

**COMMUNICATION FUNCTION OF STUDENT GOVERNING COUNCIL IN THE  
ADMINISTRATION OF PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A CASE OF AWENDO  
SUB-COUNTY - KENYA**

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**Abstract:** *The role of communication function of Student Governing Councils (SGCs) in the administration of Public Secondary Schools is increasingly becoming important. Currently, the government in partnership with other stakeholders has made it mandatory for schools in Kenya to have active SGCs who should play active roles including communication between the students and the school administration. However, it is not empirically established what exact communication functions these SGCs exercise in Awendo Sub- County. It was in light with this that the researcher sought to investigation the communication functions of SGCs in the administration of public secondary school in Awendo Sub-County, Migori County, Kenya.*

**Importance:** *This study examined the understanding, implementation and the success of the communication functions of SGCs in the administration of public secondary school in Awendo Sub County.*

**Findings:** *The study revealed that the students as well as the school administrators understand the communication functions of SGCs. Majority of the schools have fully implemented the communication functions and have acknowledge its success in the administration of public secondary schools. The student councils have acted as a channel of communication between the students and the school; a role that this research have discovered to be significant for school administrative purposes. However, when undertaking this communication function, the SGCs have faced various challenges such as being termed as a sell out by other students, lack of motivation as well as the inability to handle issues such as drug abuse, homosexuality and indiscipline cases in schools.*

**Conclusion:** *The study concludes that the communication function of SGCs is not yet exhausted in various school and further investigations should be done to ascertain how it can be strengthened. The study recommends that the student councils should be trained in order to acquire skills that will enable them overcome the challenges. In addition, benchmarking programs should be encouraged for the student councils to learn how their colleagues do it elsewhere.*

**Keywords:** *Communication Function, Dialogic Communication, Participatory Communication*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Student Governing Council (SGC) is a representative body of students, through which they participate in the affairs of the school in partnership with teachers, parents and school management for the benefit of the wider student population (Kamuri, 2014).

The expression ‘Student Council’ is not a new idea, but has been there for long. Its origin could be traced back to the times of early philosophers such as Plato, who in 386 BC assembled a collection of fledgling philosophers including Aristotle in his cocoon and instituted his own “Conservatory” where both the tutors and learners possessed as well as took charge of the property, chapel, library, lecture and discussion rooms and living quarters which belonged to the academy. The students then elected their leaders on a secret ballot to serve for ten days. Aristotle later established a homogenous institution which he termed “Lyceum” where he further enveloped and integrated the students’ participation idea, in which students elected their leaders.

During the past two decades, student participation in school governance has spread so rapidly that it can no longer be considered as an innovation or an experiment (Torres, Jones & Renn, 2009). Studies conducted in the United States indicated that between two-thirds to three-quarters of all schools in the United States have some forms of student participation in school governance. In this case, members of SGC are elected by the students to serve as primary representatives, advocates and liaison officers and are charged with such responsibilities as collecting and expressing student opinion. They actively represent student views, appropriately address their concerns and ensure that the students are fully updated of all the information of impact to their experience while working with other student groups to program activities designed to foster cohesiveness with the entire student population (Leech & Fulton, 2008)).

SGC is a new phenomenon in the Kenyan school system that was introduced in 2009 following numerous strikes that affected most secondary schools in Kenya. This made the Ministry of Education (MOEST) in conjunction with Kenya Secondary School Heads Association (KESSHA) to recommend for the involvement of students in the school governance through the establishment of SGCs to enable students to participate in the school governance in general and in the communication process in particular (Awiti, 2012).

### **Schools administration in Kenya.**

The Basic Education Act, 2013 outlines the structure of basic education in Kenya in four levels:

Pre-primary education - This admits pupils from two years old to six years and takes three years after which the pupil is promoted to the next level of education.

Primary education –admits pupils from age seven and takes eight years thereafter a national exam is undertaken to enable the students to proceed to the next level.

Secondary education– This admits students from primary school level and takes four years after which students sit for a national exams as an entrance to the next level of education.

Middle Level institutions of Basic Education/ University– This admits student from secondary school level. At this level the students undertake their career path

This structure is however undergoing some restructuring with the implementation of the 2-6-3-3-3 curriculum which shall eventually result into a new education system. This study was based on the third level of the education structure, Secondary education. Effective Communication between students, teachers and school

administration reduces conflicts which may result into indiscipline that may cause confrontations as was witnessed in 2008-2009 when majority of secondary schools in Kenya experienced strikes (Kamuri, 2014).

Communication in secondary schools is basically top-down hierarchy with the Board of Management (BOM) at the top of hierarchy, followed by the School Principal, the Deputy Principal, senior teacher, Heads of Departments (HODs), class teachers, and finally the subject teachers with students not being part of the school administration. In this type of administrative structure, communication is generally a one-way process that involves passing of messages and information from top-down fashion, ranging from the school administration to the students. In this case the school administration gives instructions to students rather than encouraging dialogue and open discussion between the students and the school administration (Kindiki, 2009).

For a longtime, the participation of students in communication process in secondary schools has been very minimal; their representation in the communication and decision making process has been through the prefects' body. The prefects are often identified and chosen by the head teachers or deputy head teachers because of their maturity, leadership qualities, excellent performance and good behavior without involvement of ordinary students in the selection process (Kipsoi, Chang'ach, & Sang, 2012). This has often resulted in students being dissatisfied with the prefects leading to poor relationship between the students and the prefect body. In most cases, the prefects serve the interest of the school administrators and not the general student populace (Otunga, Serem & Kindiki, 2008).

