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An Examination on Perceptions of Student Governance Council Communication Skills Necessary in the Governance of Public Secondary Schools within Bondo Sub-county in Siaya County, Kenya

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Abstract:

Student governing council skills has been an issue of concern in school administration. Much research has centered on the need for training the student governing council in secondary school administration without adequately identifying the needed skills to address school administration challenges that are reducing tension in the school, which may lead to student unrest and, consequently, the destruction of school property. Therefore, this study aimed to assess the training needs of the student governing council (SGC) in public secondary schools. This examination of skills needed will determine a deficit in performance and determine the training needs of the student council so that SGC could be equipped with the necessary skills to enhance their competency to accomplish their roles (Bhasin, 2021). The objectives of the study were to:

- *Establish the existence of a student governance council in public secondary schools, and*
- *Examine perceptions on SGC communication skills necessary in public secondary school governance*

The theoretical framework that guided the study was functional Leadership theory. The study adopted a case study design, and the target population was 1729 respondents, while the sample size included:

- *6 principals,*
- *6 deputy principals,*
- *12 class teachers and*
- *127 student council leaders*

The sample of the study for principals and deputy principals was selected by use of purposive sampling from the sample schools. Class teachers were selected by random sampling, and student council leaders were selected by random sampling. Data collection tools were questionnaires for principals, questionnaires for deputy principals, questionnaires for student council leaders, interviews for principals and deputy principals, and focus group discussions for class teachers. The researcher used the test-retest method for the test for validity and reliability. The data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, which included frequencies, percentages, and means as measures of central tendency, and the analyzed data were presented in charts and tables. The Respondents indicated a high need for training in these skills to improve school governance. The study concluded that communication skills are essential in the student council as they aid the student council representatives in carrying out their mandate, which includes linking the students with the school administration. Lobbying skills, negotiation skills, consensus-building skills, handling of difficult and training on how to handle students with disabilities were highly regarded for training.

Keywords: *Student governance council, communication skills, public secondary schools*

1. Background of the Study

The student council system of governance has been operational for many years. In Britain, for example, the first student council was established in the 1920s. In Kenya, establishing student councils in secondary schools' system of governance was more reactive and a problem-solving approach rather than a proactive process. Their existence is anchored in the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child in 1989 article 12, where Children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults make decisions that affect them and have their opinions taken into account (UNCRC, 1989). In Kenya, the constitution (2010) provided for, in article 33, the right to freedom of expression.

The student body has a right to say what they feel should be done in school and what should happen as they pursue their studies.

Student Governance Council (SGC) roles are several in the school administration, including SGCs acting as a representative of the student body before administration. They are students' voices. SGCs voice students' opinions, views, and concerns before the administration and Board of Management (BOM). The most critical is that SGCs are communication channels. The various roles of SGCs have been sourced from several reviewed literature (Keogh & Whyte, 2005; Woods, 2002; Library of Parliament, 2010; Ndungu & Kwasira, 2015; Itimu, 2016). Duma (2015), in a study on students' participation in school governance: the views of rural school principals in South Africa, asserted that student councils had broken new ground for students' participation in student leadership. The students are now part and parcel of the school governance. In addition, the study revealed that to be effective in management, the leadership of the student council must be prepared through training in necessary skills. The study sorted views of principals, who perform different roles in school administration and are mature, on student council effectiveness leaving aside the student council perception of their training. In addition, the study looked at the necessity of training in leadership skills but did not identify the skills necessary in administration. The Kenya Secondary Schools Head Association- Siaya County (KSSHA) report indicated that a few schools had participated in school-organised training for their student leaders in recent years. This has further been supported by the Ministry of Education Bondo Sub- County. The data indicate that Bondo Sub County has had the least in terms of training. This study fills the gap in effective student council participation by assessing the training needs of the student governing board in public secondary school administration to improve competency to arrest school unrest.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Over the years, schools have experienced students' unrest and indiscipline. Burning dormitories in secondary schools is an undesirable occurrence, disrupting learning and school peace. Examples include:

