposition is that participation can strengthen students' sense of ownership, legitimacy of school decisions and collective responsibility for maintaining acceptable behaviour. Evidence from Finland, for example, indicates that institutionalised student participation in school decision-making, including matters relating to school rules and student welfare, can strengthen students' responsibility and engagement in school governance (Salmivalli et al., 2019).



However, the international evidence also raises an important qualification: student representation does not automatically translate into effective participation or improved discipline. The effectiveness of student councils depends on the extent to which students are given genuine opportunities to influence decisions, supported to perform leadership roles, and recognised as legitimate partners in school governance. Where councils have limited authority, inadequate training or weak administrative support, their participation may become largely symbolic. This distinction between the existence of student councils and their actual empowerment is important because it suggests that the institutional presence of a council may be less consequential for discipline than the conditions under which it operates. Thus, the emerging literature points towards empowerment through leadership capacity, institutional support, participation in decision-making and clearly defined responsibilities as a potential mechanism through which student voice can influence school outcomes.

The issue is particularly relevant in African education systems, where secondary schools continue to confront challenges associated with student unrest, violence, bullying and other forms of indiscipline. Several countries have responded by introducing or strengthening representative student governance structures. In South Africa, Representative Councils of Learners were established to institutionalise democratic participation within schools, while other systems have introduced student councils to provide channels for communication and participation in school management (Mongale, 2021). Evidence from Nigeria similarly shows that student councils can represent student interests, coordinate student activities and provide links between learners and school administrators (Oresajo, 2023). However, studies from the region also reveal persistent constraints, including inadequate leadership training, restricted decision-making authority and limited administrative support. For example, evidence from Uganda suggests that student councils may have minimal influence over discipline when administrators retain most decision-making authority and student leaders lack the capacity and institutional support necessary to exercise their roles effectively (Kiggundu & Nayebar, 2021).

These findings present an important analytical tension in the African literature. On one hand, student participation is promoted as a mechanism for improving school governance and discipline; on the other, the institutional conditions necessary for meaningful participation are often weak. Consequently, the presence of representative structures alone cannot explain differences in disciplinary outcomes. What remains less clear is whether and to what extent empowering student councils rather than merely establishing them translates into improved student discipline. This issue warrants examination in contexts where participatory student governance has been introduced but remains unevenly institutionalized.

In Kenya, the introduction of student councils represented a deliberate shift from the traditional prefectural system towards more participatory student governance. The Ministry of Education promoted student councils as a mechanism for strengthening democratic representation and involving learners in school governance (MOE, 2016). This reform was particularly significant because prefectural systems were often characterised by top-down authority, whereas student councils were intended to provide students with greater representation and opportunities to participate in decisions affecting school life. Despite this policy shift, student discipline remains a persistent concern in Kenyan secondary schools, including incidents of bullying, violence, unrest and other forms of misconduct (Wanjala & Kipruto, 2022).

Existing Kenyan evidence suggests that student councils participate in activities such as monitoring compliance with school rules, guiding peers and supporting disciplinary processes (Nandeke et al., 2017; Mongale, 2021). Nevertheless, the literature indicates that their participation in substantive school management remains limited. Lumanija and Mkulu (2020), for example, found that student involvement in decisions concerning student welfare and academic affairs was not fully developed, while Karani (2019) observed that the effectiveness of student councils varies according to the degree of empowerment and institutional support provided by schools. These findings suggest that the policy transition from prefects to student councils may not, by itself, have produced meaningful student participation. In some schools, councils may continue to function primarily as administrative intermediaries rather than empowered participants in governance.

This creates a significant gap in the Kenyan literature. Existing studies have largely examined student participation, leadership roles, election processes or the general functioning of student councils, but comparatively less attention has been given to student council empowerment as a distinct institutional factor associated with student discipline. In particular, there is insufficient empirical evidence showing whether differences in leadership training, administrative support, participation in decision-making, consultation and institutional recognition are associated with differences in disciplinary outcomes. This distinction is important because a student council that exists formally but lacks authority, capacity and institutional support may have little practical influence on student behaviour.

