

**MAKING SECONDARY SCHOOL PREFECTS ACCOUNTABLE  
IN MAINTENANCE OF SCHOOL DISCIPLINE  
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE MODE OF SELECTION OF PREFECTS IN PUBLIC  
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN GATUNDU NORTH DISTRICT, KENYA**

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**Abstract**

*The issue of student discipline in secondary schools in Kenya is not just a fleeting concern of the last few months. The subject has long been debated and has featured repeatedly on school as well as national agendas both in Kenya and in other countries across the world. The study objective was to establish the mode of selection of prefects in public secondary schools. This study adopted the descriptive survey design. The target population included prefects, students and administrators (principals and deputy principals) in public secondary schools. In this study questionnaires were used. The researcher used descriptive analysis. From the study findings, majority of the respondents of all categories that is principals, teachers, students and prefects reported the prefects to have been selected as opposed to being appointed. Majority of the respondents reported the process of selecting prefects having been very successful and others saying it was conducted in a fair manner. It was recommended that all public secondary schools to select prefects democratically from the students' body. The process should be free and fair to avoid any disruption of academic work due to students feeling shortchanged. Majority of strikes in public secondary schools are due to poor leadership by the prefect's body.*

*Keywords: Accountable, Discipline, Mode of Selection, Prefects, Public Secondary*

## INTRODUCTION

The issue of student discipline in secondary schools in Kenya is not just a fleeting concern of the last few months; the subject has long been debated and has featured repeatedly on school as well as national agendas both in Kenya and in other countries across the world. The Government of Kenya (GoK) is currently implementing several measures aimed at curbing the various cases of indiscipline in learning institutions particularly the use of guidance and counseling units in all secondary schools (MOEST 2005). In spite of these efforts there have been several cases of student indiscipline reported in our daily newspapers while majority of the cases go unreported.

According to Onyango (2003) violence in Kenya secondary schools is common as evidenced by the case of Saint Kizito Mixed Secondary School on the 13th July 1991 when boys went on rampage in the night raping and maiming female colleagues in a 1.00 am violent ordeal. 19 female students died and 71 received injuries (Kenya Times, 16 July, 1991). Another incidence included Bombolulu Girls Secondary in May 1997, where 57 students perished in dormitory as a result of fire started by other students. In 1999 four prefects were burnt in a dormitory in Nyeri High School (Onyango, 2003 in Kindiki, 2004). In November 1999, a drugged and drunk student at Sagalo Institute of Science and Technology murdered the school principal (East African Standard, 13 November, 1999). In July 2001 Kyanguli Secondary School in Machakos doused a dormitory set it ablaze in the wee hours of the morning as boys slept (Onyango, 2003 in Kindiki, 2004). Students of Kithangaini Secondary School in Machakos locked the head teacher in the office and walked 25 Km to report their grievances to the Machakos District Commissioner's (DC's). They complained of high handedness of the school principal who refused to listen to their grievances (Nzia, 2006).

The indiscipline cases reported here show evidence of communication breakdown between the schools administration and the prefects. A good body of prefect that is well inducted on its work and is motivated to carry out its duty would obviously report planned violence to the authority. In this sense, the prefects in the reported schools could be said not to have played their role. The prefects in these schools might have been partisans in planning and destroying the school's property. This study was therefore establish the extent to which the prefects influence maintenance of discipline in schools.

### Statement of the problem

According to Denton (2003) the prefects play a critical role in the learning of a school given that they are charged with students' welfare, coordination of co-curriculum activities, supervision of learning activities during morning and evening preps and when situation arises that they should

do so. They also check for students' attendance to classes and other activities. Further, they are charged with dealing with minor cases of indiscipline. This implies that prefects act as a link between the students and the school administration. It also implies that they are in a position to detect indiscipline cases and report them to the administration as they have direct contact with the students unlike the administration. The rampant indiscipline cases in public schools questions the influence of prefects in maintenance of discipline in public schools. This study has been prompted by these observations and seeks to fill in the gap by investigating the influence of prefects in maintenance of discipline in public schools in Kenya by finding out, the mode of selection of prefects.

### **Objective of the study**

To establish the mode of selection of prefects in public secondary schools

### **Research question**

How are prefects selected in public secondary schools?

