The Bottleneck in Engaging Pupils in Primary School Governance In Tanzania

Aneth A. Komba and VeronikaMpeta

Department of Educational Foundations Management and Lifelong Learning
University of Dar es Salaam, P.O. Box 35048, Tanzania
E-mail: kombandembeka@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study attempts to provide answers to two research questions: (1) in practice, how are pupils engaged in public primary school governance; and (2) what challenges are faced by pupil councils in fostering school governance? The study employed a multiple case study design with a qualitative research methodology framework. The purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample of 130 respondents. Data were collected through interviews and documentary review. The data were analysed using Miles and Huberman's model (1994) of qualitative data analysis. The study found the following. Firstly, the law explicitly states that pupils should be involved in school governance through pupil councils and indicates how this should be done. Secondly, pupil councils exist in schools, but they do not conform to the guidelines for their development and play only a peripheral role in schools' governance. In addition, pupil councils face challenges associated with the failure to implement decisions, the hatred of teachers and fellow pupils, inadequate time for meetings and irresponsibility on the part of the school management in responding to pupil councils' suggestions. Based on these findings, the study provides a number of recommendations, one being that, since the government is committed to promoting and protecting children's rights, it is now high time to implement this commitment and ensure that pupils are provided with an opportunity to engage fully in school governance as a means of expressing their opinions about all matters that affect their school life.

Keywords: Pupil councils, School governance, Tanzania

Introduction

Tanzania is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Among other things, this Convention advocates for children's right to participate in decision making, which requires all social institutions, including schools, to ensure that children participate in making decisions that affect their lives. Notably, children should be consulted, be taken account of, have access to information, have the freedom to speak and be able to challenge the decisions made about them (UNHR, 1988, Johnson, 2004). Being a signatory to this Convention suggests that the government of Tanzania recognises and respects children's rights. In the light of this, children's right to participate in school governance has been stated explicitly in various policy documents with the intention of ensuring that they are involved in all matters affecting them. Indeed, children's right to participate in school governance has been legally established in Tanzania. The Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP) 2001 pointed out clearly that pupils should be involved in school governance through pupil councils and gave directions on how this can be implemented in practice. These councils are expected to: represent the views and interests of all pupils, including the

marginalised and those with special needs; participate in the decision-making of the school committee; contribute to the development and monitoring of school plans and the use of funds; and communicate information between the school/village management and the pupils (United Republic of Tanzania, URT 2001). Indeed, the role of school councils in Tanzanian primary schools is to ensure effective school governance (URT, 2003). However, despite the existence of the law, there is a paucity of information regarding its practice on the ground. The literature maintains that most people assume that the pupils are too young to be involved in decision-making (Deuchar, 2004; Mncube, 2008), and that involving pupils in school governance would overtax them (Having a Say at School, HASAS, 2010). This study investigated the ways in which pupils in Tanzanian public primary schools are engaged in school governance, the roles of school councils and the challenges faced by school councils in carrying out their activities.

How pupils can be engaged in school governance: perspectives from the literature

Effective governance is a panacea for raising institutional performance regarding the delivery of education services (Lewis, 2009). Good governance enables the government to carry out the various organisational activities necessary for implementing policies and plans. Good governance, therefore, offers tools for programme design and its execution (Mosha, 2006). In schools, effective governance is as important as in any other type of organisation. All things being equal, good governance facilitates the provision of quality education and ensures the achievement of schools' goals. It is worth remembering that the ultimate goal of schools is to provide the conditions and services that are necessary if children are to learn and acquire knowledge. This goal cannot be accomplished without effective school governance. Central to the concept of governance is that of stakeholders, who constitute different groups of people with a stake in how the school should operate (Ainley & McKenzie, 2000). These should be effectively engaged in planning, implementing and evaluating school outcomes. As learners are among the key stakeholders in schools, they should be recognised, respected and engaged in school governance activities. Empirical evidence shows that children and young people overwhelmingly wish to be involved in the decision-making process of their school (HASAS, 2010), but the staff and community members neither respond to nor take seriously pupils' views and suggestions (Deuchar, 2004). The majority doubt whether children can engage in a meaningful discussion or contribute valid ideas, although various researchers have found evidence that pupils, through pupil councils, can indeed make a contribution to issues that are relevant to schools' development.

