

Prefect Participation in School Governance in Selected Secondary Schools in Bo City

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Abstract—This is a study on prefect Participation in the Governance of Selected Secondary Schools in Bo city, southern province of Sierra Leone. Of specific interest is the prefectural system and the extent to which it makes use of the potential and capacity of pupils to contribute positively to the effective governance of a school, that is, to play leadership roles and take decisions as part of a team, in the running of the school.

For this study, a primarily qualitative and descriptive study design was adopted.

Data for the study was collected from 3 types of schools – single – sex boy's, single – sex girls' and co-educational. Junior as well as senior secondary schools, private as well as government and government – assisted, Muslim as well as Christian schools, were sampled.

Data collection was carried out using well-structured questionnaires and limited interviews. A total of 200 questionnaires were administered. 100 were administered to prefects and 100 to teachers.

Analysis of the data was employed using tabulations and frequency counts for each response category. Tables of responses were prepared and their content analyzed and discussed.

Findings obtained indicated that the prefectorial system in operation in Sierra Leone is part of our colonial heritage and has outlived its usefulness. It therefore needs to be modified to reflect present day realities especially as the involvement of pupils/ prefects in the selection procedure for prefects is limited and in the majority of cases, non-existent. One clear suggestion coming from the responses to various objectives in the study is that more democracy should occur, that is, a greater involvement of pupils in school governance must be maintained. The study recommends that this greater involvement should be making prefects and involving them in policy formulation and decision making. Without this recommended change, the prefectural system presently operating in Sierra Leone will drift to extinction.

I. INTRODUCTION

Although much discussions have been taking place in the Western world about students involvement in governance, in Sierra Leone little attention has been given to the issue though for a brief period of time, in the 1990's large sections of the capital and other parts of the country were controlled by groups made up largely of school age children and youths. With the hard earned "peace" now in place, the tendency has been to forget that without the involvement of school children and youths the decade long armed conflict could have ended much sooner. It is possible that meaningful involvement of pupils in school governance could be a way of providing school age children more of stake in the system and hence reduce the ease with which they can be persuaded to destroy something, which they are part owners. This provides part of the rationale for this study.

School governance in general, embraces the laws and regulations within which context schools operate and the various bodies, agencies and groups which bear part in the governance of schools.

The parameters include Board of Governors, Management Committees, the Ministry of Education, Regional/Provincial, district, government, education authorities and communities, old students Association, Parent Teachers Associations, employee organizations, Staff and Pupils (Commonwealth Writers, 1993). Rogers Holdsworth (1995), a leader in the field of student participation, maintains that:

Students have a right to participate in decisions that affect their lives; student participation leads to more effective decision making and learning; better decisions are made when participants share their views in making those decisions. Student participation provides challenges for schools. The active participation of students can be reflected in the organizational structure and health of the school engaging students in real life initiations with productive outcomes (P2, 3)

Price (1991) reminds educators that: The world in which students of today live and are educated is vastly different from the world in which their parents and teachers lived when they attended school.....schools have an undeniable responsibility to develop in Students the skills, knowledge and attitudes which will prepare them to be critically aware of their participation in the world. Young people need to develop decision –making and leadership skills that they can benefit from in adulthood. (p.84).

The prefectural system has its roots from Great Britain, the former colonial master of Sierra Leone and from which most of our principles of school governance has emanated. The ideas of the prefectural system was first put forward by Arnold (1795-1842) an English educator. As head of Rugby School (1827-1842) he strengthened the role of the older boys in student governance. This reform is adopted by many English Secondary Schools. (Asa Briggs – Longman Encyclopedia, 1989. P.80).

No reference is made in the Education Act of 1964 on the inclusion of prefects in the school governance structure even though the inception of the prefectural system in Sierra Leone can be traced back in the mid 19th century. In that same period, schools such as the Sierra Leone

Grammar School – 1845: the Annie Walsh Memorial School – 1849: the Rotifunk/Harford

Girls School – 1858: St Joseph's Secondary School-1866 and the Methodist Boys High School 1874 were all established. The extent to which pupils were involved in the

governance of these schools is unclear, what is known is that, these schools operated on prefectural system that exists up to present day.

The prefectural system as it is operated in Sierra Leone, involves a group of pupils selected by a committee of teachers to assist with school discipline because of academic performance, attitude and behavior that the teachers and the principals find exemplary. For example, at the Queen of the Rosary School, teachers suggested names of pupils from the senior cadre of the school whose attitude and behavior were found exemplary. The Prefect Council is headed by the Principal and supported by the Vice-Principal. Heads of department and senior teachers examine the list of suggested names and produce a final list bearing in mind the duties of the prefects. In a special investiture service and ceremony, the prefects are invested with prefect badges. The Head Girl or Senior Prefect is announced for the academic year and invested with a special prefect badge.