### **Significance of the study**

This study provided insight to those involved in administration on ways of improving students' discipline in secondary schools. The principals, deputies and teachers of secondary schools may find the findings of this study helpful in that they may be able to establish the committed prefects' body as suggested by all the school stakeholders. Others who may benefit from the study included BOG's and PTA's being the bodies in-charge of discipline in secondary schools. MOE and KESI will benefit greatly from search findings while giving seminars and workshops to secondary schools administrators. Also universities and other research institutions were also bound to benefit for their literature review.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Mode of election of prefects**

In South Africa, all learners from grade eight onwards are allowed to vote learners who will serve in the Representative Council for Learners (RCL), Doddington, Christine, Flutter, Julia and Ruddock Jean (2000). The RCL is the body that represents learners on the matters that concern them. It is the link between the learners of the school and the school administration as well as the school governing body. The RCL then elect two learners who will serve on the governing body. Their term of office is only one year, whereas other stakeholders can serve up to three years. This implies that the term of office may come to an end before the learners adapt or

familiarize themselves with the acts, procedures as well as the role that they are supposed to play in the school governing body (UNESCO, 2005).

According to Doddington, Christine, Flutter, Julia and Ruddock (2000) however policies pertaining to students' discipline are fraught with tensions and contradictions especially regarding the different notions of participation by fellow students. This suggests that the issue of learners being unable to participate fully in the school governing body can be one of the causes of tensions.

In Kenya, previously, the staff was solely involved in the selection of prefects with little or no students' participation (Otieno et al, 2000). Time has come to allow for more democracy in line with the changes in Kenya's political system. For example, Uasin Gishu High School has turned to elections to elect their prefects. (The East African Standard, 9/11/2010). If the prefectorial system is to be of any credit to the students, then they should identify themselves with it. The sure way this can happen is to let them participate in the election of their prefects (Otieno *et al*, 2000).

### **Participation of prefects in school governance**

According to Davidoff & Lazarus (1997) decentralization can be defined as means of distributing authority to the different agencies', groups and stakeholders. This is based on the notion that local communities understand their needs and are also in the best position to solve their problems. This shows commitment among education authorities that decision making about schools should lie as close as possible to each schools in order that full knowledge of circumstances be taken into account. Bhengu (2005) argued that if decisions are made closer to the clients better decisions will be made and greater achievements will result.

The first right of enhancement means that the individual should have access to critical understanding and therefore new opportunities should be available to that person Bernstein (1996). The second right refers to the social, personal, intellectual and cultural inclusion of the individual into the school community but, most importantly, without losing his or her own identity Bernstein (1996). The third right is the right to participate in the operations whereby order is managed within the school environment Bernstein (1996). This right of pupil participation receives support from Mabebe & Prinsloo (2000); Schimmel (2003) and Effrat & Schimmel (2003). This would also go some way towards the suggestion that the challenge in Kenyan education is for educational leaders to move away from bureaucracies based on constraint and control and towards an environment that focuses on results and accountability. The history of corporal punishment is firmly positioned within the concepts of power, control and discipline. The abolition of corporal punishment in schools in, for example, England 1986 (Farrell, 2006);

Western Australia 1987 (Farrell, 2006); South Africa 1996 (Morrell, 2001) and Canada 2004 (Farrell, 2006) within recent years is an important aspect of the changing philosophy of discipline.

### **The prefects' influence in maintenance of other students discipline**

There has been much heated debate about the merits of corporal punishment in schools, over the years, by teachers, the public and politicians. Some have argued that corporal punishment sets a bad example and establishes a model of violent conflict resolution; others have argued that it establishes boundaries and is not harmful, (Singh, 1997). With this change, the issue of corporal punishment came under the spotlight. Corporal punishment was removed as an option in Kenyan schools, based on the understanding that it was an infringement of an individual's human rights (Education Act, Cap 211). This change was in line with what had happened in many other countries such as England and Australia.

Morrell (2001) makes the point that reasons for the persistent and illegal use of corporal punishment include the legacy of authoritarian education practices. Many schools, by using an autocratic approach, undermine the legitimacy of their school Codes of conduct, (Christians, 2005). Flaws regarding the rules, within this approach, are that they can be restrictive, ambiguous and unexplained, authoritarian and illegitimate, legalistic and poorly taught and no collaboration and unfairness is perceived (Schimmel, 2003).

Shikami (2006) says that these extra elements are the psychiatric, psychological and educational experts, amongst others, who may give advice and opinion so as to assist the judges in their decisions. The abolition of corporal punishment came about through an understanding that it violated human rights. The authorities attempted to fill the space left by the removal of corporal punishment by introducing greater notions of co-operative democracy into schools (Morrell, 2001). This can be achieved by introducing codes of conduct and by involving parents to a greater degree, (Cowley, 2001). However, despite this new philosophy, little, in reality, has changed.

