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Students' participation in decision making: the case of senior high schools in the Volta region, Ghana

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore students' participation in decision making among senior high school students in the Volta Region of Ghana. The study was a descriptive survey. The sample size was 569 respondents. Multi-stage sampling was used. Structured questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data for the study. Frequencies and percentages were used to analyse the data. The study revealed that participatory decision making allows students to discuss issues and problems at their Students' Representative Council level and later communicate to administration. The study found that students were not fully involved in decision-making processes. The study also found that fear of being victimized and authoritative nature of heads hindered students them from fully participating in the decision making processes. The recommendations were that heads should organize orientation for the first year students and most importantly prefects and members of the SRC so that they will know their specific roles and duties in the decision making processes in the schools. Also, in order to bridge the communication gap between administration and students, they can utilize the following avenues; informal consultations from time to time involve the SRC to discuss issues on the school administration, introduction of suggestion boxes to submit their suggestions to the administration.

Key Words: Students' participation, Decision Making, senior high schools, Volta Region.

Introduction

Decision-making cuts across all human endeavors. Everybody make decision in one way or the other; husband and wife, teachers, students, administrators, governments and many others. Teachers are at times faced with the situation of selecting one best method of teaching their students out of the numerous pools of methods. Simon (1960) distinguished between two types of decisions; programmed decisions are those which are well-structured, repetitive and have definite rules and procedures for handling them. Unprogrammed decision making are those that are out of the ordinary. Asare-Bediako (2004) identified five types of structures that could be used in making decisions. The first is 'Decision by Authority 'where an individual in authority make decisions for the group. The second type 'Decision by Majority' refers to the approach where the group members have the liberty to express their views on the problem. The third was 'Decision by minority' here, a single person or a small group of people take a decision for a larger group. There is yet another structure known as 'Decision by Unanimity 'where every group member agrees with the decision taken. The last described as Consensus Decision-making'. This approach is where there is a lot of networking, collaboration and discussions, so that in the long run all members will support the decision. Harbison (1973) contends that human beings are the worth of nations and their skills, talents and potentials must be developed. This can only be effectively developed if students are allowed to participate in making decisions that invariably affect them. Hence, students' participation in decision-making in the senior high schools needs to be studied.

Statement of the problem

Students' leadership in the senior high schools is considered as part of the decision making machinery in the schools. They are represented at all levels of existing committees in the various senior high schools in

Ghana. However, these students leaders are most of the time deprived from taking part in the decision making process. Reports from Committees of Enquiry into staff and students grievances in schools in Ghana (Twumasi, 1974) such as the cases of Kadjebi Senior High School in 1969, Kpeve Senior High School in 1975 and OLA Girls Senior High School in 2011 and Mawuko Girls in 2011 all in the Volta Region of Ghana, others are Tarkwa Senior High School in 1971, Fiaseman Senior High School in 1979, seem to reveal that some school administrators deprive students from taking part in school decision-making.

The recent incident at Northern School of Business in 2016, Ghana Senior High in 2016 and Vitting Senior High in 2016 is believed to be an example of a micro situation which serves as an eye opener to the fact that students have a low level of participation in the decision-making process. The neglect of students' involvement has often led them to be militant in their demands. Consequently, properties have been destroyed and in some cases innocent lives have been lost. Students' grievances remain a big issue in recent years. Is it because these schools have poor procedures and structures in decision-making? How are students 'involved in the decision-making processes? What factors hinder students from participating in the decision-making process? This has necessitated the study students' participation in decision making: the case of senior high schools in the Volta Region, Ghana.

Purpose of the study
The purpose of the study was to explore students' participation in decision making in areas such as; the structure of decision-making process, students, teachers and heads perception in decision making and factors hindering students from participating in decision-making in the Volta Region of Ghana.

Research Questions
The study aimed at seeking answers to the following questions;
1. What are the structures and procedures of decision making process in Senior High Schools based on participatory and non-participatory decision making?
2. How are students 'involved in the decision-making processes?
3. What factors hinder students from participating in the decision-making process in the Region?