The gap is particularly relevant in Kisii County, where public secondary schools operate within the broader Kenyan policy framework of participatory student governance but differ in the extent to which student leaders are incorporated into school management and disciplinary processes. Understanding whether empowerment translates into better discipline in this context can therefore provide evidence on whether student councils are functioning as substantive governance structures or primarily as symbolic representative bodies. The present study consequently examines student council empowerment and student discipline in public secondary schools in



Kisii County, Kenya, focusing on whether the extent to which student leaders are trained, supported, recognised and involved in school management is associated with improved disciplinary outcomes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The following section presents the review of related literature and theoretical framework

2.1 Review of Related Literature

Empowerment has increasingly been identified as an important condition for meaningful student participation in school governance. In this context, empowerment extends beyond formally establishing student councils to providing student leaders with the skills, voice, autonomy, institutional support and opportunities required to influence decisions affecting school life. The distinction is important because student councils may exist as formal governance structures without possessing sufficient authority or capacity to influence behaviour and disciplinary processes. Thus, the effectiveness of student councils may depend less on their existence and more on the extent to which schools create conditions that enable them to exercise meaningful leadership.

Evidence from international studies generally suggests that meaningful student participation can strengthen ownership, accountability and responsible behaviour. Cheng et al. (2020), for example, found that participatory school governance strengthened students' sense of ownership and accountability, suggesting that involvement in governance can contribute to more responsible relationships between students and school authorities. Similarly, Yuliantini et al. (2021) demonstrated that structured leadership development can strengthen student leaders' confidence, communication and ability to influence peers. Collectively, these studies suggest that student leadership capacity is unlikely to develop automatically from participation alone; it requires deliberate institutional investment through training and structured opportunities for leadership.

However, the relationship between student empowerment and discipline is not necessarily automatic. The evidence indicates that participation without meaningful authority or institutional support may have limited behavioural consequences. Mongale (2021), examining discipline management in South African secondary schools, emphasized the importance of administrative support and the preparation of student leaders in enabling participatory approaches to discipline. The implication is that student councils are more likely to contribute to discipline when school management recognizes them as functional partners rather than symbolic representatives. Similarly, Oresajo (2023) found that participatory governance structures can improve accountability and institutional functioning, although the study focused on broader school-based governance committees rather than student councils specifically. These findings point to an important distinction between being represented in school governance and possessing the capacity to exercise influence within it.

Evidence from African and Kenyan contexts provides further support for the importance of empowerment, but also reveals important limitations. M'muyuri (2021) found that democratized school environments in Kenya, where students are involved in decisions affecting their welfare, are associated with greater responsibility and compliance with school regulations. The study also highlighted leadership training as an important component of student empowerment. Similarly, Simba, Chuka, and Mbaka (2023) reported a positive association between student council decision-making skills and discipline management in secondary schools in Mbeere Sub-County. Their findings suggest that trained and capable student leaders are better positioned to undertake conflict resolution and exert constructive peer influence. Nevertheless, limited administrative engagement constrained the effectiveness of student councils, indicating that leadership capacity must be accompanied by institutional support.

Earlier evidence from Nandeke, Chumba, and Kiprop (2017) further demonstrates the consequences of limited student involvement in discipline management. Their findings indicated that although students were sometimes involved in disciplinary processes, such involvement was not always perceived as fair or consistent. This suggests that nominal participation may not generate the ownership and legitimacy required for effective discipline. Taken together, the Kenyan evidence points toward a more nuanced relationship: student participation is potentially beneficial for discipline, but its effectiveness depends on whether students are sufficiently empowered to exercise meaningful influence and whether school administrators support that influence.

The reviewed studies indicate that student participation does not necessarily mean that student councils are empowered to influence school management and disciplinary processes. Several studies examine student involvement in decision-making, democratic elections, leadership skills or participation in disciplinary activities, but these dimensions do not necessarily constitute empowerment. Empowerment involves the capacity to act on the authority granted, supported by appropriate training, institutional recognition, access to decision-making and administrative support. Where student councils are expected to promote discipline but lack these conditions, their role may remain largely symbolic. Conversely, where students possess meaningful voice and institutional support, council participation may strengthen peer accountability, communication, conflict resolution and collective ownership of school rules.



Despite these insights, existing literature leaves three important issues unresolved. First, much of the available evidence examines student participation, leadership or decision-making skills independently, rather than conceptualizing empowerment as a multidimensional institutional condition. Second, several studies focus on the development or functioning of student leadership without directly examining student discipline as a measurable outcome. Third, evidence from Kenya remains geographically fragmented, with studies conducted in specific sub-counties and counties, limiting understanding of whether empowerment of student councils consistently translates into improved discipline across different school contexts. More importantly, existing studies provide limited empirical evidence on the extent to which training, decision-making involvement, administrative support and institutional recognition collectively empower student councils to influence discipline.