- Kyanguli secondary school in Machakos County,
- Bombolulu Secondary in Mombasa County, where twenty-four girls died, and
- Nyeri High School in Nyeri County, where sixty-four students were killed in a suspected case of an arson attack by other students who were unhappy with the school administration

In deciding to include students' representation in school management, the government has been found to improve school governance. Even though schools have been thought to have no case of indiscipline after the inclusion of student council in school governance, the burning of dormitories continues to be witnessed, especially in Bondo Sub-County. Could it be that the student council lacks prerequisite training on student governance? This way, there is a need to discover the training needs of these students' boards to guarantee that evasive discipline in public schools is established. Through suitable training with proper aptitudes, the students' leaders will have the opportunity to conduct their assignments successfully. Unfortunately, many secondary schools do not have training programs to prepare the students' leaders. The students' leaders are expected to realize how to determine conflicts and learn to deal with their fellow students. They get puzzled when duties are given to the student council without proper direction and training. From this background, this research study sought to identify the training needs of the student council in public secondary school governance in Bondo sub-county, Siaya County, Kenya.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

This study aimed to assess the training needs of the SGC in public secondary schools in Bondo Sub-County in Siaya County, Kenya.

1.3. Specific Research Objective

The specific objectives were:

- Establish the existence of SGC in the governance of public secondary schools within Bondo Sub-County in Siaya County, Kenya.
- Examine perceptions on SGC communication skills necessary in the governance of public secondary schools within Bondo Sub-County in Siaya County, Kenya.

1.4. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the research study:

- Does SGC exist in the governance of public secondary schools within Bondo Sub-County in Siaya County, Kenya?
- What are the perceptions on SGC communication skills necessary in the governance of Public secondary schools within Bondo Sub-County in Siaya County, Kenya?

1.5. Significance of the Study

Training of student councils in public secondary schools in Kenya is one of the essential administrative tasks that should be carried out effectively and efficiently. The findings of this study may help education practitioners sharing similar interests to expand their knowledge and understanding of student council training needs to improve the roles of the student council in secondary school governance. The research findings might also provide the educators with the student council's phenomenon from a different perspective, providing a chance for comparison. Moreover, the research findings might contribute to expanding literature resources on the topic of the student council in Kenya. The research finding will

aid the educators in preparing training materials to help equip the student council for their duties. The research findings will help the Kenya Secondary School Student Council conferences to identify topics to train the student leaders.

1.6. Theoretical Framework

The study was guided by the functional leadership theory developed by Hackman and Walton (1985) based on identifying team training needs to enhance skills in leadership to accomplish tasks. According to functional leadership theory, leaders of an organization operate as a team. They are supposed to fulfill functions that are required of a team to be seen as being effective. The team faces challenges in the process of fulfilling its functions. Hence, some are not fulfilled. The leaders then observe which functions are not performed by the team and consider training in necessary skills to become effective.

2. Literature Review

Communication is the act of exchanging information between people. However, communication skills are required to:

- Give direction to subordinates,
- Motivate them to become excited about their tasks, and
- Enable them to understand and accept other peoples' view-point when necessary (Rue & Byars, 2007)

SGC is one of the most effective ways of involving students directly in the administration and serves as one of the communication channels between the students and the school administration. Studies have been conducted on communication skills' importance and impact on the performance of duties in a secondary school setup. Communication skills are essential aspects of governance. For instance, Khalid's (2015) study on Student leadership: Basic Skills and Appropriate Activities in Lebanon found out that respondents picked on effective communication skills as key skills for successful leaders. Glaittli's (2018) study on soft skills in high schools in the USA revealed that preparing high school students to have soft skills can provide them with great value as they can apply soft skills to academics and personal life.

Several studies have been done on communication skills across Africa. Tsikiti and Magagula (2019) investigated the leadership skills high school prefects need in Swaziland. Respondents indicated that prefects needed training in communication skills to be effective in their roles. Komba's (2015) study to investigate the perceived importance of communication skills courses among university students: A case of two universities in Tanzania indicated that the majority of the respondents perceive communication courses as an important course for the acquisition of communication skills needed in an academic setting. Communication course build capacity in communication skills. In Kenya, Mukiri (2014) studied the role of prefects in enhancing discipline among students in public secondary schools in Embu West District Meru County. The study revealed that 83.7% of respondents said prefects are not trained in negotiation skills; hence need to enhance negotiation skills training. Prefects are involved in solving indiscipline issues among students.

