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Student Participation in Decision-Making in Senior High Schools in Ghana

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June 2015

Submitted to the University of Sussex for the degree of Doctor of Education

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree

Signature

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University of Sussex

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Education

Student Participation in Decision-Making in Senior High Schools in Ghana

SUMMARY

This case study was conducted in Ghana to explore the arenas available for student participation in decision making in public senior high schools. In Ghana, students are considered stakeholders and collaborators in decision-making alongside parents, teachers, and community members. This role is of particular importance since their participation equips them with the attributes and skills needed for active citizenship. Student Representative Councils (SRCs) are established in all public senior high schools in Ghana and their representatives serve on committees and present students' views to school authorities. Their role as representatives is therefore very significant in promoting the student voice. The objective of this study was therefore to explore the key arenas available for student participation in decision making in four senior high schools in Ghana and the levels of their participation within them.

In Ghana, no specific policy is provided for student participation in decision making even though the SRC is mandatorily established in each public senior high school. Literature on student participation in decision making in senior high schools is also scarce when compared to other African countries such as South Africa. The international literature on student participation in decision making stresses that participation is a right and that it must be given serious consideration. However, the perception some people have about students' participation in decision making is that students in senior high schools are not mature enough to participate fully in decision-making forums in schools. Consequently, opportunities provided for student participation tend to be limited to roles of supervision over student peers and fundraising activities. Arnstein's (1969) theory of citizen's participation which

portrays a striking representation of power structures in society forms the theoretical basis of the study. Relating the theory to the school context, the study is conceptualized on Hart's (1992) ladder of student's participation and Backman and Trafford's (2006) Democratic Schools concept. Backman and Trafford (2006) assert that a school can be democratic in spite of its bureaucratic structures. Given that senior high schools in Ghana are hierarchically structured, with students at the bottom of the structure, these two theories provide an appropriate conceptual framework for exploring students' participation in democratic decision making.

The study was conducted in four senior high schools in Ghana. The research participants included Student Representative Council (SRC) executives, non-SRC executives, staff members and heads of schools, purposively selected according to their roles in relation to decision making arenas in schools. The study was conducted in the interpretivist paradigm, adopting a qualitative approach, using interviews and focus group discussions. These methods were employed in order to gain in-depth insights into the interactions and perspectives of key stakeholders on students' participation in decision making in the case study schools.

The findings of the study suggested that the forums provided for student participation were similar in the four selected schools. These decision-making forums included feeding, discipline, students' accessibility to school heads, school durbars and SRC general forums. The study however focused on decision-making forums of feeding and discipline as these were the areas participants mostly stressed on in their feedback. The study found that participation in the forums studied varied across the schools, with some schools providing more opportunities for students' participation than others did. In all but one school, students' participation in decision making appeared to be episodic, restricted and largely initiated by the school authorities. Furthermore, interactions between school leadership and staff were affected by power relations which also affected the level of students' participation in decision making. As contribution to knowledge the study notes among others that the interpretation and application of children's democratic rights is culturally determined and therefore vary across culture.

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EXPLANATION OF ACRONYMS AND TERMS

CMHA	Canadian Mental Health Association
CRDD	Curriculum Research and Development Division
GES	Ghana Education Service the agency responsible for providing pre-tertiary education
HRMD	Human Resource Development Division
MOE	Ministry of Education
NUGS	National Union of Ghana Students- association comprises all bodies of student unions of tertiary institutions in Ghana
SASA	South African Schools Act
SED	Secondary Education Division
Spec. Ed.	Special Education Division
SRC	Students Representative Council
S &L D	Supplies and Logistics Division
UNCRC	United Nations Charter on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO	United Nations Education Science and Culture Organisation
TVET	Technical /Vocational Education and Training

ONE - INTRODUCTION

Much has been written in recent years to reposition the student in education reform premised on the conviction that students have unique perspectives and insights which both warrant attention from adults, (Cook-Sather, 2006). Consequently opportunity should be provided them to actively shape their education, (Cook-Sather, 2006).

The literature stresses the democratic rights of the child as stated in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which notes that the child has a right to participate in issues that affect him/her (UN 1989). Ghana, having come out of military rule since 1992 has also demonstrated commitment to democratic governance and participation of all stakeholders in decision making at various levels (Pryor & Ampiah, 2005). Within the education system in Ghana decision making has been widened to include parents and other stakeholders such as old students associations, community leaders and professionals. In the school also opportunities are created for various stakeholders including students to engage in democratic practices in school (Asare, 2004). This study thus examines the opportunities available for students to be part of decision-making processes in senior high schools (SHS), focusing in particular on students' membership of committees because these committees deal directly with students' welfare issues. It also explores the level at which students are encouraged to participate in these decision-making forums. This is particularly important because the school system at the pre-tertiary level in Ghana is structured hierarchically with designated lines of communication and decision making.

Governance in secondary education has become the focus of debate in recent times (The World Bank, 2005). A series of international conferences have been devoted to various themes analyzing and highlighting the importance of developing children to become great assets to the cause of the democratic processes (UNICEF, 1997; eurochild 2013). Furthermore, discourse about governance for democratic practices has been in the limelight in recent years (Cole and John, 2001). Prominent in the discourse is the issue of democratizing education to the local level and the enabling of other stakeholders such as students also to have an input in decision-making forums at the school level. Democratic practices in schools have led to collaboration between school authorities, parents, civil organisations and students in school decision making in some countries

(Sayed, 2002; Ranson et al, 2005). As a result students also have an opportunity to participate in decision-making forums (Robison and Ward 2005; Mncube, 2007; Mncube, 2008). By adopting democratic school governance, South Africa for example, has created opportunities for students to have membership of governing boards in secondary schools (Mncube 2009). In the UK, initiatives have increased student voice and participatory activities among student groups in schools (Fielding 2001; Whitty and Wisby 2007). In various contexts, students, through their leadership, have been given the opportunity to participate in decision making by serving on various committees in schools (Joubert, 2002; Nongobu, 2004;; Mncube, 2008; Phaswana; 2010).

Previous literature has highlighted the inability of youth to participate in decisions affecting their own development, due to an attitude and culture that views children as too young or vulnerable to be capable of being included in decision-making (Comeu, 2005). There is also the observation that students are unable to participate in decision making due to the bureaucratic nature of the school system (Cockburn 2006; Bragg 2007). Cockburn (2006) for example asserts that the school by itself does not encourage students to challenge existing authority structures. Due to this, where opportunity is available students often serve only in an advisory capacity in the school (Critchley, 2003). According to Young (2000), even within this peripheral position their contribution is sometimes dismissed because it is considered unacceptable. The observations in the literature coupled with my own experiences as a teacher, a guidance and counselling coordinator and later, as an administrator supervising and monitoring teaching and learning activities in senior high schools in the Ghana Education Service over the years, underpin this study. The chapter is presented under the following sections:

- Focus of the study
- Rationale for the study
- The Research Questions
- Research Design

1. 2. The Context of the Study

The study was conducted in four senior high schools in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. As will be discussed in more detail later, senior high schools in Ghana are bureaucratic and fashioned along hierarchical lines in keeping with the wider structures of the Ghana Education Service management structure. Decision making in senior high schools in Ghana usually rests with the head who delegates some authority to staff depending on the roles of those staff in addition to their teaching responsibilities. In addition, decision making is delegated through committees set up to perform specific roles in the school. In Ghana the Student Representative Council (SRC) is the formally recognised body that represents students in various decision-making forums. The SRC thus liaises with school authorities, provides input on students' issues and supports the staff in implementing decisions taken. The SRC with representation from all classes and houses together with senior prefects engage with school authorities at various levels of school life. The SRC in Ghanaian schools is therefore a very important entity in so far as student participation in decision making is concerned due to their role as the mouthpiece of students. The SRC therefore serves on the established committees that address various aspects of student welfare, notably, disciplinary, feeding/canteen, compound and environment, sports, and entertainment, amongst others (GES, 2010). These committees are positive indicators of the encouragement of student voice and the democratic process. Beyond this however, it is difficult to determine the extent to which such conduits function effectively for students' engagement in decision-making processes.

Incidences of student unrest in Ghana suggest the importance of ensuring student involvement in decision making. In 2006, for example, two schools were temporarily closed down because of students' riots. The students claimed they were not in favour of actions taken by the school authorities (Daily Graphic, 17th Feb, 2006). Furthermore, in May 2010, students from two schools respectively embarked on a demonstration which turned violent and led to the destruction of school and staff property. In this instance, students claimed the school authorities did not inform them before taking the actions which led to the unrest, (Daily Graphic, April, 14, 2010, Issue 145). The critical question to answer is whether the actions by the school authorities would have yielded a different outcome if they had involved the students' councils of the schools in the

decisions taken over the issues. These incidents raise questions about whether students have the opportunity to participate in decision-making forums in the schools. The purpose of the present study therefore, was to explore the forums available for students' participation in decision making and to examine the level of student participation in these forums in four senior high schools in Ghana.

1. 3. Rationale for the Study

This study builds on a mini study I undertook as a Phase One student of the University of Sussex. (refer Glover, 2009). My interest in democratic student involvement is personal, springing from a teacher's perspective during a stewardship that spanned the breadth of the education system, namely, basic, secondary and tertiary (a college of education and a polytechnic). In some of these institutions, I doubled as teacher and housemistress, and, later, guidance and counselling coordinator. As a housemistress, I was in charge of one of the female houses in a senior high school. Being responsible for the overall well-being of the students, I ensured that the girls performed their house duties, respected each other, lived in harmony and, above all, lived by the rules of the school. To ensure effective discipline at all times, I delegated some responsibilities to the house captain and dormitory monitors to supervise activities and present weekly reports. At that time, and from my perspective as a housemistress, I often categorized students simply as troublemakers who would use every opportunity to flout school rules.

My perception of students began to change after I had gone for further studies in the psychology of the adolescent and interacted with and mentored students with psychological and behavioural challenges for one year. After my studies, I was posted to a girls' senior high school and was appointed guidance and counselling coordinator in addition to teaching duties. This position presented an opportunity for a closer relationship and interaction with the students. I listened to their problems, concerns, and contributions to discussions and guided them in making their own decisions and choices. The experiences gave me a better insight into students' perceptions. Rather than being outright judgemental, which was my posturing hitherto, I began to explore student motivation; I reflected more on the students' opinions and tried to pay more

attention to their perspectives. This helped me to adopt different strategies in helping the students to resolve their behavioural challenges, even when the strategy seemed to deviate from the prevailing school regulations.

Reflecting on some of the decisions I had made as a teacher and housemistress, I realised that I, and perhaps my colleagues, had not dealt with students' issues very effectively. I sometimes concluded too hastily that the student was always wrong and failed to bring to bear the student's perspective, which could shed more light on the situation and issues at stake and probably lead to better and more well-informed decisions. The experiences gained with such duties led to a re-configured teacher/learner relationship that inspired in me an interest in students' affairs. Since then, I have adopted a more open stance on issues directly related to students' welfare and participation in decision making. With my present designation as the national coordinator of co-curricular programmes in senior high schools in Ghana I have worked closely with various student groups. My interactions with them, now as an administrator have shed more light on students' perspectives on issues regarding school decision making. These insights have deepened my perception that school administrators are sometimes misinformed or do not have adequate insight on issues that relate directly to students in senior high schools. As a result of this students have been excluded in aspects of school life that relate to their welfare. Looking back, I felt there was the need to consciously work towards students/teacher collaboration in decision making at the secondary education level.

In addition, I realised that there is a dearth of information and research literature on student participation in school decision making at the senior high school level in Ghana. The lack of relevant literature on students' participation issues appears to lead to a lack of definite and pragmatic means of resolving students concerns and issues. I therefore consider this study a means of igniting interest in and stimulating debate on student participation in decision making in senior high schools in Ghana. This topic becomes even more relevant when it is recalled that Ghana has at various times affirmed its support for policies on children's rights. Indeed, Ghana was among the first nations to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which gives legislative support to children's rights (Government of Ghana, 1989), and recently ratified the National Youth Policy of Ghana (Government of Ghana, 2010).

The study draws on Arnstein's (1969) theory of citizen's participation which strikingly reflects power structures in society and interaction between stakeholders. The theory presents eight typologies which signify various levels of participation or non-participation. It shows who is in control of decision-making at what time. The theory advocates for the typology where citizens are in control of decision making instead of being manipulated by the power-holders in society. The theory thus advocates for the empowerment of the individual to share in decision making on issues that affect them. Relating the theory to the school context Hart (1992) draws on seven levels of student participation identifying two main levels at which students participate in school decision making- students are at the participatory level or at the non-participatory level. Against the background that the pre-tertiary education level in Ghana is highly structured and the assertion by Cockburn (2006) that most schools by their nature value hierarchies and exclusions students in senior high schools in Ghana usually are excluded from decision-making forums, notwithstanding the fact that students have representation on various school committees. Students thus usually lack the empowerment to engage with school authority in decision-making forums on issues that affect. The study thus advocates for a school environment that provides opportunities for dialogue and consensus building. The above issues coupled with my personal observations form the basis for this study.

1. 4. The Research Questions

Literature has shown that many writers have taken a keen interest in student democratic participation and have worked to encourage students' participation in decision making (see Fielding 2001, 2002, Morrow, Mncube 2008, Phaswana 2008). I have also observed that the SRC has been in inception in senior high schools over decades. However, there seems to have been little study of student democratic participation in Ghana. I decided therefore to explore these areas to ascertain the forums available for students' participation in decision making and the extent to which they are engaged with school authorities in decision-making processes. In order to achieve these objectives, the following questions were developed:

1. What forums are available for student participation in school decision making?
2. What levels of student participation do these forums provide?

3. What are the constraints to student participation in these forums?
4. What policy and practice implications can be drawn from this case study of student participation in decision making in senior secondary school in Ghana?

1. 5. Research Design

The study was conducted in the interpretivist paradigm adopting a qualitative research methodology. Adopting a case study approach, I balloted to select four schools from among eight in the Greater Accra region of Ghana. All eight schools had earlier accepted to involve in the study. Thus to give an equal chance of being among the four I used the ballot to select the four that were used as study sites. The heads of these schools and key staff members with oversight responsibility of students' welfare were selected for individual interviewing. In addition focus group discussions were held with selected students from the same case study schools. Two categories of student groups, comprising student council representatives and non-council members, participated in the focus group discussions. As a Deputy Divisional Director, I have been involved in monitoring and coordinating teaching and learning activities in senior high schools. This position comes with some level of authority and thus could bear on the study. Being aware of the effect my position could have on the research, I specifically provided all information on the purpose of the study, the role of the participants, assurance of anonymity and the fact that anyone could withdraw from the study if s/he so wished.

1. 6. Overview of the Thesis

The thesis is organised in seven chapters. Chapter One has outlined the focus and rationale for the study and provided details of the problem and the study questions. The motivation for the study was also presented as well as the research questions and research design.

Chapter Two gives a brief overview of the education system, identifying the three levels of education delivery in Ghana is presented. A discussion of the administrative structure of the Ghana Education Service (GES) and that of the senior high school are also

discussed. A brief account of Ghana's decentralisation process in education highlights the participation of stakeholders at grassroots level. It is also noted that students' participation in decision making in school is not factored into the decentralisation process. A brief overview of the four selected case study schools concludes the chapter.

A review of literature is presented in Chapter Three, providing some definitions of student participation in decision making but noting that participation is defined variously by different writers. Forms and levels of participation are also discussed with reference to Hart's (1992) Ladder of participation; the chapter throws light on the social and cultural concepts of child upbringing, noting that the participation of children in decision-making forums is not necessarily akin to Ghanaian culture. There is also a discussion of the effects of participation on students and the school and of factors that constrain students' participation in decision making. Backman and Trafford's (2006) notion of practising democracy within bureaucratic systems was also discussed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the conceptual perspective adopted in this study. This draws on Backman and Trafford's (2006) democratic schools concept and Hart's (1992) ladder of students' participation.

Chapter four discusses the methodology and methods adopted for the study. This was located in the qualitative paradigm using the case study approach, with interviews and focus group discussion as the methods of data collection. Issues related to the selection of research participants, ethics in research and a short discussion on how data were processed, coded and analysed are also included in this chapter.

Chapter Five explores the forums available for students' participation in decision making in the four cases study schools, focusing on the feeding and discipline committees in particular. It notes that though similar forums were available for students' participation they did not lead to similar levels of participation, with some schools providing more opportunities for students' participation than others. It highlights bureaucracy and power relations as major constraints on students' participation.

Chapter Six highlights how adult systems perpetuate bureaucracy and hinder students' participation in decision-making forums. In discussing the student systems, the

processes of students' elections are presented. The role of the SRC and how it helps to serve the interests of school authorities and its own membership is also discussed in the chapter.

In Chapter Seven I present a review of the research questions and the main findings of the study. Findings indicate that there were similar forums for student participation but level of participation varied across schools. Bureaucracy and power relations were identified as key hindrances to student participation. The implications of the findings to policy and practice were also presented in the chapter. This is followed by contribution to knowledge. One of the contributions to knowledge among others is that the interpretation and application of children's democratic rights vary across contexts due to cultural norms.

TWO- THE CONTEXT OF EDUCATION IN GHANA

Introduction

In this chapter the context of education in Ghana is discussed in more detail, focussing on the management and administration of schools with emphasis on the organizational structure of the Ghana Education Service and the senior high schools in particular. This provides an insight into the administrative and decision making landscape in secondary education in Ghana in general and the location of students in the structure particularly in senior high school. This enables understanding of the interaction between school authority and students in school decision making at the school level. The chapter is presented under the following main sections:

- Pre-tertiary Education Management in Ghana
- Administrative structure of the Senior High School
- The SRC in the Senior High School
- The study schools in context

2. 1. Pre-tertiary Education Management in Ghana

Until autonomy in 1957, Ghana was known as the Gold Coast and was one of the numerous colonies of the United Kingdom (McMillan 2012). After independence, a number of reforms were initiated to make education accessible to all children of school-going age. In recent years, the emphasis has been on the provision of opportunities for stakeholders to participate in decision making in education especially at the pre-tertiary (Government of Ghana, 2008). Students also, through the student representative council (SRC) have some opportunities to participate in decision making processes at the senior high school level.

In 1987, Ghana implemented a decentralizing strategy in order to achieve socio-economic development. Then in 1992 the MOE implemented its decentralization strategy in education (Macmillan, 2012) to facilitate participation and decision making

of various stakeholders. The government through the Ministry of Education is implementing the programme to ensure a results-oriented, efficient and accountable system of educational governance. The purpose was to attain the 'Education for All' and the Millennium Development Goals, (MOE, 2013). The decentralization process is aimed at establishing an operational framework that transfers the responsibility of decision making over management, financial and operational issues from the Ghana Education Service to the following agencies as stated in the Government White Paper on Education (Government of Ghana, 2007) -

- National Inspectorate Board
- National Teaching Council
- National Council on Curriculum and Assessment
- District Directorates of Education and District Assemblies.

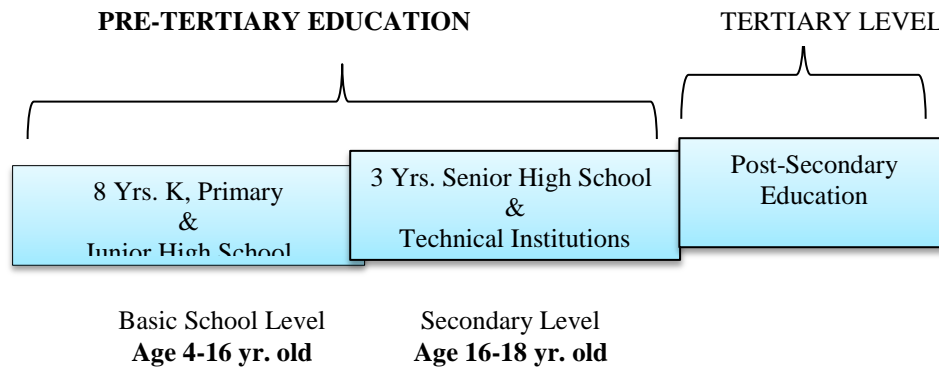
As a result School Management Committees (SMCs) were established to have oversight responsibility of basic schools at the districts level. Boards of Governors (BOG) were also established at the secondary education level for efficient and effective management at technical institutions and senior high schools. It is also significant to note that the Government White Paper on Education (2007) does not give any significant attention to the issue of student participation in decision making at the schools level within Ghana's decentralization process. However, issues regarding curriculum, teaching/ learning and assessment, the academic calendar and schools fees paid by students in senior high schools are centralised and determined by bodies set up by the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service. Heads of schools may present their views through the representing association or directly to the Curriculum, Research Development Division (CRDD) for consideration whenever the curriculum is reviewed.

2. 2. The Ghana Education Service

The Ghana Education Service (GES) is responsible for the provision of pre-tertiary education, shown in Figure 2.1. The pre-tertiary level comprises two years of kindergarten, six years primary and three years junior high schooling. Secondary level is a three-year senior high schooling (grammar type) and technical education respectively, (Government of Ghana, 2007). Basic schools in Ghana are mostly day schools, though

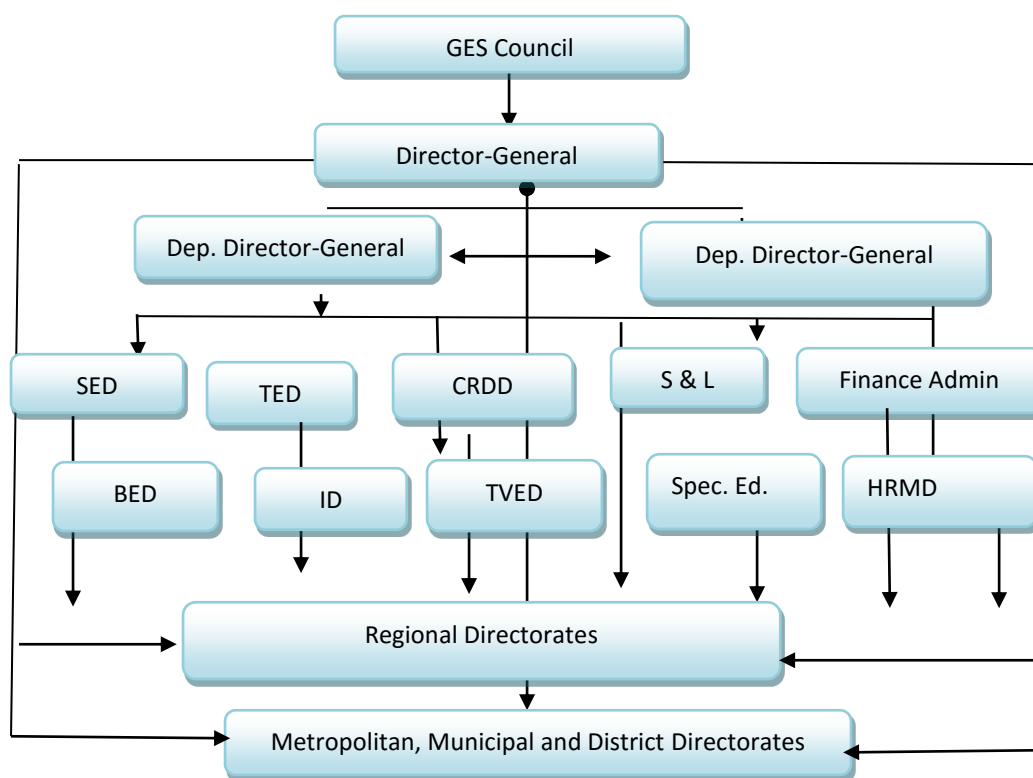
there are some which still offer boarding facilities. At the time of writing the thesis there are 556 Senior high schools out of which 448 offer either boarding facilities only or both boarding and day facilities. The case study schools thus fit in this majority group.

Figure 2.1. Structure of Education in Ghana.



Concept adapted from Government White Paper on Education (GOG 2007)

The GES has a hierarchical governance structure as shown in figure 2. 2. This indicates the channels of communication and decision making (GES, 1974). The GES Council, which is the overall governing body, has a mandate to provide support and advise the Director-General on educational issues and to monitor GES activities. The GES Council also advises the President on the appointment of senior management officers to key administrative positions (GNAT, n. d.).

Figure 2. 2. Ghana Education Service Structure¹

Adapted from GES (2000) *A Handbook for Directors of Education*

The Director-General can communicate directly to any of the levels. However, lower levels must route communication through their immediate supervisors or heads, who then pass on information to the next higher authority. For example, a Metropolitan Director reporting to the Director-General on issues pertaining to senior high school education in the directorate must route correspondence through the Regional Director and Director, Secondary Education Division to the Director-General. What this implies is that correspondence from staff at the district level, for example, cannot be sent directly to the headquarters unless it passes through the set structures.

At the basic school level daily decisions are taken by the head teacher, who is assisted by an assistant head. Prefects are appointed by the school authority based on students' academic performance, participation in co-curricular activities, and other exemplary

Notes-SED-Secondary Education Division; TED Teacher Education Division; CRDD-Curriculum Research and Development Division; S&L- Supply and Logistics Division; BED- Basic Education Division; ID Inspectorate Division; TEVD- Technical, Vocational Education Division; Spec. Ed.-Special Education Division; HRMD- Human Resource Management and Development Division

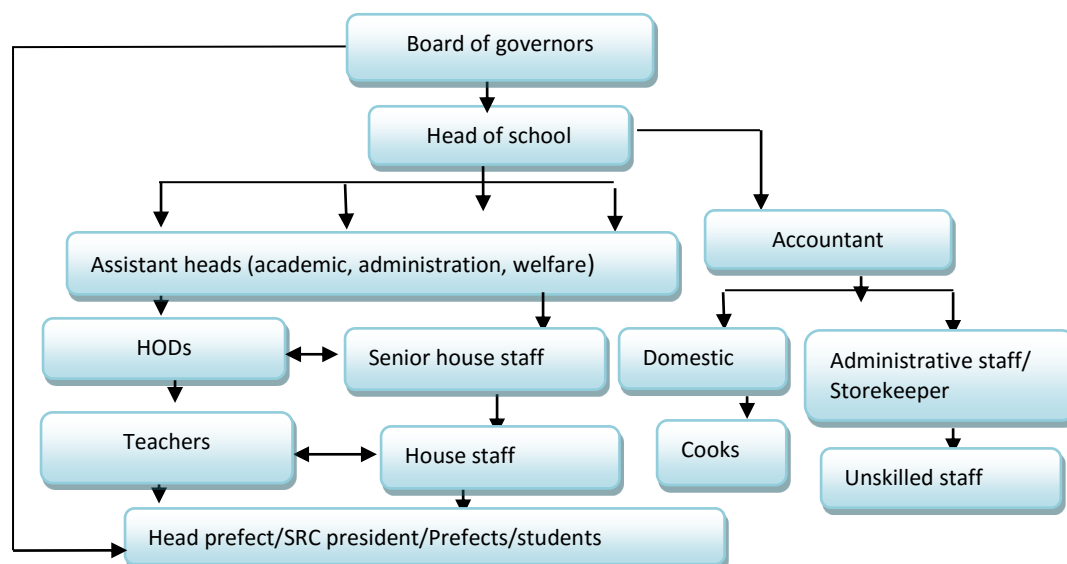
behaviour. In rare cases, pupils may be asked to suggest classmates who they think have the potential of being the head prefect – known in most cases as school/senior prefect. Basic school prefects rarely participate in any form of decision making. Their responsibility includes ensuring that classrooms are kept tidy and pupils are kept in check against any misbehaviour. The administrative structure of the senior high school – the focus of the present study – is similar to that of the basic schools; however, at the former, in addition to school prefects, the Student Representative Council (SRC) has been established to function as a liaison between the student body and the school authorities. From the discussion it is noted that despite decentralising education to include other stakeholders, the education system at the pre-tertiary level is highly bureaucratic with clearly defined lines of communication as shown in figure 2.2 above.