The role –played by prefects in school governance and management in Sierra Leone are relatively trivial. They include:

- i. Taking charge of latecomers
- ii. Encouraging pupils to stay in their classrooms in between lessons after every lunch break.
- iii. Assistance with reinforcing the school code of conduct. Cases of theft, fighting, vandalism are reported by prefects to the class teachers who in turn relay the incidents to the Disciplinary Committee.

In attempting to set standards of behavior and enforcing the school code of conduct, prefects in Sierra Leone schools encounter a great deal of problem primarily because many of the scholars especially the boys have the tendency of solving difference of opinion through violence. In considering the issue of possible greater involvement of pupils in school governance, it has to be remembered that some social problems and violence are mainly perpetuated by school age children. It is an experience that we cannot afford to continue with. To prevent a continuity of this problem, we must look at our educational system and evaluate the extent to which it contributes to our societal problems. This evaluation must of necessity start at the school level and must involve not only an examination of the curriculum content of our schools but also the role children play in the schooling process. Unlike the belief once held, we now know that children do not enter school as empty buckets waiting to be filled. They come with knowledge, values and a concept of self esteem and others that have to be recognized. They can no longer be regarded as passive victims but active participants with important roles to play in shaping schooling.

(Ivan Smith et al, 1998, p. 259) this study provides information which may help to put children back in the center of the schooling process and hopefully reduce the possibility of school children becoming the ‘dogs of war’ for the second time in our history. It focuses the search for a system of governance that could be put in place to give pupils a more active role and a greater sense of belonging and ownership. This may have a very positive effect on pupils’ behavior and

helps to reduce some of the social problems now being experienced by many schools.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. Discuss the origin of prefectural system in schools
2. Assess procedures adopted for the selection of prefects.
3. Examine the duties of prefects
4. Assess the extent of prefect participation in schools
5. Make recommendations on prefect’s participation in school governance

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in Bo City, Southern Province, and Republic of Sierra Leone. Bo City is a Cosmopolitan town found in the southern province of Sierra Leone. The city of Bo has an estimated population of about 175,000; and lies approximately 160 miles (250km) East, South-East of Freetown and about 44 miles to Kenema. Bo is the leading financial, educational center of southern Sierra Leone, (2015 Population Census).

The city of Bo is one of Sierra Leone’s six municipalities and is also the primary home of Njala University, the second largest university in Sierra Leone after the Fourah Bay college.

For this study, a primarily qualitative and descriptive study design was adopted to access the prefect participation in school governance in secondary schools. The study sample comprised of two hundred (200) respondents constituting one hundred (100) teachers and one hundred (100) pupils.

The following instruments were used to collect relevant data.

- i. Well-structured Likert scale questionnaire
- ii. Personal interview with teachers and pupils

Data for this study was collected from three (3) types of schools-single sex boys, single sex girls, and co-educational Junior as well as Senior Secondary Schools, Private as well as Government assisted Schools were sampled.

Analyses of the data employed were done in the form of tabulations, frequency counts and proportions for each response category. Tables of responses were prepared and their contents analyzed and discussed.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1.0: Distribution of Response for Questionnaires Administered to Principals/Teachers of Study School

Table 1

Schools	Number of Questionnaires Administered to Prefect	Number of Returned	Response rate
Government Secondary School, Bo	10	10	100%
Ahmadiyya Muslim Secondary School	10	10	100%
Queen of Rosary Secondary School	10	10	100%

Methodist Girls High School, Bo	10	10	100%
Methodist Secondary School	10	10	100%
Haikal Academy School	10	10	100%
Zenneth International Academy	10	10	100%
Saint Andrew's Secondary School	10	10	100%
Alawali International Secondary School	10	10	100%
Bo Commercial Secondary School	10	10	100%
Christ the King College, Bo	10	10	100%

4.1.1: Distribution of Responses for Questionnaire Administered to Perfects of Study School

Table 2

Schools	Number of Questionnaires Administered to Perfect	Number of Questionnaires Returned	Response rate
Government Secondary School, Bo	10	10	100%
Ahmadiyya Muslim Secondary School	10	10	100%
Queen of Rosary Secondary School	10	10	100%
Methodist Girls High School, Bo	10	10	100%
Methodist Secondary School	10	10	100%
Haikal Academy School	10	10	100%
Zenneth International Academy	10	10	100%
Saint Andrew's Secondary School	10	10	100%
Alawali International Secondary School	10	10	100%
Bo Commercial Secondary School	10	10	100%
Christ the King College, Bo	10	10	100%