The present study responds to these gaps by examining the influence of empowering student councils on student discipline in public secondary schools in Kisii County, Kenya. Rather than treating the existence or participation of student councils as sufficient evidence of empowerment, the study focuses on the extent to which student leaders are trained, supported, consulted and involved in school management and disciplinary processes. This approach provides a more direct test of whether meaningful empowerment of student councils is associated with improved student discipline and contributes empirical evidence from the Kenyan public secondary school context.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on Elite Conflict Theory, associated with C. Wright Mills (1916–1962). The theory explains how power and decision-making are concentrated among individuals or groups who occupy influential positions within institutions. Mills argues that those who control important institutional resources and decision-making structures are able to influence outcomes affecting other members of society. The theory is therefore concerned with unequal access to power, authority and opportunities for participation.

The theory is relevant to the present study because school management involves different actors who do not necessarily have equal authority. In public secondary schools, administrators and teachers generally hold formal authority over policy implementation, student welfare and disciplinary decisions, while student councils operate within structures established by school management. Although student councils are intended to provide students with opportunities to participate in school management, their actual influence may depend on the extent to which school authorities are willing to share decision-making space with student representatives. This creates a power relationship in which the extent of student council empowerment may determine whether student participation is meaningful or largely symbolic.

From the perspective of Elite Conflict Theory, empowering student councils involves a partial redistribution of decision-making opportunities within the school environment. Training, mentorship, institutional support, consultation and involvement in decisions affecting student welfare can strengthen the capacity of student leaders to exercise influence. However, empowerment may remain limited where school authorities retain decision-making authority without providing student councils with meaningful opportunities to contribute to school management. The theory therefore provides a useful lens for examining whether student councils have sufficient authority and institutional support to translate their leadership capacity into meaningful action.

The theory further suggests that differences in authority may influence how student councils contribute to discipline. Where student leaders are adequately empowered, they may participate more effectively in communicating school rules, representing student concerns, mediating conflicts, encouraging peer accountability and supporting school authorities in addressing disciplinary challenges. Such participation can create greater ownership of school rules among students and strengthen cooperation between learners and school management. Conversely, where student councils have limited authority, inadequate training or insufficient administrative support, their capacity to influence student behaviour may remain restricted.

The relationship between empowerment and discipline can therefore be understood in terms of the distribution and use of authority within the school. Student discipline is not only a product of rules and enforcement but may also be influenced by the extent to which students are given opportunities to participate in managing their own school environment. Empowered student councils can provide an institutional mechanism through which students contribute to the identification of disciplinary concerns, communication of expectations, peer guidance and resolution of conflicts. In this way, empowerment may strengthen shared responsibility for maintaining discipline.

Elite Conflict Theory is particularly appropriate for this study because it draws attention to an issue that may be overlooked when student councils are examined only as leadership structures: who has the authority to make decisions and how much authority is given to student representatives. The existence of a student council does not necessarily mean that students have meaningful influence over school management. The effectiveness of the council may depend on whether school administrators create opportunities for student leaders to exercise responsibility and participate in decisions affecting students. The theory therefore helps explain why similarly constituted student councils may have different levels of influence on discipline depending on the institutional environment in which they operate.