2. 3. Administrative Structure of the Senior High School

The organizational structure of the senior high school shown in Figure 2.3 is a replica of that of the GES structure. It provides a visual representation of the lines of authority, power boundaries, and modes of communication in a typical boarding senior high school. At the top of the hierarchy is the school's board of governors (as compared to the District Education Oversight Committee), and at the bottom is the student body. Each administrative decision is therefore carried out within the confines of this structure.

The school Board of Governors is to support and advise the head of school on key governance issues. The daily administrative decision making however rests with the school head. Nevertheless, important decisions such as the withdrawal of a student from the boarding school must be with the approval of the School Board. Expelling or suspending a student from school has to be with approval from the Director-General. This scenario thus provides an idea about the bureaucracy within the school system. As shown in Figure 2.3, decision making is a top-down function that is implemented through various channels of communication. Similarly, communication to the top – be it initiated by staff or students – also has to go through the various conduits before reaching its intended recipient.

Figure 2. 3. Structure of a boarding Senior High School



Adapted from Sekyere (2010), Teachers' Guide to topical issues for Promotion and Selection Interviews

The organizational structure of the senior high school, as depicted in figure 2. 3. above is clearly defined such that only those in charge of each department have the mandate to make decisions at that level but with approval from the head of school. The implication is that decision making is the sole responsibility of the school head who then will also report to her/his super-ordinates. The structure therefore affords little room for students' participation due to their position on the structure. Indeed, any issue or grievance originating from the student body must pass through these bureaucratic channels before it reaches the head of school. Nevertheless, to facilitate effective school management, various committees on which students have representation are established to work and feed into the administrative decision-making process, (GES, 2010; Sekyere, 2010). The key point is that it is only the school head that can create opportunity for a student–staff partnership in decision making, irrespective of the fact that students are members of various committees in the schools.

2. 4. The SRC in the Senior High School

The exact period of inception of the SRC in second-cycle schools in Ghana is not very clear, but drawing from my student years and professional experience, it appears to have been a feature of secondary education for decades. The SRC was established to provide

a channel for students to be involved in decision-making processes on issues that affect them, and is guided by a constitution fashioned along that of public tertiary institutions (SRC n. d). The SRC in the senior high school consists of class monitors and their assistants and the prefectural body, usually from the final year class. It is from among this group that the SRC executives are elected. It is important to note that the SRC executives are usually also final year students and mostly from the prefectural body. Furthermore, from my experiences the prefects, are expected to be of good upbringing, morally upright, have demonstrable leadership qualities and prowess in sporting activities, and be role models in various ways in the school. Generally, the SRC has representation on various committees dedicated to matters pertaining to discipline, feeding, sports, entertainment and health (GES, 2010). I observed during my years of teaching that the SRCs supported the schools in different ways including the provision of garden seats, erecting of notice boards and organisation of fund raising activities to support the schools in organising special functions.

Visits I have made to schools and reports received as National Coordinator of Co-Curricula programmes in senior high schools indicated that there has been a gradual shift from the appointment of student prefects and the SRC executives by the school authorities to the democratic election of prefects and other representatives to the positions. This development could be attributed to the strengthening of democracy at the national level, a policy that has been implemented in various public sectors including second-cycle education (Pryor and Ampiah 2005). Nevertheless, according to Pryor and Ampiah (2005), Ghanaian youngsters are brought up in an atmosphere of unquestioning obedience to adult authority. Twum-Danso (2010) also notes that parenting practices are structured along authoritarian lines. Given the context of these more authoritarian environments both in the community and the school, the extent to which students are involved in participatory decision making in school is unclear.

2. 5. Locating Student Participation in the National Governance Framework

The Government of Ghana ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1990, which was three months after its adoption and before the passage of the 1992 Constitution (Twum-Danso 2008). This was followed by the

passing of the Children's Act (Government of Ghana 1998). The Act pooled all laws relating to children's well-being and other issues into a single piece of legislation (Twum-Danso 2008). In 2010, The National Youth Policy of Ghana, (Government of Ghana 2010), which sought to institutionalize youth participation in decision making at all levels, was drawn up. Amongst other aims, the policy sought to ensure the nurturing of a democratic ethos in Ghanaian youth, noting:

The views of the youth and their participation in national development must be sought. The Government and other stakeholders must consciously and consistently involve young people in decision making (Government of Ghana, 2010 p. 6).

It states further that:

Government will inculcate in the youth democratic values through education of the youth in the principles and practices of good governance and the promotion of their active participation in decision making at all levels (Government of Ghana, 2010 p. 16).

From these two excerpts it is implied that the youth/students are expected to participate in decision making related to school governance and decision making. It may also be assumed that with this policy, the issue of youth participation begins to receive attention from government and policy makers. However, it appears that agencies that should translate the policy to implementation have not yet engaged with the policy as concrete structures are yet to be established for the participation of students and youth in decision-making platforms. Without a definite policy heads of schools will not consider it mandatory but will engage with students on decision-making forums based on their perceptions administrative objectives.

Directives stating that students should have representation on committees are not very clear on how and when students should participate or how their input could be integrated into the general framework of the school's organisational structure in relation to decision-making processes. Nevertheless, students serve on school committees. In spite of their membership on committees students in some schools have still found reason to embark on demonstrations citing non-involvement and dissatisfaction. For example, in 2006, two senior high schools were temporarily closed down following student unrest.

The students' view was that school authorities took certain decisions without involving student representatives, which was deemed unacceptable, (Daily Graphic, February 17, 2006). Furthermore, in May 2010, students of two senior high schools went on protest and destroyed school and staff property. Reports indicated that in one of the schools, students complained of not being informed by the authority before conducting an inspection in the dormitories to confiscate unapproved items brought into school by the students. The students were of the view that the school authority should have at least informed their student leadership before executing the exercise. In the second instance the students' protest was also attributed to the school authorities imposing decisions on them. The newspaper report noted that the students accused the head of being too authoritarian and unilaterally taking decisions without consulting other stakeholders, an action that the students considered unacceptable (Daily Graphic, April 14, 2010). In 2013, a senior high school was closed down due to students' riots, students accusing the head of taking unilateral decisions without involving their leadership (Daily Graphic, November 26, 2013). While the two incidents in May 2010 and that of 2013 were not in any way related, one key issue stands out – the issue of staff imposing power over students. This assertion is not to indict the staff or students of any wrong-doing but to question how the student/teacher collaboration in school decision making, which seeks to include students' views in decision making, was being practised in these - and other-schools.

In my role as the National Coordinator of co-curricular at senior high schools, I observed during school visits and inspections that there were major disparities in the scope and level of student participation in decision making on issues that affected them. The reason for this inconsistency is unclear, but could perhaps be attributed to school authorities' own interpretation and adoption of what student participation should be. For example, in two documents, Commonwealth Secretariat, 1993 and GES 2010, it has been indicated that students, through their SRCs should serve on school committees. However, other than the one sentence statement, there is no detail on how students should work on the committee, which could be the reason for the inconsistencies among the schools. It is in the light of the above observation that I conducted the present study of forums available for student participation in school decision making and sought clarification of the actual level of involvement.

2. 6. Bureaucracy, Culture and Children's Participation in Ghana

It is further observed that within the social and cultural practices in Ghana, “consulting children is not a right that children should have or an obligation that adults must meet, (Twum-Danso, 2010, p. 134). Porter et al. (2012, p. 100) also state that within the wider Ghanaian society children are “passive victims of social change”. They state further that:

Children tend to occupy the bottom rung of household and community hierarchies. . . A child's place is to be respectful and obedient. To be seen and not to be heard. (Porter et al., 2012, p. 100)

This hierarchical structure in the traditional set up is similar to the formal structure in the school where students are at the bottom of the school administrative structure. The observation of Porter et al. (2012) in the statement above thus reinforces the perception that students' participation in decision making is unusual with the Ghanaian culture and therefore a challenging venture. Porter et al (ibid) further contend that where initiatives are introduced to allow for children and youth participation, they were often paternalistic and welfarist in approach. In her study on how childhood is constructed in Ghana Twum-Danso (2010), notes that children, who are assertive and express their views, are seen as disrespectful and social deviants. On the other hand children, who are non-assertive and well-behaved in the company of parents and adults and regarded as respectful. Against this background one wonders how possible it will be for society in general and school authorities in particular to ensure that young people have an opportunity to participate in decision-making processes in their schools.

2. 7. Study Schools in Context

Four senior high schools located in the Greater Accra region were selected for the study. These schools were chosen from a number of similar institutions identified as having vibrant SRCs. Given that they had been labeled as active in organizing fund raising activities in support of their schools, I was of the view that the schools would be suitable sites for the study. All the four schools were boarding institutions, each with their unique tradition, culture and ethos. The individuality of schools is noted by Dunne et al (2007) in their study of basic schools in Ghana too. As with any senior high school

offering boarding facilities, the enrolment of students in boarding outnumber those who are day students. Students in boarding are allocated houses that are overseen by house staff. The house system in boarding schools in Ghana is a traditional structure and serves as a most fundamental area for the development of participatory capacity of most students. This is because student leadership, group dynamism and social interactions are fostered at the house and dormitory level. The house serves as the basis of training students in the non-academic aspects of school. This includes managing their day-to-day upkeep, learning to live and cooperate with others from diverse backgrounds, loyalty and commitment to one's house, and dormitory membership and roles. It is at the house that housemistresses and masters mostly provide pastoral care to students, since in the absence of parents, students are likely to depend on the school to look after their basic physical, social and emotional needs (Osei- Bonsu, 2012). The role of the senior housemaster/senior housemistress in helping students develop acceptable moral behaviour and qualities is therefore crucial and cannot be overestimated. This makes them quite powerful in the school because they are the individuals who deal mostly with student welfare. Being boarding schools also imply that there are more teacher/student interactions in these schools than there are in schools that do not offer boarding facilities. Similarly, the dining hall master also supervises and monitors preparation and service of meals to student. The dining hall teacher's responsibility also includes ensuring that the quality and quantity of food served the students is high and adequate, and that meals are served on time. The dining hall master/mistress reports to the head of school on any incidents that might occur and the interventions made to forestall any conflicts. The details of each school context are presented below.

Plomdo Senior High School

Plomdo Senior High school is a co-educational boarding institution. Students came from different socio-economic backgrounds but were mostly of middle working class parentage. The head of the school is assisted by an Assistant Head in charge of Academic affairs and an Assistant Head in charge of Administration. At the student level, there are male and female prefects for all categories of offices held. Both male and female prefects share equal responsibility over their jurisdiction. Each category of prefects is expected to collaborate and work as a team. At the time of study the Student

Council was chaired by the head boy, who had been elected by popular votes in the general assembly. Both past and present SRCs in Plomdo School have supported the school through a number of fund raising activities. The SRC is among the schools in the Region that has hosted a number of SRC congresses.

Mawudor Senior High School

Mawudor Senior High School is a co-educational boarding school. Students of Mawudor School come from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds mostly middle class civil and public servants. There are three assistant heads, Assistant Head, Academic, Assistant Head, Administration, and Assistant Head Welfare respectively. In comparison Mawudor School had a larger student enrolment than Plomdo School and this accounts for the three assistant heads. At the students' level, Mawudor School runs a prefect system in which student leaders have oversight responsibility for all student out-of-class activities. However, most student leaders have the boy as the one in authority and assisted by the girl. The head prefect – also being the SRC president – was a boy who was assisted by a girl. The SRC in Mawudor School has also supported the school by voluntarily providing some facilities to the school.

Mantsewe Senior High School

Mantsewe Senior High School is located in an outlying district of Accra, and is also a co-educational boarding institution. At the time of the study the school had two assistant heads, one for academic and the other for administration. Similar to Plomdo and Mawudor schools, Mantsewe School also adopted the prefectural system of student leadership. These student leaders likewise oversee and supervise activities of students at various levels. The head prefect was the SRC president and is a boy and the vice president was a girl. All the executive members of the SRC are final year students. The SRC in Mantsewe School also provided some facilities to the school through voluntary fund raising activities.

Ayeape Senior High School

Ayeape Senior Secondary School is situated in a busy outlying suburb of Accra. The school is also a co-educational boarding institution. There were two assistant heads responsible for academic affairs and welfare respectively. These assistant heads assist the head in most decision making forums. At the student level there is a boy and a girl head prefect respectively. The two prefects exercise equal authority and responsibility similar to what pertains in Plomdo School. The SRC president who was the head prefect was elected by the General Assembly. However the SRC runs a parliamentary system in which the SRC executive is one side and non-executive members speak on the other divide. Ayeape School SRC also hosted a number of SRC activities at both the regional and national levels. It had also embarked on some minor projects to support the school.

2. 8. Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter focussed on the administrative structure of pre-tertiary education in Ghana focussing on the bureaucratic systems in senior high schools. It highlighted some basic differences between the senior high schools and basic schools. One basic difference is that basic schools are governed by District Education Oversight Committees (DEOC) while senior high schools are governed by schools Board of Governors (BOG). However the administrative structure of both basic and senior high schools are fashioned along that of GES management structures. Child-upbringing practices within the socio-cultural milieu of Ghana and its influence in students' participation in school decision making are also discussed. The chapter also noted that though the contexts of the four study schools, though typical of any other public senior high school in Ghana vary, especially in student level governance with regards to position and status. In the next chapter I present a review of literature on student participation in school decision making focussing in particular on students' level of participation, the benefits of participation and factors that hinder students' participation in decision making.

THREE - REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the literature on student participation from various ranges of perspectives and contexts. It commences with definitions of young people's participation in school decision-making. This is followed by a discussion on forums and levels of students' participation in decision making. The positive effects of children's participation and the challenges are also discussed. The discussion is presented under the following headings-

- Children's participation defined
- Forms and Levels of participation
- Benefits of student participation in school decision making
- Bureaucracy and Power Relations as Factors that constrain student participation decision making

The conceptual approach, which is based on Hart's (1992) *Ladder of Participation* and Backman and Trafford's (2006) concept Democratic Schools, is discussed at the end of the chapter.

3. 2. Review Procedure

The literature review was developed in two phases. I was quite familiar with the subject having done some work on Critical Analytical Studies (CAS) the Phase Two year at the University of Sussex. In preparation for this final study I did a first review to update my knowledge in the subject and to gain a general idea about trends and methods used by other researchers in similar studies, their references and current articles. I continued to update the literature review during the field work and data analysis. The purpose of the second review was to locate and situate issues emerging from my data in the literature as recommended by Punch, (2005) and Merriam, (2009). I conducted a full text search of journals from publishers on the web, including both current and archived journals. I

also visited bibliographic databases in addition to full texts of journal publishers' web pages. I also conducted searches of reference lists of key authors of books, journal articles, papers and references on key specialist websites and search engines such as SCOPUS, EPPI Centre, CREATE, ERIC and Google Scholar. Having identified suitable articles I downloaded them for review. In deciding on suitable articles, I considered also the context of the articles, the themes around which the articles were written and those that dealt with a mix of policy and academia. Though I did not limit myself within specific time frame I was mindful to select articles that were written between 1995 to date. This was to enable me note trends and new information on the subject.

3. 3. Children's and Youth Participation Defined

Participation has different definitions in terms of purpose, form and implication, (Suzuki, 2002). This implies that the word is subject to different interpretations and therefore quite varied. Lansdown (2010) argues that the meaning of participation is not very clear but the concept is widely used to describe forms of social engagement, participation in games, cultural activities and in contributing to economic security of the family. Treseder (1997) cited in Cleaver et al. (2007:5) states that 'participation is a process where someone influences decisions about their lives and this leads to change'. Cleaver et al (2007) further stress that Treseder's definition does not only emphasise the significance of the process, but also stresses that participation must not be tokenistic. It should be an activity that could be measured at the end of the process to determine its impact on the actors.

In support of the above definition, Fletcher (2005) asserts that students' participation is the process of engaging students as partners in every facet of school life for the purpose of strengthening their commitment to education, community and democracy. Children's participation is also defined as young people partaking in and influencing processes, decisions and activities (UNICEF 2001). Molene and Hartung (2010) note that children's participation is a process by which children and youth engage in with other people around issues that concern their individual and collective life conditions. Children's and youth participation thus refers to their being involved directly or

indirectly in informing, working, and practising of services that affect them. In the context of the UN Convention of the rights of the child, Lansdown (2010) states that participation implies input from children and young adults giving voice to them and also giving “serious consideration” to those views when making decisions (Lansdown 2010, p. 12). In other words, participation is a human rights issue therefore opportunities for participation of stakeholders especially children and youth is binding on all groups that deal with issues regarding children and young adults. Consequently, there is a growing body of knowledge and advocacy for children and youth participation in various spheres of their social and academic lives. This also implies that that youth participation is a right which must be ensured, (Fielding, 2001; Patmor and McIntyre, 1999).

A World Bank report states that secondary schools should assume a new function of preparing the youth for life and citizenship and for collective as well as individual responsibility (World Bank, 2001). The report notes that educational programmes, contents and structures must be redefined to meet the needs of modern society. This assertion by the World Bank requires that schools begin to review their structures and processes in order to create space for all stakeholders, including students to engage with school processes and make meaning of the democratic practice. Thus in the context of this study, students’ participation in school decision making connotes the process of providing opportunities for students to participate in decisions that relate to their welfare. Participation in decision-making is also defined to include all aspects of the way a school is run, which include the schools’ decision-making structures, rules and procedures, behaviour of personnel, and how the personnel relate to one another in the school (Huddleston 2007). In other words, students’ participation must not only be viewed as a process where students are perceived as tools to achieving various educational goals and ends, (Mayall 2004) instead, it should be a social construction with students being viewed as competent social actors in contributing to the decisions that affect themselves and the larger society (James and Prout, 1997; Mayall, 2004). Thus, a participatory attitude in an organizational or school culture is one that finds ways to include students in many decision-making opportunities so they can influence strategy, delivery, and evaluation of the school. It also requires that schools identify specific areas for including students in decision making so that children have a genuine role in the learning community, (Comea 2005). Sithole (1995) also contends that a key principle of democratic school governance is that decisions are based on consultation,

collaboration, cooperation, partnership, mutual trust, and the participation of all stakeholders in the school community. This is an inclusive conception of democracy; one that considers stakeholders as permanently engaged in dialogue, presupposes a system that encourages the formation of personal opinions, and provides channels for participation (Sithole, 1995). This implies that policy makers, youth organisations, education providers and school authorities should make efforts to engage with students in decision-making forums for their democratic participatory rights. It is clear from these definitions that youth and students' participation is defined depending on different perspectives and objectives.

3. 4. Forms and Levels of student participation

Student participation can be in different forms and for different purposes (Miller, 2003). According to Miller (2003) student participation serves as a form of empowerment. It can also be used to placate student's voice and can improve the level of acceptance of decisions made by school authority; and allow students to challenge the status quo. Miller notes that student participation provides mechanisms of checks and balances of school administrators and staff. Lansdown, (2010) observes that participation varies according to one's evolving capacities, but all children and young people can participate in different forms from the earliest age. Lansdown (2010) notes that competence is not marginally endowed at a certain age but rather learned through experience. Consequently students need to be engaged in decision-making processes and forums so that they might gain experience through practice.

Students' participation occurs in various forms. For example, students could be engaged in school and community development projects as exemplified in Chile (Prieto, 2001) or as partners to adults/teachers when conducting research on school activities as exemplified in England (Bragg, 2007; Robinson and Taylor, 2013). Some of these projects have yielded positive results and are affecting policy and community life (Robinson and Taylor, 2013) while some are constrained by various factors (World Youth Report 2003). It has also been observed that some of these projects are adult led and do not readily empower students to take control of their actions (Lansdown 2010). Lansdown (2010) is concerned that many of the adult-child interactions that occur in the

school maintain the focus of power and control with the adults. Furthermore, organisations which are involved in and support children's rights issues often work for children instead of working with them. Comeau (2005) also notes that:

One of the difficulties that organisations face in developing children's participation is the attitude and culture that views children as too young or vulnerable to be capable of being included in decisions making (Comeau, 2005, p.2).

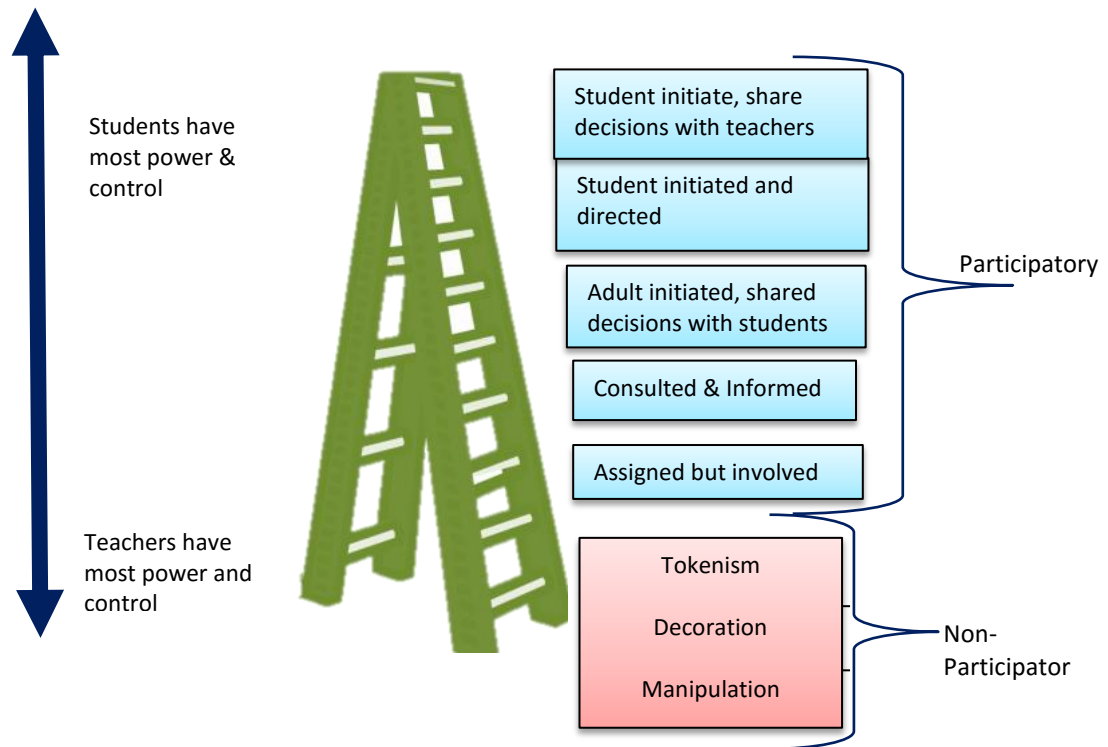
Thus in some contexts students may be unable to participate fully in decision-making forums. Comeau (2005) therefore cautions that working for children rather than with them makes them vulnerable, powerless and defeated as they do not have control or voice in what is being done for them. This thus discourages the child's ability to engage critically with issues when required to do so (Comeau, 2005).

In an analysis of children's participation in communities and institutions in the UK, Morrow (2000), distinguishes between latent participation (having a share in or taking part) and active participation (the involvement of children at all levels of decision making). She concludes that active participation (the involvement of children at all levels of decision-making and which the school council is deemed to promote) is non-existent in many schools. This is because adults across the professional spectrum have been responsible for decisions, policies and actions that have been inappropriate and sometimes actively harmful to young people, even when the underlying intention has been to promote children's welfare. Morrow's assertion resonates with Comeau's (2005) remarks noted earlier that adult attitudes reinforce the perception that children are not matured enough to contribute anything worthy in decision making forums.

To identify when student's participation is initiated by students and is linked to meaningful change Hart (1992), identified various levels and forms of participation, (shown in figure 3. 1) to indicate the levels of interaction between adults and students. This model, referred to as *Hart's Ladder of Participation*, portrays interactions that occur between adults and children and their effect on the distribution of power and control. Hart (1992) identifies two main domains known as participatory and non-participatory. Within these two domains are various rungs which represent levels at which students participate in decision-making activities in school. The lower domain which is non-participatory has three rungs of interaction which include tokenism,

decoration and manipulation which is the lowest of the three. Activities at these levels are initiated and led by adults. The implication of participation at these three lower levels is that students are sometimes consulted but are not given any feedback on outcomes. In other instances students may understand the issues but may have no input in how it is planned. Students may also be directed to act without understanding the purpose of the activity. Thus children go through the motions and are seen as participating, but this is non-effective as it does not influence any decision. While the essence of participation is to empower students in taking part in deciding on issues that affect them they rather appear to be controlled. Instances of such control could be the appointing of students on committees without them influencing any decisions made at the meetings except to agree or accept decisions already made. Whatever systems are established rather become restrictive and further entrench the status quo. The implication of children's activities in these levels is that they help adults (school authorities) to attain administrative goals. The second domain described as participatory has four levels portraying different forms of student participation. Students are informed and assigned responsibilities which they perform. Though some level of participation occurs at this level participation is adult initiated. The highest level of the participation in this domain signifies child/student initiated decisions which are shared with adults/teachers. The levels enable negotiation and power sharing between the school authority and students. Decisions are followed through and students influence decisions and bring about change and progress. This participatory level empowers students to initiate actions and share with their teachers.