In a study conducted by Apondi (2014) on forms of communication in schools: A study of public secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya, the respondents were made up of deputy principals, teachers, and student councils. The study found that forms of communication used in schools and the communication channels were ineffective in students' leadership and recommended training student council in communication skills. Muthoni, Njagi, and Wambugu (2018) studied the assessment of student leaders' skills, which is critical in managing student affairs in public universities, Karatina University Kenya. The study recommended training in communication skills for effective communication. A study was conducted by Oliech (2018) on the Communication function of Student Governing Council in Administration of Public Secondary School: A Case of Awendo Sub County in Kenya. This study revealed that the students' governing council receives and passes information from the administration and teachers to the students' body and from the students' body to the administration and teachers. The main channel of communication is oral communication.

3. Research Methodology

The study adopted a case study design to establish the training needs of SGC in school governance in Bondo sub-county and Usigu sub-county, Siaya County in Kenya. The study focused on 41 public secondary schools in Bondo sub-county, categorized as 1 National school, 4 Extra County secondary schools, 5 County secondary schools, and 31 Sub-County secondary schools. The study population comprised 41 principals, 43 deputy principals, 150 class teachers, and 1266 student council leaders, totaling 1500. Purposive sampling technique, random sampling technique, and stratified sampling technique were used to sample respondents. Research instruments comprised questionnaires, structured interviews, and focus group discussions. These were questionnaires for student council leaders (QSCL), principals (QP), and deputy principals (QDP). All the questionnaires consisted of structured questions, closed-ended questions, and a table to be filled. The questionnaire rating was Likert-type. Data Analysis was collected using quantitative data and qualitative data.

4. Findings

4.1. Students' Responses on the Existence of Student Council Training

The first questionnaire sought to find out the existence of student council training in schools. The findings are presented in figure 1.

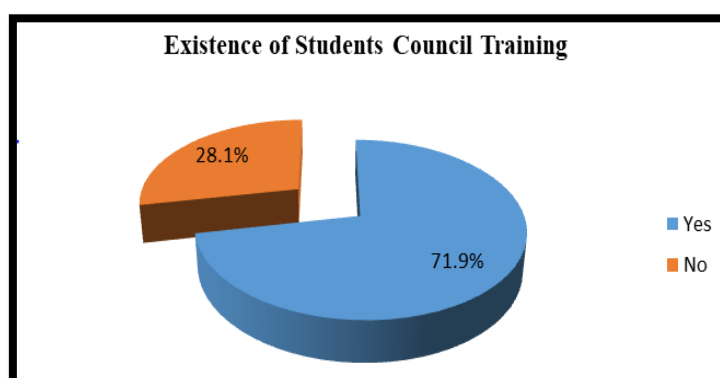


Figure 1: Existence of Student Council Training

Figure 1 indicates that 71.9% of the students responded that there was the existence of student council training in their schools, while 28.1% indicated that there was no existence of student council training in their schools. These findings show that majority of the schools had training that was conducted for the student councils.

This result corroborates the results from the interview, which showed that student councils existed in schools. This is showed in the following excerpt:

We have a student council in our school. It has been in existence for more than a decade. Initially, it used to exist as a perfect body but later on changed to the student council. It serves several functions though the key role is to oversee the functioning of the school on behalf of the school administration. (Student A002 from one of the Girls' schools).

This result is similar to Nzoka and Orodho's (2014) findings in a study on school management and students' academic achievement in which the authors noted that there was the existence of school councils in schools that assisted in the running of the school.

An interview with the Deputy Principal showed that the student council existed. This is demonstrated in the following excerpts:

Student council is a very critical component in the administration and management of schools. Therefore, our school has invested much in ensuring that the student council is established and running effectively in school. (Deputy Principal 002, working in a mixed day and boarding secondary school).