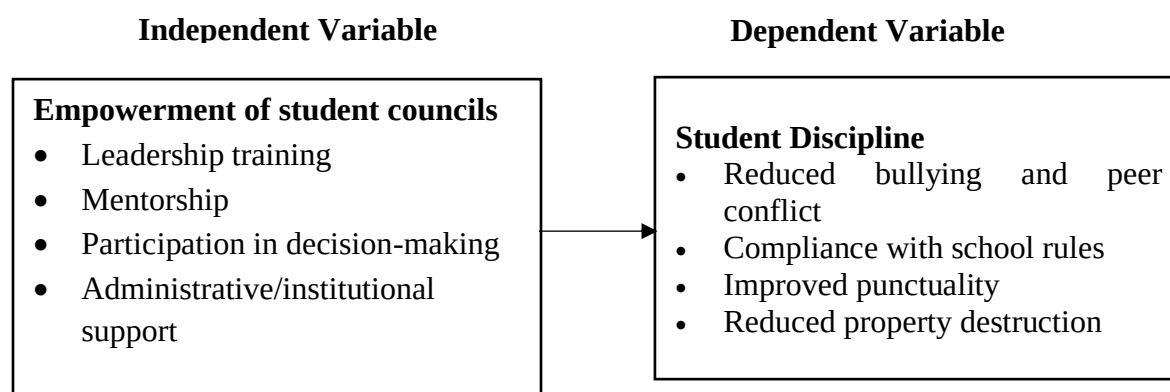


In the context of public secondary schools in Kisii County, the theory consequently provides a basis for examining whether empowering student councils through leadership training, mentorship, institutional support, consultation and participation in decision-making enhances their capacity to contribute to student discipline. The theory links the distribution of authority within schools to the ability of student councils to influence behaviour and promote a more orderly school environment. It therefore provides an appropriate theoretical foundation for examining the influence of empowering student councils on student discipline.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework illustrates the expected relationship between empowerment of student councils and student discipline in public secondary schools. The framework conceptualizes empowerment in terms of leadership training, mentorship, participation in decision-making, institutional support, and delegated authority. These dimensions reflect the extent to which student councils are equipped and permitted to exercise meaningful responsibility within school management. Student discipline is conceptualized in terms of observable behavioural and school-order outcomes, including compliance with school rules, reduced bullying, property destruction, strikes and other forms of disruptive behaviour. The framework therefore proposes that greater empowerment of student councils enhances their capacity to participate meaningfully in school management and contributes to improved student discipline.

Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework



4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a pragmatist research philosophy and a cross-sectional mixed-methods design to examine the influence of empowering student councils on student discipline in public secondary schools in Kisii County, Kenya. The study was conducted across the 11 sub-counties of Kisii County, which had 368 public secondary schools, and targeted Form Three students, student council leaders, teachers and deputy principals because of their direct experience with student leadership and school discipline. A stratified sampling procedure was used to ensure representation of schools across the sub-counties, followed by simple random sampling to select the respondents within the sampled schools. The final sample comprised 384 students, 380 student council leaders, 354 teachers and 37 deputy principals, drawn from 55 public secondary schools. Quantitative data were collected using structured and semi-structured questionnaires, while qualitative data were obtained through interviews with deputy principals and open-ended questionnaire responses. The instruments focused specifically on dimensions of student council empowerment, including leadership training, mentorship, institutional support, participation in decision-making and delegated responsibility, and on indicators of student discipline. Content, construct and face validity were established through expert and supervisor review, while test-retest reliability using data from a pilot study in neighbouring Nyamira County produced a Pearson correlation coefficient of $r = .894$, indicating satisfactory reliability. Quantitative data were analysed using frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations, followed by Pearson product-moment correlation and simple linear regression to determine the relationship and predictive effect of student council empowerment on student discipline. Qualitative data were analysed thematically to identify recurring explanations concerning how empowerment enabled student councils to contribute to discipline management. The quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated during interpretation to provide a more complete understanding of the relationship under investigation. Ethical approval and research authorization were obtained from the relevant institutional and national authorities, and participants were informed of the purpose and voluntary nature of the study, with confidentiality, anonymity and the right to withdraw safeguarded throughout the research process.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Student Council Empowerment and Student Discipline

The study examined the influence of empowering student councils for participation in school management on student discipline in public secondary schools in Kisii County. Student council empowerment was assessed in terms of leadership training, mentorship, participation



in decision-making, leadership seminars and workshops, administrative support, and opportunities for student leaders to exercise responsibility within the school.

The descriptive findings indicate that schools generally provided student council members with opportunities for leadership development. A large majority of students (89.6%) agreed that student leaders received leadership training, while participation in leadership and student management seminars was widely reported. Similarly, the mean scores for participation in seminars ($M=4.24$, $SD=0.43$) and leadership workshops ($M=4.17$, $SD=0.38$) indicated a high level of agreement that schools provided opportunities for student leaders to develop skills relevant to their responsibilities.

However, the findings were less consistent regarding the practical exercise of empowerment. Only 65.2% of students agreed that student council members received adequate mentorship, while 72.2% agreed that granting student councils decision-making authority improved students' compliance with school rules. The relatively wider variation in responses concerning decision-making authority ($SD=1.03$) suggests that the experience of empowerment differed across schools. This is important because participation in training and leadership activities does not necessarily translate into meaningful involvement in school governance. The findings therefore suggest that, although schools had established mechanisms for developing student leadership capacity, the opportunities available to student leaders to exercise responsibility and participate in decision-making were not equally experienced across all schools.