According to Brown (2003) the participation of learners in the school governing body is replete with tension and controversy. She argues that for the purpose of transformation and democracy learners constitute a large number of stakeholders, but how learners are going to participate in students' discipline is still not well defined. In South Africa, the Department of Education (1999) concurs with Brown (2003) when it states that there must be a development of concrete policies on the participation of secondary school learners in the students' discipline.

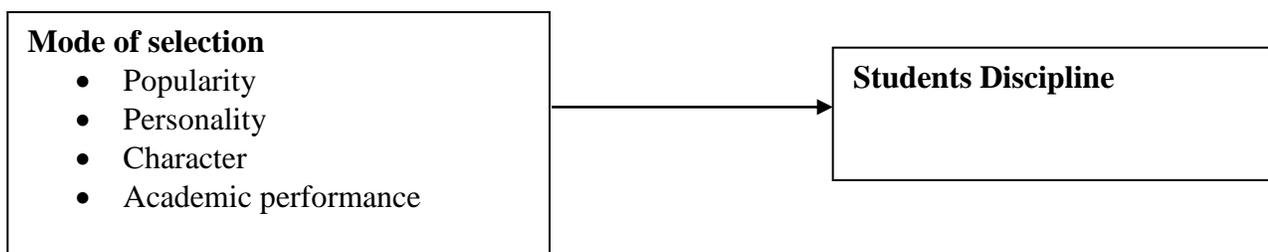
Wanjiru (1999) argues that being a stakeholder does not mean that you participate in every decision. Some decisions concerning students' discipline are best left in the hands of

parents and professionals. Contrary to that Smith, (2005) believe that when parents, educators and learners engage in co-operative decision-making, decisions will be ones that all stakeholders agree to the exclusion of learners in some of the decisions taken by the governing body cannot be considered as cooperative decision making.

### **Prefect, deterrent measures and student discipline**

Instead of moving towards more democratic methods of governance, schools merely replaced corporal punishment with other types of punishment and treatment (Pomeroy, 1999). He says that we move from the theatre of the cane at the front of the room or the private corporal punishment ceremony in the seclusion of the headmaster's office, to token reward-based economies, to contingency contracting, to banishment, to referral to therapeutic centres, to 'whole school' approaches, to medicalization and the classification of indiscipline as sickness. Some Kenyan schools tend to run on an autocratic basis and, in fact, many of them still, illegally, mete out corporal punishment (Wanjiru, 1999). Along with encouraging defiance, this does little to enhance our new democracy. This description ties in with what (Farrell, 2006) so aptly describes - the punishment has moved from the body to the soul and along with this from a public spectacle to a far more private arrangement. While the nature of the punishments has changed, there is nevertheless still a concern about a lack of discipline in schools.

### **Conceptual Framework**



## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research design**

This study adopted the descriptive survey design. Creswell (2002) observes that a descriptive survey design is used when data are collected to describe persons, organizations, settings, or phenomena. The study aimed at observing and describing the behaviour of the subjects under study without influencing it in any way and therefore considers the descriptive research design to be the most appropriate for this study.

### Target population

The target population included prefects, students and administrators (principals and deputy principals) in public secondary schools. The study targeted 28 public secondary schools, 368 teachers and 8471 students (Gatundu North DEO's Office).

### Sample size and sampling procedure

Stratified sampling was used when classifying the sampled school in different categories when selecting them. In this study the students are 8471 so a sample of 378 is appropriate. To obtain the 27 students from each school for the study, 9 students was be simple randomly sampled from each of the classes

### Research instruments

In this study questionnaires were used. There were questionnaire for the administration (principals), questionnaire for the teachers, questionnaire for prefects and questionnaire for students. The questionnaires were divided into two parts; part A contained demographic information while part B was contained information on maintenance of students' discipline.

### Data analysis techniques

The researcher used descriptive analysis. The outcomes of the quantitative data from the coded closed-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics, frequencies and percentages and presented as tables and graphs. The data collected was analyzed using the computer software; SPSS (version 22 for windows).