This was further confirmed by another Deputy Principal who gave the following opinion:

There is the existence of student council in our school. The student council has several elective posts that total up to about 45. This council is legally constituted as per the student election regulations. (Deputy Principal 003).

These results indicate that schools had student councils. This is similar to sentiments by Okwany (2020) on the influence of learners' participation in decision-making on discipline in public primary schools in Rarieda Sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya, who pointed out that the student council that exists in schools has been vital in decision-making processes in schools.

4.1.1. Communication Skills Necessary in Governance

The second objective of the research was to examine perceptions of student Governing council Communication skills necessary in the governance of public secondary schools within Bondo Sub-County in Siaya County, Kenya. The following are student Council responses on student Governing council Communication skills necessary in the governance of public secondary schools, as presented in table 1.

	No Need for Training	Low Need for Training	Moderate Need for Training	High Need for Training	Not Applicable to Student Council	Mean	Std. Dev.
Training in lobbying skills	43(33.6%)	18(14.1%)	30 (23.4%)	28(21.9%)	9 (7%)	2.557	1.339
Training in negotiation skills	16 (12.5%)	15 (11.7%)	45 (35.2%)	50(39.1%)	2 (1.6%)	3.055	1.037
Training in consensus-building skills	10 (7.8%)	17 (13.3%)	37 (28.9%)	61(47.7%)	3 (2.3%)	3.234	0.984
Training on how to handle difficult students	9 (7%)	9 (7%)	32 (25%)	76(59.4%)	2 (1.6%)	3.719	1.055
Training on how to handle students with disabilities	12 (9.4%)	9 (7%)	17 (13.3%)	81(63.3%)	9 (7%)	3.516	1.049

Table 1: Student Council Communication Skills Necessary in Governance

Findings in table 1 indicate that:

- 43 (33.6%) of the students showed that there was no need for training in lobbying skills,
- 18(14.1%) indicated a low need for training,
- 30 (23.4%) indicated a moderate need for training,
- 28 (21.9%) indicated a high need for training, and
- 9 (7%) indicated that it was not applicable

The mean = 2.557, SD = 1.339 indicates that most students felt there was a low need for training in lobbying skills.

This implies that students may be conversant with lobbying and thus do not need to have lobbying skills.

This result was echoed in the students' interviews in which students cited that when they were doing electioneering, they lobbied, thereby acquiring lobbying skills. This is shown in the following excerpt:

My lobbying skills started to develop way back when I was campaigning to be elected to the student council in our school. Back then, I would go to the lower and upper classes to solicit votes. So, for now, I feel like I am competent in lobbying skills; thus, training should focus on other skills. (Student B010).

This is in line with Robert, Dianna, and Rich (2016), who gave a report on Students' Leadership Skills Evaluation in Utah State USA in Elementary Schools. The report revealed that the program's state-funded training on leadership skills improved communication skills amongst the student council. The report indicated that students express themselves more clearly, speak in a group more confidently, and the teachers responded by saying the program improved learning and developed skills in leadership. Earlier on, Khalid (2015), in a study on Student leadership: Basic Skills and Appropriate Activities in Lebanon, indicated the importance of teaching leadership skills to students from an early age.

Table 1 further indicates that:

- 16 (12.5%) of the students disclosed that there was no need for training in negotiation skills,
- 15 (11%) indicated a low need for training,
- 45 (35.2%) indicated a moderate need,
- 50 (39.1%) indicated high need, and
- 2 (1.6%) indicated not applicable

The obtained mean = 3.055. SD =1.037 indicates that the majority of the students felt that there was a high need for training in negotiation skills. This finding implies that student council representatives were privy to the importance of negotiation skills in schools. Having students from diverse backgrounds makes schools epicenters for many demands that may arise from students. This may include demands related to food, school games, and entertainment, to name but just a few. Therefore, through negotiation skills, the student council representatives are aware that they will gain a lot, thus the high need for training.