Involving pupils in school governance activities is unavoidable. Notably, pupils feel more confident and willing to participate in the implementation of decisions if they have participated in the decision-making process. Through direct participation, pupils can develop a genuine appreciation for democracy and a sense of their own competence and responsibility (Carter, Harber & Serf, 2003; Mncube, 2008). Thus, participation helps to improve the quality of education in schools and enables pupils to become confident and assertive school members. Worldwide, pupils are engaged in sc hool governance through pupil councils. These are recognised as being the most popular formal mechanism for facilitating children and young peoples' participation in school governance (Deuchar, 2004; Dublin National Children's Office, (DNCO), 2006). They give the pupils a voice and an opportunity to work in partnership with the school management and staff to improve their school (Baginsky & Hannam, 1999; Hudson, 2005). They are also recognised as being a laboratory for democracy, a consultative body prior to the implementation of new school policies and a communication channel (DNCO, 2006). Their activities and projects provide a testing ground for ideas which become part of the school (Starkey, 1991). Indeed, the literature suggests that school

councils work for all pupils. Hence, they are the heart of pupil involvement and constitute the most representative and powerful student organisation.

Evidence from various countries suggests that pupil councils play a number of roles and face a number of challenges. In the United Kingdom (UK), pupil councils are seen as vital laboratories for democracy (HASAS, 2010). In Scotland, pupil councils are seen as a vehicle for expressing active citizenship and fostering democratic participation in schools (Learning and Teaching Scotland, LTS 2002). Pupil councils in Scotland have discussed, recommended and influenced changes to uniforms, break-times, special projects, fund-raising and the school environment, such as toilets and meals (HASAS, 2010). In Dublin, students, principals and teachers in schools with democratic and effective pupil councils have reported that enormous benefits have been gained through the work of such councils (DNCO, 2006). However, the participation of children and young people in schools, in general, and pupil councils, in particular, has also been subject to considerable criticism. Most research shows that pupils are generally dissatisfied with their overall involvement in the decision-making process, particularly as they perceive that pupil councils lack power (Cotmore, 2003; Wyness, 2005).

In South Africa, studies show that the needs of learners have been easily met through the involvement of a Representative Council for Learners in school governing bodies. It has been noted that learners' participation in school governance is influenced by the general intentions of the South African Schools Act. However, learners were not given an opportunity to participate fully in crucial decisions affecting their school (Mncube, 2008). Notably, learners were sometimes denied the right to participate fully by the adult members on the school's governing body, and were regarded as too inexperienced to deal with crucial matters affecting the school. In Northern Nigeria, school councils are seen as a forum where complaints and grievances can be voiced and settled, or as a means by which pupils can gain a better idea of what is going on in their school (Sifuna, 2000). Indeed, school councils have been found to work as an effective channel of communication between the school management and the pupils (Harber, 1989).

Generally, the literature holds that most people view primary or secondary school students as immature. This perception is invalid and should not be entertained when fostering school governance that includes the participation of pupils. In Tanzania, the Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP) back in the 2000s stipulated that pupils should play a far greater role in their respective school's management (URT, 2001). Whereas PEDP stipulates that pupil councils should meet at least once a month to discuss matters of interest to pupils, studies show that the majority of pupil councils in Tanzania never meet at all (Dachi et al., 2010). This raises questions about the effectiveness of these pupil councils in contributing meaningfully to effective school management, as targeted by PEDP.

The literature maintains that a good pupil council should command the respect and support of other pupils by opening its doors to all pupils and being aware of their needs and opinions (Dobie, 1998). It should listen to pupils' views and convey them to the school management. In a diplomatic way, the pupil council should also air any difficulties being experienced by individual pupils or groups on their behalf (DNCO, 2006). Pupil councils also offer solutions to persistent problems relating to administration and student conflicts (HASAS, 2010). They provide a forum in which students' concerns may be raised and addressed. They question the school management on various academic, social and economic issues, and ensure transparency regarding any decisions made and enforced by the school management. They can also ensure that a timely response is made to any issues raised by the pupils. Pupil councils also contribute to the school's decision-making process, whereby pupils