In this manner, the prefects fulfill the needs of the school administration by communicating to the students through them, but hardly allow the students to communicate to the administration through the prefects. This makes the students feel left out in the communication process within the school and that there is no way they can communicate their ideas, feelings or grievances to the school administration as the prefects system encourages blind obedience to school authority and create unidirectional flow of orders or communication (Kariuki, 2008). This is thought to be the genesis of conflicts between the ordinary students' body and the prefects in secondary schools in Kenya as the prefects are rejected by the students (Kiprop, 2012). Students have gone on strike and burnt prefects to death as was the case in Nyeri High School in 1998 among other schools where the prefects were burnt to death by their fellow students (Daily Nation Newspaper, 1998). This is a sign of breakdown in communication process as the students do not have forum or channels of communication through which to express their dissatisfaction with the manner in which prefects handles them or express their views and opinions to the school administration.

Schools have continued to rely on traditional modes of communication in which young people are to be keen listeners who should do as directed by their elders (Archard, 2011). Secondary school governance has been characterized by authoritarianism and traditional modes of administration where communication and decision making is vested in the school Principals and BOM (Kindiki, 2009; Kipsoi, Chang'ach, & Sang, 2012). They pass on information to students vertically from top authority to the students (downward communication). Students have been left out in communication and decision making process on matters that affect them even though they are key stakeholders in schools. Their participation is often seen to cause undue pressure to the school management, administrators, teachers and parents. They are considered as mere recipients of final decision and information (Kandie, 2017). This is because they are seen as minor, immature and inexperienced to make independent decisions on matters of the school and are viewed as problematic. This renders them passive, as decisions that concern them are made on their behalf either by their teachers, parents or administrators including the BOM (Archard, 2011).

Students are not given chance to speak their concern or give opinion on matters affecting their welfare while at school (Rajani, 2006) and are viewed as “recipients of knowledge and information rather than actors in a dialogical encounter of knowledge” (Obregon et al., 1980, p. 102). As a result, students have, in most cases, rejected decisions made on their behalf and communicated to them by school administration since “they lack ownership to such ideas or information because they are left with little or no chance for providing their own input” (Obregon et al., 2001, p.103). This has often led to violence which results into destruction of property as a way of communicating their dissatisfaction with the school administration on certain issues that affects them (Kiprop & Tikoko, 2011; Kindiki, 2009).

Due to violence that rocked secondary schools, it was realized that there was urgent need to open up channels of communication in secondary schools; cultivate a culture of dialogue and develop a non-violent dispute resolution mechanism. Rather than imposing prefects on the students, there was need for a more representative body that would give students a voice in their leadership and making them to be a bridge of communication between students and school administration (Kamuri, 2014)

The recommendation by the Ministry Of Education, Science and Technology (MOEST) that secondary schools in Kenya should involve students in the governance imply that they be considered not only as part of the school administration but also in the communication process of their schools through the establishment of SGCs.

### **Statement of the problem**

The establishment of SGC was intended to improve the governance of school by enhancing the communication process between the students’ body and the school administrators in Kenya and represent their views on matters of general concern (Kamuri, 2014). This was believed to reduce the unrest that has often been witnessed in secondary school all over the country, Awendo Sub-County included. However, this has not been the case; the strikes and rowdiness have continued to exist within the students’ body in secondary schools. The continued strikes in schools have led to massive destruction of properties. This has not only led to government wasting substantial amount of finances to rebuild and renovate the burnt dormitories but also led to decline in students’ performance and drastic increase in indiscipline cases due to prolonged strikes and absence in school (Kiprop & Tikoko, 2011).

The change in the process of communication in schools from the traditional bureaucratic to modern participatory approach so as to include students in the administration of secondary schools in Kenya is the only remedy for the witnessed unrest. It is believed that lack of proper channels of communication between the students and school administration is among the causes of students’ unrests in secondary schools in Kenya. Poor channels of communication between the students and school administration are associated with development of antisocial personalities among students and have contributed to violent behaviors among them (Kindiki, 2009). Therefore, the inclusion of students in the school governance through the establishment of SGCs with the aim of improving not only school governance but also the communication process in schools in Kenya is a potent approach to reduce these students’ violent behaviors and improve their involvements in governance of the schools, but when their roles in communication processes are not understood then their participation in school governance may remain ineffective, as is the case in Awendo Sub-County, Migori County. Based on this backdrop, this study therefore seeks to investigate the implementation of communication functions of SGC in the administration of public secondary schools in Awendo Sub-County.

## **Research Objectives**

The study had the following specific objectives:

- i. To establish whether the students as well as school administrators understand the communication function of SGCs in the administration of public secondary schools.
- ii. To find out the implementation of the communication functions of SGC in the administration of public secondary schools.
- iii. To ascertain the success of the communication function of SGC in the administration of public secondary schools.

## **Scope of the study**

This study investigated the awareness on the communication functions of SGC in the administration of public secondary schools in Kenya. The study only focused on the understanding to the communication function of the SGC as perceived by the students and school administrations. It considered the medium and language of communication between SGC and the school administration, established who sends what information, who receives the information, what type of message is communicated, how such information is encoded and decoded and whether or not there is feedback during the communication process. The study looked into the level of application of the communication functions in the schools, including the frequency of using the SGC in communication and types of information that is passed through SGC. The study also established the success of the application of communication functions of SGC in the administration of public secondary schools in Awendo Sub-County. These included positive difference realized in the implementation of the SGC in communication in the schools, relative to before the application of the SGC.

The study was conducted in Awendo Sub-County in Migori County with a total of 25 public secondary schools. A total of 24 principals and 24 deputy principals were used as the respondents, well as members of SCG from the three schools sampled from each category of mixed, girls and boys schools. The study used both primary and secondary data sources and applied purposive sampling technique to arrive at the number of schools and respondents in the schools.