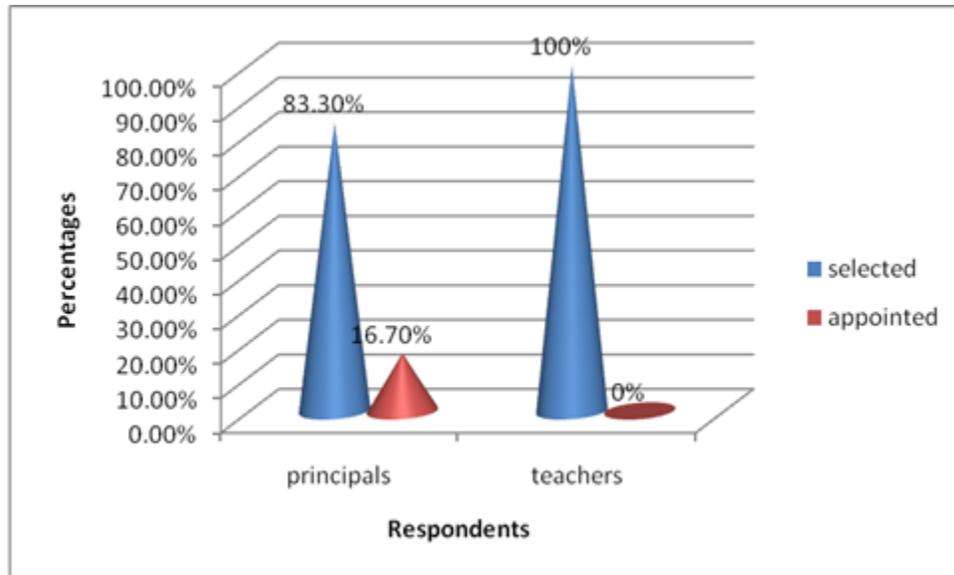
## ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In Kenya, previously, the staff was solely involved in the selection of prefects with little or no students' participation (Otieno et al, 2000). Time has come to allow for more democracy in line with the changes in Kenya's political system. For example, Uasin Gishu High School has turned to elections to elect their prefects. (The East African Standard, 9/11/2010). If the prefectorial system is to be of any credit to the students, then they should identify themselves with it. The sure way this can happen is to let them participate in the election of their prefects (Otieno *et al*, 2000). The researcher first sought to know how prefects are selected in the different schools.

From the figure 1, all the teachers 100% reported that prefects were being selected in their school and not appointed. However, only 10 (83.3%) of the principals reported to have selected prefects while the remaining 2 (16.7%) reported prefects to have been appointed. From

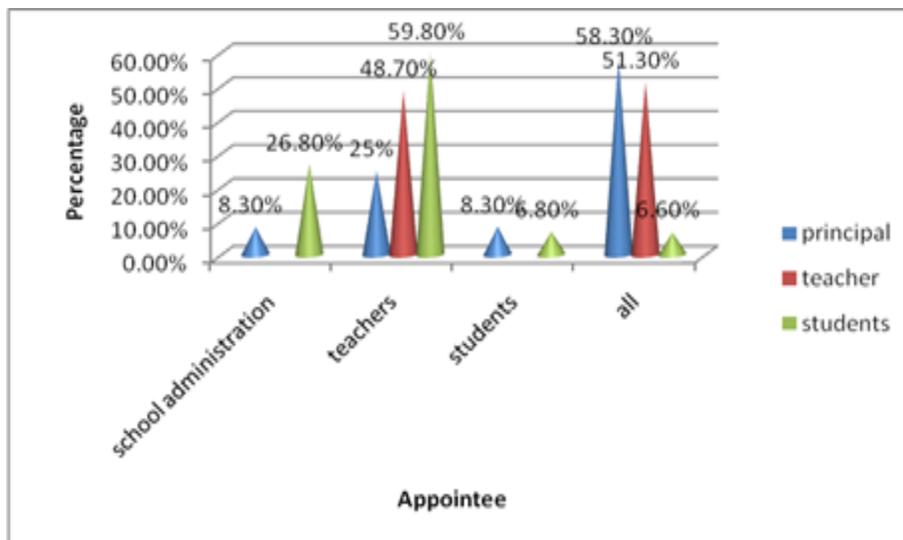
this it can be deduced that majority of prefects were being selected in a democratic manner as opposed to being appointed directly.