Figure 3.1: Hart's Ladder of Participation



Adapted from Hart (1992), *Children's Participation; From Tokenism to Citizenship*

It must however be noted that, in using this ladder, one must not subscribe to it as a sequence that must be followed hierarchically, but as a set of interactions, with each implying its own specific legitimate purpose (Comeau, 2005). It is important to stress however that education systems are usually non-democratic. Thus advocates and agencies working for children and youth empowerment suggest that school authorities identify and provide areas that students can legitimately participate in decision making (Mayall, 2004; Comeau, 2005; Backman and Trafford, 2006). Hart's (1992) Ladder of participation is designed to enable stakeholders to measure interactions and activities that involve students throughout schools. The higher the rung on the ladder, the more likely it is that interactions could initiate change and be meaningful to students (Fletcher (2005). It also signifies the extent of democracy practised in the school.

Within the context of student participation in decision-making, identifying aspects that relate to students in order to provide opportunities for genuine participation is paramount to the democratic process (Huddleston, 2007). This implies that educators should work hard to communicate with students and provide any information necessary to make them succeed. Fundamentally, it is argued that students should not be written off with the perception that they do not know or are not mature to understand as noted

in my mini study on related topic (Glover, 2009). On the issue of maturity, Lansdown, (2010) asserts that children are citizens now and the future and thus should be encouraged to engage in decision-making arenas now. Huddleston also notes that “students are citizens with rights and responsibilities in their own right not simply citizens-in-waiting, and that schools have a duty to provide students with opportunities to exercise these”, (Huddleston 2007, p8). Korczak, (1997) also points out that instead of saying that students do not understand, school authorities should make the efforts to enable them [students] know and understand. Thus instead of adults allowing contrived student participation e.g. by inviting one student to a meeting just for representation, school authorities could encourage and continuously acknowledge diverse students’ participation by encouraging them to represent their own ideas, opinions, knowledge, and experiences (Hart, 1992). Through these opportunities, students gain knowledge of the political process, ability to analyze political issues and a desire for active participation in the democratic process (Fletcher, 2005).

In discussing the issue of student voice and participation in decision making it is important to note that students are not one homogeneous group and that they therefore do not have similar perspectives and aspirations (Fielding, 2001). The differentiation in student voice is due to a range of factors, including social class, gender and ethnicity. For example, Fielding, (2001) suggests that middle class students control social interactions in school. Power relations thus emerge as a result of the differentiation as those who are articulate display confidence and dominate conversations to the disadvantage of the vulnerable, (Robinson and Taylor, 2013). Robinson and Taylor (2013, p. 41) describe this as “domination, exploitation and subordination” with power relations impacting on those who are listened to. . . . Fielding (2004) further stresses that when student voice is homogenized, there is a significant danger of sidelining the vulnerable and the world of the advantaged becomes dominant. The awareness of differences in student aspirations and motivations thus questions whether the voice of those who speak truly reflects the perceptions of all those on whose behalf they speak.

3. 5. Some Benefits of Student Participation in School Decision-Making

Research has shown that student participation in decision making has yielded immense benefits to the individual student, the school and eventually, the community, (Patmor and McIntyre, 1999; Wallin, 2003; Whitty and Wisby, 2007). Participation leads to full human development, which includes cognitive, social, political and moral development (Patmor and McIntyre, 1999). Students who usually have opportunity to participate in decision-making forums acquire skills for effective engagement with life issues, become responsible and active adults with positive emotional well-being (Wallin 2003). In addition democratic participation offers students the opportunity to develop self-confidence thereby improving their conditions of learning and social life (Rudduck and Fielding 2006, Mncube, 2008). It is further noted that young people discover themselves, affirm their personal perspectives and gain attitudes of cooperation and negotiation (Rajani, 2001; Ruddock and Fielding (2006). Describing students who have had experience in democratic practices, Prieto (2001) notes that they are autonomous and firm in their resolves and motivated to make critical reflections on issues. In their interaction with others they feel confident and not easily swayed and as a result their ideas are respected (Prieto, 2001). As students engage in democratic practices their perspectives of issues begin to modify and they see issues from the others' view point. Their interaction through dialogue and discussions makes them gain ideas from beyond their own social world (Cleaver, Supple & Kerr, 2007). They begin to see things from different perspectives and become more aware of their empowerment and work toward taking ownership and responsibility for their decision and actions (Wallin, 2003). Marques, (1999) also indicates that students who become involved in school decision-making processes become aware of political issues which provide them with opportunities to gain leadership skills. They learn also to appreciate the value of dialogue, lobbying and consensus building in democracy (Chapman, Toolsie-Worsnup and Dyck, 2006). However, the extent to which the students or their representatives are engaged in democratic issues is informed by perceptions school authorities have on the relevance of student participation (World Youth Report, 3003). Correspondingly, students' own understanding and perception of their roles in decision-making affect their participation in decision-making forums (Lewars, 2010). Students tend to manifest leadership control and power needs in negative ways if they are not given the relevant opportunities to engage in decision-making processes (Marques, 1999). Such

manifestation could eventually lead to suspicion and rancour among students towards their teachers. This could result in riots and destruction of school property and consequently a disruption of academic work (Marques, 1999).

Many school conflicts occur sometimes because students feel deprived of opportunities to express themselves. Some of the riots noted earlier in the schools in Ghana could be attributed to the tendency of school heads being economical on information flow and the probable disregard for students' concerns. When students are given the chance to present their views and if school administrators are able to manage these views effectively student leadership, could be an effective tool to achieving great success in school governance. Democratic governance therefore would offer the "most practical, effective means of improving the school's moral culture, the operative moral norms that shape the behaviour of school members" (Wallin 2003; 57). Huddleston, (2007) is of the view that there is better student-teacher relation, less exclusion and more positive attitudes towards school.

Through the practice of student participation the school develops a cohesive school culture built on consensus and dialogue (Chapman, Toolsie-Worsnup and Dyck, 2006). It also implies that the student as a stakeholder has been recognized as a unique individual with "knowledge, experience and perspective" (Chapman, et al 2006, p. 1), which are brought to bear on school decision making. Students then begin to understand and appreciate the challenges thereof. This positive attitude developed through democratic school governance could lead to more transparency and accountability in the school (Sigudhla 2005).

3. 6. Bureaucracy and Power Relations as Factors that Constrain Students Participation

Various arguments have been raised in favour of students' participation in decision making as discussed above. Nevertheless, the literature also identifies certain factors that constrain students' participation in decision making and render it ineffective. The World Youth report (2003, p. 284) indicates that:

Many factors contribute to the failure or refusal of adults to recognize the value of a more democratic relationship with young people; presumptions of their incompetence and the insignificance of their experience, traditions of adult power over youth, the fear of losing status or control, and the belief that young people will lose respect for adults and refuse their protection can all play a part.

Bureaucracy and power relations constrain students' participation in diverse ways. The school is a bureaucratic institution, which has clearly defined lines of authority (Mullins, 2007). The bureaucratic nature of the school thus affects the levels at which students can interact with school authority. It has been observed that the position of the student at the lowest rung of the school's structure could pose a hindrance to their participation (Martin and Franklin, 2010; Young, 2000).

The observation is that student voice and participatory activities are gaining grounds in recent times, however Fielding (2001, p100) wonders whether what is happening "is the emergence of something genuinely new exciting and emancipatory that builds on rich traditions of democratic renewal and transformation" or whether student voice advocates are presiding over the "further entrenchment of existing assumptions and intentions using student or pupil voice as an additional mechanism of control" The point is that where it appears that student voice and participation are practised school structures and bureaucracy may constrain students from gaining full access to decision-making forums. Thus while it appears that students are getting opportunities to be part of decision-making processes, the situation on the ground appears different.

In addition to bureaucracy, the play of power has implications for student participation as it could delay or constrain students' actual engagement (Ray, 2010). In some instances, staff may hinder the implementation of a decision if they perceive that it will have adverse effect on them especially, if they are not well-informed on the substantive issues (Levin, 2000). The observation therefore is that bureaucracy at various levels of school decision making and its related power dynamics does constrain students' participation in school decision making. Backman and Trafford, (2006) affirm that the school is a bureaucratic institution and is governed by rules and regulations. The school head therefore has the responsibility to ensure that these bureaucratic structures work effectively for school governance and decision making. However, Backman and Trafford, (2006) are of the view that the school can still be a place for democratic

practices and that the head could lead the process by adopting various means to create opportunities to engage with all stakeholders in decision-making forums. They also argue strongly that existing school structures are reviewed by the head to create opportunities for participation at both formal and informal arenas. They contend that the school head adopts a positive personality, engage with students and teachers, build trust, delegate decision-making to teachers and students at various forums and interact frequently with these personalities. In view of this they provide a step-by-step process to democratic school governance, based on the European Council's three principles of Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC). They identify some key areas for consideration by the head of school, which include:

- governance, leadership management and accountability
- value centred education
- co-operation communication and involvement
- student discipline.

Backman and Trafford, (2006) assert that these key areas are mutually interrelated but stress that the issue of student discipline or indiscipline for that matter, is a sensitive one because of the erroneous view that democracy is incompatible to discipline. This, they argue, is a wrong perception. In fact, they contend that that the school cannot be entirely democratic, and that the head should identify areas that are democratically engaging and create the opportunities for student engagement. They insist that the journey to democracy begins with the head assessing her/his values and adopting strategies that will facilitate the process.

The kind of school environment and interactions Backman and Trafford (2006) prescribe require the provision of horizontal rather than vertical structures within aspects where students can engage in decision making without any hindrance. Adopting a horizontal structure could provide opportunities for all stakeholders - especially students - to participate in decision making forums in school. It is only then that student participation in decision-making processes in the school can be genuinely participatory and not tokenistic (Hart 1992).

3. 7. Conceptual Framework

The review has thrown light on people's views on students' participation in decision making, highlighting efforts made in some countries to include students in decision-making forums. While the debate points to the need for widening forums for realistic engagement of students in decision-making it also notes that bureaucracy does hinder student participation. Drawing from the literature review it was noted that cultural practices especially in the case of Ghana could influence students' participation in decision making (Twum-Danso, 2010; Porter et al., 2012). However, though the school is bureaucratic, it is possible to practice democracy in the school as posited by Backman and Trafford, (2006). In instance where opportunities are available for students' participation, the literature notes that students' level of engagement is participatory or non- participatory depending on where participation in decision making is located on the rungs determined by (Hart, 1992). Thus the more students' participation is identified on the top rungs of the ladder the more empowerment students have in participation opportunities. On the other hand the more students' participation is identified at the lower rungs of the ladder, the less empowerment students have in participatory rights. Given the In view of this, with the bureaucracy in the Ghanaian education system and the observation that students are at the lowest level of the organisational structure, democratic engagement of students may require the reforming and reinventing of the school structure, so that it provides opportunities for students to participate in school decision-making. On the basis of issues drawn from the literature and experiences drawn from senior high schools in Ghana, the conceptual framework adopted for this study draws on Backman and Trafford's (2006) Democratic Schools and Hart's (1992) Ladder of children's participation These two theories were used to explore students' level of participation in decision making in the forums studied in the four case study schools.

FOUR - METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the research design, and a discussion of the methodological foundations and methods adopted for data collection. It concludes with a description of how the data were analyzed. The chapter is divided into the following sections:

- Rationale for the Interpretivist approach
- The case study
- Ethical issues
- Research methods
- Data handling and analysis

As indicated in Chapter One, the study was conducted in four senior high boarding schools in the Greater Accra region selected for case studies. The study was located in the interpretive paradigm. One-on-one interview and focus group discussion were the methods used to gather data in the case study schools. Granting that the SRC has been in existence in senior high schools in Ghana for a long time it is important to ascertain the extent to which students through the SRC have had opportunity to participate in decision making forums in the schools. The following four research questions were thus developed to facilitate the research process:

1. What forums are available for student participation in school decision making?
2. What levels of student participation do these forums provide?
3. What are the constraints to student participation in these forums?
4. What policy and practice implications can be drawn from this?

These questions were developed my teaching experiences and also on the backdrop of reports received from some schools which indicated various levels of conflict between students and their school authorities. Such issues, in my opinion could be resolved given

the right democratic environment between student Councils and school authorities. These concerns thus informed the development of these research questions.

4. 2. Rationale for the Interpretivist Approach

Education and social research are guided by two main philosophical thoughts – quantitative and qualitative paradigms. These traditions respectively express different assumptions about the nature of reality and knowledge (Cohen et al., 2007; Creswell, 2007; Bryman, 2008; Blaikie, 2009). Indeed, one's assumptions of what reality is and how knowledge is obtained inform the design of and approach to any given study (Cohen et al., 2007; Merriam, 2009). These philosophical paradigms are known as positivism and interpretivism.

Positivists are of the view that social reality exists independently, and is “observable, stable and measurable” (Merriam, 2009: 8). They argue that social reality is not subject to any human influence or interpretation, and that knowledge of this reality can be obtained in an objective manner through prescribed scientific processes (Bryman, 2008; Blaikie, 2009): one only needs to look for it through specified procedures to discover it. Therefore, positivists test research hypotheses by establishing predictions and generalisations that lead to society's scientific laws (Usher, 1996). Consequently, quantitative methods are used to collect and analyse data with the purpose of finding relationships between variables. Budd et al. (2006) and Blaikie (2009) assert that the main research strategy of the positivist is the use of quantitative methods in the construction of knowledge.

The Interpretivist on the other hand contends that human beings comprise valuable subject matter for social research because they interpret situations in diverse ways and construct meaning as necessary (Neuman, 2006; Cohen, et al., 2007; Creswell, 2007; Bryman, 2008; Blaikie, 2009). My role as a social researcher was to seek meaning into the actions, utterances of the staffs and students in the selected schools in order to gain understanding (Bryman, 2008). Consequently I adopted the interpretivist approach. My decision to adopt an interpretive approach was reinforced by Cohen et al. (2007: 21) that, “The central endeavour in the context of [the] interpretive paradigm is to

understand the subjective world of human experience” – because the social world is a human construct rather than something tangible. It was such a world that the present study sought to examine. While not downplaying the relevance of positivism the phenomenon of youth and student participation in education decision making – as discussed in the literature review in Chapter Three – was perhaps best studied by means of qualitative research because of the questions that I wanted answered. Student participation in education decision making is a human activity that is operationalized within a specific social context. Therefore, to make meaning of how key actors lived in and perceived their world in the selected schools required a qualitative approach that allowed the use of different data collection modes. I also noted that most research work in related fields was conducted within the qualitative paradigm (Manu, 2005; Mncube, 2008; Phaswana, 2010).

Secondly, my research questions which mainly sought to explore forums available for students’ participation in decision making and the level of their participation were not quantifiable; therefore, adopting a positivist paradigm would not facilitate the answering of the questions. Furthermore, the conceptual approach of Hart (1992) ladder of participation adopted for the study and discussed in Chapter Three requires a methodology that will facilitate interpreting attitudes, actions and conversations of participants in order to determine the levels at which students in the case schools were engaged in decision-making processes. It was thus quite impossible to adopt any other methodology than the interpretivist. The feelings, attitudes and actions of participants that I sought to understand could only lend themselves to the interpretivist (Bell, 2010). The objective of understanding the dynamics of participation within a framework of the senior high school student voice underpinned my methodological position.

By opting for the Interpretivist paradigm, I align myself with a wide range of researchers such as Ussher (1996), Denzin and Lincoln (2000), Creswell (2009), Merriam (2009) who argue severally that interpretivism facilitates insight into the motives and intentions of human behaviour. They also contend that reality is a social construction, and gaining knowledge of such reality requires an understanding of the perspectives of the actors in their social world. Through this approach, participants were able to describe their experiences without any imposition from me, the researcher. I believed that my study fitted the interpretive paradigm well because, by its very

nature, it set out to describe, interpret and explain the manner in which participants in the schools made sense of their world. Additionally, the qualitative approach was well suited to my study because I was working within a relatively unexplored territory in Ghana. In this regard, my position aligns with Creswell's (2009, p26) assertion that:

One of the chief reasons for conducting a qualitative study is that the study is exploratory. This usually means that not much has been written about the topic or population being studied, and the researcher seeks to listen to participants and build an understanding based on what is heard (p. 26).

From the quote above, it is implied that there was not much empirical studies on issues pertaining to student participation in decision making, and especially in senior high schools in Ghana. A qualitative approach, employing different methods of data collection was of much use for the study as findings could inform decisions on policy and practice in student democratic participation in senior high schools in Ghana. The choice of the interpretive approach was informed by the fact that I had to personally visit the schools and engage with the participants to collect data. This required the formation of relationships with study participants which helped me in making sense of their views. Creswell, (2009, p.18) notes that:

Humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives... Thus, qualitative researchers seek to understand the context or setting of the participant through visiting the context and gathering information personally.

In view of this I visited schools and interacted with participants for them to present their perspectives on the subject under study. I was thus able to gain insight into how they viewed their world (Creswell, 2007). The information I gathered and my interpretation of it helped to improve my understanding of these forums and the opportunities they provided for meaningful student participation.

I am very much aware of criticisms against qualitative research- that it is subjective and lacks transparency because it relies too much on the researcher who uses unconventional methods to collect and analyse data (Bryman, 2009). It is argued also that the researcher may be biased in determining what is relevant to the analysis and, as a result, findings cannot be generalized or replicated in similar circumstances. The

critics may be right to the extent that the study is related to quantitative research. However, as stated in Chapter One, my motivation for conducting the present study stemmed from a recognition derived from my professional experience that the senior high school structure in Ghana maintained a superordinate–subordinate relationship in the decision-making processes rather than creating partnerships between teachers/administrative staff and students. In considering the issue of student participation in a superordinate–subordinate relationship in school, I realized that adopting a positivist methodology would lead to the neglect of important dynamics of social inquiry. I was aware that research outcomes could be shaped by my motivations and perceptions, and the decisions I made during the planning and research process. Therefore, to a large extent, my objectives and motives could influence the kind of data I collected, and also help to shape my positionality (Dunne et al., 2005). To eliminate such bias and make the inquiry robust, I employed two methods of data collection- the interview and focus group discussions- from different categories of participants from schools selected as case studies.

4. 3. The Case Study

Ragin (1992) suggests that there is a lack of clarity about what a case study actually is. However, Miles and Huberman (1994) posit that a case can be defined as a phenomenon that occurs in a bounded context. In other words, it should occur within a social context. Creswell (2009:13) also describes the case study as “a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores a program, event, activity, process or one or more individuals”. He further asserts that through this approach, the researcher explores a bounded system through detailed, in-depth data collection that involves several methods. Thomas (2011, p. 23) also says that

Case studies are analyses of persons, events . . . institutions . . . which are studied holistically by one or more methods. The case that is the subject of inquiry will be an object will be an instance of a class of phenomena that provides an analytical frame-an object-within which the study is conducted and which the case illuminates.

Similarly, Cohen et al. (2007) state that the case study usually involves research that is bounded by limits of time and space, and employs different modes of data collection. In opting for the case study I acknowledged that the school is a unit bounded by space and

time where the phenomenon of student participation in decision making in senior high schools in Ghana occurred regularly (Merriam, 2009). My decision to adopt the case study was also reinforced by Merriam (2007) and Creswell (2009) who stated that the case study is ideal for conducting a thorough investigation into a phenomenon in the natural environment, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon being researched and its context are not very clear. I had indicated earlier that although students participated in decision making in the four senior high schools, the forums available and levels of participation within the forums were not clear. For this research therefore, the case study was of student participation in decision making, with the four schools providing specific instances that brought out the nuances of interactions among students and staff.

A number of criticisms were leveled against the case study. I however focused on two main limitations and managed these so they did not affect the outcome of the study. Concerns were raised about the integrity of the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2007). Taking cognizance of this concern, I adopted two modes of collecting data- the interview and focus group discussion- in order to triangulate and compare information provided by the participants. I also ensured that I separated my personal opinions and focused on the substantives issues in analyzing the data. Following Merriam's (2007) advice, I set a boundary to the case and limited my study to issues of student participation in decision making in order to avoid digression. The implication is that issues about teaching and learning were not the subject of interest and thus were not discussed in the study. There are also concern that the case study lacks rigour and thus prone to bias (Merriam, 2007). However, Shields (2007) cited in Merriam (2007) argues that the case study includes paradoxes and acknowledges that there are no simple answers as subscribed to by quantitative methods. Flyvberg (2006) also argues that affairs of human beings cannot be universal. Each issue thus must be located and discussed within context. He further states that:

. . .the case study has its own rigor, different to be sure, but no less strict than the rigor of quantitative methods. The advantage of the case study is that it can 'close in' on real life situations and test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice (p. 19).

From what Flyvberg (2006) states the case study is also very rigorous but more importantly directly relates to real life situations within the natural setting

4. 4. Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues related to the protection of research participants and the confidentiality of information are of prime importance in research (Merriam, 2009). Creswell, (2009) states that research involves collecting data from people and about people, some of whom could be vulnerable and who must therefore be protected from any form of harm. Individuals are considered to be vulnerable if the outcome of a study has or could have an adverse effect on them (Creswell, 2009). Tisdale (2004) also describes children and students – as vulnerable because they are easily pressured and intimidated by adults to act in adult's interests.

The present study involved two categories of participants: school staff, who are in authority and students, who are affected by such power and authority, and therefore vulnerable. As students, their position in the school structure placed them in danger of manipulation or intimidation by those in authority. Additionally, by reason of such a position, they could be reserved in their interaction with me for fear of victimization. I was therefore particularly careful to protect the confidentiality of any information students – and, in fact, all other participants – divulged during discussion. I also ensured that no identifiable names were used in writing the thesis and that no statement was attributed to any particular participant. Additionally, the schools that participated in the study were assigned pseudonyms to protect them from identification.

As a research student, I needed to obtain approval from the Cluster-based Research Ethics Committee (C-REC) of the University of Sussex supported by a certificate of approval to commence field work,(as shown in Appendix I). This approval was granted after I had shown evidence of fulfilling various requirements of research ethics, including formal invitation to participants, an information sheet on the study, informed consent, and satisfactory responses to the issues of confidentiality and anonymity. I also sought approval from the Ghana Education Service (GES), a requirement for any person seeking any form of information in any of the country's public pre-tertiary institutions.

Before beginning the fieldwork, I wrote letters to the selected schools seeking their formal consent to conduct the study. This letter together with the approval from the GES was submitted to the heads of school. Since I had already held informal

discussions with them on my intention to study their schools, the letter concluded the formal process. I also enclosed an informed consent form and information sheet (Appendix II) for their perusal and affirmation to conduct the study. The information sheet included an invitation to participate in the study, the purpose of the research, its risks and benefits, the voluntary nature of participation, and measures taken to ensure the confidentiality of participants and anonymity of schools (Groenewald, 2004).

Access to participants was facilitated through heads of schools as the original recipients of the letter of approval, which they then passed on to their staff. However, I followed this up with a briefing session with each potential participant at which I verbally explained the nature of the study and clarified any issues they raised. During the briefing, I also provided them with an informed consent form. Some of the adult participants objected to writing their names on the consent form since it meant revealing their identity. We therefore agreed that they would indicate with an 'X' their consent to participate in the study. The student respondents all preferred not to fill in the consent form at all because they also wanted to safeguard and ensure their anonymity. I accepted this provision since I was well aware of the power relations at play (Babbie, 2005), and also the culturally situated notion of people's reluctance to sign a document for fear of it being traced back to them if anything unexpected happened. Although my visit was private and personal, the heads took it upon themselves to formally announce my visit to the schools. The impression created from this announcement was that an officer from headquarters was going to conduct an inspection. Even though such inspections were conducted regularly, an individual who wanted to do an in-depth study could have implications for the school's perceived administrative capacity and the view was that I planned to discuss my findings with GES management.

4. 4. 3. My Identity

As the national coordinator of co-curricular activities at the senior high schools level, and latterly, a member of a project team coordinating and organising various workshops in all senior high schools, I had already had several interactions with all school heads and most subject teachers. This identity combined with the fact that I worked at GES headquarters had some implications for my study. On one hand, it made it easier for me to access the schools and participants (heads of school, teachers, and students). It also

created an environment conducive to cordial interaction between the respondents and me.

My identity might also affect the extent to which participants opened up to me in the conversations. In order to reduce the influence of my identity as an officer from headquarters, I visited each of the selected schools on a number of occasions to interact with its community members – student representative council (SRC) executives in particular – so that I could establish some familiarity and rapport with them. For example, I attended some Saturday entertainment programmes and inter-house sports activities and engaged in conversations with some of the students. This was very important because I felt the familiarity would assure their confidence to open up to me in discussion when we met later. I think my experience as a former guidance coordinator helped me achieve some level of rapport with participants during discussions.

Having taught in senior high school and gained some experience of its administrative structure and the general boarding school culture, I had a fair knowledge of the system. This gave me the advantage of some foreknowledge of the various issues raised by participants and some understanding of their perspectives. On balance, I think my identity as an insider researcher enabled me to understand issues that emerged during interactions better. Finally, in discussing my findings in this thesis, I have been careful not to allow my identity to cloud the critical analysis of data gathered from the field, but rather focused on the relevant issues.

4. 5. Research Procedures

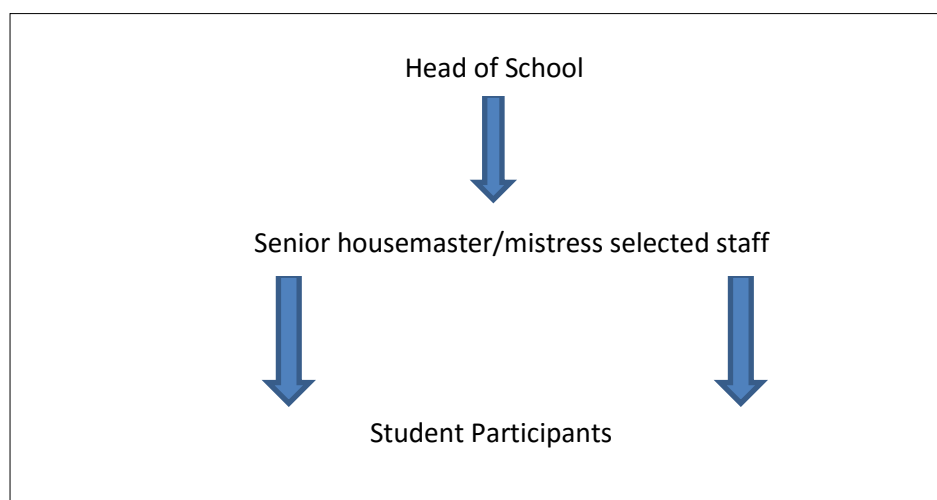
This section discusses how the field work was conducted in the selected case schools. The section however begins with a presentation of selecting the schools and participants. Eight schools were identified through discussion with the Director of Education in the Greater Accra region. The heads of these schools were contacted and had agreed to participate in the study. I selected four eventually based on proximity to work place and home, given that I had to shuttle between office to the schools on some

occasions and from the house to the schools on others. A key consideration was therefore accessibility to the schools and the time available to conduct the field work.