are expected to challenge any plans/actions undertaken by the school management. This ensures that the school management remains open, fair, responsible and accountable to the pupils (URT, 2003). Notably, pupil councils are responsible for presenting pupils' requirements with regard to various academic, social and economic issues. They therefore serve as a link and communication channel between the students and the school management, teachers and non-teaching staff. The presence of a pupil council within a school provides opportunities for both pupils and staff to learn how to compromise, where necessary (DNCO, 2006). Pupils also learn democratic principles which call for active participation, freedom of expression and a sense of justice and fairness (Starkey, 1991). Through pupil councils, pupils also acquire the necessary leadership skills and learn to co-operate in various situations, thus developing the qualities of patience, perseverance and discipline, which are needed for being successful in life (HASAS 2010). Pupils also learn how democracy works, and can use these skills both at home and in their community. In the widest sense, pupil councils can contribute to the development of pupils' social and moral responsibility, community involvement and political literacy (Taylor & Johnson, 2002). Silencing the voices of learners, implicitly or explicitly, means that the issues of social justice and democracy are being neglected in schools. Involving pupils in school governance enhances its effectiveness, i.e., it improves the school's ability to organise, coordinate and supervise the implementation of educational plans efficiently and effectively (Mosha, 2006). It also creates a conducive environment, which will enable pupils to engage effectively in understanding and improving their school's development process (Makongo & Rajani, 2003). The presence of a pupil council, therefore, can lead to positive changes occurring in schools.

The literature provides the following reasons for pupils' involvement in school governance. Firstly, the pupils obtain a greater insight into the life of the school. They know what is going on in the school, and can contribute practical ideas for change. For example, they can tell when school resources are being used effectively, when teachers are punctual and what can be done to improve their school (Mncube, 2008). Secondly, participation creates a sense of ownership. Pupils who have been involved in creating something are more likely to understand it, see its importance and feel committed to it. Arguably, rules and regulations developed with pupil participation are more likely to be fair and respected. These councils can play a huge role in the process of encouraging pupils' sense of ownership and accountability, and hence in the sustainability of various initiated programmes (Dobie, 1998; Mncube, 2008). Lastly, participation is a right. Pupils are full human beings and have certain basic rights. Pupils' participation in school is also recognised in major education reforms and policy (Deuchar, 2004). Above all, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Tanzania, recognises in Articles 12-15 the right of children to be involved in all matters affecting them (Mascarenhas & Sigalla, 2010). How, then, are pupils being engaged in the governance of Tanzanian public primary schools?

Objectives of the Study

The study had two objectives: (i) to explore the ways in which pupils are engaged in public primary school governance; and (ii) to explore the challenges that pupil councils face in executing their roles. More specifically, the study was guided by four research questions: (i) Who are the members of pupil councils? (ii) How are pupil councils engaged in public primary school governance? (iii) What challenges are faced by pupil councils in executing their roles? And (iv) what should be done to strengthen pupil councils in Tanzanian public primary schools?

Research Methodology

The study employed the qualitative research methodology, using a case study design, specifically, a multiple case study. The cases were the schools, in each of which the units of analysis were the pupils, the members of the pupil councils, the head teachers and the teachers. The study was conducted in Kinondoni district of Dar es Salaam. The sample size for this study was five public primary schools. From these schools, the study selected five head teachers, five counsellors, 20 teachers (four per school), 70 members of pupil councils (14 per school), and 30 other pupils who did not serve on the pupil council (six per school). Two categories of sampling techniques, namely purposive and simple random sampling, were used. Purposive sampling was used to select the head teachers, members of the pupil councils and the counsellors. Teachers and other pupils who did not serve on pupil councils were selected through the simple random sampling technique. The researcher considered this technique appropriate because the categories mentioned constituted a large population. However, it is worth noting here that the purpose of using the simple random sampling strategy was not so much to allow for generalisation of the research findings but rather to minimise bias in the selection of the sample. The data were collected through focus group discussions, interviews and documentary review, before being analysed using Miles and Hurberman's 1994 model of qualitative data analysis.

Findings and Discussion

The findings are organised in four sub-sections: (1) the membership of pupil councils; (2) the ways through which pupils are engaged in public primary school governance; (3) the challenges pupil councils face in enhancing school governance; and (4) ways in which to strengthen pupil councils in Tanzanian primary schools.

The membership of pupil councils

Regarding the membership of pupil councils, the researchers' assumption was that, in line with the Tanzanian Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP), they should consist of two elected representatives from Standards III to VII and two to four representatives from special groups, such as children with disabilities, apart from school prefects and class monitors (URT, 2001; URT, 2003). The findings indicate that the pupil councils were made up of prefects, class monitors and school club leaders. On the other hand, gender was given little consideration. This was contrary to the ESDP, which directs that pupil councils should consist of 50:50 males and females (URT, 2003). The findings further show that the majority of pupil council members were appointed by their teacher rather than being democratically elected by fellow pupils. This was also contrary to the Government's stipulation (URT, 2003), which expects members of pupil councils to be democratically elected by fellow pupils. It was further observed that the majority of the appointed members were prefects and school club leaders, while the elected members were only class monitors.