Figure 1: How prefects are selected



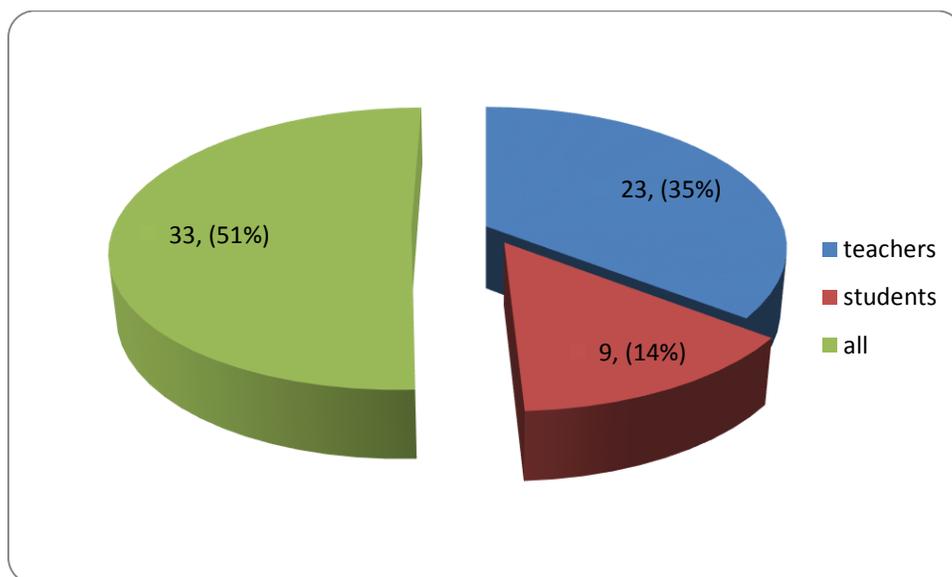
Having found how prefects are selected, the researcher went further to investigate who was responsible of selecting prefects.

Figure 2: Authority of selecting prefects



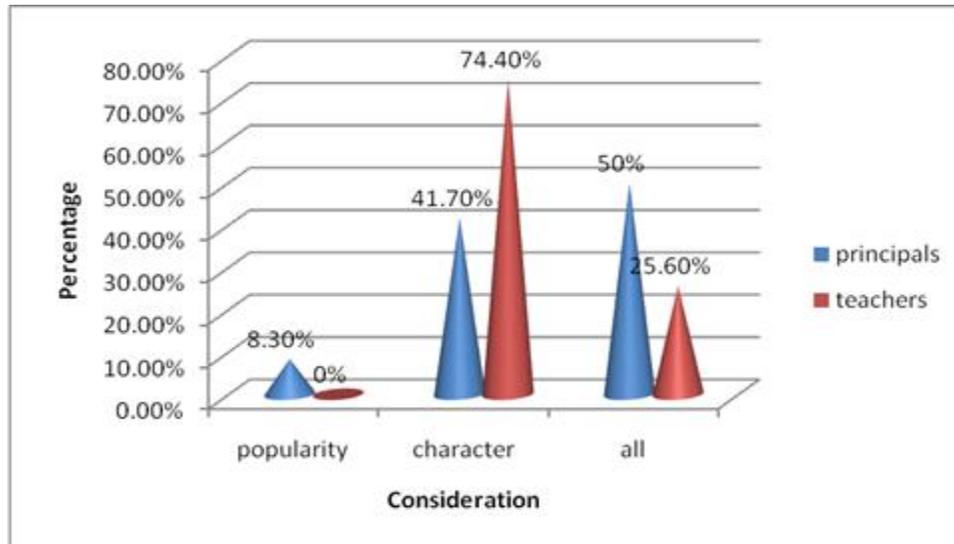
From the figure 2, majority of respondents students 210 (59.8%) reported the prefects to have been appointed by teachers, they were followed by 7b (58.3%) of the principals who reported the prefects to have been appointed by all the stakeholders while 20 (51.3%) of all teachers reported prefects to have also been appointed by all stakeholders. From this it can be deduced that prefects were being selected by different stakeholders in the various schools depending on the school set up. Having found the one responsible for appointing prefects, the researcher went further to investigate who selected the current prefects.