## **II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study employed qualitative research design. The target population for the study was 24 principals, 24 deputy principals and 118 student leaders making a total population of 166. The students leaders was selected from 3 schools out of the 24 public secondary schools based on the category of the school i.e. girls, boys or boarding. Simple random procedure was used to randomly choose the student leaders from the 3 public secondary schools. The research instruments were a structured questionnaire distributed to each participant. Focused Group Discussions were used to get data from the SGC from the three schools that had been sampled. Focus Group Discussion is a form of group interview where a researcher or a moderator facilitates a discussion with a small group of people on a specific topic (Jwan and Ong'ondo, 2011).

### **III. DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION**

#### **The understanding of students and administration on the communication functions of SGC**

This section looks into the understanding of the communication functions of SGC by both students and school administration (including the principals and the deputy principals) as the first objective of the study. The section is discussed from various perspectives to bring all the aspects of this objective.

#### **Existence of SGCs in the schools**

The respondents from all the participating schools (24 (100%) principals, 24(100%) deputy principals, 118 (100%) student council revealed that SGC exist in their schools and that it was part of the schools' systems as a governing body of the overall students' body in the schools. SGCs, as was noted, was created to replace the previously called 'prefects body', though in some occasions the SGC were still referred to as prefects. Even though the policy of creating SGCs in secondary schools in Kenya was issued in the year 2009 by the government through the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MOEST), its implementation in most of the participant secondary schools did not take place immediately; 65% of the schools created SGC body immediately while 35% did so after two-to-three years; Despite 100% of the schools have implemented SGCs, 45% of them still term it as prefect body.

The number of students in the SGC differed from school to school, depending on population of a school, nature of the school (boarding or day school, mixed or single gender school) and the number of students-based departments in a school, such as clubs and societies. It was noted that schools with relatively higher students' population had a larger number of students in the SGC than to those that had relatively smaller students' population. Boarding schools had a larger number of students in the SGC compared to mixed day schools.

The SGC members were democratically and rightfully elected by fellow students in attempts to factor in interests of the students in electing their leaders. Interested candidates for particular positions were required to register their interests in time, and depending on the time frame allocated by a school, a campaigning period was given to the potential SGC members to seek support from their fellow students.

In most schools, vetting was done by teachers to potential SGC members in order to allow only right candidates for particular positions. Some of the factors considered included; students' discipline, communication skills and academic performance.

#### **Communication channel within the schools**

All the participants (100%) acknowledged the use of oral communication in order to relay messages within the schools, either from students to teachers/administration or from teachers/administration to the students. Even though there were other channels of communication, oral communication was the mostly used channel of communication in the schools. 85% of the participant recognized that the use of oral communication was the most preferred channel since it ensured immediate feedback when information was conveyed to the intended recipients while 15% were not sure why it was the most popular channel for communication. Reaction of the recipients could be seen from the message conveyed and this would help in gauging the reception of the recipients to the messages conveyed to them. One of the Principals described how she would feel every time she communicated a message to the students in a school forum. She said that she prefers using oral communication when addressing students as this allows us to get immediate feedback from the students.

I like oral communication, especially when I am addressing students in a school forum because I can tell how receptive the students are to the information that I relay to them. This is more especially to issues that directly affect them within the school system. In an event that they are receptive to the message relayed to them, I'll be satisfied that the message has achieved what it intended, but if they become resistant unexpectedly, I will be able to know the next step to take. This enables me to gauge whether further clarification should be made on the message in order to win the students satisfaction, or I would rather abolish the intent for the sake of avoiding any rebellion from the students. School assemblies which are mainly conducted on Mondays and Fridays appeared to be the most used forum through which oral communication was used. During school assemblies, the Principal, Teachers on Duty and SGCs would address the students on various issues concerning the students.

As was reported by 85% of the principals that they hold two forums every term to meet all the students and address issues that concern them. Some of the issues that would be addressed by the Principal are related to students' discipline, matters relating to academics (e.g. exams performance) and students' welfare or sometimes on emerging issues that the principal felt that he/she should communicate directly to the students.

Also, 92% of the students governing council reported that class and dormitory meetings were used to discuss the issues that faced the students. Class or dormitory secretaries would convene meetings for members to address issues that affected their respective classes/dormitories. Such assemblies would occur frequently to discuss pressing issues affecting them, and sometimes would involve school captain or even a class teacher or dormitory patrons depending on the magnitude of the matters to be addressed.

75% of the SGCs reported that Students' baraza (students open forum) exists in their schools. Every term, students meet with SGCs and have open discussion on issues that affect students in general. One of the school president (school captain) from one of the participant schools emphasized on the importance of open forums and his take on the need for open forum in his school:

I am convinced that students' open forum is so much important since it gives students a useful platform to discuss issues that affect them within the school in the absence of their teachers. Whenever the Student Governing Council meet with the students in open fora, the students would always open up to talk on issues that affect them, issues that they can never dare discuss with teachers directly. Whenever they bring their complaints on matters that they feel are not favoring them within the school system. As SGC, we note them down and later forward to the school administration in attempts to seek sustainable solution. In other instances, the students complain on the leadership practices of the SGC and this can enable us to correct on areas that they feel are not right. Furthermore, SGC get important opportunity to address students on issues that they deem necessary or on those that are communicated from the school administration to the students through the SGC body.

SGCs forum was found to be a platform through which oral communication was embraced. This involved meetings amongst the SGCs only. In most of the occasions, the meetings would take place at the beginning of a term or at the beginning of every week. This enabled the SGCs to lay down their leadership strategies for the week or for the term and to discuss on various issues regarding governance of the school through their input. Deputy Principals or teacher on duty would sometime call for such meeting with the SGC. In events where SGCs were to meet alone, school president (captain) would convene and chair such meetings.