The findings suggest that pupil council members were being appointed by their teachers rather than being democratically elected by fellow students. The interviews with the head teachers revealed that they thought that the pupils were too young to identify disciplined and gifted students who might lead them. It was also found that, if left to choose by themselves, the pupils would tend to choose pupils who would be too passive to take action against pupils' misconduct, as highlighted by one head teacher during the interview:

> Although in a real sense members of the pupil council need to be voted for by fellow students through a democratic election, we cannot let them to do this because, if left to vote by themselves, they might vote for an undisciplined pupil provided that he/she condones their bad behaviour. To have good members, we appoint those whom we see are capable, even in terms of cleverness (interview, head teacher, 29/01/2013).

The tendency of pupil council members being elected by the teachers denied the pupils an opportunity to engage in the democratic election process. It also suggests that the teachers had considerable influence over how the pupil councils operate, and it is obvious that these councils are expected to function according to the teachers' wishes. The other findings show that, while pupil councils existed in all of the studied schools, they met only every six months, i.e., twice a year. The teachers noted that the time was limited, as most schools had double shifts, hence making it difficult for pupils to meet due to variations in their timetables. The findings further revealed that, in all of the studied schools, no time was allocated in the school timetable or school almanac for pupil council meetings. This suggests that these councils rarely meet. Hence, most of the schools lack frequent pupil council meetings, despite the fact that the ESDP guidelines state explicitly that pupil councils should meet at least once a month, and, if necessary, more often than that (URT, 2001; URT, 2003). This lack of regular meetings prevents pupils from participating in their school's decision-making process and denies them the opportunity to communicate their opinions and ideas in a structured, acceptable manner.

Ways through which pupils are engaged in public primary school governance

The pupil council members and counsellors were asked: "What roles does the pupil council play in enhancing the school's governance?" The findings revealed that the main roles of the pupil councils were: listening to pupils' views and suggestions and conveying them to the school management; promoting the communication of information to pupils, the school management and parents; assisting fellow students with academic, disciplinary and social problems; and supervising various school activities, such as cleaning the environment. On the other hand, none of the pupil council members in the sample schools were involved in certain crucial aspects of school governance, such as participating in the planning, decision-making and monitoring of school-related matters and the use of funds, which is contrary to the ESDP guidelines. The researcher further explored how each of the above roles was executed and whether they were clear to the pupil council members.

Regarding the first role, i.e., listening to and presenting pupils' views and suggestions to the school management, three issues were investigated: (1) views which are commonly suggested by the pupil councils; (2) the ways in which pupil councils obtain the views of pupils and send them to the school management; and (3) the roles of the counsellors and how they were obtained. To find out what views were commonly conveyed by pupil councils, the pupils were asked to respond to the following question: "What views have you conveyed to the school administration?" The findings revealed that the pupils tended to discuss academic, social, economic and environmental issues. More specifically, the issues raised were concerned with school uniforms, teachers' failure to attend class, the provision of speed tests for standard seven pupils (in the morning before class), reduced fees for speed tests, repair of school buildings, construction of school fences and canteens, shortage of books and desks, the provision of identity cards for pupils with a chronic illness or disability, the shortage of water in school, the provision of porridge for pupils, environmental cleanliness, particularly the toilets, and hygiene of the food vendors in school. These findings concur with those of Baginsky & Hannam

(1999), who suggested that pupils promote the discussion of wider, genuine educational matters, which are crucial to the school management.

Concerning the ways in which the pupil councils obtain the views of pupils and convey them to the school management, the findings revealed that each member of the pupil council obtained views and suggestions from his/her respective class, which were then discussed at the monthly pupil council meeting. It was also noted that a counsellor attended their meetings, who was responsible for conveying the issues discussed to the school management. However, in reviewing that pupil council's meeting minutes, it was also observed that sometimes the pupil council itself conveys the views and suggestions of pupils to the head teacher. The responses from the remaining four pupil councils and counsellors indicated that all of the pupils in school met their counsellor(s) once per term to deliberate the suggestions noted down by prefects, which the counsellor(s) subsequently conveyed to the school management. During FGDs with pupil council members, one pupil noted:

> Usually all the pupils meet with our counsellor at the assembly once a term to discuss our problems and suggestions, some of which are responded to by the counsellor, who forwards anything beyond his control to the head teacher (FGDs, Pupil: 31/01/2013).