Teachers' responses supported this interpretation. Teachers generally acknowledged that student council members received leadership training, mentorship, and guidance, although they were more cautious in their assessment of the extent to which empowerment translated into effective discipline management. They nevertheless emphasized the importance of clearly defined responsibilities between teachers and student councils. This suggests that empowerment is likely to be more meaningful where student leaders understand their responsibilities, the boundaries of their authority are clear, and school administrators provide the institutional support required for them to perform their roles.

The qualitative findings provided further insight into how empowerment was implemented within schools. Deputy principals reported the use of induction programmes, leadership seminars, workshops, teacher mentorship, and guidance sessions to prepare student leaders for their responsibilities. These initiatives were perceived to strengthen communication, conflict resolution, peer counselling, and cooperation between student leaders and teachers. Student leaders similarly identified communication, conflict management, decision-making, and peer counselling as important areas in strengthening their capacity to address disciplinary concerns.

Nevertheless, the interviews also revealed limitations in the implementation of empowerment. Some deputy principals identified inadequate resources, limited time for leadership development, resistance from some students, and restricted authority as challenges affecting student councils. In some schools, student leaders were expected to assist in maintaining discipline but had limited discretion to contribute to decisions concerning disciplinary matters. These findings point to a distinction between the formal existence of empowerment structures and substantive empowerment. Student leaders may receive training and participate in leadership activities while still having limited opportunities to influence decisions affecting students. The effectiveness of empowerment may therefore depend not only on leadership development but also on the extent to which schools provide institutional space for student leaders to exercise the skills and responsibilities they acquire.

5.2 Inferential Statistics

Table 1: Correlation between Student Council Empowerment and Student Discipline

Variables	Student Council Empowerment	Student Discipline
Student Council Empowerment	1.000	0.890**
Student Discipline	0.890**	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	-	.001
N	299	299

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation analysis revealed a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between student council empowerment and student discipline ($r = .890$, $p < .001$). This indicates that higher levels of student council empowerment were associated with better student discipline outcomes in the sampled public secondary schools. Schools in which student councils received leadership training, opportunities to participate in decision-making, administrative support, and institutional recognition tended to report higher levels of student discipline. The strength of this relationship suggests that empowerment may provide an important institutional condition through which student leaders are better able to participate meaningfully in school management. When student leaders are equipped with relevant skills and supported to exercise their responsibilities, they may be better positioned to communicate school expectations, represent student concerns, mediate emerging conflicts, and encourage responsible behaviour among their peers. While the correlation results



establish a strong association between student council empowerment and student discipline, regression analysis was conducted to examine whether empowerment significantly predicted student discipline within the estimated model

Table 2: Regression Results for Student Council Empowerment and Student Discipline

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	0.290	0.105	-	2.750	0.006
Student council empowerment	0.716	0.019	0.857	37.878	0.001

a. Dependent Variable: Student Discipline

The regression results presented in Table 2 indicate that student council empowerment had a positive and statistically significant influence on student discipline ($\beta=.857$, $B=.716$, $SE=.019$, $t=37.878$, $p<.001$). The positive coefficient indicates that higher levels of student council empowerment were associated with improved student discipline. Specifically, an increase in student council empowerment was associated with a corresponding increase in student discipline, suggesting that the extent to which student leaders are supported and enabled to participate in school management has an important relationship with discipline outcomes.

The study therefore tested the null hypothesis that empowerment of student councils for participation in school management has no statistically significant influence on student discipline in public secondary schools in Kisii County, Kenya. Since the relationship between student council empowerment and student discipline was statistically significant at the 0.05 level, the null hypothesis was rejected. The findings provide evidence that student council empowerment has a statistically significant positive influence on student discipline in the sampled public secondary schools.

The finding suggests that the presence of a student council alone may not be sufficient to contribute meaningfully to discipline management. Its effectiveness is likely to depend on whether student leaders are adequately prepared and supported to perform their responsibilities. Leadership training, mentorship, opportunities to participate in relevant decision-making processes, consultation on student welfare and disciplinary matters, and administrative support appear to provide the conditions through which student councils can contribute more effectively to positive student behaviour. Empowerment, therefore, involves more than assigning students representative positions; it requires creating an institutional environment in which they can exercise their responsibilities within clearly defined structures of school governance.