Research Design
The basic design used in this study was the descriptive survey (Gay, 1996). A sample size of 569 respondents was used to carry out the study. This was made up of 370 students, 184 teachers, 15 Heads. The selection of 370 students and 184 teachers was done based on Krejcie and Morgan (as cited in Sarantakos, 1998) but for a sample of 100 or fewer people, the researcher should survey the entire population in order to collect data from everybody for that reason, all 15 heads were used for the study. The multi-stage sampling technique and censored technique was used to select respondents. Self-developed sets of questionnaire were the main instruments used to collect data for the study.

Results and Discussion
Research Question 1: What are the structures and procedures of decision making process in Senior High Schools based on participatory and non-participatory decision making?

Table 1: The Structure and Procedures of Decision- Making in the School

Structure	Agree		Disagree		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Structure and Procedure (Students)						
There is SRC in my school	305	82.4	65	17.6	370	100
Students selected by popular choice	206	55.7	164	44.3	370	100
Students serve on disciplinary comm.	177	47.8	193	52.2	370	100
Students opinion are invited	134	37.0	236	63.0	370	100
Structure and Procedure (Teachers)						
There is SRC in my school	121	65.8	63	34.2	184	100
Students selected by popular choice	112	60.9	72	39.1	184	100
Students serve on disciplinary comm.	85	46.2	99	53.8	184	100
Students' opinion invited by adm.	80	43.6	104	56.4	184	100
Structure and Procedure (Heads)						
There is SRC in my school	13	86.7	2	13.3	15	100
Students selected by popular choice	14	93.3	1	6.7	15	100
Students serve on disciplinary comm.	9	60	6	40	15	100
Students' opinion invited by adm.	7	46.7	8	53.3	15	100

Table 1 showed that 206 (55.7%), 112 (60.9%) and 14 (93.3%) of students, teachers and heads respectively indicated that students leaders are selected by popular choice whereas 164 (44.3%), 72 (39.1%) and 2 (13.3%) of students, teachers and heads respectively disagreed that students are selected by popular choice. This means that the choice of student leadership is a combination effort of both the school administration and students. The results support earlier findings of Amedzro and Youdeowie (2005) that leaders may be appointed or elected. On the question of whether students serve on disciplinary committee 177 (47.8%), 85 (46.2%) and 9 (60%) of students, teachers and heads respectively agreed that students serve on disciplinary committee. On the other hand, 193 (52.2%), 99 (58.3%) and 6 (40%) disagreed that students are allowed to serve on disciplinary committees. This means that in many schools, decision taken by the disciplinary committee had been vetoed by the headmasters of their schools. This is in support of Shanahan (1987) that students want to be involved in establishing classroom discipline in the school. On whether the school administrator welcomes students opinions to effect or bring about change, it became clear from Table 1 that 134 (37.0%), 80 (43.6%) and 7 (46.8%) of students, teachers and heads respectively agreed that school administrators welcomed opinions of students on issues affecting the school. On the other hand, 236 (63.0%), 104 (56.4%) and 8 (53.3%) of students, teachers and heads respectively disagreed that school administrators invited students opinion on issues affecting the school. This means that students views are not taken into consideration before decision affecting the school and students are made.

Research Question 2: How are students 'involved in the decision-making processes?
Table 2: Students Participation in Operational Decisions

Operational Decisions (Students)	Agree No.	%	Disagree No.	%	Total No.	%
Choosing class monitors	298	80.5	72	19.5	370	100
Planning new projects	169	44.7	201	55.3	370	100
Assigning co-curricular activities	243	65.7	127	34.3	370	100
Disciplining students	222	54.3	148	45.7	370	100
Operational Decisions (Teachers)						
Choosing class monitors	123	66.9	61	33.1	184	100
Planning new projects	50	27.2	134	72.8	184	100
Assigning co-curricular activities	104	56.5	80	43.5	184	100
Disciplining students	140	76.1	44	23.9	184	100
Operational decisions (heads)						
Choosing class monitors	8	53.3	7	46.7	15	100
Planning new projects	12	80	3	20	15	100
Assigning co-curricular activities	8	53.3	7	46.7	15	100
Disciplining students	8	53.3	7	46.7	15	100

Table 2 revealed that 169 (44.7%), 50 (27.2%) and 12 (80%) of students, teachers, and heads respectively agreed that students were involved in planning new projects for the school.