There were three categories of participants involved in the study. Respondents were purposefully selected on the basis of their school duties and the fact that they were willing and able to provide the data. The first category comprised the heads of the selected schools and teachers with additional responsibilities of over-seeing students' welfare. The second consisted of SRC executive members who also were in the prefectural body. The third comprised non-SRC executive members. The staff and SRC executives were purposively selected based on their functions and roles since they could provide information relevant to the study. I selected the non-SRC executive groups randomly by picking every fifth name in each final year class register. The names were then put in a bowl and I selected six boys and six girls for each group. However, as mentioned earlier, the initial notification that I wished to engage participants for a study was relayed by the heads at various forums when they received my written request to engage their schools. The senior housemistress or master then informed the students.

Figure 4.1 below, which reflects the hierarchical system of the senior high school, shows the information flow to student participants.

Figure 4. 1. Means of Accessing Student Participants



I used semi-structured, interviews and focus group discussions to gather data from the field. However, before commencing the actual fieldwork, I conducted a pilot study observing the same ethical considerations and purposive sampling procedures. The pilot was employed to enhance my data collection skills, and also to help identify ambiguous

and redundant questions (Cohen et al., 2007). The pilot was conducted in one senior high school (name of school withheld for purposes of anonymity) purposively selected for this purpose.

My experiences during the pilot gave me insight into the challenges that were likely to occur during the main study. I was therefore able to put in place contingencies that would help to mitigate such challenges. Moreover, conducting a pilot helped me refine and focus on the key issues for the fieldwork. The pilot also helped me gain confidence in conducting interviews, and, , generally boosted my self-assurance during the actual fieldwork. I also gained insight into what and how my identity could affect interaction. For example, during a focus group discussion, I realized that student participants were addressing a ‘schoolmarm’ rather than a fellow – albeit post-graduate – scholar who was seeking information from them. I tried to address this issue by socialising more with study school communities before commencing the fieldwork.

During the pilot, I chanced upon a scenario in the school and decided it would be a good starting point for my fieldwork given that it related to the issues of participation and decision making. A student was caught using a mobile phone, which is banned in senior high schools in Ghana. Usually, the disciplinary committee would meet to investigate the issue and make recommendations to the head before any action was taken. In this instance, however, the student was called by the head to their office, without consulting any other staff member, issued with a letter withdrawing him from the boarding house. This incident was relevant to my study and thus served as a starting point for a focus group discussion. Data from the pilot were analyzed and submitted to my supervisor for her comments on the findings that emerged from it.

4. 6. Data Collection in the Study Schools

Data was collected from all four case study schools, one after the other. My original plan was to interview 20 teaching staff participants. However, only fourteen people participated because three senior housemasters doubled as Disciplinary Committee chairmen in their respective schools, one just did not turn up for the meeting without

any reason and two others opted out. I conducted all interviews in English because it was the official language in Ghana.

4. 6. 2. Interviews with School Heads and Selected Staff

There were two phases of staff interviews; the first was to gain information and the second to clarify issues from the previous conversations. During the initial sessions and later, reading through the transcripts, I realized that there were some issues that needed further clarification and therefore conducted a follow-up on the issues. The interviews were held in the afternoons after classes were over. All except one were conducted on school premises. As agreed upon during the briefing I recorded all the interviews on a voice recorder. I conducted follow-up interviews two weeks after my initial visit to each school. The following is a list of categories of individuals interviewed:

- Head of school
- Senior housemaster/DC chairperson
- Senior housemistress
- Feeding committee chairman

As recommended by Merriam (2009) and Creswell (2009), I completed all interview sessions at one school before proceeding to the next, because it helped me organize data more logically. Following this suggestion proved to be very useful to me. I realised that concluding the study on one site before proceeding to the next, helped in identifying issues that should receive more attention at the subsequent study sites. After I had visited the first two schools, I noted that the data I had collected were virtually identical and skewed towards feeding and disciplinary issues. As a result, I reviewed some of the questions in order to follow up on information gathered from the two schools I had already visited.

Table 4.1 Summary of interview sessions in each study school

School	Participant	No. of sessions
Plomdo School	Head of school	1
	Senior housemaster	2
	Senior housemistress	2
	Feeding committee chairman/ Dining master	2
Sub total		7
Mawudor School	Head of school	2
	Senior housemaster	2
	Feeding committee chairman/ Dining master	2
Sub Total		6
Mantsewe School	Head of school	2
	Senior housemaster	2
	Senior housemistress	2
Sub Total		6
Ayeape School	Head of school	2
	Senior housemaster	2
	Senior housemistress	2
	Feeding committee chairman/ Dining master	2
Sub total		8
Total		27

Semi-structured, interviews (Appendix III) were conducted with all teacher participants selected from the study schools. The interview was adopted for staff because I considered them as contemporaries engaged in sharing perspectives. According to Kvale (1996), and Kvale and Brinkmann (2007), the interview is an exchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest. It enables the researcher to find out from people things that cannot be directly observed. Through the interviews I sought the perspectives of the teacher participants and drew out the manner of interactions in the schools (Bryman, 2008). I was thus able to build a fair picture of the opinions and perceptions of the staff participants on the issue of students as partners in school decision making (Neuman, 2006; Cohen et al., 2008).

I commenced my fieldwork at Plomdo School. The first participant on my pre-arranged schedule was the senior housemistress, who, it appeared, was a very busy person. She was responsible for allocating dormitories and rooms to female students when they first reported to school. That afternoon was one of the days when the senior housemistress was receiving students who had transferred from other schools. Consequently, we had to

interrupt the interview intermittently for her to attend to the new arrivals. I began by asking her about her experiences as a housemistress. As she began to relax, I steered the conversation towards more substantive issues. Using the interview guide, I probed a number of topics that touched on organizational structure, the process of electing prefects, opportunities available for student participation, school meals, student discipline, and how the student voice with regard to these matters was managed. The session lasted for about 50 minutes, which she complained was too long because she had other duties. Interviews with the other participants at Plomdo School followed a similar procedure except that I reviewed the trend of responses and adjusted my questions accordingly as the interviews progressed. The last person I saw was the head of school. The session only lasted for 30 minutes because she was called away on an emergency. When she returned 30 minutes later, she asked for a postponement because she was not in the mood to continue with the session. I was never able to meet her again.

Mawudor School was the second school I visited. Four teachers agreed to participate in the interview; however the senior housemistress opted out of the study. The head of school, who was the first to be interviewed, indicated that he had personal interest in the subject because of his experiences as a former senior house master. He was very enthusiastic in discussing the issues. Interviews with the senior house master and the dining hall master, who was also the feeding committee chairman, also went on successfully. I noticed however that at the initial stage the feeding committee chairman was apprehensive and wanted to know if I was going to discuss his answers with the head of school. His question provided insight into the power dynamics at play in the school system. Having reminded him of my assurance of confidentiality, he slightly regained his composure, but not until we agreed that any follow-up would be done outside school premises. Because of this development, I telephoned all the other participants to inquire whether they had any concerns about being interviewed on schools premises. Since they did not, the other sessions, except one, were conducted in schools.

It is difficult to describe the atmosphere as I entered the headmaster's office at Mantsewe School that afternoon. The headmaster and the senior housemaster respectively appeared not to show much interest in the discussion and were not that

eager to respond to my questions initially. They were not forthcoming on issues that I was interviewing them on. The senior housemaster also appeared detached from the discussion. In fact, I had some difficulty following up on some of the responses to get issues clarified. However, I was able to get through to each of them by the middle of the conversations. The interviews with the two gave me some insight about school climate and the trend of responses also showed the kind of relationships that existed among the groups in the school. Interviews with the remaining two participants lasted 45 minutes each. The session with the senior housemistress was a lively one and her responses shed more light on the school environment. I used the opportunity to conduct a follow-up on some of the responses from the senior housemaster and the Head without revealing my sources. The atmosphere during my second visit to the school was more congenial and both the senior housemaster and the head were more receptive of my presence.

At Ayeape School, which was the last school I visited, I decided to raise some of the issues that had begun to emerge from sessions at the three previous schools. The headmistress was very supportive and readily answered my questions. Most issues focused feeding, discipline and how students' input was considered in taking decisions. Interviews with the senior housemistress and senior housemaster were also successful as each readily spoke on the issues under discussion.

4. 6. 3. Focus Group Discussions with Students

The data collection method I chose for use with student participants was the focus group discussion. A focus group is a method of inquiry that is similar to the group interview but differs in the method of data collection (Cohen, 2007). My adoption of the focus group was premised on the fact that each participant would have an equal opportunity to discuss issues from different perspectives (Kleiber, 2004; Babbie, 2005; Merriam, 2009). Accordingly, employing this method enabled me to explore the group dynamics within each school (Kleiber, 2004; Cohen et al., 2007; Bryman, 2008), and gain insight into the views, understanding and perspectives of the participants themselves as well as social interaction in the study schools (Bryman, 2008).

Moreover, through this method, I was able to collect large amounts of data in a shorter period than by interviewing each student participant individually (Cohen et al., 2007). I

also took cognizance of the fact that the respondents shared similar attributes (Babbie, 2005; Bell, 2010). For example, they were all final year students and had fundamentally similar experiences, having all interacted with school authorities for the same period of time. Being peers, they were also able to engage with one another in discussing issues beyond their own private thoughts and felt able to articulate their opinions freely (Holloway, 1997; Kleiber, 2004). Conversely, a participant from a lower grade might not have been able to express his or her views openly in the presence of those in higher grades for fear of being ridiculed or intimidated by her/his seniors.

In addition to these, as final year students, all focus group participants had at one time or another been assigned to a week's supervision of their fellows, as was the norm in Ghanaian senior high schools. They were therefore better informed about issues pertaining to student-teacher interactions in school decision making than those in the lower grades who had not yet experienced 'student power'. I organized two main categories of focus groups: executive members and prefects on the SRC in one, and non-SRC executive members in the other. It was indeed necessary to include the views of rank-and-file members because as those represented by the SRC; their views would enrich the research and provide a broader perspective on the subject. The following is a breakdown of the executive membership:

- Head prefects
- Dining prefects
- Compound and environment prefects
- Entertainment prefects
- SRC secretary
- Protocol/welfare officer

Each category was then subdivided into separate groups of boys and girls. During the pilot study, I realized that some of the girls were unable to articulate their views confidently in the presence of boys. Reasoning that they were shy or perhaps felt intimidated by the boys, I agreed to their request to speak to me in private after the group discussion. In the light of this experience, I decided to separate boys and girls in focus groups to mitigate such coyness, create a congenial atmosphere, and give all participants an equal opportunity to respond to sensitive issues under study. Although the study did not focus specifically on gender as a factor affecting student participation in decision making, it was important to give all participants an equal opportunity to

discuss the issues without any fear of intimidation. Indeed, democracy is about equal opportunities for all irrespective of one race, gender or class (Hedstrom and Smith 2013). Therefore, if by the separation they would be able to share their views, then it was needful to do that. Both categories of groups participated on gender basis- boys separately from girls. A summary of the SRC executive focus groups is presented below.

Table 4.2 Number of SC representatives and sessions

School	Composition		No of Sessions
	Boys	Girls	
Plomdo School	6	5	2
Mawudor School	6	4	2
Ayeape School	5	5	2
Mantsewe School	5	3	2
Total number of sessions			8

The focus group discussion at Plomdo School began with a short introduction as I had not had an opportunity to brief them earlier as I had with the adult interviewees. I also assured them of the confidentiality of our interaction, after which the discussion began. The first group of students, which comprised six boys, was initially hesitant, perhaps because of my identity. However, they began to open up after I had shown them my University of Sussex student identity card. I started the discussion with the scenario concerning the repercussions of the prohibited mobile phone that I had observed during the pilot study. This stimulated a lively debate among the participants, drawing out how they felt about the issue of their participation in school decision making. It also revealed some of the inconsistencies that obtain between the ideal situation and the reality, and how students perceived them. The session lasted for one hour.

My meeting with the girls' group was interesting because of the manner in which they spoke on the issues. Again, before the actual discussion started, I explained the purpose of the meeting and informed them about their voluntary participation and the confidentiality of their involvement in the study. However, I asserted that issues such as harassment of any kind and drug abuse were criminal, and not covered by the non-disclosure arrangement other than is so far as their identity would be protected; which

point was made to the boys also. The girls were very outspoken and discussed a range of issues including the openness of the head of school. I was careful to ensure that particularly outspoken members did not dominate the discussion and encouraged the quieter ones by redirecting some of the issues to them for their contribution.

At Mawudor School, the boys participated actively in the discussion and there were quite heated arguments over some issues. For example, there was disagreement on whether students should attend committee meetings to discuss issues or obtain information. However, the girls were not able to actively engage in the issues raised. Although two in particular seemed very well informed about student politics, they did not talk as much as the boys did.

Student participants at Mantsewe School actively participated in the focus group sessions. It was noticeable from the discussion that students saw the focus group as an opportunity to raise concerns about issues that affected them, and I deduced from their enthusiasm that they felt my visit was an opportunity to seek redress for their grievances.

At Ayeape School, five boys and three girls respectively participated in the SRC executive focus group discussions. The boys were more talkative than the girls. It is difficult to assign a reason for this, although it is possible that the number of participants in girls' group could be a factor for their reticence. I was obliged to prompt and encourage the girls on a number of occasions to engage their active participation.

The non- Student Council (SC) student groups were not as enthusiastic as the SRC executive groups in the focus group discussion. Most of the groups appeared not to be much interested in taking part in the discussion. Nevertheless, they raised an issue that prompted contemplation on student demography and power dynamics. As with the SRC executives, I was able to manage proceedings to prevent a few vocal individuals from dominating the discussion.

Table 4.3 Number of non-SC representatives and sessions

School	Composition		No of Sessions
	Boys	Girls	
Plomdo School	6	6	2
Mawudor School	6	6	2
Ayeape School	5	5	2
Mantsewe School	5	5	2
Total number of sessions			8

Having completed the field work in the four study schools mentioned in the table 4.3 above, I concentrated fully on analysing the data.

4. 7. Data Handling and Analysis

Creswell (2009: 183) asserts that, “The process of data analysis involves making sense of the data.” Indeed, qualitative data analysis is a continuous process that runs simultaneously with data collection (Merriam, 2009). Accordingly, I conducted data transcription concurrently with the fieldwork. Nevertheless, after data collection had been completed, robust data analysis was carried out in various stages.

4. 7. 1. Organizing Data

Creswell (2009) indicates that the process of organising data involves transcribing interviews and typing up field notes. Given that I had audio-recorded interviews and focus groups discussions, I spent some time listening to the recordings. I then transcribed the data in the order in which interviews and focus group discussions had taken place. Thus, I completed the transcription for one school and spent some time reading over it before proceeding to the next. This process helped me gain a general sense of the issues participants raised and responded to at each school. Adopting this procedure also helped me link similar ideas that emanated from one school with those from another. While reading the transcriptions, I made notes of similar or familiar phrases and ideas that recurred across schools. I also noted and highlighted words and phrases that seemed potentially relevant to my research questions. These notes,

comments and phrases were later written on another sheet of paper for grouping into categories. The same procedure was repeated with the data from the focus groups.

Ideally, I should have given copies of transcribed interviews to the participants so that they could verify and affirm their responses. However, given the limited time I had and the fact that schools had broken up for the holidays by the time I had completed the transcriptions, I was unable to return to confirm their responses. However, I telephoned all staff participants from Ayeape School and two from Mawudor School to confirm their responses, transcriptions of which I had earlier sent by email. I could not adopt the same procedure for the rest because I was unable to reach them even through their phones.

4. 7. 2. Sorting, Categorizing and Coding Data

During transcription, I made codes of similar responses to help identify common themes (Creswell, 2009) from statements and remarks that could have a bearing on the questions to which I was seeking answers. I read the transcripts several times as I continued to write comments and notes, which I later copied onto a different page of my notebook, as suggested by Babbie (2005) and Creswell (2009). I then organized these notes and comments into categories in order to label and code them. I noted related expressions that recurred in participants' comments from a particular school. For example, Plomdo School SRC: "Head is a mother; meets and discusses issues; listens to students [when] we meet with her." These expressions were categorized as 'accessibility of head teacher'. Similarly, I read through all the other transcripts, noted common expressions that were related and devised codes accordingly. I then used these codes to help identify themes for my analysis. As I read through the codes, I noted the themes that began to emerge, which included the following:

- Forums available were similar but participation was not similar.
- Level of participation varied across and within the selected schools.
- Adult and student systems further enhanced bureaucracy and tradition, which were constraints to student participation.

The themes and related issues are discussed in detail in the ensuing chapter.

4. 8. Reflections on Data Collection

The methods of data collection adopted my study included interviews and focus groups. These were appropriate since they helped me get the information needed for the study. Reflecting on the field work, I realized that significantly, it should take more than just talking with people to get a fuller perspective of the phenomenon studied. A fuller and richer study should have included participant observation and record analysis. Merriam, citing Guba and Lincoln (1981) asserts that looking for documents or official records is “to presume that if an event happened, some records of it exists”, (Merriam, 2009). Official records of the Students Councils’ activities would thus have confirmed the assertions of the various respondents. However, requesting for documents from relevant participants could affect the relationship and hinder the free flow of information because of my identity. Secondly, conducting a participant observation demanded my being formally posted into each school as a staff member. This was not possible since it meant my moving from one school to another in short periods till all four schools were covered.

A study of this nature, in my opinion required a longer period to enable me to interact more with the school environment, which could give me a better and deeper insight into the issues under study. The field work was however conducted in a period of three months due to the short time available to me and the fact that I was working while on the study programme. The interviews were not without their challenges. On a few occasions, participants could not keep the appointments as arranged, which delayed the start of the session for up to 20 minutes. In one particular instance, a participant had ‘dashed’ to the supermarket and got stuck in traffic. We had to rearrange the time so we could meet in the late afternoon of the same day. Most teachers in senior high schools engaged in private tuition after their regular classes; therefore, I had to wait for some to finish this before we could meet. There were frequent breaks in the sessions with both the senior housemaster and senior housemistress at Plomdo School because they had to attend to student matters; however, this did not adversely affect the interviews because I was recording the conversation at all times.

I noted after I had visited the first two schools that the conversations shifted and focused more on the issue of students' feeding and discipline. Though my interview schedule included other forums of decision making, I began to modify my questioning in order to delve deeper on the feeding and discipline issues. Participants could and indeed spoke on other forums of decision making but they appeared not to be of much significance to participants as compared to the passion with which both students and staff participants discussed feeding and disciplinary issues.

FIVE - FORUMS AND LEVELS OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING

Introduction

The chapter begins with a general overview of some of the forums available in the four study schools for students' participation in decision making. This is followed by a discussion on the disciplinary and feeding committees as available forums and level of participation within these forums. The school head's accessibility to the SRC which is not necessarily a formal forum but provides opportunity for students to present their views is also discussed. The issues were analysed drawing on Hart's (1992) ladder of student participation in decision making. Hart identifies eight rungs which are levels at which students participate in decision making. Three lowest levels of the rung, ranging from manipulation to tokenism are non-participatory (Hart, 1992). The five upper levels ranging from students being assigned and involved, to students initiating decision and share with adults are, participatory, (Hart, 1992). The discussion of the data is presented under the following headings:

- Forums available for Students' Participation in Decision Making
- Forums and Levels- The Feeding Committee
- Forums and Levels-The Disciplinary Committee
- Access to the Head teacher as an informal forum: Its implication to Participation
- Overview of issues raised

5. 2. Forums available for Students' Participation in Decision Making

From the data available it was noted that students, through the respective SRCs and prefects in the study schools, had been engaged in decision making in their respective schools at various levels. Prefects who were final year students and executives of the SRC were assigned roles of responsibility and were in charge of students' activities in the case study schools. The essence of these roles and responsibilities was to ensure the smooth functioning of administrative machinery at all times be it in the presence or

absence of school authority. In the performance of these functions, the SRC executives and prefects served on various committees in order to present students' views and concerns on issues that affected students to school authorities. The study identified that the feeding and disciplinary committees among others were of much interest to students and school authorities as well in the study schools. The discussion thus focused on the feeding and disciplinary committees in the chapter.

One key **fact** noted from the data was that though forums available were similar across the study schools, students' participation in these forums varied. The significant **fact** about these forums is that they were established by the school authorities and were therefore formal structures in school decision making. In addition to these formal forums, an informal forum of gaining access to the heads of schools was also included in the discussion because it emerged as an important issue for student representatives. Table 5. 1. below shows the forums available for students' participation in decision making.

Table 5.1 Some Decision-making Forums for Students' Participation

SCHOOL	Available Forums		
All Four Schools	Feeding Committee	A students' Disciplinary Committee (DC) & Staff DC	Formal and informal meetings with Head

In table 5.1 above it is noted at a glance that forums were available for students' participation in decision making. The discussions that follow are analyses of extracts from the conversations that confirm the provision of forums for students' participation. A staff participant in Plomdo School stated that:

The tradition, since I became the head of this school is that students are represented by the SRC on various committees that are related to students' welfare (Headmistress, Plomdo School).

Students' participation, from the head's point of view, was a tradition. Responding to the issue of their participation a student participant stated that:

It is our mandate to serve on committees, so we have representatives on some committees in this school (Students Council (SC) representative, Plomdo School).

Evidence gathered from Mawudor School also indicated that forums were available for the SRC to participate in decision making in various spheres. It was remarked that:

Students serve on various committees including the disciplinary and feeding committees (Senior housemaster, Mawudor School).

Similarly in Mawudor School it was noted that:

Students serve on committees. Ever since I have seen that they [students] help in the work we do, it has been my vision to involve the immediate beneficiaries in decision making (Head of Mawudor School).

Responding to whether students had opportunity to be part of decision-making processes in Mawudor School, a student participant stated that:

There are committees on which the prefects serve and decide on our cases (Non- SC representative, Mawudor School)

The response from the non-SRC representative signified that there were forums at which students participated in decision making. Similarly responses from both Ayeape and Mantsewe Schools pointed to the notion that forums were available for students as participants in school decision making. One participant noted that:

We have a disciplinary committee which includes representatives of the students like the Boys prefect, (Senior housemistress, Ayeape School)

And:

They have appointees on the disciplinary committees. They play roles in passing punishments to offending students and usually supervise the carrying out of the punishments. They also serve on the food committees (Senior Housemaster, Ayeape School)

A student representative, discussing the issue also indicated that:

The SRC has representatives on some committees. For example, we serve on the disciplinary and feeding committees and other committees also (SRC representative, Ayeape School).

In Mantsewe School the SRC had representatives on committees including discipline and feeding. It was noted that:

The SRC has representatives on committees such as the canteen (feeding) and disciplinary committees, (senior housemaster, Mantsewe School).

From these remarks, one can state that forums were available for students to participate in decision-making in the four selected schools. It is noted that social interactions between adults and the young in the Ghanaian society is traditionally authoritarian (Twum-Danso, 2010), therefore, it is commendable that school authorities provided these opportunities for students to participate in decision-making processes. That the schools provided these forums is indicative that students are being considered as significant stakeholders in the schools.

5. 2. 1. Motivation for providing forums for students' participation

From the preceding discussions it was noted that forums were available for students' participation in decision making. It was observed also that the motivations for providing the forums were not based on the participatory rights of the child as required in Article 12 of the UN rights of the child which provides children and young adults the right to participate in decisions that affect them (UNCRC, 1989). The motivations of the heads though varied, all aimed at achieving the schools' administrative objectives. The headmistress of Plomdo School for example stated that:

It is a personal conviction that when you involve young people in decision making it helps them to understand things better and appreciate whatever you want them to do. If you keep them out of decision making they tend to have some suspicion and they seek answers to their problems from lots of sources. I'm sure...it is because I was a student leader myself, so I understand the issues much better. Involving them in decision making helps a lot. Students are better informed about what is required of them so they are not misled. (Head of Plomdo School).

From the remark, the headmistress' experiences as a former student leader influenced her decision to open up forums for students' participation in decision-making. Moreover, she did not want students to be misled and misinformed. It was clear from

the discussion that the underlying reason for providing the forums was for student containment.

The head of Mantsewe School also stated that:

It is the SRC's duty to keep reminding the students about the rules and regulations of the school help the prefectural board to ensure that discipline is observed and maximized for effect academic achievement.

In a similar manner, the headmaster of Mawudor School indicated that:

Most of the time when the students are going contrary to the law, they [SRC] are there. They are the people we have to report such cases to us. On many occasions, this has helped with discipline (Headmaster, Mawudor School).

From the two quotes above, the heads of Mantsewe and Mawudor schools saw the SRC as a mechanism for maintaining discipline and enhancing academic achievement. The headmaster of Mawudor School further explained that student representatives acted on behalf of teachers when they [*teachers*] were absent. By considering student representatives as working for or on behalf of the staff, students' role of representing their peers became blurred as they appeared to be more concerned with enforcing rules than seeking welfare of their peers. The perception of the student leaders working for staff was affirmed by some staff participants also. The housemistress of Ayeape School, for example, highlighted the relevance of the SRC in the school by stating that:

The problem of aluta [student demonstrations] has reduced drastically. The SRC has been very effective in maintaining discipline. They ensure that students do the house duties on time and supervise evening studies in the absence of teachers-on-duty (housemistress, Ayeape School).

Student demonstrations could be viewed as not in the best interest of the SRC. Its occurrence could signify a lack of effectiveness of the SRC. The statement therefore was a compliment of SRC. Nevertheless, confining the SRCs to instruments for achieving administrative objectives and reducing students' demonstrations could affect students' participation since the heads might be inclined to involve students only when it suited their (heads') objectives. The headmistress of Ayeape School stated that:

They (SRC) are participating alright, but in the end it helps in the smooth running of the school. This helps my administration.

In all these remarks cited above, none of the authorities mentioned the participatory rights of the students but rather how the SRCs profited the schools by maintaining discipline to enable the schools administrations achieve their objectives. This observation relates to Rudduck and Flutter, (2000) who observed that school authorities were using pupils to serve the objectives of a society that was concerned with pupil performance only rather than empowering students with greater student-generated activity. It also resonates with Grant Lewis and Naidoo's (2004) assertion that school authorities define participation in very narrow terms that emphasizes efficiency objectives rather than for democratic purposes. Perhaps this narrow confinement influenced the level of student's participation in decision making?