The findings from four of the five sampled schools suggest that there were no meetings of pupil councils. Rather, the schools opted to use the school assembly to discuss pupils' concerns about school-related matters.

Concerning the roles of the counsellors and how they were chosen, the policy clearly states that they should be chosen by the pupil council members to facilitate their meetings and convey the issues discussed to the school management (URT, 2001; URT, 2003). The findings indicate that the counsellors were appointed by the head teachers. Apart from facilitating the pupil council meetings, the counsellors also served as a bridge between the pupils and the teachers and conveyed the content of the pupil council meetings to the school administration. The tendency by the school to select counsellors for the school councils, as was the case in the five schools studied, indicates that that schools thought that the pupils were too young to make an effective decision regarding which of their teachers could best serve as their counsellor.

The findings regarding the information communicated by the pupil councils to the parents indicate that intended to focus on pupils' absenteeism and other social and disciplinary problems, as noted by one pupil:

> We normally tell the parents about various issues; for example, absenteeism, discipline and other social issues, like buying the appropriate school uniform for their children…. However, not all parents respond positively…because most parents consider us too young to tell them about these issues (FGDs, Pupil: 08/02/2013).

Although the pupil councils were found to be a good communication channel, it was established that parents ignored them and regarded the members as being too young to convey important information regarding fellow pupils' school-related issues.

Regarding how the pupil councils assisted their fellow pupils, the findings indicate that each member of the council identified pupils with problems in their respective class and then each pupil was accordingly provided with assistance by the pupil council, depending on the severity of the problem.

Depending on their capacity, the pupil councils also raised contributions from fellow students and bought exercise-books, pens, pencils and uniforms to help needy pupils. The responses further indicate that the pupil councils gave advice to pupils with poor behaviour, as highlighted by the following pupil during a FGD:

> We usually advise undisciplined students to stop their kind of misconduct, but we also encourage those who are underperforming to work harder… Also, there are pupils from poor families who lack even the basic necessities, such as exercise books and pens, or they sometimes wear ragged uniforms. In cases like this, we normally sensitise all students to contribute on their behalf (FGDs, Pupil: 06/02/2013).

Having identified the roles performed by the pupil council, it was also necessary to explore whether those roles were clear to the pupil council members. The findings indicate that the pupil councils were unaware of their other roles, such as participating in the development and monitoring of school plans and the use of school funds, as stated in the policy. During the interviews, it was observed that the pupils could not participate in planning or monitoring issues concerning the use of school funds, as they were regarded as being less concerned with that, as noted below:

> Actually we cannot involve the pupil council in everything which goes on in the school…with this, they are less concerned. We just give them feedback about what happened, for example, regarding the use of school funds (Interview, Head teacher: 15/02/2013).

As a consequence, the researcher was further interested in finding out how the pupil councils found out about their roles. The findings indicate that, after being appointed, the members of the pupil councils met their counsellor(s), who briefed them about their expected roles. The researcher then asked the counsellors questions to establish their familiarity with these roles. The responses reveal that they simply used their common sense regarding what the pupil council members need to do. During an interview with one counsellor, he commented:

> We are not given any documents to which we can refer regarding these roles. You are just appointed by the head teacher to this post, and the head teacher announces to the teachers and pupils that you will deal with the pupil council (interview, Counsellor: 13/02/2013).

The findings show that, when those roles were clearly understood by the pupil council members, the councils were effective in performing them. The pupils not on a pupil council and the teachers admitted that the pupil councils generally fulfil their roles and assist the school management considerably, for example, in learning about pupils' needs and dislikes. Indeed, the pupil councils assisted greatly by providing the head teacher with information on issues concerning teachers with poor behaviour and those who never attended class. However, despite their importance, pupil council members were not allowed to attend school committee meetings, were the majority of crucial issues were decided on. The policy states that there should be a representative of the pupil council at school committee meetings (URT, 2001; URT, 2003).The study findings, however, revealed that there were no pupil representatives at school committee meetings. One head teacher noted:

> Pupils are rarely involved in school committee meetings. In fact, I can say that they do not participate. They are only free to participate in parent-teacher association (PTA)

meetings if they wish, which they don't tend to do (interview, head teacher: 06/02/2013).