Despite oral communication being the predominant way for passing information, 100% of the school administrators (principal and deputy principals) recorded that they still use written communication as well to

pass some of the messages to the students. Written channel of communication was recognized to create point of reference since someone (recipient) could always re-read on the written communication in order to develop more understanding on the intended information without distortion that could have happened if a third party would report the same message to the intended recipient.

On the other hand, written communication would be used in schools to emphasize on the previous oral communication. One of the deputy principals interviewed noted:

In most cases we use written communication in our school to put more emphasis on a previously verbal communication on issues to the students or staff. Sometimes there is need to put more emphasis on a serious issues communicated within the school or an intended information to the students or teachers. Usually after addressing students in the assembly on serious issues, such as contagious health issues, we ensure that we write a notice and pin on the school notice boards to ensure that students develop more understandings.

Bulletin boards (school and office boards) were used to display notices to the students and teachers or to all, depending on whom the message was intended to. Internal memos were normally pinned in the offices and staffroom to communicate to teachers. School notice boards were placed at strategic places within the school to ensure that all the students could access. Some of the types of messages communicated through school notice boards included; exam results, school core values and missions, school policies and rules, and any other general information that the school would feel fit to communicate through the notice board.

Newsletters were normally written to parents to communicate specific issues from school, like issues regarding school fees, call for parents meeting, students discipline, school term dates, school development programs. This would be prompted only during the events that the letters intend to communicate. On the other hand, school magazines were used by few schools to communicate messages regarding guidance and counseling and educative articles. This would be done by both students and teachers and most of the times would be intended to the students. The participants also noted that the articles written in the magazines were coordinated by SGC.

As realized during the field study, most of the communication done on the notice boards were from the administration to the students (top-bottom approach), but in other cases SGC would communicate to other students on the notice boards.

### **Language(s) used by SGCs in relaying messages**

100% of the participants reported that the official languages in the schools were English and Kiswahili, and that all the students were bound to speak in the two languages. They also said that specific days had specific language (either English or Kiswahili) and all the students had to comply with the policy. For example, 70% of the schools, Mondays were English days while Fridays were Kiswahili days, 25% of the schools used Kiswahili on Monday and English on Friday while the remaining 5% used Kiswahili on Wednesday and English on Monday and Fridays. Therefore, all the students (including SGCs) were expected to use the languages on the respective days. They other days the students and teachers could use any language they prefer between Kiswahili and English. However, in some few occasions there would be the use of Sheng (a mixture of Kiswahili and English) amongst the SGCs or between the SGC and the students even though it was forbidden in all the schools.

The SGCs were expected every time to use the official languages within the school as they address other students or when communicating with teachers. One of the SGC members recognized their need to use the

official languages every time as leaders who were expected to maintain high level of discipline in terms of languages they speak:

As a leader, I am required to comply with the school's regulations every time. Other students would be looking upon me as a leader and as a role model, and therefore I risk losing my integrity if I go against the stipulated rules and regulations by speaking in any other language that is not official.

### **The implementation of the communication function of SGC**

100% of the administrator reported before they have fully implemented the communication function of SGC. However, only 74% of the student governing council acknowledged that the SGC is fully whereas the remaining 26% complained that they were bypassed on all communications of the administration to the students. The results were however divided into the following;

#### **Messages to the students through SGC**

80% of the school administrators reported that they consulted their student governing council on matters relating to school routines, school rules, behavior change, updates on current affairs (e.g. on cholera outbreak), students discipline and health and sanitation, curriculum and co-curriculum changes within the school before passing the similar information to the rest of the students. However, only 65% of the SGC confirmed this. The remaining 35% indicated they were neither consulted nor informed on any intended message of the school administration to the students. In the occasions the SGC were consulted, they were expected to pass on the messages as communicated from the school administration. 75% of the SGC passed the information to the students during school assemblies, students open forum whereas 25% did so via class secretaries and Dorm captains. 45% of the SGC indicated that after passing the information from the school administrators, they gave the students opportunities to give their responses on the communicated message while 55% deemed it unnecessary to ask for the students input. Of the SGC that received the feedback from the students, only 80% passed the response to the administration; 20% found it unnecessary to do so.

80% of the school administrators indicated that they ensure re-enforcement of the messages communicated to the students through the SGC by making follow ups and re-communicating the same message to the students to lay more emphasis. As noted by one of the deputy principals, there was a great need to make follow ups and re-communicate similar messages communicated by the SGC to the students from school administration:

Whenever our school administration communicates something that is felt to be so important for students and to the school, e.g. security alerts, we always make follow ups to gauge whether there was understanding and reception from the students on the information, and in other cases we re-communicate the same message ourselves (administration) to the same students for the sake of emphasis.

100% of the administrators who could not communicate some messages to the students through SGC believed the issues to do with school administration are very sensitive and could trigger rebellion from the students, including the SGC. One of the principals said:

We embrace communication to the students through SGC, but we do it cautiously. There are some issues that may affect all the students negatively, including the SGC themselves and therefore we cannot fully entrust them with such information. In such cases, even SGC receive such messages negatively, hence they may be influenced to convey them negatively. Issues such as controversial change in school meals must be communicated carefully, especially when it does not favor the students themselves.

### **Messages to the administration through SGC**

100% of the student governing council confirmed that they passed both oral and written communications from the students to the school administrators. The information were either feedback from the messages previously received from the administration or the new issues that the students need to be clarified. One of the SGC member emphasized on the need to have written report of the students' message to the administration:

We sometimes feel that when we write the message on paper, it will make it easy for the administration to always refer to the document and it will also bring more seriousness to the information that the students intend to be heard. Therefore, after students' forum, we compile full report of the students' issues and forward to the school administration.