Figure 3: Selected prefects



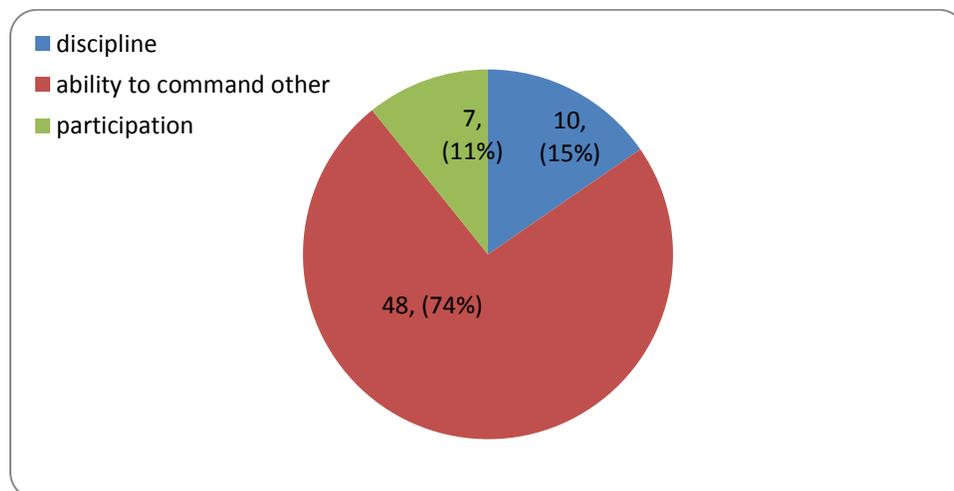
From the figure 3, majority of prefects 33 (51%) reported to have been appointed by all stakeholders, they were followed by 23 (35%) of all prefects who reported to have been appointed by teachers while the remaining 9 (14%) were appointed by the students. From this it can be deduced that selection of prefects is done by all stakeholders of the various schools. Having found out who selected the current prefects, the researcher went further to find out the considerations in prefects selection.

Figure 4: Consideration in prefect selection



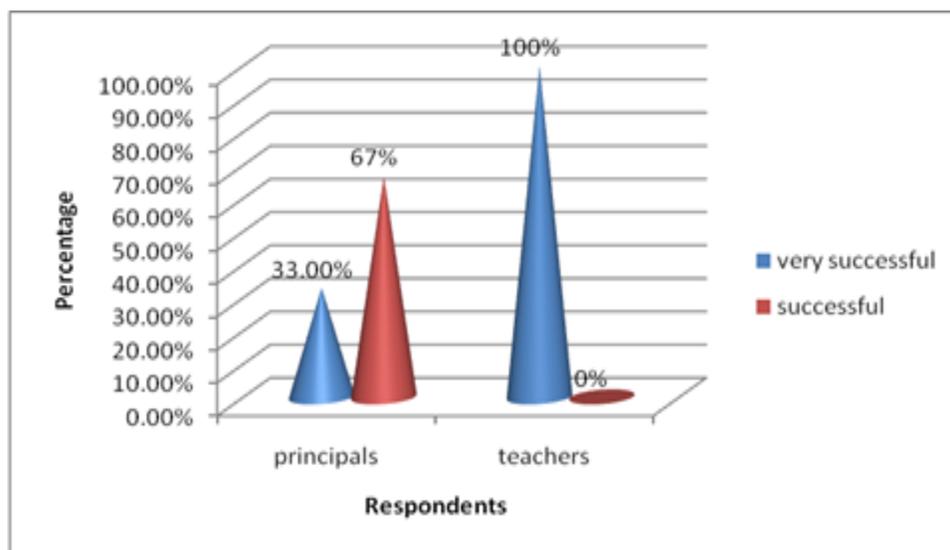
From the figure 4, majority of teachers 29 (74%) reported to have considered the character of the students before selecting prefects, 10 (25.6%) had considered popularity, personality, character, academic performance and activeness before selecting the prefects. Majority of the principals 6 (50%) had considered all the attributes, they were followed by 5 (41.7%) of all the principals who reported to have considered the character of the students before selecting prefects. From this it can be deduced that consideration was put to all attributes ranging from popularity, character, personality and academic performance but most importantly was the character of the students. Having found the principals and teachers' consideration for selecting prefects, researcher went further to investigate the criterion used to select the current prefects.