These findings confirm that the pupils were not involved in school committee meetings, which execute crucial functions and where key decisions are made, which also suggests that the pupils were excluded from the planning and decision-making that affect them.

The researcher was further interested in determining whether the views proposed by the pupil councils were seriously considered by the school management and why the pupils were less involved in other crucial governance functions. The findings from the FGDs reveal that the school authorities took action on some issues but disregarded others. It was further noted that most of the issues considered were concerned with academics, such as claims about teachers failing to attend class and the shortage of books. However, other issues, such as reducing punishments, prioritising sports and games in extra-curricular activities and permitting girls to braid their hair, were given less consideration by the school administration. During an interview, one head teacher reported:

> These students propose many things, but some issues are not that important… What we do is to implement only those issues which are crucial and within our capacity (interview, Head teacher: 06/02/2013).

Following that response, it was necessary to learn about the teachers' perceptions of the pupils' participation in those key roles. The findings show that the majority of the teachers believed that, despite their young age, the pupils should be involved in the school's planning, monitoring and decision-making. These findings are consistent with other researchers, who found that learners should play a role in the decision-making and implementation of various school-related issues, as they constitute a major stakeholder group (Sifuna, 2000; Carter, Harber & Serf, 2003; Mncube, 2008). Following these observations, it was concluded that pupils were not included in the key governing functions not because of their age but because of the entrenched tendency to exclude pupils from participating in most of the crucial matters within the school system.

The challenges pupil councils face in enhancing school governance

From the findings, four major challenges were identified: (1) the failure to implement decisions; (2) hatred of their teachers and fellow pupils; (3) shortage of time in which to hold regular or the required number of meetings; and (4) the lack of or delayed response to some of the issues raised with the school administration. Regarding the first challenge, the findings reveal that the pupil councils were involved in conveying various issues concerning the school and pupils' affairs. However sound their suggestions might appear to be to them or the school in general, the pupil councils lacked the power to enforce action, as they had to rely on the goodwill of the school authorities. As a result, they were generally dissatisfied with the level of their involvement in the decision-making process. During the interviews, one head teacher reported:

> Although they can make proposals, their work has limitations. However good or bad a proposal might be, they have no power to take action…the school administration sorts out what happens to the students (Interview, Head teacher: 06/02/2013).

These findings are in line with the evidence from the literature. Notably, children and young people's participation in schools in general and pupil councils in particular has been subject to

considerable criticism due to their lack of power to implement their decisions (Cotmore 2003; Wyness, 2005).

Another challenge faced was the hatred of their teachers and fellow pupils. The findings show that the pupil councils were responsible for reporting pupils' and teachers' misconduct. These reports fanned the hatred of pupil councils by those being reported. During the FGDs, one pupil had this to say:

> Our work is quite challenging…sometimes, we are hated by fellow pupils because we report their bad behaviour. The teachers also do not like to be told the truth about their weaknesses; for example, issues relating to them not attending classes… they perceive us as interfering with their freedom…This sometimes makes us afraid to raise other sensitive issues, as we could be beaten (FGDs, Pupil: 31/01/2013).

Shortage of time in which to hold their regular or statutory meetings was another challenge faced by pupil councils. The members were supposed to meet once and, if issues arose, more than once a month. However, the findings show that the majority of pupil councils met twice a year. During the FGDs, one pupil commented:

> We normally meet once a term and only for a short period of time, as it occurs during assembly time…but it often happens that we have issues arising before or after the meeting…in these circumstances, we wait till the next meeting…this delays the response, when sometimes immediate action is required (FGDs, Pupil: 11/02/2013).

These findings indicate that pupil councils sometimes fail to perform their duties effectively because of a failure to hold statutory meetings as stipulated by the ESDP. The other challenge revealed was the lack of or delayed response to some of the pupils' concerns by the school administration. The findings suggest that the views acted upon by the school administration were only those it considered crucial, suggesting that the school authorities do not respond to or take pupils' views seriously. During an FGD, one pupil explained:

> Sometimes, we propose issues, but they are not responded to…for example, we always talk about the issue of building a fence but up till now nothing has been done…The absence of a fence is a big problem for schools which are based in urban areas like these…robbers cut across the school…this is dangerous for us and even for the teachers (FGD, Pupil: 06/02/2013).