5. 3. Forums and Level of Participation- The Feeding Committee

From the discussions in the first section of the chapter it was evident that students had opportunity to participate in decision making-forums in the study schools as students were said to be on various committees. The feeding committee was identified in the data as one of the forums available for student participation in decision making. It is important to note that the feeding committee was responsible for ensuring that the menu planned was according to the criteria determined by the GES (GES, 2010). The feeding committee was also responsible for monitoring how food items were issued for cooking, the general kitchen environment, quality and quantity of meals served, in addition to addressing students' minor concerns on feeding issues. The committee also submitted reports to the head for necessary actions. The student representatives (all final years) that were on the feeding committees varied across the study schools. The significant issue however was not about the number of students on the committee, but whether their membership on the committee influenced decisions made on students' feeding. The observation made from the discussions on feeding was that students of Plomdo and Mawudor schools at various times participated in decision-making on students' feeding. This thus placed them on the participatory level of Hart's (1992) ladder. On the other hand, Ayeape and Mantsee schools had little opportunity to participate in decision-making on students' feeding, which thus identified them at the non-participatory level of Hart's (1992) ladder.

Plomdo and Mawudor schools appeared to be more engaging with students on issues regarding feeding. Though student representatives of the two respective schools were not part of the initial planning of the school menus, it was evident that the views of the SRCs were sought at some stages to discuss the quality and quantity of food served. In Plomdo School for example, student representatives met with staff committee members to agree on the planned menu before it became operational. One student remarked:

We normally have meetings comprising a head prefect, dining hall prefects, the matron, the dining hall master and mistress, and some of the cooks (SC representative, Plomdo School).

A staff participant also stated that:

We sit down with them to discuss the menu and agree on what should be included. When they ask for changes and we feel it cannot be met, we explain the reasons to them. Sometimes the food they request may be out of season. When it comes to feeding, we are very careful because any misunderstanding could lead to student riots and we try to avoid that (Senior Housemistress, Plomdo School).

The remark above portrayed some level of consultation with the SRC on feeding issues. This led to significant arrangements and agreements in decisions on students' feeding. The interpretation given to the discussions and interactions between students and staff is that students were involved in decision making on issues regarding feeding in Plomdo School. The participatory level of students in Plomdo School was on the sixth rung of Hart's (1992) ladder because participation in feeding issues was adult initiated and shared with students. However, one can infer a direct link between feeding and discipline in the statement made by the senior house mistress, which statement implied that the purpose of providing forums for students' participation in decision-making forums was to avoid confrontation between school authority and students. It was also evident that power dynamics were at play in some of the meetings as inferred from the statement below:

At our last meeting, for instance, the dining hall mistress was the one taking notes of all that transpired, so we believe she conveyed our concerns to the headmistress (SC representative, Plomdo School).

Inferring from the statement above the students did not know but believed the discussions at the meeting were conveyed to the head of school. Besides, one wondered

whether students were able to articulate their views given that it was the senior house mistress who wrote the minutes at the meeting. On this issue, Mabovula (2009: 227) notes that, “The mere presence of an educator who is an adult could intimidate learners” at the meetings. It would be rare for a student, coming from the Ghanaian context and authoritarian nature of the school system to counter a suggestion of a teacher. Given that issues discussed at the meeting concerned students as beneficiaries, it would have been more democratic and meaningful for students to take the minutes and present the report to the head. This could give more credence to their presence at the meeting. In spite of these observations however, there was evidence that students’ perspectives influenced decision on feeding. A non-SRC representative confirmed the observation by stating that:

For example, it was realised that most people were not taking the “tom brown” that was served to us in the dining hall. We reported it to the administration and they changed it to rice porridge instead, (Non-SC representative, Plomdo School).

Evidence gathered from the data indicated that in addition to students’ representation on the feeding committee, the authorities at Mawudor School provided another avenue to gain students perspectives on meals provided. It was stated that:

Normally, we have a dining hall comment book, and they [the students] handle it and we [the administration] look at the comments and appreciate what is written in the book. In the past, we used to review the comments on a monthly basis but because of time, we review it every term instead. Therefore, they (presumably students) are usually at the meetings to tell us what the students want (Dining Hall Master, Mawudor School).

The adoption of a comment book created opportunity for not only student representatives but the student populace also to participate in decisions regarding their feeding. By the use of the comment book a larger number of students had opportunity present their perspectives on the meals provided by the school. This was quite different from Plomdo School where participation was through student representatives only. This notwithstanding, it was noted that they review meetings to discuss comments in the book and possibly improve students meals was reduced from monthly to termly. Explaining why the schedule of meetings was changed, the participant stated that:

It was due to time constraints. The administration decided it was better to meet once a term. So we have resorted to meeting to look at the comments (Dining Hall master Mawudor School).

Given that food items were seasonal, and that student' comments were about meals served for that term, one wondered the extent to which outcomes of the review meetings would be of any relevance as decisions were deferred to the following term. In view of this one could argue that the comment book though a laudable idea, was not being used effectively if students' views regarding meals served did not receive the necessary attention. While Plomdo School immediately effected changes in the menu, Mawudor School delayed action to the following term. Comparing the two schools, the SRC at Plomdo School had a higher level of participation in feeding matters than the SRC at Mawudor School due to the attention given feeding issues at Plomdo. Participation level of students at Mawudor School on issues regarding feeding therefore is on the fifth rung as students were consulted and informed on their feeding. One can infer from the discussion that even between Plomdo and Mawudor schools, student participation in food related issues was not similar though each school had some level of in this forum.

The situation at Ayeape School differed markedly from that of Plomdo and Mawudor schools. Though it was indicated that the SRC executives were on the feeding committee and they had access to the head, student representatives at Ayeape School did not have much opportunity to attend food committee meetings or make contributions to their feeding. The opportunity to discuss what had been planned before it was served as exemplified in Plomdo was not available. Neither was there any book for students to comment on their meals as in the case of Mawudor School. It was noted that the SRC, on some occasions would meet with the head to raise concerns about their feeding. On one occasion however, instead of adopting the usual process of meeting the head, the SRC adopted a rather radical approach to get their concerns addressed. The dining hall master indicated that:

There was once a menu they didn't like, so they prepared a different one, wrote and attached a letter to it, served [copied it to] the dining hall master, and later presented it to the headmistress. Some changes were made concerning the food. Yes they are involved.

It was quite unusual that students would, by themselves prepare a menu and submit it to the school authority. The action, by itself was a revolt against a decision made by the

school authority. Therefore if the school authority had not accepted the reviewed menu, it could turn into an unorthodox means of resolving the differences. The dining hall master however saw the students' action as participation in decision making and not an act of rebellion.

A student participant confirming the action reported by the dining hall master stated that:

The menu because was monotonous; it was the same thing that was served last term. Our people were not happy because when we reported to the dining hall master he did nothing. There was an emergency meeting to discuss the issues. Then our people said we should change the menu and report to the headmistress (SC representative, Ayeape School).

It was clear from the remark that students were aware that the head would listen to them if they took that action. Because there had been previous instances where they complained about a meal and that was changed by the head as indicated in the remark below:

Last term, the students said they didn't like 'Tom Brown'² and *oblayo*,³ so together with the food committee, we met and they suggested tea and rice porridge as their preferred meals (Head of Ayeape School).

Therefore if the students did not request for a change in the usual manner but resorted to planning a new menu, the headmistress will not take it for granted. Though the incident cannot be described as participation that is how the senior housemaster described it. Perhaps, from his viewpoint, the fact that the authorities accepted the new menu and effected the changes then it implied that students participated in decision making. He thus concluded that:

When they [the students] are involved, it helps them feel part of the decision so that when it comes to the implementation they do not feel left out (Senior Housemaster, Ayeape School).

Perhaps if students had had opportunity to study the menu and presented their views before it was implemented, as exemplified at Plomdo School, the students might not have replaced it with their own. Reflecting on the interaction between the students and staff on one hand and between the students and the head on the other on issues

²Roasted maize porridge.

³ Coarsely ground maize porridge served mostly for breakfast.

regarding students' feeding there was probably a better rapport between the head and the students than between the students and other staff. One can deduce that students were reacting to their exclusion from decision-making arena on feeding. With reference to Hart's (1992) ladder and comparing the scenarios at Plomdo and Mawudor schools to that of Ayeape, what occurred in Ayeape school regarding feeding was non-participatory, putting students' participation level at third rung of Hart's (1992) ladder as their membership on the feeding committee was only rhetoric.

The general impression gained from the data is that an authoritarian regime obtained at Mantsewe School, and that students did not have much opportunity for participation in feeding matters despite the assertion that they served on the feeding committee. Students' level of participation in issues regarding their feeding was tokenistic because despite the assertion that students were on the feeding committee, they had little opportunity to contribute to decisions regarding students' feeding. Beyond the assertion that students were represented on the committee staff participants, except the senior housemistress, were evasive on discussing the role of students on the committee. The senior housemistress's comments gave much insight to the general cultural milieu of the school. She noted that:

em yeah...involvement.... what I see is ... well, they're involved. You come to me with your issues. I give you a seat and listen to you and I write down issues raised. I'll see what I can do... I've listened to you...there's an involvement....but working on your issues... at the end of the day....it will be manipulated...so most of the time they don't see their issues being worked on...I think most of the time they're involved but in the end...nothing is done about their issues so ... there's no involvement.

The comments above portrayed an environment where students went through the motion of participation but in the end their issues did receive the needed attention. On the other hand the student representatives were quite keen to express their views. One student stated that:

Before we are aware the menu has been planned and we don't even know when it was done, (SC representative, Mantsewe School).

The understanding gained from the comment above is that students were not given **the** opportunity to provide input in the menu before the meals are served. The difference between the participatory rights of the SRC at Mantsewe School and Ayeape School on

issues of feeding was that while the SRC at Ayeape School could reject a menu and plan their on their own the SRC at Mantsewe School would not be able to so due to the authoritarian culture of the school. Student representatives seemed quite dissatisfied with their non-participation in their feeding and stated that:

It's difficult talking about feeding matters in this school. When we talk they say we are disrespectful, (SRC representative, Mantsewe School).

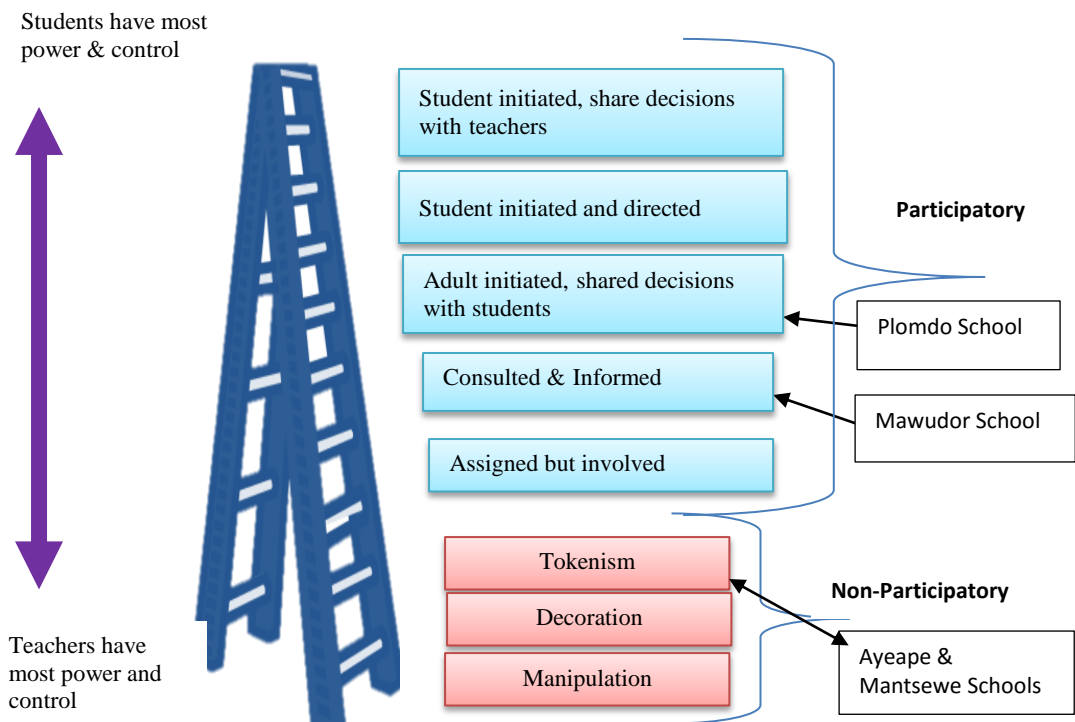
Another student declared passionately:

We pay for the meals, so we have to be part of the planning; then we will not talk (not raise concerns), (SC Member, Mantsewe School).

Drawing inferences from the remarks of the SRC representatives of Mantsewe School, I concluded that students were accorded little opportunity to participate in feeding matters in the school. The displeasure of students for being excluded from taking part in decision making on feeding issues manifested in the focus groups. The picture portrayed a high level of control with little or no opportunity for students to present their views on their meals. The regime thus denied the subjectivity and ability students had to create and generate their own meaning and vision. There was rather the tendency to control what students should do or say in issues that related to their feeding.

From the discussions so far it was clear that the level of participation in decision-making forums on feeding varied in the four study schools. There was much more participatory decision making at Plomdo and Mawudor schools than in Ayeape and Mantsewe schools. Students in Plomdo and Mantsewe Schools could and did present their perspectives on students' feeding at some stages of decision making on feeding issues. This put the two schools at the participatory level of Hart's (1992) ladder. On the other hand, students in Mantsewe and Ayeape schools did not have the opportunity to add their perspectives to decisions made on students' feeding. This thus placed them at the non-participatory level of Hart's (ibid) ladder. The difference between Ayeape and Mantsewe schools is that in spite of their non-participation in feeding matters, the SRC at Ayeape had an administrative head that listened to students. The environment at Mantsewe School on the other hand did not allow open interaction between the administration and the students regarding students feeding. The differences in level of students' participation in feeding issues could be attributed to the leadership style of the heads and their preparedness to widen authority boundaries.

Figure 5. 1. Students' Level of Participation in Feeding Issues



With reference to Hart's (1992) ladder Figure 5. 1. above provides a graphic impression of the levels at which students participated in feeding related decision-making in the four case schools. It shows the differences in the level of student participation in feeding issues across the four study schools.

5. 4. Forums and Levels-The Disciplinary Committee

The disciplinary committee was another forum identified in the data as available for students' participation in decision making. The disciplinary committee had the responsibility of investigating all major cases of indiscipline and make recommendations to the head for necessary sanctions, and students were ostensibly part of the team. Feedback from both staffs and student participants of the respective case study schools indicated variously that the SRCs had representatives on the disciplinary committees. Regardless of students being represented on the disciplinary committee, evidence gathered from the discussions indicated that the student representatives in the respective schools did not have adequate opportunity to participate in decisions regarding students' disciplinary issues. A split disciplinary agency was rather identified

in the four study schools. There was a student disciplinary committee separate from that of the staff in each of the schools. The students' disciplinary committee was established by the SRC to monitor students at their level. The committees however received some level of recognition and support in all but one school. The support for the students' committee was because it helped the staff in dealing with disciplinary matters that did not need the main committee attention. This arrangement benefited the staff reasonably since they did not have to be present at all times with students. Thus on the whole, students' views were not sought on issues pertaining to discipline except when the staff needed some information from students to facilitate their work on the committees. This observation thus placed students' participation in decision making on disciplinary issues at the non-participatory level of Hart's (1992) ladder.

At Plomdo School staff participants and students had affirmed that students were sought and that they participated in decision making on disciplinary matters. It was later noted that the student representatives were actually not involved in decision-making forum of discipline but called in to clarify issues in reports they had presented to the main committee. In her discussion with me, the senior housemistress earlier stated that students were invited to sit in and participate in discussions at committee meetings as indicated below:

They are allowed to contribute to discussion. They (SRC representatives) have the right to question any issue for clarification (Housemistress, Plomdo School).

From the comment one would assume that students had been actively engaged on the decision-making forum. It was noted later that students were not part of the main disciplinary committee as she later explained:

A major hindrance (to their participation) is the scheduling of meetings especially the emergency ones. Since they are students, we don't really bother them (Senior Housemistress, Plomdo School).

Two issues stand out in the remark of the senior house mistress, first was the time meetings were scheduled, and secondly the students were "students". The senior house mistress alluded to the fact that the time of meetings hindered students' participation. One can infer however that the actual reason students were not included was because

they were “students”. The observation that students were not included at the committee’s work was confirmed by the senior house master that:

In most of the disciplinary committee meetings there are no student representatives... Sometimes, if the disciplinary issue that we are going to talk about is very sensitive, then we let the prefect body know exactly what their colleagues did. They may present more information and communicate these at the meeting. We involve them in such cases so that they don’t feel left out and after an action has been taken (Senior Housemaster, Plomdo School).

The deduction made from this statement above is that selective participation occurred in this school- inviting students in so they did not feel left out. The student representatives were made to think they were part of the decision-making process whereas in fact, they were not but only conveyors of information. Furthermore, it was clear from the statement of the senior housemaster that there were separate disciplinary committees. For he stressed that:

There are no students on the DC (disciplinary committee) that was constituted by the head of school (Senior Housemaster, Plomdo School).

The statement implied that there was a committee that was not constituted by the headmistress. It may therefore be reasonable to conclude that the students’ disciplinary committee was not constituted by the headmistress and therefore was not part of the administrative process. From this perspective one could argue that the students’ disciplinary committee was a student-level affair. The senior housemaster further explained that:

You see, some of these things involve a lot of time and students should not bother about these issues at the present. They should pay attention to their academic work (Senior Housemaster, Plomdo School).

From the senior housemaster’s viewpoint there is a time allotted for student participation in decision making. This viewpoint however does not resonate with Tisdal’s (2010) assertion that students were active members of society now and the future. As noted in the data students who held positions were screened and found capable of combining leadership roles with their academic work. To argue now that student politics involved too much time so they should concentrate on their academic

work for now was untenable. From the discussion one can conclude that what went on in Plomdo School was what described by Hart (1992) as manipulation, students being made to believe they were part of the decision made. Thus Plomdo School was at the non-participatory level of Hart's (1992) ladder. This notwithstanding, students did not seem perturbed. This probably could be because they had more participatory opportunities in other forums and therefore did not consider their non-engagement in disciplinary matter an issue.

The scenario at Ayeape School was similar to Plomdo School issues regarding discipline in that there were two separate disciplinary committees in the school. In Ayeape School also the SRC's participation in decision making on disciplinary issues was at the students' level only. Thus in Ayeape School, students' activities were at the non-participatory level of Hart's (1992) ladder. In his response to the question of the role of students on the disciplinary committee a staff participant stated that students dealt with minor cases but were not part of the main disciplinary committee since it dealt with cases considered above students' level. He explained:

After they [student representatives] take their decision at the SRC level, they are not involved at the higher level disciplinary committee meeting (Senior housemaster, Ayeape School).

The senior housemaster's comment suggested that whatever went on at the SRC level was students' affair. The statement also suggested a distancing of the school authority from decision made by the SRC. The assertion that the SRC operates on a different level from staff who deal with higher level decision on disciplinary issues was confirmed by a student participant who stated that:

We have the teachers' disciplinary committee and the students' disciplinary committee. People aspire to become student DC president and are elected via a voting process (SC representative, Ayeape School).

The insight gained from the two remarks above is that disciplinary issues were classified into levels with one being addressed at the student level and the other at the staff level. From the discussion what was termed minor cases and handled by the student representatives were everyday occurrences which kept students engaged very often on daily basis. Thus on the premise that the 'higher level' disciplinary cases were

occasional occurrences, students needed the opportunity to gain experience in dealing with such cases in order to avoid excesses mentioned by a staff participant in one of the schools. However, one could also infer from the remark by the senior housemaster that the issue of “higher level” he referred to was more an issue of power relations than anything. The separate students and staff disciplinary committee suggests segregation in which staff felt they could not engage with students in decision-making platforms on partnership basis. Drawing from the discussion and scenario at Ayeape School, the school is identified on the lower rungs of Hart’s (1992) ladder of participation. The implication is that students’ participation was tokenistic.

The scenario at Mantsewe School was not that different from the two schools already discussed. The observation was that two separate disciplinary committees were at Mantsewe School also. In their discussion a student explained that:

The SRC has a DC (disciplinary committee) which sits on students’ disciplinary cases. We determine sanctions based on the offences committed by students. We handle cases such as students’ refusal to do routine work, failure to dress your bed or taking food out of the dining hall. But the staff DC, which meets separately is different from the SRC DC (SC representative, Mantsewe School).

The student’s comment portrayed that the trend was to have two separate disciplinary committees in the case schools. Unlike students from Plomdo School who did not complain about their non-participation, in the case of Mantsewe School, the student representatives at were unhappy about their exclusion from the main disciplinary committee. This could be because students in the school had little opportunity in participating in other decision-making forums. One remarked:

It’s not the best. If we don’t sit on the main disciplinary committee, how can we explain to other students if they ask us? Sometimes, you feel betrayed, you wonder how many people sit on a case and how conclusions are drawn (SC representative, Mantsewe School).

This comment was made after the respondent had stated that they had student representation on the disciplinary committee but had never participated in determination of students’ indiscipline cases. The senior housemaster of the school who had earlier

stated that students participated in decision making on issues regarding discipline later remarked that:

You know, students should rather pay attention to the core reason why they are here. When they go to the university then they can do school politics. They will be more matured then (Senior housemaster, Mantsewe).

From the remark, one can deduce that the senior housemaster did not consider students capable of decision making as he felt they were not yet mature to engage in ‘school politics’. The senior housemaster’s comment thus affirmed Merita’s (2000) observation that some school authorities think that secondary school students lack the requisite maturity to engage in the decision-making process. However, James and Prout (1997, p. ix) contend that “Childhood should be regarded as a part of society and culture rather than a precursor to it; and that children should be seen as already social actors not beings in the process of becoming such”. The senior housemaster’s comments were thus at variance with James and Prout’s (1997) viewpoint.

From the discussion it was clear that the SRC in Mantsewe School was not integrated into the decision-making forum of discipline because the school authorities did not consider the student representatives competent enough to confer with staff. In an informal discussion with the headmaster during a follow-up visit, he referred to the student disciplinary committee as a “kangaroo court” in which cases were deliberated upon and recommendations made before they reached the school disciplinary committee. Yet earlier he had indicated that students were on the disciplinary committee in the school. Given that the headmaster had ultimate power to determine who got or did not get involved in decision making in the school, it was clear that his perception and that of the senior housemaster who felt students should defer participation to latter time determined the level at which students participated in decisions regarding discipline. Basically, student level of participation in decision making was at the lowest rung of Hart’s (1992) ladder of participation.

It was observed from the discussions that Mawudor School also was at the non-participatory level of Hart’s (1992) ladder with regards to students’ participation in decision making on disciplinary issues. Both the headmaster and senior housemaster

were evasive during the interview sessions. The head master, who had earlier stated that the SRC had the highest representing number on the committee, referred me to the senior housemaster who he said would talk on the issues better. The senior housemaster, who doubled as the disciplinary committee chairman was evasive and did not provide any definite responses except stressing that students were members of the disciplinary committee. Responding to whether the student representatives were active members and attended committee meetings, he indicated that:

It was the student leaders who reported cases of indiscipline to the school authority in the first place, because they were always with the student populace to know exactly what went on.

He stated further:

But for their reports we (school authority) would not have been able to know students who misbehave because we are not there always, but they (SRC) are (Senior housemaster, Mawudor School).

The remarks above signified the reluctance of the senior housemaster to provide a direct responses student representatives' actual participation in decision making on disciplinary issues. However, drawing inference from the student's remark, I concluded that the SRC representatives were only members of the school disciplinary committee in so far as they presented reports on cases that occurred. One student participant described SRC disciplinary committee stating that:

We have a vibrant SRC DC (disciplinary committee). We check students' attendance to school gatherings; dressing of beds, and also ensure that students do their house duties to keep the environment clean, (SC representative, Mawudor School).

The comment portrayed a scenario where student representatives were vibrant at only the students' level, monitoring routine activities and reporting on students' major infractions. Asked whether after reporting these violations the SRC DC had opportunity to present their views or suggest any sanctions for the offenders. The response was that:

We write reports on the incidents that happened and submit to the senior housemaster. But we don't sit on the committee with the teachers in dealing with cases (SC representative, Mawudor School)

From the student's remark one can deduce that the SRC was not actively a participant in decision-making forums on disciplinary issues, despite the high number (70%) on disciplinary committee. The students groups indicated that they were not involved in decision made on students who went out of bounds for example or were caught stealing even though they reported the cases to school authority. The scenario at Mawudor School was thus comparable to the other three schools with regards to students' participation in disciplinary cases. Secondly it was noted that what was described as participatory- the invitation to report or obtain information- was selective and episodic. An observation that was noted as similar in all the schools involved in the study. The role of the SRCs on the main committees was to report cases of indiscipline to the committees through the senior housemasters. Thus the picture painted of the disciplinary committees in the schools is that of a two-tier system with students 'doing their own thing' and staff dealing with "higher level" issues. Although some student representatives seemed displeased with the fact that they did not participate in arriving at decisions by the main disciplinary committee, the impression gathered was that at their level they were active and satisfied with their role as suggested in the remark below:

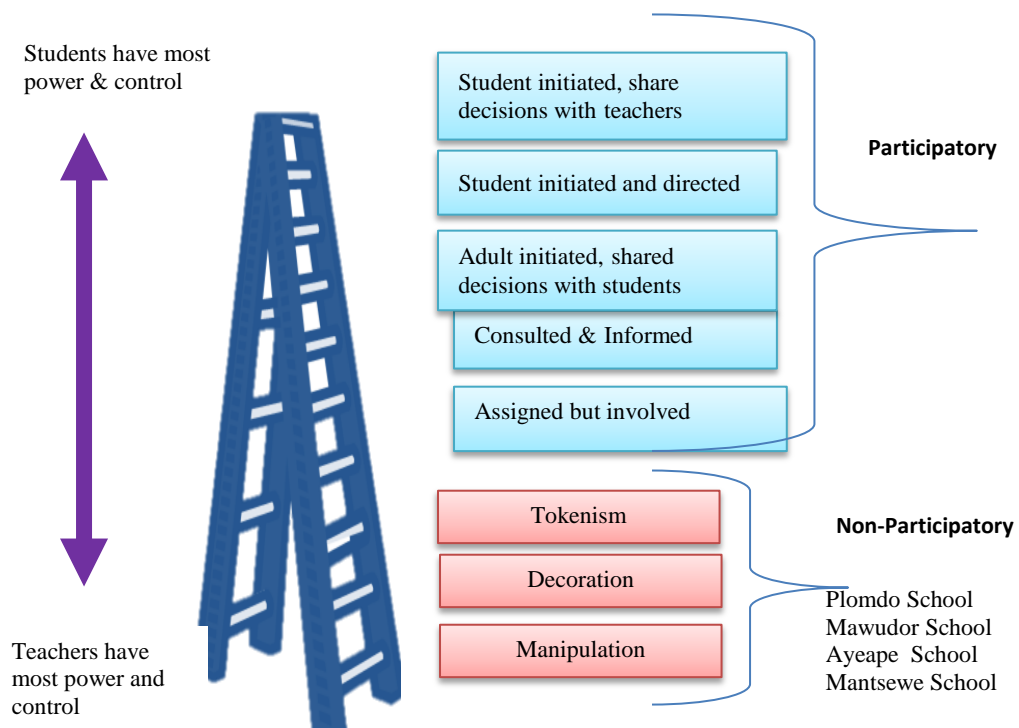
With the student disciplinary committee, at least, we are able to assess what the student has done and recommend appropriate penalty (SRC representative, Mantsewe School).