On the other hand, 201 (55.3%) of students, 134 (72.8%) of teachers and 3(20%) of heads disagreed that students were involved in planning new projects for the school. Table 2 clearly shows that students are not involved in planning new project for the school. Table 2 further indicated that 243 (65.7%) of students, 154 (56.5%) of teachers and 7 (46.7%) of heads agreed that students are assigned duties concerning co-curricular activities. Also, 127 (34.3%) of students, 80 (43.5%) of teachers and 8 (53.3%) of heads disagreed that students are assigned duties concerning co-curricular activities. It could be deduced from Table 2 that majority of the respondents agreed that students are assigned duties concerning co-curricular activities. The Table also indicated that 222 (54.3%) of students, 140 (76.1%) of teachers and 8 (53.3%) of heads agreed that students were involved in disciplining their own colleagues. However, 148 (45.7%) of students, 44 (23.9%) of teachers and 7 (46.7) of heads disagreed that students were involved in disciplining their own colleagues. From the analysis, it is clear that majority of the respondents agreed that students are involved in disciplining their colleagues.

Table 3: Students' Participation in Managerial Decisions

Managerial Decisions (students)	Agree No.	%	Disagree No.	%	Total No.	%
Planning the school menu	169	45.7	191	54.3	370	100
Purchasing items that are sold to school	164	44.7	206	55.3	370	100
Teachers & house staff assessment	176	47.5	194	52.5	370	100
Planning the school timetable	169	45.7	191	54.3	370	100
Selecting teacher& students for award	173	46.8	197	53.2	370	100
Managerial Decisions (Teachers)						
Planning the school menu	140	76.1	44	23.9	184	100
Purchasing items that are sold to school.	100	54.4	84	45.6	184	100
Teachers & house staff						

assessment	93	50.5	91	49.5	184	100
Planning the school timetable	93	50.5	91	49.5	184	100
Selecting teachers and students for award	75	40.7	109	59.3	184	100
Managerial Decisions (Heads)						
Planning the school menu	9	60.0	6	40.0	15	100
Purchasing items that are sold to school	8	53.3	7	46.7	15	100
Planning the school timetable	6	40.0	9	60.0	15	100
Selecting teacher $ students for awards	6	40.0	9	60.0	15	100