The participants identified some of the issues raised by the students to include; dissatisfaction on diets and food quality, high handedness by some teachers, reports on lesson attendance by teachers (recorded by class secretaries), concerns on health and sanitation within the school, among others.

Further, all the school administrators indicated that at one point they have received anonymous letters written by the students and dropped into their offices or in school suggestion box. Such messages would include issues that criminalize SGC for specific wrongdoing and therefore students would not trust the SGC to pass such messages to the administration.

One of the deputy principal's reported that:

In some cases students themselves write anonymous letters and drop secretly in my office or into the principal's office. Such messages raise issues concerning misconducts from the SGC or even teachers or administration and therefore students find it difficult to forward such information through SGC because of fear of being reprimanded.

From the interview, 80% of the administrators noted that whenever they received information through SGC or from anonymous letters, they would always accept the message without prejudice. This would be followed by investigative analysis by the administration before responding to that information. The response from the administration depended on the nature of the information.

### **Response of school administration to communication from students through SGC**

100% of the school administrators noted that they consider communications from students through SGC. 80% of them noted that they would conduct investigations upon receiving information from students through SGC to authenticate issues raised while 20% accepted acting immediately without conducting further investigations. Of the administrators that conducted investigations, their response to issues depended on the nature and magnitude of the issues conveyed. Issues such as planned students strike were treated as urgent and the administration responded immediately.

One of the Principals interviewed reported how he would respond to various communications from students through SGC:

Addressing issues from students, through SGC, would depend on the nature of the issues themselves. There are those that need immediate attention such as planned students strike, and this would call for urgent response to avert the likelihood of strike. We treat such issues with the urgency it requires and try to device means to prevent such from happening.

Issues touching students' academics are also treated urgently by administration. For example, when students reported on specific issues contributing to decline in their performance such as teachers missing their lessons, the administration would make positive response by establishing validity on such information and coming up with immediate remedy.

It was also interesting to note that occasionally administration gave negative response to communications from the students by either ignoring such communications or by failing to do in line with students' expectations. In such cases, administration would explain reason as to why such issues could not be addressed to their expectations, or rather administration would totally ignore without giving any response. Some of the issues include; students requesting for change of school uniform which may be deemed as not urgent and pressing, inclusion of a specific meal in current school diet.

### **Response of students to communication through SGC**

100% of the respondents noted that communications to the students through SGC were basically from the teachers or administration (top-down communication). Only in few occasions the SGC would communicate to students directly (horizontal communication). The nature of response given by the students to communications from SGC depended on the nature of the message, either favorable or unfavorable to them. In events where the messages favored the needs of the students, they tended to give positive responses. Never the less, if the messages conveyed to them by SGC were not favorable, they became less receptive to the messages and therefore were likely to give negative responses.

One the members of SGC reported how students would respond, depending on the type of message conveyed to them:

Students will always want to hear what they feel is good to them and favor their needs. Whenever any official communicates a message that do not meet their expectations or is less satisfying, they will revolt or rather accept the directives but gloomily. On the contrary, if the message favors their needs they will always show happiness and show positive signs of following the directives.

All the participants acknowledged that in some situations the students were forced to comply with the communication from the teachers or administration through SGC for the fear of punishment from the administration/teachers. Students would then give positive response, especially when assigned duties by SGC. Students perceived teachers and administration as top authorities of schools and therefore students were bound to comply with instructions and directives given to them from the authority, through SGC. One participant explained why sometimes students do not question communication from teachers or administration but just comply:

Sometimes students fear the wrath of being punished by teachers or school administration if they fail to do the tasks they are assigned to, and therefore they would show positive response when SGC communicates such messages to them from the teachers/administration.

Generally, 90% of the participants realized that students would show positive response when communicated to by SGC since they feel that the SGC were their peers and could express to them messages in a language that they could easily understand. The participants also acknowledged that whenever the SGC interacts with the students, they would feel at ease to interact and express what they feel since they are addressed by their fellow students (SGC).

Nevertheless, 10% of the participants reported that students hardly trusted and feel complete subjects before their fellow students' (SGC). In such instances, they failed to seriously take the messages delivered to them by SGC. They would give negative responses to most of the communications given to them from SGC. This would be realized when they failed to perform duties assigned to them by the SGC or refusing to carry out the task completely. In such cases the administration or teachers would make follow ups to ensure that students adhered to the information passed through SGC.

### **Success of the communication function of SGC**

90% of the school administrators acknowledged that the communication function of the SGC have been a success. They noted that through SGC, they are able to receive adequate information that are of great help in avoiding the students' unrest that have been witnessed in many schools within Awendo Sub-county. Further, they acknowledged that the existence of SGC was appreciated to have helped in shortening communication pathway between students and administration/teachers. There was no particular day that would pass without SGC relaying message to the students from administration/teachers or from students to administration/teachers.

SGC helped in reducing the contact times between the administration/ teachers and the students and this was very essential in ensuring that administration/teachers-students respect was maintained and teachers concentrated on both academic and administrative issues. By SGC speaking on behalf of the school administration or teachers, it created a platform in which students would listen to the SGC freely and closely as opposed to when a teachers/administration would communicates the same message to them. Occasionally students felt less comfortable when addressed by school's principal or deputy principal, and therefore the students would find it intimidating before the administration.

One the SGC explained his experience before he was elected:

I remember how I would always feel uncomfortable when being addressed by the principal in school assemblies or in open forums. When the principal speaks to us no one dare oppose his orders or ask questions on controversial issues he addressed. The situation is different when we (SGC) address students on particular issue, as students always feel free to ask for clarification and even give their immediate genuine response. Students feel at ease with us.