4.2: Origin of the Prefectural System Existing in Secondary Schools

Chronology of Events Culminating in the Introduction of the Prefectorial System to Sierra Leone

Table 3

No	Year	Event
I	Mid 1800s	Thomas Arnold introduces the prefectorial system to the Rugby School in England
II	Mid 1800s	English Secondary Schools adopt Thomas Arnold's prefectorial system
III	Mid 1800s	Schools in Sierra Leone adopt the prefectorial system of

		their English counterparts
i.	Founded 1845	The Sierra Leone Grammar School
ii.	Founded 1849	The Annie Walsh Memorial Secondary School
iii.	Founded 1858	The Rotifunk/Harford Girls School
iv.	Founded 1866	St. Joseph's Secondary School, Brookfields
v.	Founded 1874	The Methodist Boys' High School

Table 3 shows that Thomas Arnold, the head of Rugby School in England, first introduced the prefectural system in the middle of the 19th century. Other secondary schools in England soon copied Arnold's example. Schools in existence in Sierra Leone around that time such as the Sierra Leone Grammar School and the Annie Walsh Memorial School soon followed suit. The Roti funk/Harford Girls School, founded in 1858, together with St. Joseph's Secondary School, Brook fields, founded 1866, and the Methodist Boy's High School, founded in 1874, all joined the two earlier mentioned schools to introduce the prefectural system into their schools. Subsequently all secondary schools in Sierra Leone adopted the prefectural system

4.3.1 Assessment of Procedures Adopted for the Selection of Prefects.

Views: Prefects and Teachers about the Procedures Employed for the Selection of Prefects?

Table 4 provides a picture of the views of prefects and teachers in all school types about the procedures employed for the selection of prefects.

Table 4 – Views: Prefects and Teachers on Procedures adopted for the selection of prefect

Procedure A: A team of teachers select pupils based on academic performance, attitude and behavior.

Procedure B: Pupils apply for the position and are selected after interview

Table 4

School type	Pupils				Teachers			
	Procedure A		Procedure B		Procedure A		Procedure B	
	No.	Prop.	No.	Prop.	No.	Prop.	No.	Prop.
Single Sex boys N = 30	30	1.00	-	-	30	1.00	-	-
Single sex girls N=40	35	0.88	5	0.12	35	0.88	5	0.12
Co-educational N = 30	30	1.00	-	-	30	1.00	-	-

The above table reveals that in almost all schools sampled, a team of teachers without pupils having any input selects prefects. Even the schools in which some pupil input takes place, it is only in the form of a pupil presenting himself/herself for consideration.

4.3.2: Views of Prefects about Satisfaction with the Procedure Employed for the Selection of Prefects

Table 5

School - Type	SATISFACTION					
	Fully		Moderately		Not at all	
	No.	Prop.	No.	Prop.	No.	Prop.
Single – sex boys (n = 30)	24	0.8	04	0.13	02	0.07
Single – sex girls (n = 40)	25	0.62	14	0.35	01	0.03
Co-educational (n=30)	15	0.5	14	0.46	01	0.03

The above table reveals that most prefects are satisfied with the procedures for selecting prefects. In fact the majority of prefects are fully satisfied, with the procedures for selecting prefects in their schools. Only in single sex boys’ schools are more than 5% of the prefects dis-satisfied with the procedure employed for selection.

80% of prefects from the single sex boys’ schools are fully satisfied with the selection procedure, whilst 62% and 50% are the percentage of those from single sex girls’ and co-educational schools who also expressed full satisfaction with the selection procedure.

4.4.1: Examine The Duties of Prefects.

The views of the different categories of respondents about the duties of prefects in Sierra Leone.

Table 6. Views of prefects from all school types on the duties of prefects

Views	Single sex boys N = 30		Single sex girls N= 40		Co-educational N=30	
	No.	Prop.	No.	Prop.	No.	Prop.
I Maintaining law and order	21	0.70	29	0.725	2	0.07
II Responsibility for latecomers	22	0.73	13	0.32	7	0.23
III Assisting, representing and reminding teachers	6	0.20	4	0.10	6	0.20
IV Resolving disputes of fellow pupils and mediating with teachers	4	0.13	3	0.08	4	0.13
V Supervising the cleaning of the school compound	2	0.07	2	0.05	1	0.03
VI Responsibility for school	-	-	1	0.03	-	-
VII Responsibility for pupils dress code and neatness	15	0.50	-	-	8	0.27
VIII Assistance with assembly/devotion	8	0.27	2	0.05	-	-

Table 6 clearly indicates that prefects from single – sex boys’ schools are mainly involved in the enforcement of school rules and regulations. Only on the issue of enforcement of rules and regulations are more than 50% of the prefects sampled in agreement. It is interesting to note that only 20% gives assisting teachers as a duty as it can be argued that prefects are most needed when teachers are not around.