That the students were content with their role as depicted in the remark above points to the fact that students were not well -informed on their role as student representatives. On this issue Tisdall (2010) asserts that students' lack of awareness limits their ability to recognize their citizenship. The lack of knowledge of student rights and participation issues limited their capacity to negotiate for more participatory opportunities on the school disciplinary committee and other relevant arenas in which decisions affecting them were made hence their satisfaction with the level of participation. From the discussions it was clear that students' views were not sought on issues regarding students' disciplinary matters though they were members of the committee. This thus makes their participation in disciplinary issues tokenistic.

Given that School authorities had stated that they wanted to prevent student conflicts and that student's participation had reduced the phenomenon of student riots, it is rather

odd that students in the case schools had restricted access to the decision-making forum of discipline. One would think that having identified that student participation created congenial environment for the school the school authorities would rather create more spaces for their involvement if only to reduce conflict between school authorities and students. Conclusion drawn from the discussion on the participatory activities of the SRCs in the study schools on disciplinary issues is that essentially there were SRC representatives on the various disciplinary committees. Their participation was however limited to presenting reports on incidents of students' indiscipline and conveying decisions taken by the staff committee members to student populace. Consequently, students had a legitimate voice only in student-specific issues at the students' level and practically no part in decision making on disciplinary issues. The practice revealed one of manipulation rather than participation which put the schools on the tokenistic level of Hart's (1992) ladder of participation shown in the figure below.

5. 2. Students' Level of Participation in Disciplinary Issues



Drawing from Hart's (1992) Ladder of student participation, students' participation in disciplinary issues was on the third rung of ladder implying that their participation was tokenistic as indicated in Chart 5. 2. What this signifies is that students were ostensibly

members of the disciplinary committees since they were not actually engaged in decision-making forums regarding discipline.

5. 5. Access to Head as an informal forum: Its implication to Participation

The head of a senior high school in Ghana commands authority and power due to the bureaucratic structure of the system. He takes ultimate responsibility of the daily decision-making processes in the school. The extent to which s/he wants to delegate power and responsibility depends on him in most cases. At the students level getting opportunity to confer with the head is an indication that the head shows concern for students' issues. Access of heads to students is thus not a formal forum as in the case of having representation on committees set up by the school authority. However, it emerged in the data as a major issue in some of the study schools because direct access provided opportunity for the SRCs to provide first-hand information to the heads without reverting to the protocols which could be delayed through the communication loop. As in the case of the formal forums for decision making there were differences in the extent to which students gained direct access to the various heads of schools. The platform was more accessible to the SRC at Plomdo and Ayeape schools because students did not have to go through the lines of communication but could request a meeting directly and it was granted. In Mawudor and Mantsewe schools however the heads were not easily accessible as they had to observe the bureaucracies to gain access to the heads of schools.

It was noted from the discussions that the social interactions between students and the school authorities in Plomdo School was mutually reciprocating as indicated by the remark below:

In this school, respect is given to prefects. Our headmistress relates to students. She has time for us. She is the type that you could walk to and present your problems. They attend meetings, talk about our food and discipline cases (Non-SC representative, Plomdo School).

From the remark above, the student appeared to be informed about the activities of SRC in her school – what they did and issues that were discussed at the meetings. This confirmed the assertion that students had access to the school head. It also signified that

that the SRC at Plomdo School was not only interacting with the school authority but was communicating issues agreed at their meetings to the student populace.

The interaction between the head and students representatives of Ayeape School was comparable to that between the head and the SRC of Plomdo School. The data indicated that students had opportunity to meet the head for discussions on relevant issues. It was remarked that:

They have the opportunity to freely meet me and tell me their issues so if there is any problem I know, (Headmistress, Ayeape Senior Secondary School).

The inference drawn from the remark above was that students had access to the head for discussions. A student participant confirmed the observation that:

The openness of the headmistress has made the students very good and comfortable because we can freely go to her (the head) with our problems, (Non-SC representative Ayeape School).

The remark portrays a good rapport between the students and the head of the school. However, the rapport between the head and students was not appreciated by the staff. As a result some staff participants raised concerns on the head's perceived disregard to school structures. Similarly, the data indicated that there was opportunity for the SRC at Mawudor School to meet and interact with the head as remarked below:

Yes the opportunity is there for the students interact with me. Some students even wait and meet me with their problems when I'm walking about on the compound (Head of Mawudor School).

The head's comment signified that students could easily approach him with their issues. However from the remark that followed it was noted that students had to observe some protocols before they could meet with him if it became necessary. He stated that:

But most of the time, we prefer them going to the counsellor and the Assistant Head first. We need to observe the authority structures. That is the way things work here.

The statement portrayed a delegated system with an authoritarian leadership of which much importance was attached to the head. This also showed that the head wanted the

stakeholders in the decision making arena involved in decisions made on students' issues. The statement therefore was more about the signalling that power was vested in him who will be consulted ultimately. The organizational culture in Mawudor School thus differed slightly from that of Plomdo and Ayeape schools in so far as interaction between the SRCs and the heads was concerned.

Mantsewe School however differed from the other three schools in the extent to which the SRC had access to the Head of school. Meeting the head of Mantsewe School appeared to be restricted due to the overly observance of procedures and structures. The head of school, responding to the issue, noted that:

They have the patron and the Assistant head Administration to respond to their concerns. The senior housemaster is also there when they need to see someone.

One student also stated that:

We meet the patron of the SRC and discuss issues with him. Then he also forwards them to higher authority; but if the patron is not around, we write letters and present them (SC Representative, Mantsewe School).

A patron is a teacher appointed by the head to serve in an advisory capacity to the SRC. Mostly, the patron was the liaison between the SRC and the school head. He also served as advisor to the SRC in their interaction with the school head specifically. By stating that the SRC meet with the patron or the assistant head of the school signified the extent to which the protocols were followed in the school authority. It was noted that the only school that made mention of a patron in the conversations was Mantsewe School. The point is the other schools also had SRC patrons but they were scarcely mentioned in the discussions. This observation stresses the extent to which formal procedures were followed in this school. The SRC executive's remark quoted above confirmed that students did not have direct unfettered access to the school head unless the processes were followed. Students could not meet even the deputy head directly to discuss anything unless it passed through the patron. While it was noted that interaction between the heads of the study schools and the SRCs respectively was a forum for students' participation in decision making, these interactions varied depending on the disposition of the school heads.

5. 6. Overview of Issues Raised

The discussion so far indicated that forums were available for students' participation in decision making in the selected study schools. The level of participation in these forums, however, varied in the respective schools. The level of participation in decision making, in fact, was complex with variations in level of participation even within each school. While there appeared to be higher level of participation on feeding matters in Plomdo and Mawudor Schools, students' level of participation in Mantsewe and Ayeape schools was nominal and tokenistic since students views were not usually factored into decisions made on feeding of students. Students' level of participation in decision making regarding disciplinary issues was similar across the study schools, students and teachers had separate committees. Student representatives were essentially on the main disciplinary committees but were not participants in the main committees, as lack of time, student level of maturity, and students' inability to deal with sensitive and higher level issues were assigned as reasons for their exclusion. A summary of level of students' participation in decision making drawing on Hart's (1992) Ladder is provided in Table 5.2 below.

Table 5. 2. Levels of student participation in Forums studied

Forum	Plomdo School	Mawudor School	Mantsewe School	Ayeape School
Feeding	Adult initiated, shared decisions with students	Consulted and informed	Decoration	Tokenistic
Discipline	Tokenistic	Tokenistic	Tokenistic	Tokenistic
Accessibility to Head	Consulted and Informed	Manipulation	Manipulation	Consulted and Informed

The table 5. 2. is a summary of the forums available and level of students' participation in these forums. Plomdo and Mawudor schools were identified to be at the participatory level Hart's (1992) rung of the ladder with regards to feeding. Mantsewe and Ayeape schools were at the non-participatory level of the rung given that interactions were manipulation and tokenistic in the two schools respectively. Students' participation in

disciplinary matters as noted from the table was tokenistic in the four study schools, making their interactions non-participatory.

SIX - BUREAUCRATIC SYSTEMS AND ISSUES OF POWER

Introduction

This chapter draws on a discussion of the school systems and how these helped to constrain students' participation in some of the study schools. It draws in part on Fielding's (2001) reflections on whether the student voice is an additional mechanism of control in the school; and Backman and Trafford's (2006) building democratic schools in bureaucratic systems. The chapter examines the role of the student representatives in facilitating the agenda of control of power in some of the schools studied. I conclude the chapter by exploring the SRC as a route to bureaucracy and power and how bureaucratic systems constrained students' participation in decision making. The chapter is presented under the following headings:

- Adult Systems
- Student Systems
- The SRC: A Link between School Authority and Students?
- The SRC: A Route to Bureaucracy and Power

6. 2. Adult Systems

Bureaucracy and power relations were identified as key factors that hindered students' participation in decision making in some of the study schools. Though some school heads widened their power boundaries for students' participation, others maintained the boundaries. In addition to this some staff also held entrenched positions and insisted that the school structures should be followed consistently. This thus affected the level of students' participation in decision making arenas in these schools. In Mantsewe School for example it was noted that:

The SRC is made to understand that they should work closely with the assistant head, administration. Because they have patrons, they have a very easy reach to the assistant head to present their problems (Head of Mantsewe School).

The understanding gained from the remark above is that the assistant head in responsible for administration was easily accessible to the SRC, however given the bureaucratic nature of senior high schools in Ghana, and the fact that key decisions are made by the head only, the assistant head would not be able to respond effectively to students' issues. The statement thus signifies that the bureaucracy was followed in Mantsewe School. For, even the assistant head would meet with the SRC after it had followed the procedure of going through the patron. Secondly, the tone and expression in the quotation suggested an authoritarian and regimental posturing in which the SRC was expected to follow rules and procedures to the letter. In addition to these, the statement confirmed the fact that the head was not easily accessible to the student representatives-power dynamics manifesting in the statement made by the head of Mantsewe School.

A regime of bureaucracy and dominance, it was noted, obtained in Mantsewe School as the head threw more light on the perspectives of his staff as they interacted with the SRC. He indicated that:

Some teachers do not readily listen to the students. Overall, teachers expect the students, especially prefects, to understand the positions they occupy (Head of Mantsewe School).

While the statement above could imply that the teachers wanted students to be responsible, it could also be deduced that the teachers expected student representatives not to overlook the fact that they (teachers) had supervisory authority over them (students). Therefore, students should keep their social distance. Indeed, in a later interview, the head asserted that the position prefects occupied should not be interpreted as a licence to consort with teachers. His directive that students should meet with the Assistant head first before requesting a meeting with him was a portrayal of the closed nature of his leadership. A discussion with the senior housemistress at Mantsewe School confirmed the authoritative style of governance was in the school. One of her statements indicated that shared decision making involving students was usually lacking:

The students will definitely have to use the protocol, passing through the patron or the senior housemaster. I do that occasionally when the senior housemaster is not available. If the two are not available, then I would lead them to the head. The head sometimes insists either the patron or

senior housemaster is present at the meeting with the students (Senior Housemistress, Mantsewe School).

The insistence of following the procedures before meeting the school head however did not sit well with student representatives, one of whom said that:

The bureaucracy in this school is too much (Students Council representative, Mantsewe School).

Another student added that:

By the time the message gets to the head the key issues have lost their relevance, (SC representative, Mantsewe School).

The statements made by the SRC representative validated the observation that the school was bureaucratic. The remarks also imply that the SRC representatives but did not get the expected responses from their school authority, having followed the structures.

Some school differed in the extent to which they relaxed the authority boundaries for student participation. While in Mantsewe School it was the both head and some of the staff that insisted that procedures were adhered to, in Ayeape School it was some of the staff that asked that the protocol was observed. In Ayeape School, the senior housemaster was concerned about the open manner in which the head dealt directly with the SRC without using the structures. He stated that:

The SRC usually comes in when there is a decision to be taken by the administration. Such information is channelled through me to them. They then discuss the issue and bring their opinions on the issue. I then forward their views to the headmistress. They are involved in any decision taken in the school (Senior Housemaster, Ayeape School).

The senior housemaster positioned himself as the medium through which communication between the SRC and the administration was conveyed. The respondent appeared to draw attention to the importance of keeping to the bureaucratic procedure in the statement, "I then forward their views to the headmistress." It also showed that he attached much importance to the position he occupied and thus wanted other stakeholders not to not lose sight of that. From his viewpoint, channelling information between students and the head constituted student participation. He also raised concerns about students taking decisions without involving other stakeholders; the

exclusion of key non-student actors such as the patron of the SRC in the administration–student decision-making processes. He stated that further:

See, these students go to the headmistress anytime they feel like. The head is pampering them. The way students are they will make too many demands on the school if they are given too much attention. Sometimes, you feel the head is pampering them (Senior Housemaster, Ayeape School),

The participant was thus concerned about the SRC's direct access to the headmistress. It was clear however that the issue was not about students' accessibility to the headmistress, neither was it about students being given too much attention. Rather it was because his authority would erode if the bureaucracy was not followed- that would make him lose power and control over the students. Thus, the whole discussion was about where power was being relocated. From his viewpoint, the direct access to the head of school could lead to disrespect of the school's chain of authority; and, in a sense, undermine his role as a 'gatekeeper' and conduit of communication between the SRC and the head. He therefore commented that:

There is no coordination between the administration and the SRC; unlike in other schools where there is usually some co-ordination between the administration and the SRC. The patron is sometimes unaware of certain decisions involving the administration and the students. These are some of the lapses in the system (Senior Housemaster, Ayeape School).

The lack of a definite governing structure so far as the SRC was concerned was spelt out by the senior housemaster at Ayeape School. In his opinion, administrative lapses and an inconsistent leadership style were the main factors that encouraged the absence of a clearly defined communication and decision-making process.

I think it is due to administrative lapses. Depending on the leadership style of the head of the school, sometimes they want things done quickly so they go straightforward to those [students] involved instead of meeting with the stakeholders who will take it to the various points. But sometimes things are done in a rush. Usually, the SRC will have to use the structures available for seeking redress or book appointment with the head. And this is usually done by the patron. Before you are aware, students have already been to the head. It affects our position. You think the head wants to undermine your work (Senior Housemaster, Ayeape School).

One can deduce from the quotation above that the debate is more about power relations, authority and who should possess it. By implying that the head was breaking the norm when she bypassed the governance structure and dealing directly with the students he was stressing that the bureaucracy should be observed. Through this his authority would be maintained as the SRC would have to continue reporting through his office to the head of school. Notwithstanding the fact that he had earlier indicated that it was important to create opportunities for students at decision-making forums. The senior housemaster of Ayeape School after criticising the head's direct link with student leaders however admitted that:

Sometimes, they want things done quickly so they [the school head] go straightforward to those (students) involved instead of meeting with the stakeholders who will take it to the various points.

Irrespective of the fact that some decisions could be taken quickly without adhering to procedures he re-emphasized that key persons in the administrative structure should always be consulted on student issues regardless of the urgency of the situation. This position thus reinforces the perception that those in authority exploited the structure to prevent students from engaging directly with school heads. Any effort by the head to sidestep the structure was thus seen as an encroachment of the authoritative function of especially the senior housemasters. The posturing of the senior housemaster, together with that of other staff who wanted rigid observance of the school structures could hinder students' participation in decision making in Ayeape School as teacher could prevent students from initiating action on decisions agreed on with the school head. It is significant to note that the head of Ayeape School recognised the procedures and requested the students to go back and follow the procedure after she had met with them. She remarked that:

The prefects come to me and discuss issues first and I ask them to go back and follow the structures again. But sometimes, if you have to follow all the structures, someone might get and keep information and it will not get to the head, who will not be aware of what is happening. So, I balance the two systems to get information ahead (Head of Ayeape School).

In occasionally sidestepping these procedures however, the head took cognizance of the fact that exclusive adherence to the formal structures would not only lead to delays but

could also prevent information from reaching its destination. In fact, the remark calls to reference the statement by a student in Mantsewe School who stated that delays getting information to the head of their school resulted in their concerns not being resolved or that the significant issues failed to receive the necessary attention. Thus, perhaps recognizing that staff could delay or fail to communicate information from students, she decided to interact directly with them on some occasions in order to obtain first-hand information. Nevertheless, while the head perceived the teacher–student relationship to be mutually beneficial and respectful, some staff members perceived it as a threat to their authority. By adopting informal structures to create space for students, the head avoided a situation that could give opportunity for student unrest. What this also signified on the other hand is that the head’s open administrative style was not universally welcomed by some of the staff. The assertion that “someone might get and keep information, and it will not get to the head” raised questions of the social interactions in the school administration. It portrayed some degree of mistrust between the head and teachers, which could lead to cynicism, withdrawal, low morale, and demotivation on the part of those entrusted with the welfare of the students.

Though there appeared to be cordial interactions between the school head and the SRC representatives at Plomdo School, one cannot fail but notice that power relations and bureaucracy played in the school. One staff participant from the school noted in his conversation with me that:

I personally think the students have been given too much freedom. We should not think of empowering students without limits (Dining Hall Master, Plomdo School).

The dining hall master further stressed his reservation of engaging students as collaborators in decision making. He was of the view that:

When students are given more mandate than they have now, a time will come they might even dictate to the head; and if their requests are not met, they might proceed on a sit-down strike. So, I think there should be some checks and balances. It will get to a time when they will feel they require more voice than they presently have and this may create problems for the teachers. (Dining Hall Master, Plomdo School).

The argument by the participant to restrict students' mandate on participation is not tenable, because Whitty and Wisby (2007), and Birzea, (2000) contend that when students are given adequate information on the processes and nature of collaboration, they would not abuse their empowerment. Thus what the school needed to do was to provide adequate information and training to students so they will put in practice their role in the decision-making forums. The teacher's concern was therefore not about students getting too much voice but rather it was about them (staff) losing power and control.

The senior housemaster at Plomdo School expressed similar views, stating that:

Students go to the head before we are even aware that there is a problem... The headmistress gives too much attention to the students. Sometimes, they would bypass the channels of communication and meet her (Senior Housemaster, Plomdo School).

In the latter remark, the respondent presented another dimension to the effects of a direct relationship between the head and students. In his opinion, the reason why students felt they could bypass the laid down communication channel was because they enjoyed much attention from the head. The housemaster expressed concerns about being denied the responsibility of obtaining information before it got to the head. He felt that a direct interaction between the head and students not only eroded his authority but also rendered his core responsibility of offering pastoral care redundant. It was also evident from his remark that the head acted on the information derived from students, which was not well-received by the senior housemaster.

The remarks by the two participants from Plomdo School, Mantsewe and Ayeape schools for that matter, resonate with Robinson and Taylor's (2013: 38) observation that some teachers are concerned that the student voice might "undermine the voice of teachers within the school". Fiske's (1996) asserts that interest groups in the school may or may not support a reform due to how the change will affect them. On this very issues Fielding (2001, p.106) also notes that

. . . the development of student voice at the expense or to the exclusion of teacher voice is a serious mistake. The latter is a necessary condition of the former: staff are unlikely to support developments that encourage positive ideals for students which thereby expose the poverty of their own participatory arrangements.

Perhaps, the heads of Plomdo and Ayeape schools did not manage the staff/student interaction efficiently thereby creating grounds for concerns from their respective staffs. Even though the number of participants who expressed these views was insignificant when compared to the number of staff participants involved in the study their statements were of much significance to the study. A senior housemaster in a Ghanaian senior high school wields much authority to the extent s/he is perceived as the next in authority after the head of school in so far as students' welfare issues are concerned. Consequently, he could influence other staff to be disloyal to the school head by not supporting decisions made by the head. The posturing of the two participants therefore, could inhibit students' participation in various ways in the respective schools. Conclusions drawn from the discussion is that the overly application of bureaucracy and power relations constrained students' participation in school decision making.

Plomdo and Ayeape schools in particular were noted by some education officials as schools that had vibrant SRCs. My initial interactions with the staff participants and the students also portrayed that cordial interactions existed between students and staffs of the schools and that students and teachers collaborated in decision-making forums. It is interesting therefore to note by the trend of conversations from the key staff members that some of the teachers were not comfortable with the open administrative adopted by the heads of schools. The senior housemaster at Ayeape School, probably fronting for other staff members, described the open-door system adopted by the head as a lapse in the administrative machinery. He was not hesitant in indicating that staff member usually failed to support these decisions between the SRC and the head at which they were excluded perhaps to frustrate the student representatives and/or the headmistress. Either way, system in Ayeape School was indicative of the arbitrary relationships between teachers and students regarding who had the right to make, regulate and implement decisions. By suggesting that procedures bureaucracy was followed in dealing with the SRCs, staff participants at Plomdo and Ayeape schools would be able to maintain the status quo and the formal recognition of their role in facilitating the required information from the head to students and vice versa; this kept them in control. This observation thus relates with Harts' (1992) assertion that people, and in these instances the key staff Plomdo and Ayeape schools, might have difficulty working creatively with students because they are used to routine operations that demand obedience.

Though conversations at Mawudor School did not portray the issue of bureaucracy, it heightened that of power and authority. Power was manifested in very subtle manner through the reactions and responses of some of the key participants in the school. For example, responding to a question on students' reaction when the school authority did not accept a view presented the dining hall master stated that:

You know with the presence of the headmaster, students will not usually be disrespectful.

There appeared to be some apprehension or reservations in discussing issues that related to discipline or interactions with students. I recalled, for example one staff participant's apprehension and hesitation during the interview process to the extent that he wanted to find out if I was going to discuss the responses with the head of school. There was also the feeling that staff considered students as not capable of managing information therefore had reservations partnering them in decision-making forums. The senior housemaster, in his conversations with me, indicated that:

Teachers felt it was not proper that students should sit at the DC meetings with them, (Senior housemaster, Mawudor School).

Asked to explain why there was that feeling he indicated that:

The issues are usually too sensitive for students to handle maturely so they would not be part of their meetings. Teachers feel students will go talking about the issue among themselves after leaving the meeting, (Senior Housemaster, Mawudor School).

As can be deduced from the statement the staff felt students should not be part of the discussions, citing students' immaturity to handle sensitive issues as reasons for students' exclusion. There seemed to be an issue of trust as teachers felt student representatives might go and discuss the issue on other platforms. I tried to reconcile this assertion with what a SRC representative had stated earlier that there was mutual respect between the SRC and the staff. The mutual respect was in each group understanding its position in the social interactions in the school, perhaps. Further discursions indicated that most activities of the SRC were a students-level affair. Thus issues that school authorities considered important were not open for students' interaction and participation in the school. This also explained why the feeding

committee changed their meeting to review students' comments from three times to once a term. A student representative stated:

With the SRC we plan and organise our programmes which we have submitted to the school authority. For example, we'll be celebrating SRC awards soon and students are looking forward to the occasion (SC representative, Mawudor School).

The student's remark thus confirms the observation that the activities of the SRC were student specific and not integrated into the school's formal processes. As a result the SRC was not engaged until the staff felt it expedient to engage with them. Generally there was a separation between what was organised by the SRC and that organised by the school as a whole. Power dynamics played into various activities such that the head was present at the SRC general assembly which was exclusively students' activity. His presence thus muffled the significance of the all-students meeting. One student indicated that:

In actual fact, the headmaster is there. So whatever the headmaster wants us the students to do, he informs us and we do it (Non-SC representative, Mawudor School).

This statement was in response to how the SRC organised forums and discussed issues that affected them at their (SRC) general meetings. The presence of the headmaster at the SRC general meetings was a setback for students' participation in decision making because it could intimidate and prevent students from speaking out on issues that were of concern to them. Though the head might not interfere with the deliberations at the meetings, but his presence, as one in authority diminished the relevance of the SRC executives. One would argue that he was at the students' forum to get first-hand information of students' perspectives, but for one who wanted asked students to deal with their patron it would have been more appropriate to ask the patron to attend the meeting. The point being raised is that the head's presence at the students' forum could mute some students who might want to speak on issues. Drawing from the discussions at Mawudor School, the impression gathered was that the head. The general observation made from the discussions at Mawudor School was that the issue of bureaucracy was very subtle and not explicitly manifested but one could not fail to notice that it was inherent.

The discussion so far has shown the extent to which those in power worked to maintain their hold of power. Efforts were made by some school heads to engage with the SRCs at decision-making platforms in their schools respectively, but their efforts were hindered by staffs, who felt that the structures were followed consistently. The heads of Plomdo and Ayeape schools, made efforts to widen the school structures, however, they could not effectively manage it to embody the staff. The staff thus employed the structures to hinder students' participation. It was noted that the form of communication endorsed by some of the senior housemasters, as against their heads of schools, was mostly of the vertical type. Although such a situation was obvious in all the study schools, it was mostly manifested at Mantsewe School, where students remarked that the bureaucracy was excessive; and at Mawudor School where staff participants were hesitant in responding to some of the questions. Both the head and key staff members of Mantsewe School were bureaucratic, giving the SRC little opportunity to participate in decision-making forums. Consequently the adult systems and processes became a setback for students' participation in decision making in the schools.

6. 3. Student Systems

From the discussions it was noted that representation on school committees was linked to the roles assigned the prefects' who were also the SRC executives. School prefects were elected or appointed from among final year classes only. The prefects then elected as the executives of the SRCs. The SRCs on the other hand comprised representatives for all year groups elected from their classes. These included class prefects, assistant class prefects and other selected representatives. These SRC executives/prefects were therefore those who represented students on the schools committees discussed in the previous chapter. The process of selecting prefects was given much attention by school authorities because of the prefects' relation to the school authorities. The process of determining who became a prefect in Plomdo and Ayeape schools was through popular voting, while there was a combination of staff appointments and popular voting at Mawudor and Mantsewe schools.