The findings suggest that pupil councils were discouraged from working consistently due to the lack of or delayed response to the issues they raise.

Ways to strengthen pupils' councils in Tanzanian's primary schools

The study established that there are four potential ways of strengthening pupil councils in Tanzanian primary schools. Firstly, the findings suggest that including a representative from the pupil council at school committee meetings would empower pupil councils to contribute to the planning, monitoring and decision-making regarding various issues concerning pupils and the school. Secondly, awareness of the importance of pupil councils would be raised. The findings indicate that, due to the lack of awareness of the importance of pupil councils, pupils, teachers and parents failed to provide

effective support for them. As noted earlier, pupil councils were sometimes hated by both fellow pupils and their teachers for reporting bad behaviour or unprofessional conduct. Thirdly, the findings show that it is necessary to allocate sufficient time on the school timetable for pupil council meetings. It was revealed that pupil councils sometimes failed to perform their duties effectively because of the shortage of time available in which to hold the required number of meetings. According to the FGDs with pupil councils, the pupils proposed that the school timetable should indicate the time allocated to their meetings. Lastly, the findings established that sometimes the school administration was late in responding to some of the issues raised by pupil councils or it did not respond at all. During the FGDs with the pupil councils, the pupils proposed that there should be an immediate response or feedback should be given with regard to the issues they raise.

Conclusions

The study came up with six key findings:
(1) Not all the roles of pupil councils regarding school governance, as stipulated by PEDP, were being performed effectively, although they did play a significant role in enhancing school governance through those roles they were performing;

(2) The main roles performed by pupil councils were: listening to and conveying pupils' views and suggestions to the school management for improving the school; communicating information between pupils, the school management and parents; assisting fellow students with academic, disciplinary and social problems; and supervising various school activities, such as cleaning the environment. These roles were clear to the pupil councils and, to a large extent, were being fulfilled. On the other hand, pupil councils were rarely involved in other key functions of school governance, such as developing and monitoring school plans and the use of funds, and making decisions on various school matters, primarily because pupil council members were excluded from school committee meetings, where the key governing functions were mainly being executed;

(3) Schools do not regard roles such as participating in the development and monitoring of school plans and the use of funds and making decisions on various school issues as ones in which pupils ought to participate, which is why pupil councils were rarely involved in these;

(4) In performing their roles, pupil councils faced various challenges, including the failure to implement decisions, the hatred of their teachers and fellow pupils, the shortage of time for meetings, and the lack of or delayed response to some of the issues they raised with the school administration. These challenges hindered pupil councils from performing their work as effectively as they were supposed to;

(5) There is a lack of understanding of the roles of pupil councils among the teachers as well as the pupils, which is why the teachers and pupils who were reported on for misconduct tended to hate school councils; and

(6) Schools fail to allocate time in their school timetable and/or almanac for pupil council meetings. This indicates weak implementation or understanding of the policy directives regarding pupil councils.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings, the following recommendations are made. Firstly, the policy should provide guidelines and a framework for school inspectors to inspect the functioning of primary school pupil councils. This will ensure the proper functioning of pupil councils as per the policy regulations and will help to minimise policy implementation irregularities pertaining to the operation of pupil councils nationwide. Secondly, pupil councils should be fully involved in school committee meetings, where they can participate in other crucial school-governing functions, such as planning, monitoring and decision-making pertaining to issues affecting their wellbeing. This will enable them to meet the targets of PEDP by making the school administration more accountable and responsive to the needs of the pupils. Thirdly, the government should provide information to the teachers, parents and pupils on the roles and importance of pupil councils with regard to school governance. This will increase the recognition of pupil councils and hence reduce the hatred of teachers and pupils, even in cases where some of them are reported for misconduct. Fourthly, to make their work effective, pupil councils should meet regularly and frequently. Hence, schools should allocate and indicate sufficient time in the school timetable and/or almanac for pupil council meetings and not simply use assembly time. Fifthly, the school administration should provide prompt responses to or feedback on the issues pupil councils raise. Even though the school administration lacks the capacity to take action on the issues raised by pupil councils, it is important that they give immediate feedback. Such prompt action will encourage the pupils to feel committed to their work on the pupil council. Sixthly, head teachers should be provided with regular seminars on how to implement the policy directives. This will promote the effective involvement of pupil councils in school governance, and enable head teachers to direct pupil councils and counsellors regarding their correct role, so as to counteract their current passive role. Seventhly, since the government is committed to promoting and protecting children's rights, it is now high time that this commitment was implemented by the government to ensure that pupils are provided with an opportunity to engage fully in school governance as a means of expressing their opinions on all matters that affect their school life. Lastly, this study notes that there is a need to conduct similar research on schools which are located in remote rural areas, to assess whether there are any similarities or differences between rural and urban areas with regard to the role of pupil councils.