The SGC interview echoed a similar opinion with one of the student leaders in one of the student councils had this to say:

This training is crucial for us because we are engaged in daily negotiations with our college students. Remember, we have new policies being implemented in order to improve. This calls for negotiation among students and even the parents. (Student A001 from a mixed day and boarding secondary school).

The results of these findings are consistent with a study conducted by Wong (2017) on the Communication habits and skills of adolescents studying in mainstream secondary schools in Hong Kong: A comparison of adolescents and speech-language pathologists' perspectives in China. Wong chose three adolescent students as participants to respond to a questionnaire. The finding of the study revealed that adolescents tended to perceive negotiation skills.

Further findings in table 1 indicate that:

- 10 (7.8%) of the students disclosed that there was no need for training in consensus-building skills,
- 17 (13.3%) indicated a low need for training,
- 37 (28.9%) indicated moderate need,
- 61(47.7%) indicated high need, and
- 3 (2.3%) indicated not applicable

The obtained mean = 3.234. SD =0.984 indicates that the majority of the students felt that there was a high need for training in consensus-building skills. These findings indicate that student council representatives are aware of the modern trend of solving problems through consensus. Rather than students engaging in activities that may jeopardize the management of schools in the name of airing their grievances, the council is aware that consensus can be an alternative pathway that averts such problems, thus the high need to engage in consensus. They are, therefore, aware of the consensus that should be built relating to school discipline, which is critical in school governance. A study by Wahed (2012) on effective communication of urban and rural school leaders in Egypt revealed that effective communication is the motivating force for any successful leader, and key components of successful leadership are developed through effective communication. The study indicated that there should be consensus building for schools to achieve effective communication.

Further findings in table 1 indicate that:

- 9 (7%) of the students disclosed that there was no need for training on how to handle difficult students,
- 9 (7%) indicated a low need for training,
- 32 (25%) indicated moderate need,
- 76 (59.4%) indicated high need, and
- 2 (1.6%) indicated not applicable

The obtained mean = 3.719, SD = 1.055 indicates that the majority of the students felt that there was a high need for training in how to handle difficult students. These findings indicate that schools may be experiencing difficult moments, such as indiscipline and low performance in the examination, thus warranting training on how to handle such situations. Students' opinions from the interview showed that they preferred training in handling difficult students.

I prefer to be trained on how to handle difficult skills, such as balancing studies and leadership roles and handling complex cases like drugs and theft. These are just but many of the complex matters that we go through as a student council. Thus training in the same will be very timely. (Student B005).

This result is consistent with Komba (2015), who investigated the perceived importance of communication skills courses among university students: A Case of Two Universities in Tanzania. The study indicated that communication course, which should include training for difficult students, was important in acquiring communication skills needed in academics.

The findings in table 1 indicate that:

- 12 (9.4%) of the students disclosed that there was no need for training on how to handle students with disabilities,
- 9 (7%) indicated a low need for training,
- 17 (13.3%) indicated moderate need,
- 81 (63.3%) indicated high need, and
- 9 (7%) indicated not applicable

The obtained mean = 3.516, SD = 1.049 indicates that the majority of the students felt that there was a high need for training on how to handle students with disabilities. Recently, there have been a higher number of students in mainstream school who are physically challenged. This has exacerbated the need to have skills in handling them, thus the high need as responded by the student council. Similar sentiments were echoed in the interview with a girl in one of the mixed-day schools who had this to say:

Students who are physically challenged need a lot of care and understanding. In order to achieve this, we need training that will equip up with the necessary skills to handle them. Failure of such skills may make the student feel like they are alienated from mainstream school management. (Student A004).

Interview responses from the Deputy Principal showed that the students needed moderate training in lobbying skills. This is captured in the following excerpt:

Our students are good at lobbying skills. This can be seen when they communicate with teachers, especially when we have academic tours. They will lobby for it until they become successful. They also lobby amongst themselves during electioneering season. So, I feel like they can be trained not solely in lobbying but in other skills, such as negotiation, that they may be weak in (Deputy Principal 002).