6. 3. 1. Election of Prefects

The data indicated that the mode of electing prefects varied at the study schools. Plomdo and Ayeape Schools adopted the democratic process of popular votes to elect students prefects. Students aspiring for leadership positions as prefects in the two schools voluntarily picked nomination forms and contested for the positions. The process of electing student leaders was more democratic in Plomdo School and Ayeape School where students voluntarily picked nomination papers and went through the processes specified by the school before voting. A student participant noted that:

Students are given the chance to aspire for the positions. You first go through the students' vetting process after filing your nomination. The prefects vet the aspirants and those they deem successful move on to the next stage – the teachers' vetting. Successful aspirants after the teachers' vetting are then qualified to be voted for into the positions they are vying for (SC representative, Plomdo School)

The remark above was confirmed by a staff participant who indicated that:

We ask students, who are interested to pick the forms, fill and submit to the vetting committee. So that is the first area and, looking at it, that is very democratic; they themselves choosing who they feel should lead them...they themselves nominate their own people for the post (Dining hall Master, Plomdo School).

A similar scenario obtained in Ayeape School where students aspiring for leadership positions also picked nomination forms voluntarily. It was indicated that:

We picked application forms and were endorsed by other students from all the classes. But we were groomed⁴ by our seniors also. So we are able to tell those who can do the work during the grooming (SC representative, Ayeape School)

Mentoring by itself is not a bad idea, since the mentee gains experience in whatever field s/he is preparing for. However, it could be a means of excluding other students who might have developed interest in holding an office later. Their chances of being successful at the initial vetting conducted by the outgoing prefects might be slim because since they had not been mentored. A staff respondent also stated:

⁴ 'Groomed' implied that students went through mentorship. It is an expression used in senior high schools in Ghana.

When it's time for elections, they call for nominations and these nominees are later vetted by the outgoing prefects. After the vetting, the successful aspirants then pass on to the Electoral College and then to the house staff (Senior Housemistress, Ayeape School).

Describing what pertained in Mantsewe School, one participant explained that:

The head prefect and the assistants are selected by the staff after thorough vetting. We consider many things before selecting candidates for the position of head prefect and assistants. The candidates selected are presented to the student body and are voted for. The other positions are elected through the ballot (Head of Mantsewe School).

This assertion revealed the direct hand of the school administration in the election process in determining who headed the team of SRC. The headmaster could not explain why the school adopted the two modes of determining student leaders but stated that it was the established norm at the school. There seemed to be a contradiction between the head's comment and that of the student as to which positions by staff appointment and which were by students' voting. The student indicated that:

The head prefect is elected by popular vote and the other positions are appointed by the teachers (SC representative, Mantsewe School).

What came up from the discussions with staff was that three students were screened and selected by the school authority and presented to the students to vote for one. This was probably not known to the students since they voted for one candidate among three.

The process at Mantsewe School showed that the election was a two-stage affair through which the head prefect and assistant were appointment by the school authorities while other positions were contested for by students. The indirect appointment of a head prefect by the school authorities was a contravention of the SRC constitution, which states that all SRC executives "shall be elected" (SRC, n. d. p.2). If the head prefect did not pick nomination forms voluntarily as was done in Plomdo and Ayeape schools, then his position as the SRC president was flawed since he was basically determined by the school authority. The relevant point being made is that the initial process of electing the student leadership was as important as their participation in decision-making forums in the schools studied. Thus, if the process appeared to be manipulated directly or indirectly, the prefects might not have the full support of the student body. Students might assume that the elected prefect would only rubber-stamp

decisions made by the school authorities and impose those decisions on them. Cautiously s/he might protect the position being occupied, than being the leading voice of the student populace. This could compromise the rationale for student participation in decision making. The headmaster of Mantsewe School further explained that:

What we do here is give them [students] a chance to advertise themselves, after which they are nominated. After the nomination, they are vetted by their various students who know them better. Before the vetting, a lot of people including teachers sign their nomination forms. After the students' vetting, comes the teachers' vetting. After the teachers' vetting, those we believe are fit for the positions are put forward (Head of Mantsewe School).

One could read intent to control and decide who occupied the position of the head prefect from the head's remark. Requiring teachers to endorse a student aspirant could affect the election process due to power relations, as staff could be seen as influencing the procedure through promoting their favourites. Such a system could also dissuade other interested students from coming forward if they felt they would be hindered from contesting the position. Secondly, and more importantly, since neither the head nor assistant head prefect went through the vetting procedure but were selected by the school authorities, the former might end up not representing the students whose welfare they were elected to protect.

A dual process for selecting student office holders was noted at Mawudor School also. The feedback indicated that the positions of head prefect and assistants were contested democratically; however, other positions were determined through mentorship, and later via confirmation and appointment by the school authorities. A student respondent remarked:

We were groomed by our seniors till we became seniors, and were tested and vetted by students, and then the masters (SRC representative, Mawudor School).

Another student also explained:

We applied, but then we were recommended by some masters and students. They made sure there were recommendations, and the students were allowed to vet us and really get to know us. The masters also had the opportunity to do that before we were elected (SRC representative, Mawudor School).

At Mawudor School, the positions of head and assistant prefects were democratically contested after candidates had presented themselves and gone through vetting; other positions were appointed by the school authorities. A student stated:

The top positions – head prefect and their assistants, the dining hall prefect, and the grounds prefect – are elected. Some positions such as house captains are appointed by housemasters and other teachers. The protocol prefect and some of the other prefects are also appointed (SRC representative, Mawudor School).

The similarity between Mantsewe and Mawudor schools was the two-stage process of determining student leadership. In each case there was direct involvement by the staff in appointing a category of leaders while some positions were elected by the students

The election processes, though democratic in Plomdo and Ayeape schools and partially democratic in Mantsewe and Mawudor schools affirm Lewars' (2010:274) observation that student councils are invariably "dominated by a certain type of student – academically successful, well behaved, and usually middle class". These students usually tend to be from the elite class and favourites of school authorities and predecessors who favoured them. Lewars' (2010) observation supports Nongubo's (2005) assertion that it is usually students who already have a certain rapport with teachers who are elected to prefectural positions. Judging from the senior house mistress' earlier remark and the assertions by Lewars and Nongobu, it was thus clear that students that passed the vetting in the four study schools were those favoured by the staffs. I could argue also that behind these vetting processes was the hidden agenda to control the election and appoint students who would do the bidding of the school authorities. Lewars (2010) contends that an atmosphere of non-cooperation, conflict, cynicism, and dissent may emerge among the student populace if they perceive any intention of manipulating the election process.

The democratic mode of student elections dovetailed into the administrative style of the two heads thereby making the SRCs in the two schools enjoy cordial interactions with the school authorities. In addition, these democratic processes were also indicators to the two heads of school heads being easily accessible to the SRCs. On the other hand, the spilt agency in the conduct of student elections at Mantsewe and Mawudor schools had an effect on students' democratic participation in the two schools. It could leave

room for manipulation and appointment of staff favourites, which also could affect the level of students' participation in the two schools.

6. 3. 2. Election of SRC Executive Members

The SRC elections were held after school prefects had been elected and sworn into office and class prefects had been appointed for the classes. With the appointment of class prefects and election of prefects, an SRC has been established in the school and therefore executives could be elected. The election of SRC executives was done at the general assembly of the representatives. It was noted that the SRC election procedures were similar in the four study schools, probably because the schools were guided by one SRC constitution, which states that, "Officers elected at the Local General Council meeting [at the school] shall consist of the Local President, Local Vice President, Local SRC Secretary, Local Deputy Secretary, Local Financial Secretary/Treasurer, and two Local Organizing Secretaries" (SRC Constitution, n. d. p. 5). The prefects thus contested for these positions at the general assembly. The Head prefects however did not contest since by virtue of their positions they were SRC presidents in the respective study schools. The observation was affirmed by a participant that:

The SRC president who is also the school prefect and his assistant are automatic members of the SRC executives (Head of Ayeape School)

Given that executive positions should be contested by the aspirants, one could state that the authorities in Mantsewe School contravened the SRC Constitution by appointing head prefects who then automatically became SRC president by virtue of their position. The argument is that if a head prefect has been elected by popular vote, it is reasonable that he or she should also be SRC president. However, if the head prefect was appointed by the school authority, as in the case of Mantsewe School, his/her position as the SRC president contravenes the SRC Constitution because he was not elected by popular votes. The positions to be elected appear to be subsumed by election of prefects making the SRC constitution ineffective.

6. 3. 3. The SRC: A Link between School Authority and Students?

Perhaps one significant factor that inhibited the participation of the SRC in decision-making forums was the limited scope in which the students saw their functions. Most discussions with the students indicated that the SRC was a liaison between the school authorities and student populace and responsible for resolving students' grievances. Discussing the functions of the SRC in their school, a participant noted that:

The SRC mainly serves as channel or link. Whatever problem confronts students, we the SRC take it to the school administration. We also resolve students' grievances and problems (SRC representative, Mantsewe School).

As a link in the chain, the students at Mantsewe School did not have much of a mandate to engage with the school authorities until they were invited. However, judging from the tone of this remark, student respondents appeared to be content with the role of managing issues concerning student indiscipline and supervising routine assignments. Such a notion of the 'grievance resolving' and intermediary roles of the SRC though relevant for the development of students' skills and attitudes is restrictive and could affect students' level of participation in decision making.

Discussing their role a student at Plomdo School noted:

Our responsibilities are to ensure constant flow of information between the educational authorities and the student body, and also to take the grievances of the students to the administration – serving as the link between the administration and the student body. We do exactly that. In other words, we are like a mouthpiece; an intermediary between the students and the administration; a link between the two sides (SRC representative, Plomdo School).

Similar views were expressed by the student participants at Mawudor and Ayeape schools. This thus confirmed the notion that SRC representatives were only conversant with their role as intermediaries. It has however been noted that Student Councils are to foster, promote and develop democracy as a way of life and permit students to assume responsibilities and have experiences in democratic participation. In addition to these, it provides students with opportunities to develop leadership abilities to participate in determining school policies and practices and build school spirit and pride (Robinson

and Donald Koehn, 1994). Thus the intermediary stance of the student representatives defined the scope of operation and limited their functions as conduits for disseminating information. Consequently, the student representatives were active only at the students' level and not within the whole school system. This perhaps explains why they created student-level disciplinary committees, which from all indications did not receive much recognition from the school authorities, though it served their purposes.

Feedback from non-student council members showed mixed reactions to the performance of the SRC in their respective schools. It was only at Plomdo School that the response indicated some satisfaction of the student council's activities. A student noted that:

The relationship we have with them is very good. In each house we have a SRC representative who we can go to with our problems (Non-SC representative, Plomdo School).

While the remark implied a cordial interaction between the student groups, it also portrayed the existence of a structure which paralleled that of the administrative structure of the school. Despite the perception that the practice reflected a grass root structure where the SRC House Representatives acted as local authorities and listened to the students at the House level it also signified the authority lines that existed.

In Mawudor School however, a different picture however was painted with a student participant remarking that:

They [SRC representatives] should be more open and tell us what they really stand for and exactly what they are supposed to do so that we can know what to tell them, (Non-SC representative, Mawudor School).

From this perspective, the SRC at Mawudor School appeared not to be transparent to the student body in the execution of its responsibilities. Student participant was not certain of the SRC stance in relation to its functions. It also suggested that the SRC was not communicating effectively with the general student body. This observation was reinforced by the quotation below from another student in the same school.

Yes, but sometimes you don't really know whose side they are on. They don't tell us anything about issues we complain about. (Non-SC representative, Mawudor School).

The response indicates that, students' view of the SRC as representatives was blurred by the SRC's inability to adequately communicate with the populace. The on-going discussion portrayed a rather unilateral bearing of the SRC in Mawudor School by the other selected student participants. It also signifies that the mutual respect between students and teachers as indicated by one of the SRC representatives was only at the staff and student leadership.

The feedback from discussions at Ayeape School suggested there was a gap between the SRC executives and the student populace as the SRC was unable to communicate with their peers effectively on decisions made by the school authority. It is interesting that while a teacher had indicated that there was a lapse in the school's administrative, a student saw the gap between the students and the SRC. In her response, one stated that:

The gap is between the student representatives and the student body because they have to make us aware of what is really going on, (Non-SC representative, Ayeape School).

Another respondent also confirmed that:

Apart from the SRC forums any report they send to the masters we don't get feedback. Sometimes we complain about issues, for example food issues but they don't assure us that they are still pursuing it. (Non-SC representative, Ayeape School).

What is gathered from the comment above is that the student populace appeared not to be well informed about what their representatives were doing. Knowing that the head of Ayeape school for example, adopted an open system of administration, students concluded that the SRC was not doing enough to ensure the successful implementation of their petitions. Thus the students perceived a gap, not between the SRC and the administration, but between the SRC representatives and the general student populace.

The situation was not any different in Mantsewe School, where Student Council representatives:

Speak to the students a lot; they interact with us and forward issues to the administration. So generally they are there to help the students (Non SC representative, Mantsewe School).

However, just as observed from Mawudor School, students in Mantsewe School reported inadequate flow of information from the Council on its activities. The response below by a student participant supported the claim.

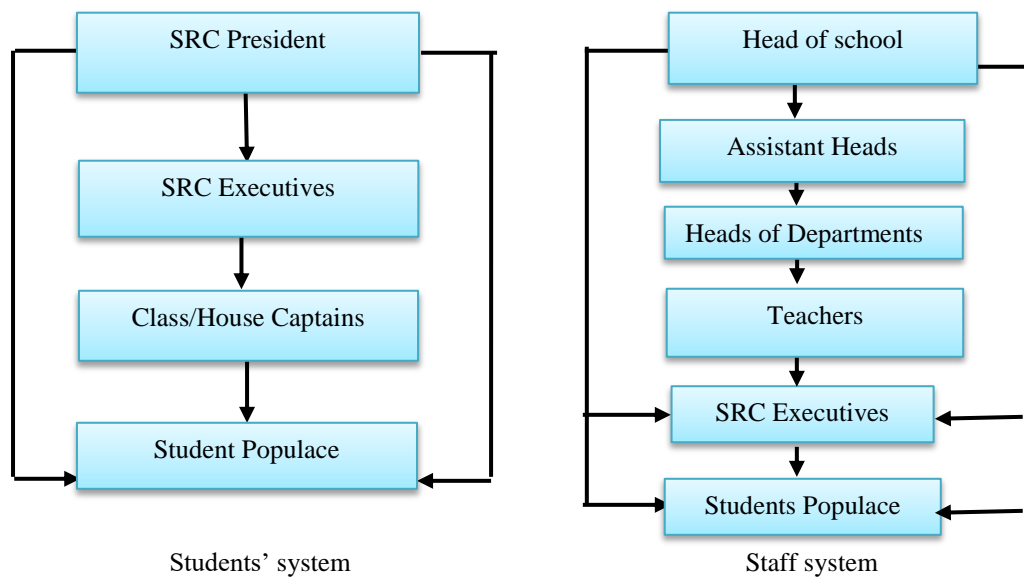
They usually keep them [information] secret (non-SC representative, Mantsewe School).

If the SRC main role as indicated in the conversations, was to communicate information through and fro staff and students, was being described as keeping information, then one wonders whether it sought the welfare of the students. The strand of conversations however showed that most of the SRCs placed emphasis on and went through the motions of organizing SRC forums and meetings at various students' levels. However, the outcomes of these activities were not effectively communicated to their colleague students. The communication between the student populace and the SRC was sporadic just as their participation in decision-making was at the school level.

6. 4. The SRC: A Route to Bureaucracy and Power

The SRC as I stated in chapter two represents the voice of students. This is done through organising forums and meetings to seek the welfare of student populace, which implies that the SRC must be very democratic in its activities and decision making at the students' level. However, the SRCs in the four study schools appeared to be a route to bureaucracy and power and thus epitomise the formal structures of the schools. Chart 6. 1. below is a semblance of the structure of the SRCs as compared to that of the school system.

Chart 6.1 Structure of the students system compared with staff system



The figure shows the reporting channels of both the SRC and the schools. The student populace were thus expected to follow these processes of reporting at the students' level. The parallels show the SRC president as head of the students and the head of school as the head of the school. The other positions in both the students groups and the school system thus convey a notion that the SRCs replicated the bureaucracies and protocols they observed in the school systems. This structure thus gave the SRC executives the exercise of power over the student populace as students also had to follow the protocol in their interactions with the SRC executives. Inferences drawn from remarks made by both students and staff participants at different sessions indicated that SRC executives felt they were helping their school authorities in performing their (staff) duties. As a result they saw themselves as being above the rules governing the schools. Reacting to a decision by the head of their school regarding a SRC representative who flouted schools rules and was sanctioned the SRC executives noted that the sanction was not justified. One student representative remarked:

In my opinion as a prefect with such a respectable post as the Assistant SRC General Secretary, he has to be accorded some dignity. Stripping him of his post is too harsh a decision. I think giving him internal suspension for a week would be ideal (SRC representative, Mantsewe School).

The SRC executives felt the sanction inappropriate because the student was a SRC executive. By the statement the SRC executives expected that the position of the

offending student leaders should be taken into consideration before pronouncing any sanction on the errant students, notwithstanding the fact that the student leaders had flouted the rules. Similarly, in Ayeape School it was noted that the SRC wanted to be served special meals by virtue of the position as student leaders. The dining hall master stated that:

On one occasion, the prefects came to me requesting for special diet for the prefects. I told them it couldn't work and they were annoyed because they thought they were in helping with the running of day-to-day activities of the school. Therefore, they should be treated on a different way (Dining hall master Ayeape).

In Plomdo School also, it was noted that:

We talk about the food, how the prefects treat us. For example how they exercise their power over us (Non-SRC representative, Plomdo School).

The participant's comment was in response to how the SRC forum was organised in their school and what transpired at the forums. Embedded in the remark was the fact that the SRC executives exercised some 'power' over the student populace, (an indication of conferred or delegated authority from the school authority). This observation and others from non-SRC executives from Ayeape and Plomdo Schools reinforced the view that there existed a super-ordinate/subordinate relationship between the student leaders and the student populace. This was thus a replication of what transpired at the administration level. The significance of this discussion is the fact that the SRCs were concerned about the bureaucracy in their schools and how this affected their work as student leaders. Yet these same student representatives mirrored the very practice they raised concerns about on their peers. Once the SRCs began to express a notion of superiority and were requesting for privileges, there was also the tendency to impose their will on the student populace instead of representing them in decision-making forums. One cannot fail but notice that the power relations between students and school authorities were replicated at the various students' levels in the four study schools because of the positions they occupied. The discussions thus closely relate to the concerns raised by Fielding (2001) as to whether student representatives' perceptions and intentions reflect the experience of the student populace they represent.

6. 5. Key issues arising from this Chapter

The discussion in this chapter highlighted two significant issues. The first one is that there was more democratic student representation in some schools than others. The second observation was that head is the one to initiate students' participation in decision making in the school. In concluding the chapter, I draw out these two issues in more detail.

6. 5. 1. More Democratic Representation in Some Schools than Others

Overall it was noted that there was more democratic students' representation in some schools than others; the election processes and scope of students' participation highlighted this observation. In the determination of who headed the SRC, Plomdo and Ayeape schools adopted more democratic processes with minor deviations at some stages of the process. At Ayeape School, for example, a double scrutiny of student candidates was identified; students were scrutinized by senior house staff after they had been vetted and approved by the Electoral College. While the practice deviated from what pertained at the national level, the fact was that students were elected democratically. At Plomdo School students were also elected democratically. However, its transparency was questioned because the vote counting was conducted by only one person and that was done in privacy instead of before the student populace. The students elected were not 'imposed' by the staff and while Ayeape and Plomdo schools made efforts to adopt some democracy in instituting student leadership, their efforts were only partially consistent with the macro democratic process of Ghana. Fielding (20041) contends that the rise of a student voice as the focus of a reform movement cannot be detached from the transformation of state governance. The point being made is that as Ghana deepens its democratic process, it is hoped also that the processes permeate all state institutions and especially the senior high schools level, which is a terminal point for some students and a link to higher education for others. The students in the four study schools needed to acquire knowledge and attitudes in democracy through participation. In a conversation with a retired Director of Education, she indicated that one of the reasons balloting was introduced into the selection of student leaders in the Senior High Schools was because it was important that students engaged practically with the democratic process to gain experience. Thus to appoint head prefects as done in

Mantsewe and Mawudor schools defeated the very purpose of adopting the process of voting in schools. Besides, national elections are held during school term and students who are eligible to vote are granted permission to vote in their electoral areas. It is therefore baffling that school heads would allow students to vote during national elections yet fail to encourage these same students to democratically contest for positions in their schools.

Rudduck and Flutter, (2000 p 83) citing Hodgkin state that, “Democracy is not something which is taught; it is something which is practiced.” Thus, the heads of the study schools would have to consider initiating democratic practices that reflect national-level practices for students to acquire the knowledge and right attitudes in democracy and citizenship. In addition to the fact that they will acquire hands-on experience of democracy, students will also gain new perspectives and ideas from beyond their immediate social worlds that will help ensure that they do not feel alienated. If Ruddock and Flutter’s (2000) assertion that children (and by extension students) are socialized to become responsible citizens is to be noted, then it is necessary that school authorities inculcate these values in their students by encouraging their participation in democratic practices in the four schools.

6. 5. 2. The head as Initiator of students’ participation in decision making

Christiansen et al., (1997) assert that disparities arise in organizations because of status and power; and the failure of those who wield power to empathize with those who do not. Indeed, the present study identified differences of opinion in interactions between staff members and their heads, and between staff and SRC executives, as exemplified in Ayeape School and Mantsewe School respectively. The subtle politics that was taking place among staff and heads of schools regarding decision making and school governance was a fertile ground that could breed dissension among staff and students respectively. Some of the attempts made by the heads to engage with students without integrating it into the schools culture provided a fertile ground for resistance from staff. The lesson learned from the interactions among staff of Ayeape School – as represented by the senior housemaster and the head of school – is that reform should be systematic and appropriately applied so that everyone understands its essence and impact. The responsibility of providing arenas for students to initiate decisions and share with

teachers lies with the head. Nevertheless, it is important that teachers are well informed about their role in the process of integrating students in decision making forums. Without that, any effort to engage with students as partners in decision making would only lead to the staff blocking decisions and activities of the students to sabotage the efforts of the head.

Backman and Trafford, (2006) contend that though authoritarian structures do not easily lend themselves to democratic practices, it is possible to adopt democratic practices in structured school environments if the head is prepared to take the lead. As Backman and Trafford (2006 p 27) note, “The head’s behaviour is what really counts.” The notion is that school administrators control both school agenda and process, (Cockburn, 2006). Therefore, school heads are the ones who can set the tone, bring their staffs on board for congenial social interactions, and create the required forums for students’ participation because they (heads) are the only people who have the opportunity and privilege to do that. Thus, the head’s role in creating forums for students’ participation in decision making is very paramount.

This chapter focussed on school systems and how these helped to maintain the status quo in the school. It concluded that the student system was a replica of the adult one which was bureaucratic. The implications of the findings discussed in chapters Five and Six are discussed in the concluding chapter.

SEVEN - CONCLUDING DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Introduction

In the previous two chapters I presented an analysis of the data focussing on forums and levels of student participation in chapter five and the bureaucracies in the formal systems in the four schools in chapter six. In this concluding chapter I review the research questions in the light of the main findings before moving on to consider the implications to policy and practice. The chapter is presented under the following sections:

- Research questions revisited
 - Forums for student participation in decision making
 - Levels of Participation
- Barriers to Student Participation
 - Bureaucracy
 - Inadequate Knowledge of Student Participation Issues
- The Case Study Schools in Perspective
- Policy Issues
 - Implication to policy
 - Implication to practice
- Contribution to Knowledge
- My Reflections

7. 2. Research Questions Reviewed

In this study I sought to explore the forums available for students' participation in decision making in school and also students' level of participation in the forums studied. I also examined factors that constrained students' participation and the implications of the findings for wider policy and practice in Ghana's senior high school system. In answering these questions I adopted a qualitative approach using interviews and focus group discussions to collect data in four selected case study schools. Findings that emerged from the data are discussed below.

7. 2. 1. Research Question one: Forums for student participation in decision making

The first research question focused on the forums available for students' participation in decision making in the four case study schools. Participation in the forums studied was mostly through the SRC executives who were prefects and liaised between the student populace and the school authorities. The findings indicated that there were similarities in the forums available but the manner of participation in these forums varied across the case schools. The schools set up various committees and students had representatives on the committees that dealt with student welfare. Thus basically forums were available in the schools for students to engage in decision making on issues that affect them. There were however differences in participation in these forums. In Plomdo School for example elected students representatives attended meetings with their teacher members on the feeding committee. At Mawudor School in addition to elected students who attended meetings the general student body entered their comments in a notebook provided by the school. These comments were later perused for future consideration, Thus between the two schools discussed so far students' participation was wider spread in Mawudor School than in Plomdo School where participation was limited to only the student representatives. However, in Mantsewe and Ayeape schools, despite students' membership on the feeding committees, the student representatives did not have access to the forum as their counterparts in Plomdo and Mawudor schools had. Thus two schools had more access to the forum on feeding issues while two had limited access on feeding related issues.

With regards to students' participation in decision-making on disciplinary issues, it was noted that across the four schools studied, student representatives in the four schools had limited access. Whereas it was noted that students were members of the disciplinary committees in their respective schools, their participation was only nominal. This was either due to perceptions that students were not mature to handle 'sensitive matters' or that school structures hindered their participation in the forum. Morrow (2000, p.62) notes that, "Adult structures and institutions constrain and control children" such that the children are excluded from participating in decision-making forums; this was the situation in the four study schools on issues regarding participation in disciplinary matters. The disciplinary forum is the only one that participation was similar across the

four schools. Thus instead of the student representatives partnering their teachers in decision-making forums regarding disciplinary issues they were rather liaisons between the student populace and school authorities. Students' participation in decision making on disciplinary issues was tokenistic. On the whole students were engaged in decision making on disciplinary issues to help maintain discipline, achieve administrative goals and keep students in containment rather than for ensuring student participatory rights. The observation thus affirms Mayall's (2000) contention that students' participation can sometimes be for achievement of organisational objectives.

The study noted that beside the forums available, students had informal access which is a way in which participation could be achieved- interaction between students and their respective heads of schools. There was more rapport in the social interactions between the heads and student representatives of Plomdo and Ayeape schools than in Mawudor and Mantsewe schools, an indication that the Heads of Plomdo and Ayeape schools paid more attention to their students' views. This is in contrast to the observation that school systems in Ghana are generally authoritarian (Pryor et al, 2005). Thus the social interaction between students and school heads in Plomdo and Ayeape schools was an indication that the respective heads had widened their power boundaries for student/staff collaboration. On the other hand there was little rapport in the interaction between student representatives and their respective heads in Mawudor and Mantsewe schools, which affected students' participation in decision making in these two schools. From the presentation, generally, the conclusion that is drawn is that though the forums available were similar across the schools there were variations in students' participation in decision making in the studied forums across and within the schools.