Figure 5: Criterion for selecting the current prefects



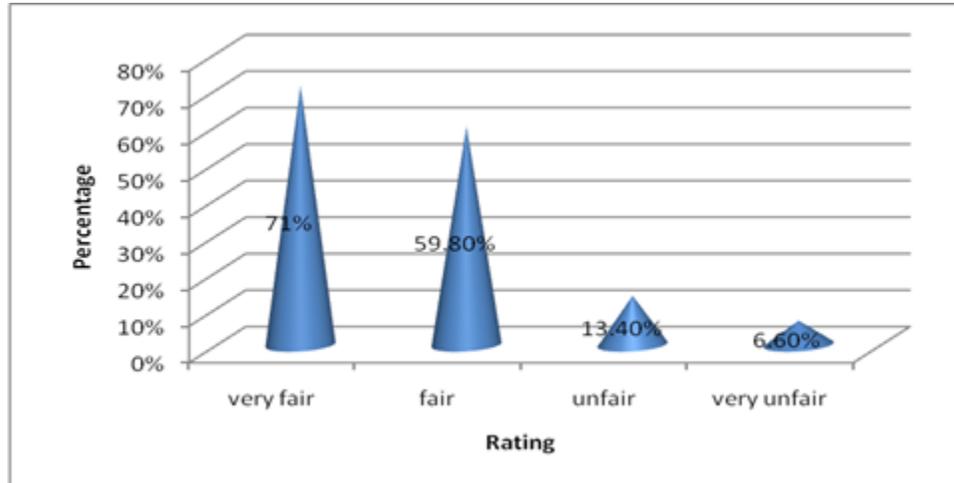
From the above figure 5, majority of the respondents 48 (74%) of all prefects reported to have been appointed because of their ability to command others, they were followed by 10 (15%) who reported to have been selected out of discipline while the remaining 7 (11%) were selected out of participation in school activities. From this it can be deduced that majority of the current prefects were selected out of their ability to command others. Having found out the criterion for selecting the current prefects, the researcher went further to investigate the how the process of selecting prefects was rated.

Figure 6: Rating of the process of appointing prefects



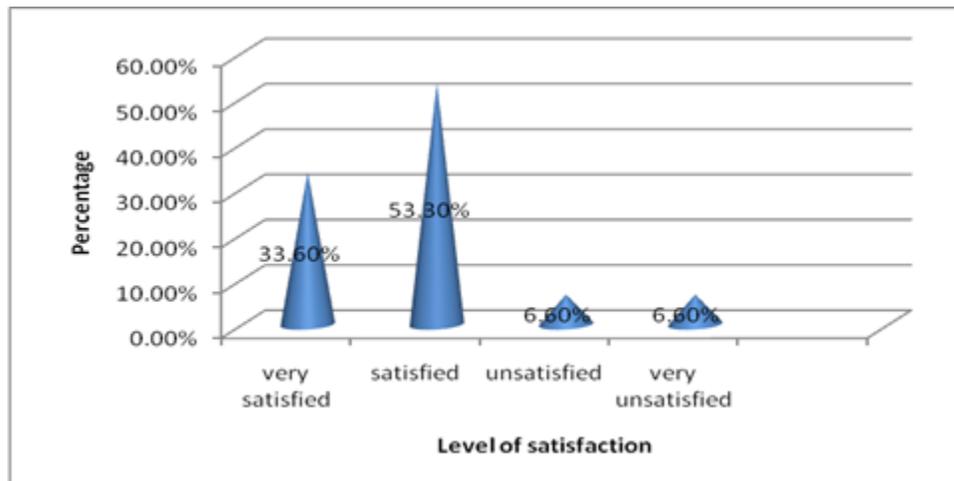
From the figure 6, all the teachers reported 39 (100%) reported the process of prefect selection as very successful. Majority of principals 8 (67%) reported the process as successful while the remaining 4 (33%) reported the process as very successful. From this it can be deduced that the process of prefect selection was successful. Having found how the principals and teachers rated the appointment of prefects, the researcher went further to investigate the students rating.

Figure 7: Student rating of appointment of prefects



From the figure 7, majority of the students 210 (71%) rated the appointment of prefects as very fair, 71 (59.8%) as fair while 47 (13.3%) of all the students rated the appointment of prefects as unfair. From this it can be deduced that the appointment of prefects was being conducted in a fair manner. Having found the rating of students on appointment of prefects, the researcher went further to investigate whether students were satisfied with the selected prefects.