The issue as to whether students are involved in managerial decision was investigated in Table 3, 169 (45.7%), 140 (76.1%) and 9 (60%) of students, teachers and heads respectively agreed that students were involved in planning their school menu. Also, 191 (54.3%) of students, 44 (23.9%) of teachers and 6 (40%) of heads disagreed that students were involved in planning the school menu. From the analysis it was noted that students were not well involved in planning the school menu. On the issue of purchasing of items sold to students, 164 (44.7%), 100 (54.4%) and 8 (53.3%) of students, teachers and heads respectively agreed that students were involved in purchasing of items sold to students. The data also indicated that 206 (55.3%), 44 (23.9%) and 1 (6.7%) of students, teachers and heads respectively disagreed that students were involved in the purchasing of items sold to students. The information shows clearly that students were not well involved in the purchasing of items sold to students. Information from Table 3 shows that 176 (47.5 %) of students, 93 (50.5%) of teachers and 14 (93.3%) of heads indicated that students were involved in selecting teachers and students for awards compared to 194 (52.5%) of students, 91 (49.5%) of teachers and 1 (6.7%) of heads who disagreed that students were involved in selecting teachers and students for awards. Table 3 further showed that teachers and heads agreed that they were involved but students disagreed that they were involved (52.5%). Similarly, 169 (45.7%) of students, 93 (50.5%) of teachers and 6 (40%) of heads agreed that students were involved in planning the school time table whereas 191 (54.3%) of students, 91 (49.5%) of teacher and 9 (60%) of heads disagreed that students were involved in planning the school time table. The data indicated that majority of respondents (54.3.5) and (60%) of students and heads respectively disagreed that students were not much involved in planning the school time table for preps and other extracurricular activities. On the issue of teachers and housemasters' assessment 176 (47.5%) of students, 93 (50.5%) of teachers and 14 (93.3%) of heads agreed that students were involved in assessing teachers and house staff. Also 194 (52.5%) of students, 91 (49.5%) of teachers and 1 (6.7%) of heads disagreed that students were involved in assessment of teachers and house staff. The Table shows that students are not fully involved in assessing teachers and house staff. Information from Table 3 clearly shows that with regards to operational decisions, students are not involved in planning new project for the school and concerning managerial decisions students are not involved in issues like purchasing items to be sold to them, planning the school timetable for preps and other activities and selecting teachers and students for special awards for speech day. The findings are in agreement with findings of Afful-Broni (2004) that students' participation level for both 'desired' and 'actual' was not least for managerial decisions. The findings further revealed that it is not all managerial and operational decision that students are involved in but heads could include them in making decision pertaining directly to their day to day activities especially in areas of discipline and the preparation of the schools menu. Involving students in these areas would help prevent vices like gambling, drinking, stealing and smoking. This information is presented in Table 3.

Research Question 3: What factors hinder students from participating in the decision-making process in the Region?

Table 4: Factors that Hinder Students from Fully Participating in Decision Making

Hindering factor (Students)	Agree No.	%	Disagree No.	%	Total No.	%
Authoritative nature of heads	264	71.4	106	28.6	370	100
Fear of being victimized	262	73.5	98	26	370	100
Lack of students on committee	266	71.9	104	28.1	370	100
Students' unwillingness	166	44.9	204	54.1	370	100
External influence	164	44.4	206	55.6	370	100
Hindering factor (Teachers)						
Authoritative nature of heads	108	58.7	76	41.3	184	100
Fear of being victimized	98	53.2	86	46.8	184	100
Lack of students on committee	128	69.5	56	30.5	184	100
Students' unwillingness	18	9.8	166	90.2	184	100
External influence						
Hindering factor (heads)	16	8.7	168	91.3	184	100
Authoritative nature of heads						
fear of being victimized	9	60.0	6	40.0	15	100
Lack of students on committee	3	20.0	12	80.0	15	100
Students' unwillingness	11	73.3	4	26.7	15	100
External influence	3	20.0	12	80.0	15	100

Table 4 shows that 264 (71.4%) of students, 108 (58.7%) of teachers and 9 (60.5%) of heads agreed that the authoritative nature of the heads was a hindrance to students participation in the decision- making process. However, 106 (28.6%), 76 (41.3%), and 6 (40%) of students, teachers and heads respectively disagreed that the authoritative nature of heads hindered students participation in decision- making. The results showed that the authoritative nature of heads resulted in a closed channel of communication between administration and the students. One the issue of whether fear of victimization hindered students' participation in decision making, 262 (73.5%) of students, 98 (53.2%) of teachers and 3 (20%) of heads agreed that fear of victimization hindered students participation in decision making. However, 98 (26%) of students, 86 (46.8%) of teachers and 12 (80%) of heads disagreed that fear of victimization hindered students participation in decision making. The results shows that majority of students (73.5%) and teachers (53.2%) except the heads agreed that fear of victimization hinder students' participation in decision- making comparing the results of fear of being victimized and authoritative nature of heads majority of the respondents agreed that they hindered students participation in decision making. This results is in line with Amedzro and Youdeowei (2005) who argued that heads in this type of school condition use dictatorial approach, always giving instructions to students. No questions, opinions and views from students and teachers are always loaded with instructions. The authoritative nature of heads coupled with students' fear of being victimized account between administrators and students. Amedzro and Youdeowei (2005) further indicated that since close channel of communications bring about the achievement of organizational goals, there is the need to adopt certain measures to improve the communication process hence, administrators and students must develop simple language, speak with clear voice, place emphasis on important and relevant issues and make speeches at an appropriate pace, not too fast for listeners not to follow what is being said or too slow to bore people.