It was largely recognized that SGC uses simple expressions to address the students and therefore students were likely to listen and understand them. This made communication more effective.

Horizontal communication was highly embraced whenever communication was done to students or teachers/administration through SGC. This created a great sense of dialogue between the students and administration/teacher as SGC acted as a mouthpiece in such situations, and this was perceived by the SGC to be a good platform to represent students by ensuring that their needs were catered for through dialogue.

On the other hand, 10% of the administrators reported that the communication function of SGC is a failure. They noted that the students do not respect and trust their fellow students who sit on the SGC; therefore, the information given by the SGC is normally deemed void by the entire population. Furthermore, SGC would distort the information given to them by either students or the administrators and passed over the unintended message.

#### IV. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

##### Summary of key findings

##### **Understanding of both students as well as school administrators on the communication function of SGC**

The first objective of this study was to find out the understanding of both the students as well as administrators on the communication function of SGC. The findings revealed that all students and school administrators (Principals and Deputy Principals) fully understand the communication functions of SGC. According to the results, all the 24 schools have student council bodies that are functional. The SGC confirmed that they fully understand their role of passing information from school administration to the student and vice versa without distortion. In the same manner, majority of the school administration reaffirm their knowledge on the importance of SGC as a channel of communicating to the students. They believe that communication function of SGC is the major reason why there are no wrangles between the students and the school administration. Whenever a right channel of communication is used in relaying a particular information to a given target recipient, then the reception of the information by the recipient become positive and the level of understanding is boosted which leads to immediate response.

In using the SGC to communicate to the student, administrators used both written and oral communication, though the latter was the predominant one. Linda (2000) notes that the type of audience normally dictates the type of channel to be used in communication and by using the right channel of communication, the recipients are likely to get satisfaction in regard to their expectation of the information relayed to them. For the schools to show trust to their SGC, they majorly used oral communication to pass information to the rest of the students through their leaders. The only circumstance they used written communication was on sensitive matters. Diana (2008) notes that some of the reasons why an institution may opt to use written channel of communication include; the urge to ensure that the message is relatively more permanent than oral channel, the need to create a point of reference on a particular message that was previously communicated to ensure clarity and understanding, and the need to make a particular communication look more official than if oral communication was applied. As identified during this research, SGC and school administrations embraced a lot of oral communication in various platforms within the schools. Linda (2008) supports this by further emphasizing the essentiality of application of oral communications in various institutions in an organized system ensures that recipients of a particular information enjoys immediate clarification if need be and that the communicator always get personal satisfaction whenever there is immediate response from his or her audience.

The major issues that were communicated by the SGC to school administration basically pertained to students' welfare, e.g. on students' discipline, students' complaints on meals and hygienic matters, lessons attendance by teachers, etc. It was also important to note that in some cases school administration would specify the type of messages to be communicated by the SGC to the students, and that the SGC were to adhere to the guidelines provided by the school administration. On the other hand, school administrations communicated a wide range of issues regarding students' welfare and curriculum implementation, e.g. issues related to health, emerging and current issues, students discipline, school routines, school policies and regulations, and school fundraising events, etc. Mutua (2014) notes that the types of messages communicated by students through SGC are normally limited to issues related to the students welfare within schools, and occasionally are conveyed orally. Kiprof & Tikoko, (2011) also confirms that parameters used by student leaders and school administrations conform to standards laid down by various ministries of education around the world. Before a teacher or school administration consider conveying any message to students directly or through students' leaders, the teachers

or administration must ensure that a given set of parameters are laid down to guard the interest of the message in question. Mukiri (2014) also affirms that most of the secondary schools in Africa are very authoritarian due to the fact that the school administrations tend to be stricter with communications that SGC should make to the students and in some cases school administration tend to certify or doctor particular messages before they are passed to the student.

Types of information passed to students through SGC can directly give indications on the extent of students' participation in communication process in their schools. In occasions where administration communicates administrative or policy issues to the students (top-bottom), like, exam issues, students always feel dictated to and made to be listeners rather than stakeholders on issues that affect them (Aggrawal, 2008). He further notes that such issues are very sensitive and can only be handled by the school administration. However, Wirth et al. (2008) disagrees by noting that students should be involved in implementation of communication function in schools, and they should be given chance to have input on matters that affect their welfare since they are the key stakeholders in school.

### **The implementation of the communication function of SGC**

According the findings of this report, 100% of the school administrators believed that they have fully implemented the communication function of SGC. Even though only 74% of the student councils confirmed this, it is enormously visible that the SGC is actively functional in all schools. The SGCs confirmed that they received information from the school administrations and effectively relayed them to the students as instructed. At the same time, they confirmed that they recorded students' grievances and successfully passed them to the administrators. Majority of them confirmed that they are the only channel of passing of information between teachers and students except for the some few incidents that the administrators reported to have received anonymous notes directly from students concerning varied issues. Further, the report confirmed that both the administration and the students responded promptly to the information given to them by the SGC from the respective sender. Responses to communications through SGC largely depended on the nature of information conveyed. If students perceived particular information to be in favor of their interest they would respond positively, but they would appear defiant to the messages that do not favor them and would therefore give negative responses. Fielding & Rudduck (2002) confirms these findings by noting that students are always positive to communications that serve their interests and meet their expectations. On the other hand, students are reluctant to respond positively whenever they deem particular information not to meet their expectations.