For prefects from single sex girls’ schools the fact that 72.5% gives maintaining law and order, and 32% give responsibility for latecomers and truants as duties of prefects indicates that for them, the main duty of prefects is to enforce school rules and regulations. All other duties appear to be given very low priority. The fact that representing the school is only given by a single prefect suggests that the duty is given very low priority.

A greater percentage of prefects from co-educational schools give assistance with devotion as a duty than their counterparts in single – sex boys’ and single – sex girls’ schools. However, enforcing the rules and regulations of the school is also given as an important duty. What surprising is the low percentage of students in agreement for any of the duties? A possible reason for this observation will be considered in the subsequent pages.

4.4.2: Views of Teachers from All School on the Duties of Prefects

Duties of the prefects

Table 7

Views	Single sex boys N = 30		Single sex girls N= 40		Co-educational N=30	
	No.	Prop.	No.	Prop.	No.	Prop.
I Maintaining law and order	30	1.00	29	0.725	26	0.87
II Responsibility for latecomers and truants	13	0.43	25	0.625	8	0.30
III Assisting, representing and reminding teachers	10	0.33	3	0.075	10	0.33
IV Resolving disputes of fellow pupils and mediating with teachers	20	0.67	1	0.03	3	0.10
V Supervising the cleaning of the school compound	9	0.30	10	0.25	1	0.03
VI Responsibility for school	20	0.67	1	0.03	5	0.17
VII Responsibility for pupils dress code and neatness	30	1.00	22	0.55	3	0.10
VIII Assistance with assembly/devotion	30	1.00	27	0.675	11	0.37
IX Helping to organize fellow pupils for activities	10	0.33	2	0.05	3	0.10
X Helping with conduct of school examination	5	0.17	2	0.05	3	0.10

As in the case of the pupils, the table above indicates that prefects in single sex boys’ schools are used mainly to enforce school rules and regulations. All teachers, 100% give maintaining law and order and responsibility for dress code as well as assistance with devotion as duties of prefects. It is surprising to note that all teachers give assistance with school devotion as a prime responsibility but only 27% of prefects

give it as a duty. The duty of assisting teachers is given by only a small percentage of sampled teachers, as was the case with prefects. The responses indicate that few of the sampled schools use prefects to represent the school in outside activities.

Also the table indicates that whilst teachers from single-sex schools believe enforcement of school rules and regulations to be major duty of school prefects, they also believe assistance with devotion to be a very important duty. The latter contrasts sharply with the views of prefects from the same schools who do give any importance to prefects in assisting with devotion. Teachers also give the cleaning of the environment much higher priority than prefects do from single-sex girls, schools.

Also teachers from co-educational schools think very much like their counterparts from single-sex schools on the matter of duties of prefects. Most give enforcement of school rules and regulations, e.g.: (1) 87%, as a key duty and assistance with assembly as another important duty. The small deviation from their counterparts and prefects from the same schools is that a greater percentage gives assisting teachers as a duty.

4.5: Prefects Participation in School Governance and Management

Views of prefects in all school types about their participation in school governance and management.

Table 8:

Views	Single sex boys N = 30		Single sex girls N= 40		Co-educational N=30	
	No.	Prop.	No.	Prop.	No.	Prop.
I Maintaining law and order	24	0.80	34	0.85	28	0.93
II Substitutes for absent teachers	20	0.67	28	0.70	18	0.60
III Discipline of pupils for minor offences	20	0.67	28	0.70	18	0.60
IV Taking charge of pupils for visits and extra-curricular activities	18	0.60	25	0.63	15	0.50
V Organizing extra-curricular activities	10	0.33	25	0.63	15	0.59

The table above indicates that most prefects in single-sex boys' schools regard enforcing the rules and regulations of the school (I) 'law and order' – 80% and (II) 'discipline of pupils; 67% as their major role in school governance. Interestingly, substitution for absent teachers (67%) also features prominently even though it was not given as a major duty under objectives.