The third factor that lack of students representation on committees hinder students participation in decision making, 266 (71.9) of students, 128 (69.5%) of teachers and 11 (73.3%) of heads agreed that lack of students representation on committees hindered students participation in decision making. On the other

hand, 98 (26%), 56 (30.5%) and 4 (26.7%) of students, teachers and heads respectively agreed that lack of students representation on committee hindered students participation in decision making. This means that majority of students (71.9%), teachers (69.5%) and heads (73.3%) agreed that lack of students' representation on committees hindered their involvement in decision making. On the issue as to students unwillingness in taking part in the decision- making process hindered their participation in decision making, 166 (44.9%), 18 (9.8%) and 4 (26.7%) of students, teachers and heads respectively agreed that students unwillingness hindered their participation in decision making. On the other hand, 204 (54.1%), 166 (90.2%) and 11 (73.3%) of students, teachers and heads respectively disagreed that students unwillingness hindered their participation in decision making. This means that (90.2%) majority of students (54.1%) teacher and heads (73.3%) disagreed that students unwillingness hindered their participation in the decision making process. On the issue of whether eternal influence hindered their participation in decision making, 206 (55.6%), 168 (91.3%) and 12 (80%) of students, teachers and heads respectively agreed that external influence hindered students participation in decision- making. Also 164 (44.4%), 18 (9.8%) and 3 (20%) of students, teachers and heads respectively disagreed that external influence hindered students participation in decision making. This agrees with the finding of Afful-Broni (2004) who indicated that old students of school have in many cases influenced the management of their schools. For instance, students may prefer that a new toilet facility should be constructed for them but the old students may prefer on the construction of a new school block. Since old students may provide part of this fund for the project, the school administrator decides to construct the school block instead of the toilet. Analyzing the responses in Table 4, it became evident that it is not students who are unwilling to participate in the decision- making process, neither is it that they are not represented on the school committees but rather the fear of being victimized, authoritative nature of heads and external influences are the main hindrances to their active participation in the decision making process of their school.

Conclusions
Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn; two main types of decision making were realized, participatory and non-participatory. The participatory decision making allows students to discuss issues and problems at their SRC level and later communicate to administration; the choice of student leadership is a combination effort of both the school administration and students, students are assigned duties concerning co-curricular activities. The non-participatory type was mostly used when administrators made managerial decisions. From the analysis it was noted that students were not well involved in the purchasing of items sold to them, students were not well involved in planning the school menu, not fully involved in assessing teachers and house staff, students are not involved in planning new project for the school, decision taken by the disciplinary committee had been vetoed by the heads of their schools. In order to avoid agitation, it is important to involve students' before decision affecting the school and students are made. On the issue of what hinders students from active participation in the decision-making process, it was found that students were willing to fully participate in both operational and managerial decision making but the fear of being victimized and authoritative nature of heads hindered them from fully participating in the decision making process of their schools.

Recommendations
Based on the evidence and the conclusion drawn, the following recommendations are made;
- School authorities should encourage participatory decision- making structures in schools. In order to bridge the communication gap between administration and students, they can utilize the following avenues; informal consultations from time to time involve the SRC to discuss issues on the school administration, introduction of suggestion boxes to submit their suggestions to the administration.
- Since fear of being victimized is the main factor which students admit prevent them from participating in school decision- making. It is recommended that heads should do well to remove such fear by taking their views into consideration.
- School authorities for that matter heads should organize orientation for the first year students and most importantly prefects and members of the SRC so that they will know their specific roles and duties in the decision making process.

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