References

Ainley, J., & McKenzie, P. (2000). School governance: Research on educational and management issues. *International Education Journal,* 1(3), 139-151.

Baginsky, M., &Hannam, D. (1999). *School councils: The views of students and teachers.* London: NSPCC.

Carter, C., Harber, C., & Serf, J. (2003). *Towards ubuntu: Critical teacher education for democratic citizenship in South Africa.* Birmingham: Development Education Centre.

Cotmore, R. (2003). Organizational competence: The study of a school council in action. *Children & Society*, 18, 53-65.

Dachi, H.A., Alphonce, N.R., Kahangwa, G., Boniphace, R., & Moshi, M. (2010). *Leadership and management of change for quality improvement: Baseline study in selected districts of Tanzania mainland. EdQual working paper No. 21*. University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Deuchar, R. (2004). *Reconciling self – interest and ethics: The role of primary school pupil councils.* Retrieved from www.scotedreview.org.uk/pdf/262.pdf

DNCO [Dublin National Children's Office] (2006). *Second-level student councils resource pack: It's your choice use your voice.* Dublin: Brunswick Press. Retrieved from http://www.dcya.gov.ie/documents/childyouthparticipation/sci_resourcepack-eng.pdf

Dobie, T. (1998). Pupil councils in primary and secondary schools. D. Christie., H. Maitles., & J. Halliday (Eds.), *Value education for democracy and citizenship.* Glasgow: Gordon Cook Foundation/University of Strathclyde.

Harber, C. (1989). *Politics in African education.* London: MacMillan Publishers.

HASAS [Having a Say at School] (2010). *Research on pupil councils in Scotland: Pupil council 'effectiveness' part two, outcomes.* Research briefings paper 5. Scotland: The University of Edinburgh.

Hudson, A. (2005). Citizenship education and students' identities: A school based action research project. In A. Osler (Ed.). *Teachers, human rights, and diversity.* Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.

Johnson, K, (2004). Children's Voices: Pupil leadership in primary schools. *International Research Associate Perspective.* National College for School Leadership, South Australia.

Lewis, M. (2009). *Governance in education: Raising performance.* University of Sussex and World Bank.

Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) (2002). *Education for citizenship in Scotland: A paper for discussion and development.* Dundee: LT Scotland.

Makongo, J., &Rajan, R. (2003). *The power of information for school governance: The Hakielimu experience.* Hakielimu working paper series No.2003.1. Retrieved from info@hakielimu.org

Mascarenhas, O., & Sigalla, H. (2010). *Poverty and the rights of children at household level: Findings from Same and Kisarawe districts, Tanzania.* Research report 10/3, Dar es Salaam: REPOA.

Miles, M. & Hubermans, M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis.* London: Sage Publications.

Mncube, V. (2008). Democratization of education in South Africa: Issues of social justice and the voice of learners. *South Africa Journal of Education,* 28, 77-90.

Mosha, H. J. (2006). *Planning education systems for excellence.* Dar es Salaam: E&D Limited.

Sifuna, D.N. (2000). Education for democracy and human rights in African schools: The Kenyan experience. *Africa Development XXV,* (1&2), 213-239.

Starkey, H. (1987). *Teaching and learning about human rights in secondary schools: European teachers' seminar.* Portugal, Carcavelos: Taylor & Francis Ltd.

Taylor, M. J., & Johnson, R. (2002). *School councils: Their role in citizenship and personal and social education*. Berkshires: NFER.

URT (2001). *Education sector development program: Primary education development plan 2002-2006*. Dar es Salaam: Basic Education Development Committee (BEDC).

URT (2003). *Strengthening institutional arrangements: Education sector development program, primary education development plan*. Edited in April, 2003. Dar es Salaam: BEDC.

UNHR [United Nations Human Right] (1988) *Convention on the Rights of the Child* retrieved from http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx

Wyness, M. (2005). Regulating participation: The possibilities and limits of children and young people's councils. *Journal of Social Sciences Special Issue,* 9, 7-18.