As was noted from the research findings, compliance and positive responses from students to communications through SGC was made easy since the students and SGC interact on the students-peers platform. This good relationship between them makes it possible for good reception of the messages. For instance, class secretaries and dorm captains found it easier to have positive responses for the communications on issues related to cleaning of classrooms and maintaining good hygiene in the dormitories. Fielding & Rudduck (2002) recognizes that students (peer-peer) relationships is so important in ensuring that they communicate with great understanding amongst them, and this make it easier for student to easily give positive responses to communications from SGC. Furthermore, Njue (2014) emphasized that the nature of response from students to any communication depends on who communicates. SGC create a good environment for further interaction, requisite for seeking more clarifications, thereby finding it easy to respond to information that they understand. Fielding & Rudduck (2002) in his substantiation recognizes the existing positive relationship that exists amongst students-peers in schools and the nature of fondness amongst them. He further notes that such

relationships among students, to a larger extent, helps student leaders to create good rapport with other student, and this enhances positive reception of students to communication from SGC as was realized during the study.

**Success of communication functions of SGCs**

According to the results, the communication function of SGCs have been implemented in all the public secondary schools in Awendo Sub-County.90% of the administrators acknowledged its success with only 10% giving the contrary opinion. As was noted by most of the participants, without SGC in schools communication pathway would be long and the frequency of passing information from students to administration or from administration to students would be reduced significantly. Titus (2014) notes that, SGC in Kenyan secondary schools are so important in ensuring a high level of effectiveness in communication process between school administration and the general students’ body. Titus divides the levels of effectiveness into three, i.e. supervisory roles, representational roles and disciplinary roles as summarized in the table 1 below:

*Table 1: The effectiveness of the communication functions of SGC*

<b>Role</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Achievement(s)</b>
Supervisory	General cleaning, games activities, movements/time management, language usage, etc.	Enhances positive students’ behavior and positive relationship with SGC
Representational	Airing students grievances to administration	Addresses students emotional and personal needs
Disciplinary	Issuing light punishment to students, reporting in disciplinary cases to administration	Promotes students discipline, promotes level of understanding and controlling students behavior

The findings further reported that the SGC has been very successful in providing the link between the school administration and the students. Schimmel (2003) notes that prefects(SGC) in schools in Kenya are very important links in school systems as they provide a more participatory approach to decision making in public secondary schools in Kenya. According to Wambulwa (2004), the use of prefects (SGC) in promoting communication functions in secondary schools has raised a great link in connecting students/learners and school administration which may serve as rich ingredients for discipline, high representation in inclusive decision making of the students in school matters. This was expounded by Kiprop & Tikoko (2011) who notes that prefects (now SGC) are backbone of information passage in secondary schools in Kenya, and their presence enables for an existence of an important link between students and school administration. He further emphasizes that the presence of prefects (SGC) enables students to open up to what they wish to communicate to schools’ administration as they occasionally don’t have direct contact with school administration. The presence of SGC builds the students confidence in speaking their minds as they view them as their peers whom they can open up to and speak the same language.

The range of information passed from students to administration through SGC sometimes tend to be limited to issues related to students welfare (e.g. complains on foods), reports on students discipline and codes of conduct, suggestion in decision making processes on matters that affect students directly, and issues related to students rebellion and potential planned strikes. Wambulwa (2004) who notes that prefects (SGC) interact with students on daily basis in issuing daily manual work assignments, in supervising the duties assigned to them and in passing on various messages to them from teachers or administration. SGC have various platforms for relaying

information to the students, including; school assemblies, class and dormitory assemblies, and students' forums.

Regardless of the success of the communication functions of SGC, this research found out that majority of the SGC faced various challenges when relaying the information. The mistrust and lack of unity amongst the students' council was a great challenge that contributes to poor duties and job execution. Mutua (2014) affirms this finding by noting that lack of teamwork which is usually experienced when some members of the SGC decide to work on their own without consulting others, or refused to take orders from the school captain, may contribute to division amongst them and in the long run lead to lack of cohesiveness and poor delivery of their duties. Similarly, they received overwhelming expectations from the students and administration/teachers and when they fail to meet these expectations, they would always face criticism and get demoralized. In addition, the SGC lacked basic training on how to perform their communication roles effectively and this presented various challenges in handling various roles in relaying information, motivating students, meeting student's personal and emotional needs and managing students. These findings are in line with Kiprop & Tikoko(2011) who established that most of the time student council members being still student and being unexposed to any training are unable to handle common problems which face other students like drug abuse, HIV/AIDS, homosexuality and conflicts between teachers and students. Furthermore, some of the SGC members would be found in indiscipline cases and this would lead to lose of respect from fellow students, and therefore when communicating to students they would not be taken seriously. These are affirmed by Okumbe (2001) who emphasizes that prefects (SGC) are also students like any other normal students and therefore are vulnerable to being indiscipline, and this may make them be in awkward positions when punishment is issued before other students.

## **Conclusions**

From the research findings, it was confirmed that all schools in Awendo sub-county has established SGC as part of the schools administrative systems. From the research, it was found that SGC had been established in the schools, but their communication functions had not been wholly implemented. SGC played pivotal roles in the schools' administrative support, including the promoting of communication functions within the schools' systems, which includes; relaying of information, motivation to other student, managing students' behavior, fulfilling students' personal and emotional needs. Despite being deemed to be very important in the implementation of these communications function, SGC had not realized full capacity to implement the functions due to lack of full knowledge, lack of opportunity, among others.

The study findings showed that SGC had great significance in relaying information within the schools' systems, that is, information from administration/teachers to students, and from students to administration/teachers. On a frequent basis, the SGC was involved in passing on of messages to students from the administration on: supervisory, disciplinary and representational information. The research concludes that the extent of relaying particular information is limited to the nature of information and SGC is not fully involved in disciplinary role but largely involved in administrative, supervisory and representational in relaying information.