Prefects in single-sex girls' schools share similar opinion with their male counterparts on the issue of involvement in school governance that is, the main duty of enforcing the rules and regulations of the school (I) 'law and order' – 85% and (iii) – 'discipline of pupils' – 70%). The major differences is

in that more prefects from single-sex girls' schools regard organizing extra-curricular activities as an involvement in school governance. It is also interesting to note that substituting for teachers is given as maintaining law and order again features in the table above as the most cited involvement of prefects in school governance that is, maintenance of law and order 93%. In a departure from their counterparts in single-sex schools, however, 50% gives assisting fellow pupils and supervision of the cleaning of the school compound as involvement in governance.

V. CONCLUSION

The prefectural system operating in secondary schools in Sierra Leone is a Colonial heritage. It originated in England, more specifically at the Rugby School, into which its headmaster introduced it, Thomas Arnold. Although it started with just a few schools in the middle of the nineteenth century, all schools in Sierra Leone now operate the prefectural system.

Unsurprisingly both prefects and teachers are in agreement on the procedure for selection of prefects operating in their schools, that is, a team of teachers select pupils based on academic performance, attitude and behavior. 12% of prefects from single sex girls' schools wish for pupils as well as teachers to be involved in the selection of prefects.

Prefects sampled indicated by their responses that they are in general satisfied with the procedures adopted for the selection of prefects. For example, whilst 93% of prefects in single-sex boy's schools indicated moderate or full satisfaction with the selection procedure for prefects, 97% of their counterparts in single-sex girls' schools and 90% of those in co-educational schools responded in a similar manner. Less than 10% expressed total dissatisfaction. Overall, the duty of a prefect most highlighted by prefects and teachers is that of enforcement of school rules and regulations. Assistance with devotion is given as a duty to a higher percentage by teachers than by prefects. The latter reflects in part the relative priority given to assisting with devotion from the percentages mentioning them, it appears that all other duties of prefects in sampled schools are regarded as secondary to the two mentioned earlier. Prefects believe that they are involved in school governance but mainly as policemen maintaining law and order (enforcing school rules and regulations) and who discipline fellow pupils.

Substituting for teachers was cited by a surprising number of prefects considering that relatively few had given this as a duty under objectives 4.

However, the full and proper involvement of students in school governance could mean for:

- i. *The pupils,*
 - a. More 'say' on how the school should operate
 - b. Influence over the school rules and regulations
 - c. Greater responsibility for the success and failure of the school and the general perception of the school.
 - d. A greater stake in the school system
 - e. Improved overall pupils performance
 - f. An opportunity to make the school a more child friendly place

- g. An opportunity to play a meaningful leadership role in early life
- ii. *The school,*
 - a. More inclusive leadership
 - b. Greater pupil commitment to the well-being of the school
 - c. A better disciplined and maintained school
 - d. Enhanced pupil: teacher relationship
 - e. A more pleasant teaching/learning environment
 - f. An improvement in school examinations performance
 - g. An enhanced reputation of the school
- iii. *The community and nation,*
 - a. Less student violence and vandalism
 - b. Improved community/school relationship
 - c. Improvement in the well-being of the community and the nation
 - d. A decrease in the likelihood of pupils being easily persuaded to destroy the community and the nation
 - e. An enhanced community reputation as being the home of a 'good' school
 - f. An improvement in the quality of manpower available for the community and nation.
 - g. A significant increase in the number of tried and tested good future leaders of the communities and the nation as a whole.

To summarize the above, with greater involvement in governance, pupils will begin to learn how to play leadership roles, they will acquire a sense of ownership and do everything possible to develop rather than destroy the school. With greater pupil and school moral, outputs of pupil should improve and external perception of the school could become more positive; the community will therefore be more willing to support the school. As the quality of pupils produced by the school improves, Sierra Leone would benefit from having better educated elites.

Recommendations

The study recommended that:

- 1. Prefectural system in Sierra Leone needs to be modified to reflect the present day realities.

- 2. The selection procedure must not be done on sentimental bases.
- 3. More democracy should occur, that is a greater involvement of pupils in governance must be maintained.
- 4. School administrators should be making prefects and involving them in policy formation and decision making.
- 5. School administrators must encourage prefects to make use of their potential and capacity to contribute positively to the effective governance of their schools, that is, to play leadership roles and take decisions as part of a team in the running of the schools.
- 6. Pupils should take responsibilities of their own affairs so that they do not appear like vulnerable passive pupils that are meant to be seen and not to be heard.
- 7. Pupils must be brought into the projects of selecting prefects.
- 8. The lack of involvement of prefects/pupils in policy formation and decision making needs to be reviewed in order to avoid the danger of prefects being regarded as no more than instruments of school administrators by fellow pupils.

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