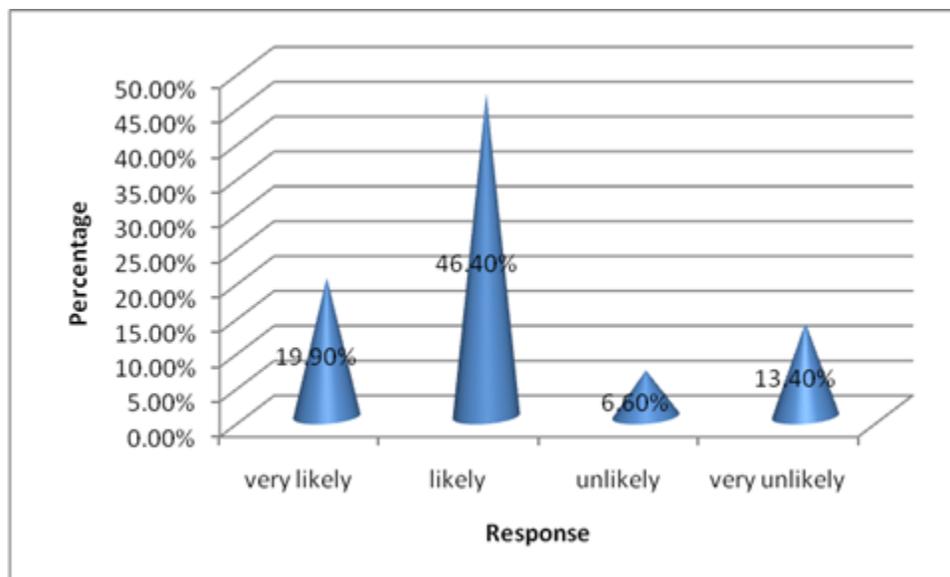
Figure 8: Level of satisfaction



From the figure 8, majority of the students 187 (53.3%) were satisfied with the prefects selected in their respective schools, 118 (33.6%) were very satisfied while the remaining 23 (6.6%) were unsatisfied and very unsatisfied respectively. From this it can be deduced that majority were satisfied with the prefects selected. Having established that majority of students are satisfied

with the student's selection, the researcher went further to investigate the attitude of students towards selection of prefects.

Figure 9: Attitude towards selection of prefects



From the figure 9, majority of respondents 163 (46.4%) respondent that it was likely the mode of selection of prefects determine their performance of duties in the respective school, 70 (19.9%) reported very likely while 47 (13.4%) reported very unlikely. From this it can be deduced that the mode of selection of prefects was a likely determinant of their performance of duties in schools.

## DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Majority of the respondents 10 (83.3%) in the category of principals reported their schools to have selected prefects from the students body as opposed to appointing them directly. This was supported by 100% of the teachers who reported the prefects to have been selected. Majority of the prefects confirmed that they were selected in a democratic manner to their roles.

Majority of the principals 7 (58.3%) reported the prefects to have been selected by all stakeholders in the school who range from school administrators, teachers, former prefects and students themselves. This was also supported by 20 (51.3 %) of the majority of teachers. However the majority of students 210 (59.8%) reported the prefects to have been selected by teachers. Majority of the prefects however reported to have been selected by all stakeholders. Popularity, personality, character and academic performance are the qualities majority of principals 6 (50%) reported to have considered when selecting prefects. Majority of teachers 29 (74.4%) on the other hand reported to have considered the character of students. Majority of

students 48 (73.8%) reported to have considered the discipline when making their choice of prefect. This was supported by majority of prefects who agreed that they were appointed to their position due to discipline.

From the study findings, majority of principals reported the process of selecting prefects to have been successful. Majority teachers reported the process to have been very successful. However, majority of students 210 (59.8%) reported the process to have been fair. From the study findings majority of students 187 (53.3%) reported to have been satisfied with the prefects appointed in their schools and 163 (46.4%) reported the mode of selection to have been likely to determine prefects performance of their duties in school.

From the study findings, majority of the respondents of all categories that is principals, teachers, students and prefects reported the prefects to have been selected as opposed to being appointed. This was confirmed by majority of the current prefects who reported to have been selected. The study has revealed that majority of prefects are selected by the school administration. However some are selected by teachers, students and to some extent the out going prefects. Discipline has come out as the criterion which many schools use in selecting prefects. However some were using academic performance and ability to command others as their criterion. Majority of the respondents reported the process of selecting prefects having been very successful and others saying it was conducted in a fair manner. The study further revealed that the students were very satisfied with the prefects selected and that the process of selection was a likely determinant of their performance of duties.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the conclusions of the study it has been revealed that majority of public secondary schools were selecting prefects from the student body as opposed to appointing them. However the study has further revealed that some students were not satisfied with the prefects selected. From this it is recommended for the all public secondary schools to select prefects democratically from the students' body. The process should be free and fair to avoid any disruption of academic work due to students feeling shortchanged. Majority of strikes in public secondary schools are due to poor leadership by the prefect's body.

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