These results indicate that lobbying is essential though other skills can be looked into to improve communication skills. These results align with Onen (2020), who investigated cultivating critical thinking amongst university Graduate students in Kampala. The author argued that the important critical skills that are applied to university students may be applied to secondary schools because university students were once in secondary schools, and they may have undergone the same challenges. As much as Onen study recommended for formal inclusion of lobbying skills under critical thinking to be included in the curricula, the current study feels that training on the same may be important for the student council. Principals' Responses on Student Council Communication Skills Necessary in Governance are presented in table 2.

	No Need for Training	Low Need for Training	Moderate Need for Training	High Need for Training	Not Applicable to Student Council	Mean	Std. Dev.
Training in lobbying skills			4 (66.7%)	2(33.3%)		3.333	.516
Training in negotiation skills			1 (16.7%)	5(83.3%)		3.833	.408
Training in consensus-building skills				6 (100%)		4.000	.000
Training on how to handle difficult students				6 (100%)		4.000	.000
Training on how to handle students with disabilities				6 (100%)		4.000	.000

Table 2: Principals' Response to Student Council Communication Skills Necessary in Governance

Table 2 indicates that 4 (66.7%) of the Principals showed a moderate need for training in lobbying skills, while 2 (33.3%) indicated a high need for training. The mean = 3.333, SD = 0.516 indicates that the majority of the Principals felt that there was a moderate need for training in lobbying skills. This implies that Principals who are the leaders of schools will prefer to lobby with student council to manage school affairs.

Table 2 further indicated that 1 (16.7%) of the Principals disclosed a low need for negotiation skills training, while 5 (83.3%) indicated a high need for training. The obtained mean = 3.833, SD = 0.408 indicates that the majority of the Principals felt that there was a high need for training in negotiation skills. Generally, Principals will wish to have an environment that allows for negotiation rather than confrontation. They will prefer to have talks at a table with the student council if there is a misunderstanding. Further findings in table 2 indicate that 6 (100%) of the Principals disclosed that there was a high need for training in consensus-building skills. The obtained mean = 4.000, SD = 0.000 indicates that the majority of the Principals felt that there was a high need for training in consensus-building skills. These findings indicate that Principals are aware of the modern trend of solving problems through consensus. Further findings in table 2 indicate that 6 (100%) of the Principals disclosed that there was a high need for training on how to handle difficult students. The obtained mean = 4.000, SD = 0.000 indicates that the majority of the Principals felt that there was a high need for training in how to handle difficult students. These findings indicate that schools may be experiencing difficult moments, such as indiscipline and low performance in the examination, thus warranting training on how to handle such situations.

The finding in table 2 indicates that 6 (100%) of the Principals disclosed that there was a high need for training on how to handle students with disabilities. The obtained mean = 4.000, SD = 0.000 indicates that the majority of the Principals felt that there was a high need for training on how to handle students with disabilities. Recently, there have been a higher number of students in mainstream school who are physically challenged. This has exacerbated the need to have skills in handling them, thus the high need as responded by the student council.

5. Summary of the Findings

Communication skills are necessary for the governance of public secondary schools within Bondo Sub-County in Siaya County, Kenya. The study found out entailed lobbying skills, negotiation skills, and consensus-building skills, handling difficult students, and training on how to handle students with disabilities. Respondents, including principals, Deputy Principals, and student councils, indicated a high need for training in these skills to improve school governance.

6. Conclusion

Communication skills are essential in the student council as they aid the student council representatives in carrying out their mandate, which includes linking the students with the school administration. Lobbying skills, negotiation skills, consensus-building skills, handling of difficult and training on how to handle students with disabilities were highly regarded for training.

7. Recommendations

Based on this research, the following recommendations are suggested:

- Since training is imperative in equipping student leaders with skills such as communication, intrapersonal and interpersonal, and organizational skills, it ought to be well-structured, planned, and offered more regularly.
- Regular training at least once a year should be conducted to sharpen the communication skills, intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, and organizational skills of the student council.
- The training should be done at the school, local, regional, and national levels.
- Institutions such as Ministry of Education, County Governments, and Media Corporations should be engaged to oversee such training.

By so doing, the student council will be able to interact with other councils and share their experiences in leadership roles.

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