This finding is consistent with Cheng et al. (2020), who found that structured student participation can strengthen students' sense of ownership and accountability within educational institutions. Similarly, Yuliantini et al. (2021) showed that leadership development can improve student leaders' confidence and communication capacity, thereby strengthening their ability to influence their peers. Mongale (2021) also emphasized the importance of administrative support and leadership development in enabling student leaders to contribute to discipline management. Within the Kenyan context, M'muyuri (2021) associated student involvement in school decision-making with greater responsibility and compliance, while Simba et al. (2023) found that leadership and decision-making skills enhanced student councils' contribution to discipline management.

The present findings add to this body of evidence by showing that student participation is more likely to have practical significance for discipline when it is accompanied by substantive empowerment. In other words, giving students an opportunity to participate in school governance may not, by itself, be sufficient. Student leaders also need the necessary skills, institutional support and opportunities to exercise meaningful responsibility if their participation is to contribute to the management of student discipline.

5. CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

This study examined the relationship between the empowerment of student councils for participation in school management and student discipline in public secondary schools in Kisii County, Kenya. The findings suggest that the contribution of student councils to discipline depends not merely on their formal existence within the school governance structure, but on the extent to which they are prepared and supported to perform their roles. Leadership development, consultation, involvement in decision-making, administrative support, and institutional recognition appear to create conditions under which student leaders can participate more meaningfully in matters affecting their peers and the wider school environment. Under such conditions, student councils are better placed to facilitate communication, represent student concerns, support peer accountability, and contribute to the management of emerging disciplinary issues.

The study therefore concludes that empowerment provides an important institutional basis for meaningful student participation in school management. Establishing a student council, by itself, does not necessarily guarantee that students will have a meaningful role in school governance. Where student leaders have limited preparation, unclear responsibilities, or few opportunities to participate in decisions



affecting student welfare, their role may remain largely representative rather than functional. Conversely, when student leaders are equipped with relevant leadership skills, consulted on matters within their area of responsibility, and supported by school administrators, they are better positioned to contribute to a sense of shared responsibility for school rules and standards of behaviour.

An important implication of the study concerns the distinction between student participation and student empowerment. The two concepts are closely related but should not be treated as synonymous. Participation creates an avenue through which students may express their views or take part in school activities, whereas empowerment concerns the capacity, support, and institutional space that enable them to exercise meaningful responsibility within those processes. This distinction is particularly relevant in schools where student councils exist within administrative structures that remain highly centralized. The value of student participation may therefore depend less on the mere presence of student representatives and more on whether the institutional environment enables those representatives to contribute meaningfully to issues affecting students and school life.

The findings also have implications for the practice of participatory school governance in Kenya. Empowering student councils does not require the transfer of formal disciplinary authority from teachers and administrators to students. Rather, it calls for a structured form of participation in which student leaders can contribute within clearly defined boundaries and remain accountable to established school management structures. Such arrangements can complement existing administrative systems by strengthening communication between students and school authorities, providing opportunities for early identification of emerging concerns, and encouraging peer guidance and shared responsibility for acceptable behaviour.

At the policy and school-management levels, greater attention should therefore be given to the conditions under which student councils operate. The Ministry of Education, Boards of Management, and school administrators should institutionalize structured leadership development for student council members, beginning with induction after election and continuing through mentorship and periodic capacity-building activities. Training should address areas relevant to their roles, including communication, ethical leadership, conflict resolution, peer mediation, and responsible participation in decision-making. Schools should also provide student councils with clearly defined mandates and appropriate opportunities to contribute to discussions concerning student welfare and discipline.

The study further recommends the establishment of regular and structured forums through which student representatives and school administrators can engage on matters affecting students. Such forums may provide opportunities to address concerns before they develop into more serious disciplinary problems while strengthening trust and communication between students and school authorities. Periodic reviews of student council structures and practices would also be useful in determining whether councils are functioning as meaningful mechanisms of participation or merely fulfilling formal governance requirements.

Future research could extend this inquiry beyond Kisii County to establish whether the relationship between student council empowerment and student discipline is consistent across different educational and institutional contexts. Comparative studies involving different categories of secondary schools may also provide further insight into the conditions under which student empowerment is most effective. Longitudinal research would be particularly valuable in examining whether changes in empowerment practices over time are associated with changes in student disciplinary outcomes.

6. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Future research could examine whether the relationship between student council empowerment and student discipline is consistent across different counties and categories of secondary schools in Kenya. Longitudinal studies could further assess whether sustained leadership training, administrative support and participation in decision-making produce lasting changes in disciplinary outcomes. Qualitative studies could also explore the experiences of student leaders and administrators to identify the institutional conditions that facilitate or constrain meaningful student empowerment.

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