It was realized that students (including SGC) had very unique relationship amongst themselves and this could make it so easy for SGC to meet the needs to fulfilling students' personal and emotional needs. In some occasions students would entrust SGC with their private information in attempts to find solution to their

personal and emotional needs. This aspect therefore enables SGC to ensure fulfillment of students' personal and emotional needs as an important communication function in secondary school in Kenya.

Also from the findings, it was realized that SGC were involved in motivating students. However, this communication was not fully achieved as most of the schools did not have full understanding of the motivational function of SGC. This left the SGC with generic approaches in motivation that included; appreciating students when they performed manual duties as expected, when students maintained a required standard level of discipline and when students had exemplary achievements in sport activities. It can therefore be concluded that SGC in secondary schools in Kenya are rarely involved in motivating students, as they do not fully understand this function and they feel that they do not have the full capacity to implement this function.

Another important finding was the communication function of managing students' behavior by SGC. SGC had great role to play in ensuring that students' behaviors were contained within expected levels for the sake of maintaining students discipline while in school. Both internal approach, external approach and interactional approach was widely used by SGC to ensure that students' behaviors were to the accepted limits. The study therefore concludes that all the approaches employed by SGC in managing students' behavior in schools were effectively used to realize this function. In most of the schools, the school administration entrusted SGC to play an important role in this regard.

Despite the frequency of communication through SGC in public secondary schools in Awendo Sub-County and the appreciation of effectiveness of the use of SGC to pass information within the schools' system, there existed some challenges in the use of SGC in passing on information within the schools. These challenges presented inefficiency in ensuring completeness in application of communication function of SGC in the schools. Therefore, for effectiveness in the understanding and implementation of the communication function of SGC, challenges like; lack of full understanding of the communication roles, lack of proper opportunities to implement the communication functions and proper delegation of the roles, must be overcome in the public secondary schools.

## **Recommendations**

A number of recommendations were derived from the study, after having examined communication functions of SGC in the administration of public secondary in Awendo Sub County. The recommendations included;

### **Understanding of the communication function of SGCs by the students as well as school administrators.**

From the research findings, it is clear that not all SGCs and school administrations fully understood the communication functions of the student governing councils in the administration of public school. Their understanding was restricted to supervisory role. Therefore, it is recommendable that both the students together with their leaders (SGC) and school administration should be able to fully understand the communication function of SGC. To achieve this, they should be offered regular trainings on the communication functions in particular and on leadership skills in general. This should be organized by the school administrators themselves and the government through the MOEST. They should annually hold seminars and workshops for both students' leaders', teachers and school administrators to.

Secondly, the administrators and student leaders from various schools should conduct benchmarking programs to schools that have fully executed the communication function of the SGC in their day to day administration. This will enable both the students and administrators to learn through observation and interview on how these

other schools have successfully executed this function. Also, this will enable them to adopt various leadership skills in promoting communication functions and improve on the existing ones in their schools.

### **The implementation of the communication functions of SGC in the administration of public secondary school.**

According to the finding not all the schools have fully implemented the communication function of the student governing council. Some of the administrators have communicated directly to the students and have failed to give room for students' opinions or views. This has evidently led to students' unrest resulting to strikes and destruction of school properties. To ensure that the schools effectively implement this function, this study recommends that all schools pass every administrative decision to the students through their leaders and allow students to convey their inputs with regards to the school management/ administration through the representatives, the SGC. In the event that they deem that certain decisions are sensitive and should directly be relayed to the students by the administration themselves, they should first consult with the student governing body so that they are not caught unaware. This will enable the SGC to answer impromptu questions that the civilian students normally ask them.

Secondly, the administration should steer away from avoiding the issues sent to them through the student governing body. They should ensure that every issue or information from the students relayed to them through the SGC is diligently addressed and given the equal attention. When some issue are ignored or assumed and others addressed, the civilian students will lose trust on their leaders and might stop airing their grievances through the SGC. This will lead to strikes; since they will take this as an alternative of being heard.

Thirdly, the school administration should open offices for the SGC within their respective schools so that the leaders can be able to effectively receive information from students. Having the offices would enable them the much required privacy to diligently perform their duty of being the link for conveying information between the students and the school administrations.

Finally, school programs should be made in such a way that students have free time for interactions. This would make it easy for students to share ideas and opinions which would eventually be conveyed to the school administration. This would help reduce cases of students going on rampage to express themselves and let the school know their demands.

### **Success of the communication functions of SGC in the administration of public secondary school.**

To ensure that the communication function of SGC is successfully executed, the school administration should do the following: first and foremost, they should frequently motivate the students' leaders to encourage them to diligently perform their duties. Offering presents like free school uniforms and shoes, occasional offer of special meals, publicly commending them for their good works and offering occasional outings or trips is important to encourage them to work selflessly. This will also reduce the number of times that SGC have distorted information. Secondly, the school administration should frequently train student leaders on the need for effective leadership and communication skills. Holding conferences within Awendo Sub-county for the SGC of all the schools will enable them learn new skills from their colleagues. Finally, the administration should incorporate SGC in the guidance and counseling team and train them on peer counseling techniques. This will enable them effectively handle issues such as drug abuse and HIV/Aids trauma amongst their fellow students.

### **Suggestions for further studies**

The community, the parents and the non-teaching staff play a very key role in molding students and thus Students Governing Council. The study recommends that a conclusive research be conducted on the influence of community, parents and non-teaching staff in the implementation of the communication functions of Students Governing Council in Secondary schools in Awendo sub-county and/or any other sub-county or county in order to have a holistic understanding on the factors influencing the implementation of the communication function of SGC.

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