7. 2. 2. Research Question Two: Levels of Participation

The second research question focused on the level of students' participation in the forums studied. On this issue it was noted that students' level of participation in the available forums was diverse across the case study schools. As noted in the Chapter Five the heads of the four study schools had different motivations for providing the forums for students' participation in decision making. The diverse motivations coupled with school structures, power relations and attitudes of some staff in the respective schools contributed to the differences in level of students' participation. It was noted

that Plomdo and Mawudor schools were at the participatory level in feeding related issues, students' input being factored into decision making. In spite of the observation that these two schools were at the participatory level there were differences between the two schools in when their issues were given attention. The difference was that in Plomdo School students were involved in decision making before implementation; but in Mawudor School students were involved in decision making after implementation with the view that their input would be given attention in drawing the following terms' menu. Therefore participation in deciding on students' feeding was more relevant to students in Plomdo School because it responded to their immediate needs and concerns. The students of Plomdo School had opportunity to make input into the planned menu. Morrow (2000, p. 29) describes the form of participation in feeding matters in Mawudor School as "latent"- the students knowing that their concerns are taken note of and may be acted upon. Students were at the non-participatory level in feeding related issues in both Mantsewe and Ayeape schools. The students through their representatives usually had little opportunity to participate in decision making in this forum. However, students in Ayeape School could and were able to cause a change in menu due to the rapport that was between the head and the students. In Mantewe School however, it was quite impossible for students to request for a change in menu as this was considered disrespect for school authority.

With reference to Hart's (1992) ladder, students' level of participation in decision-making arenas in the area of discipline appeared tokenistic across the four schools as there was little collaboration between staffs and students in that forum. Students were informed only about decisions made and asked to communicate the information to their peers. It was evident that power relations directed and informed the level of student participation in issues related to discipline as staff described some disciplinary issues as "higher level" and thus denied students' access into this forum. This 'higher level' segregation fits into what Robinson (2013, p.38) describes as "hierarchical authoritative positions" manifesting in the formation of the schools disciplinary committees. Students thus went through the motions of participation, by creating their own disciplinary committees to take decisions on students' minor offences. From the presentation, generally, the conclusion that is drawn is that there were variations in level of students' participation in decision making forums studied.

7. 3. Research Question Three: Barriers to Student Participation

The study identified bureaucracy and power relations, school systems and structures and inadequate knowledge of students' participatory rights, as factors that hindered students' participation in decision making. This finding relates to the third research question which examined factors that hindered students' participation in decision making in the study schools

7. 3. 1. Bureaucracy and Power Relations

The study indicated that bureaucracy and power relations affected the level at which students participated in decision making in the study schools. Dunne et al. (2007, p. 44) in their study of school processes in basic schools in Ghana had a cogent point when they stated that:

Teacher and student interactions are central to understandings [sic] of the school as a social arena. School and classroom studies indicate strong social hierarchies in which age and gender relations play an important part.

The quotation above relates to age and gender in the school, and how these nurture social hierarchies in the system. The significance of the quotation in this regard reflects teacher–student interactions and how these perpetuated bureaucracies in the schools in the study schools. Similarly Robinson and Taylor, (2013, p. 42) also assert that “The subtle presence of hidden domination . . . between teachers and students, has significant implications”. This subtle domination, which restricted students' access to decision-making forum of discipline, was identified in the four case schools. As noted in the data chapter, some heads indeed created some opportunities for students' engagement. However, these heads did not receive the necessary support from some key members of their staff because they wanted the processes to be followed. The interviews suggest also that key staff such as senior high masters felt students were not yet matured to participate in decision-making processes at the senior high school level. Thus, instead of supporting their heads, who wanted to include students in decision-making forums, these staff, excusing themselves through the school structures and their perceptions of students' maturity level constrained students' participation by insisting that the

administrative and communication lines were duly followed. The attendant effect was that students' level of participation was low even in the forums provided. The point is that in most of the instances staff participants argued in favour of students as partners in decision-making forums on issues that affected them; yet, the very same teachers finding excuse in the school systems, were not in favour of student' participation in decision making when the opportunity was available. Bragg, (2007) asserts that some schools by their nature value hierarchies and use them to exclude students from participation. This was mostly manifested in the interactions in some forums in the study schools- the two-panel disciplinary committees and the heads' accessibility to the SRC were all issues of hierarchy. Since the environments created were bureaucratic, students' level of participation was hindered. In this wise the assertion by Dunne et al. (2007: 44) that, "Within the school and classroom there is little or no space for student participation" resonates with the contexts of the study schools in which structure and social space were used to constrain students' level of participation.

It is clear that leadership types and system structures have either supported or constrained student participation in the four study schools. There were more social interactions between the student representatives and their school authority in Plomdo School. This rapport therefore enabled more opportunities for students to participate in decision making.. The differences in students' participation in decision making intra-school highlight Backman and Trafford's (2005) assertion that the Head of school really matters in creating democratic schools. Thus without a review of the vertical structures to horizontal ones students participation indecision making would be more of non-participatory than participatory.

The study noted that the student system was a reflection of the adult one as it mirrored what occurred in the adult system. Instead of the democratic systems required in the student system to facilitate their participation in school decision making, the system rather fostered vertical lines of communications. The bureaucracy in the student system placed some authority in the student leadership, which made them see themselves superior to above their peers. This superiority complex led to the leadership in Ayeape and Mantsewe schools asking to be given some favours. The result was that the student body wondered whether their leaders were on their side or on the side of the school authority. The bureaucracy in the student system and the perception that student

representatives felt above their peers affected students' participation at both the school level and the student level and highlights the observation that some student councils are interest groups seeking to satisfy their selfish interests (Lewars, 2010).

7. 3. 2. Inadequate Knowledge of Student Participation Issues

Students do not inherently know how to be meaningfully involved in their schools. Likewise, most educators struggle to figure out how to meaningfully involve students (Fletcher, 2005. p.116).

The above quotation resonates with the findings that inadequate knowledge of issues pertaining to students' participatory rights affected students' level of participation in decision-making forums in the study schools. Reflecting on the discussions, it was clear that some of the participants did not have a clear understanding of the concept of student participation in decision making. Most student interactions with school authorities were thus based on what the SRCs observed from their predecessors. On the part of the staff, their knowledge was based on the norms and traditions of the respective schools and their personal motivations and inclinations. The lack of knowledge and understanding of the rights of children and young people affected and limited the level of students' participation in decision making in the study schools. On the part of the SRCs, due to the limited knowledge they had on students' participatory rights most of their activities were focused on fulfilling the requirement of the SRC constitution which include organizing SRC forums and SRC awards events. The lack of requisite knowledge led to elected student representatives requesting for preferential treatment over their peers. For if they had adequate knowledge about student participatory rights they would understand that the responsibilities were not about asking for favours but influencing decisions on issues that affect students. Lewars (2010) asserts that students unintentionally limit the scope of their participation, unaware of the full canon of deliberative tools available to them. Students' lack of awareness on child rights and participation issues posed a hindrance to their participation in school decision making because it restricted their ability to negotiate for more access to the forums available in the study schools. With regards to the teachers, it was noted that the concerns they raised on students' maturity level and that students should defer school politics till they entered the university were due to the inadequate

knowledge on students' democratic rights which requires children's participation in decision making at all levels on issues that affect them.

7. 4. The Case Study Schools in Perspective

When I opted to use the case study approach, I was influenced by Flyvberg's (2006, p.223) assertion that "the closeness of the case study to real-life situations and its multiple wealth of details" and Runson and Host's (2009, p 131) assertion that the case study is suitable for examining "contemporary phenomena in its natural context". The case study was thus significant in identifying the nuances in implementing the participation rights of students in senior high schools in Ghana. Selecting the four schools as case studies was thus essential in gaining insight to the motivations and actions of the school authorities and students regarding students' participation in decision making. Having done the case study in the four selected schools, I observed that there existed differences in the extent to which students were encouraged or given opportunity to participate in decision-making forums. Participation of students in decision-making forums depended on the extent to which the Heads were willing to open the power boundaries and when it suited some of them.

Plomdo School

What I observed is that Plomdo School among the four case schools had the most cordial interaction with students thereby creating opportunities for students' participation in decision making. Students could approach teachers and present their views without the fear of being intimidated. This provided opportunity for students to participate in decision making in the forums studied. Though the school environment was cordial and student voice was given much attention, the forum in which students were given voice was selective. While student voice was loud in the area of students feeding their voice was drowned in disciplinary issues. Thus I observe a combination of participation in one area and non-participation in another aspect. Drawing on Hart's (1992) ladder, students were at the participatory level in feeding related issues while at the non-participatory level of the ladder on issues regarding discipline. Taking cognisance of Backman and Trafford's (2005) assertion that schools are traditionally bureaucratic but could be democratic based on the values of the head I could conclude

that the head of Plomdo School had very positive view of students being part of decision-making processes and therefore created the space for cordial interaction between students and staff in the school. Comparing the two forums studied at Plomdo School however, students had more democratic participation in feeding issues than in disciplinary matters.

Mawudor School

My observation of Mawudor School is that students had opportunity to participate in decision making on students' feeding just as it was observed in Plomdo School. In addition to student representatives input on feeding the student populace also wrote comments on the meals served at dining in a book provided by the school authorities. However, students input did not receive immediate attention but was deferred to the following term. However the impact of their voice was not immediate, as their concerns were deferred to the following term. Decision-making activities in feeding related issues placed Mawudor School at the participatory level on Hart's (1992) ladder of participation. Just as it was in Plomdo School, students in Mawudor School were also side-lined regarding participation in disciplinary matters. This places students' participation in decision making at non-participatory level of Hart's (1992) ladder in as far as disciplinary issues were concerned. The trend of participation in Mawudor School was therefore similar to that of Plomdo School where students had opportunity to take part in decision making forums on feeding but had little participation in disciplinary issues. I observed also that an authoritarian culture existed in the school to the extent that a staff member was hesitant in engaging with me during the interview. The bureaucratic attitude of the head of the school accounted for student populace always looking up to only him for direction. Overall students' participation in decision-making forums was episodic and restrictive.

Mantsewe School

The observation I made about Mantsewe School was that the school was rather authoritarian especially in the forums studied. Despite the affirmation that students were members of the feeding and disciplinary committees, the reality was different. The overly adherence to the school structure made it difficult for students to negotiate access into decision-making forums. It was the only school among the four studied that there was clear disregard to student participation issues, with the head describing the

disciplinary committee set up by the students at their level as 'kangaroo court'. I also observed that adhering to the structure and protocol was very high in Mantsewe School leading to low participation in both feeding and disciplinary issues. The non-engagement with student in the forums studied led to discontent among student representatives. As a result student participation in both feeding and disciplinary issues was at the non-participation level, drawing from Hart's (1992) ladder of children's participation. This implied that the school environment was less-democratic in forums studied in the school.

Ayeape School

From my observation there was much rapport between the head and students and yet students did not have much opportunity in decision-making forums in the school. The situation in Ayeape School is quite complex. Though students described the head as a mother and could approach her without hindrance, the interaction was not integrated in the administrative machinery of the school mostly because staffs were left out. The student/head relationship led to power struggles among some staff members, who felt their authority over the students was being reduced and thus accused the head for being overbearing with students. Student participation in decision-making was at the non-participatory level on Harts (1992) ladder in both the disciplinary and feeding forums mostly due to the staff power struggle. In fact, it was only at Ayeape School that staff power struggle was observed. There is not much difference between Ayeape and Mantsewe schools in so far as student participation is concerned since the two schools were at the non-participatory level of Hart's (1992) ladder of participation. However, participation was hindered by staff power struggles in Ayeape School whereas in Mantsewe School it was bureaucracy and system structures.

The four case study schools thus present different perspectives of students' participation in decision making. The differences also portray the motivations and objectives for providing the forums; which also make students' participation episodic and restrictive. The key issue however is that while there were forums available there were instances where there was little participation in these available forums. It is important to note that the provision of forums was more for student containment than for democratic rights.

7. 5. Policy Issues

The findings of the study have a number of implications for policy and practice. The study has demonstrated to a large extent how the structured systems hinder students' democratic participation in school decision making. Both the literature and the study have affirmed that structured systems give little room for student voice and participation. It is within this context that Backman and Trafford (2005) have called for heads of schools to develop values that promote democracy within bureaucratic systems. This call however has policy implications especially within the Ghanaian education system.

7. 5. 1. Implications for Policy

The study identified that some teachers in the case schools insisted that the schools observe organisational structures at all times. This was exemplified most strongly by the head of Mantsewe School and the senior housemasters of Mantsewe and Ayeape schools respectively. By strictly observing structures students will have little access to decision making forums, unless the school authorities reviewed the structures to create more opportunities for student participation in decision making. Given that the school structures were fashioned according to GES policy guidelines, it is needful that GES reviews the vertically structured system to a horizontal one so that both students and staff can be important players in decision making forums. The current administrative structure which adopts top-down communication line does not encourage participation of all stakeholders, especially students in the school system. By providing a policy that supports a lateral mode of formal interactions, students stand a better chance of participating in decision making forums. This could reduce the bureaucracy and power manifested by some heads.

7. 5. 2. Implications for Practice

Morrow, (2000:6) asserts that "A sense of participation could be fostered early on by including young people in decision-making processes, . . ." but it seems clear that many (adult) structures and practices need to change and shift before this can happen effectively. This implies that power held by school teachers and school heads in the hierarchical authority positions must be relocated and spread among all stakeholders, including students. Thus at the school level, rather than adopting a purely-top-down

administrative style, school authorities could identify other appropriate mechanisms for seeking the views of students outside the leadership circle. For example, heads of schools could provide suggestion boxes and bulletin boards through which students could present their views and concerns to the authorities. Anonymous surveys could also be conducted periodically to garner students' opinion on substantive issues, the findings of which could be used to review decisions and school policy. Specific to the issue of discipline for example, since rules and regulations are centralized and formulated at the headquarters of the GES, the Heads of the study schools could ask students to study the regulations and suggest those that could be adaptable to each school. Students' participation in determining the rules applicable to their specific contexts would be more meaningful to them because they participated in deciding the suitable ones for their schools. If students participate in that process, they would also be more committed to working with the rules than if the rules are 'pushed' down on them by the school authorities. Indeed, student contribution in setting rules that best ensure peace and cohesion would be more meaningful to them than sitting with their teachers at committee meetings to determine cases on students' indiscipline. The essence of this contention is that, given the authoritarian nature of schools and the power relations, students might be hindered in contributing to discussions at such forums. Phaswana, (2010) and Nongobu, (2004) have individually articulated that students are unable to contribute much to meetings with adults due to intimidation, power dynamics and perceived social conventions. Thus to forestall such hindrances the school authorities of the study schools could consider other means of engagement with students in decision-making forums on disciplinary issues and other decision making forums. As students note that they are gaining access to decision making forums and that their issues are being given attention, they will perhaps refrain from going on demonstrations and be more cooperative with school authorities.

Beyond this however, there is the need to widen representation to cover not only students, but all other stakeholders in the schools, given the fact that some teachers criticized the cordial interaction between the heads and students when they felt left out of the relationship. School heads could run workshops where both staff and students could share ideas and build consensus. In addition to gaining more insight in student participation, teachers would be less likely to raise concerns when students are acting on decisions agreed on by all stakeholders. This is particularly important as it is clear from

the study that the formal available forums suffered hindrances due to power struggles and school structures. As both groups work together they will begin to appreciate the challenges each group has and will find middle grounds to resolve these challenges.

7. 5. 3. Training and Awareness Creation for all stakeholders

One way of achieving collaboration between students and school authorities is through training and sensitization of all stakeholders in the school system. The relevance of such education is that it equips members of the school community with the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to realize student participation and voice. Sensitization, it is argued, reduces bias towards issues not hitherto well understood by individuals (e.g. EFA Global Report, 2012). Building capacity for both students and staff of the study schools to sensitize them on student participatory issues could help in making all stakeholders work in collaboration. In the Ghanaian culture where engaging with students as collaborators in decision making appears to be a novel and challenging phenomenon, training and awareness creation cannot be overemphasized. Workshops, seminars, and symposia could be organised at the schools level to train students and staffs on issues related to students' participation in decision making. The knowledge, attitudes and skills acquired would broaden perspectives of stakeholders in the four schools also help in reducing the concerns teachers might have about losing their authority over students when they collaborate with students at decision-making arenas. Through education and training, staffs' and students' perceptions of student participation would change as they begin to view issues from a broader perspective.

7. 5. 4. Setting Common Standards for Students' Elections Process

Transparency in all stages of election is very important. Although there is currently no directive to schools regarding how prefectural system is instituted or appointed in the school it is necessary that whichever processes are adopted in each of the study schools are well understood by and agreeable to all stakeholders. Student leaders must not be perceived as 'puppets' or favourites of school authorities since this could jeopardize the confidence of the student body in its leaders. Rather, all candidates must have a fair chance of participating in the democratic process after satisfying the criteria for contesting for the positions. The fact that there is a two-stage election process with

some category of students being elected and others appointed in the same school is an indication that democracy has not yet been achieved in the study schools.

7. 6. Contribution to Knowledge

The study examined forums available for student participation in decision making in senior high schools in Ghana. It makes contributions to knowledge that either add to or extend existing knowledge of issues regarding the rights of children and their democratic participation in issues affecting them. The contribution of this study is particularly relevant to Ghana but it has wider implications also. This study shows that it is possible to create forums for participation without providing opportunities for participation. Factors such as bureaucracy, people's perceptions, attitudes and the desire to dominate others are factors that limit students' access to available forums. The study demonstrated that the motivation for providing the forum was more for student containment than democratic rights.

One key contribution is that while there is a universal acceptance of UNCRC's children's participatory rights, there is also a cross-cultural variation in the interpretation and application of these rights. In more liberal societies application of child rights' issues are more easily applicable than in authoritarian societies. In Ghana, for example, children's participation in decision making does not generally conform to child rearing practices and thus is not a norm; conferring with children therefore tends to be considered a privilege rather than a right. Socio/cultural practices, whether in the macro or micro society are strong influences in the acceptance of children and students as partners in decision- making forums. In Ghana boarding schools have their individual ethos and traditions, which affect the extent which school authorities engage with students in decision-making forums. Part of screening students and approving them to contest for the position of head prefect is based on the tradition of the school – for example that the appointed must belong to a specific religious group. By maintaining this kind of tradition an individual may be denied access to decision making forums because s/he does not belong to the group.

As a contribution to knowledge it is observed that bureaucracy is not the same as power. Nevertheless, these two are inter-related to the extent that they affect lines of communication in the schools system. The level of bureaucracy in the school determines the power manifested at each level. The instance where the senior housemaster of Ayeape School insisted that should be consulted by the students before issues are sent to the headmistress and vice versa highlights the level of bureaucracy and its consequent power over the students in the study. Bureaucratic systems thus create opportunities for authoritarian regimes, dominance and power, which eventually hinder students' participation in decision-making forums as was manifested in the study schools. It is quite difficult to create students participatory opportunities within the senior high school structures and systems in especially Ghana. This is because teachers would usually insist that authority structures are observed. The insistence of maintaining the administrative structures and systems would not provide room for students' democratic participation.

Finally, the notion that student councils represent the student populace is a contested one, especially when it has been noted that not much research has been done in that area (Rudduck and Flutter, 2000). Student representatives have been noted to replicate the dominant power relations (Robinson and Taylor 2013). Furthermore, Silva (2001, p.98) asserts that "Student voice and participation can actually reinforce a hierarchy of power and privilege among students and undermine attempted reforms". Similarly Robinson and Taylor (2013) also stated that there is a manifestation of power relations in the social interactions among and between students. My study noted that the student systems themselves were not that democratic but rather reflected issues of bureaucracy and power as manifested in adult systems. They had a structure that determines who speaks and who to address at their levels. Beside this observation there was also a self-seeking attitude among student representatives who, instead of seeking the welfare of their peers students, felt they were above their peers by virtue of their positions and were making demands for favours. This thus questions whether the students' councils in the study schools were indeed students' representing their peers or were self-seeking interest groups mirroring the adult structures.

7.7. Final Reflections

When I began the study, I was of the view that school authorities had not given students space to collaborate with them in decision making in the schools I worked in as a teacher. At the end of the study my conviction has been deepened having realized that school authorities could do more by giving students opportunities to participate in decision making arenas not for containment but for genuine democratic practices. The study shed light on interactions among key stakeholders and how these could foster, or mar democratic processes in the study schools. From my professional experience and as one who belongs to the hierarchy, I realized that it was quite easy acknowledging students' participation in decision making but more challenging for school authorities to break the power boundaries for students' participation. I could relate to the arguments put up by the staff participants because of the various positions I occupied in my teaching years. A lot of training and sensitization to allay the fears and uncertainties teachers may have working with students as collaborators in decision making. From an insider perspective, structures could be there to ensure that the system works effectively. However, I am convinced that within these structures school heads and teachers could create systems that will make the school culture and interactions more congenial and democratic as prescribed by Backman and Trafford (2005) for all stakeholders, especially students.

My convictions as I reflect on the research process, starting from negotiating access through to collecting data have made me wonder how much of power school authorities in senior high schools have and whether they are willing to relinquish some of it for actual student participation in decision making in schools. I say this on the backdrop that though I had free access to participants, instead of allowing me to negotiate with staff and students the heads made it their responsibility to give formal notice to staff and students. Given that the study was personal and had nothing to do with official work, I thought it was intriguing that the heads took it upon themselves to inform students and staff of my intention. It is understandable that students are informed by the head as an approval that they could speak to this 'outsider' on issues related to the schools. However, giving notice to staff and virtually asking them to expect me was quite worrying. More disturbing was the fact that staff complied without any hesitation. That nobody (staff or students) questioned this affirms the observation by Robinson and

Taylor (2013, p29) that it is a demonstration of “acceptability, indeed the ‘taken-for-granted’ nature of cultural norms relating to modes of authority (and domination) which infuse existing . . . power relationship”. In interacting with the schools therefore, I made participants aware that my visit had nothing to do with official work but rather for academic purposes. I also made it clear to participants, especially the staffs not to hesitate to ask for a neutral venue if they felt to do so, which indeed one person did.

Reflecting on my interactions with the participants, I realized how fluid the researcher position could be as my knowledge and understanding of the school system made me relate with the issues raised by all participants. However, more importantly for me, was the knowledge that the insider/outsider identity was not only about understanding the organisational culture but also how the identity positioned me as a researcher, and how this position could affect the findings in the study. My interaction with the school authorities found me at one time a teacher, a head of department, and a senior housemistress. As guidance and counseling coordinator and from students’ level I saw myself as an advocate for students’ participatory rights. Each of these identities came with its own perspective in the study. Thomson and Gunther, (2011, p25), state that:

This provisionality of positioning called up various aspects of our own identities. On the basis of this experience we want to suggest that the very notion of inside and outside is of limited utility to organizational researchers working, as we did, on participatory research in schools.

The insider/outsider position is therefore very fluid and sometimes “messily blurred in particular places and times” (Thomson and Gunther, 2011, p.26). Thus, like Thomson and Gunther, I spent time reflecting on how to engage with the school authorities and students in the four study schools at different times and in relation to their different tasks. This guided me to reflect on what I was doing and why at each time.

As a member of the senior staff of the GES and national coordinator of co-curricular programmes, I have worked extensively with schools. As a result, many heads of schools, especially those in Accra, were quite familiar with me. This insider position granted me privileged access to the study schools enabling me to engage with staffs and students cordially. My access into the school was without any hindrance as the heads announced my visit by themselves due to the perceived position as an officer from the national office. Reflecting on my position as an insider, I realised that these supposed

rapport between me and the school authorities could have an adverse effect on my study if care was not taken. I am aware that these perceptions could affect the information participants were willing to provide. Some participants could have felt that the information would be made available to the national office, given that I had been to schools collecting data for official purposes on a number of occasions. Secondly, as an insider, I was quite conversant with some of the issues in the schools and therefore this could conflict with and influence my interpretation of the data and findings. Having held the position of senior housemistress before, I was aware that my knowledge of the system, personal convictions and biases about how the system worked could influence my interpretation of feedback provided by respondents. I mindful of Merriam's assertion that:

. . . researcher and researched bring biases, predispositions, attitude, and physical characteristics that affect the interaction and data elicited . . . Taking a stance that is non-judgmental, sensitive, and respectful of the respondent is but a beginning point in the process" (Merriam, 2009 p. 109).

Bearing these comments in mind and reflecting on the experiences of my first pilot study and fieldwork efforts, I made every effort to relegate my predispositions and biases to the background and tried to interact with participants on a collaborative level. My insider position made it possible to relate to the discussion with each individual and groups as we interacted with each other.

This research was not without constrains. A key limitation is that I was only privy to information and experiences that were provided by the various participants. The data I gathered were thus like snapshots displaying the stories that were told. Beyond that I had limited insights into what went on in my absence. My major constraint was the time available for data collection. The data were collected in the afternoons after schools closed from classes. Most co-curricular activities were scheduled for the afternoon after siesta. Some of my student participants were actively involved in some of these social activities and were needed to be present at the meetings to participate in their activities. This therefore delayed two of our sessions by one hour, which also affected their other activities for the evening. Coupled with this, some of the schools were admitting students who had transferred from other schools. The senior house staffs, who were

responsible for this assignment had to break the interviews to attend to the new arrivals before returning to the session. These interruptions might have implications for the quality of data collected. A longitudinal study would have provided greater opportunity to see more closely how power relations shape interactions in the schools and how these in turn foster student participation in decision-making forums.

In conclusion, the study has noted that though school authorities have accepted the notion of students, as collaborators in decision-making forums and some efforts are being made by heads to engage with students in the democratic process, the efforts are hampered by system structures. The debate therefore should not be about whether forums are available in senior high schools in Ghana for students' participation in decision making, but, rather, whether school structures will allow for students' participation in the available forums. The debate is still ongoing.

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Appendix I: Certificate of Approval



University of Sussex

Sussex Institute

Social Sciences Cluster-based Research Ethics Committee	
CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL	
Reference Number:	1011/06/06
School:	ESW
Title of Project	STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN GHANA
Principal Investigator:	Dorothy Abra Glover (Dr. Louise Gazeley)
(Supervisor as applicable)	
Expected Start Date:*	1 August 2011
<p>*NB. If the <u>actual</u> project start date is delayed beyond 12 months of the expected start date, this Certificate of Approval will lapse and the project will need to be reviewed again to take account of changed circumstances such as legislation, sponsor requirements and University procedures</p>	
<p>This project has been given ethical approval by the Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (C-REC). Please note the following requirements for approved submissions:</p> <p>Amendments to research proposal - Any changes or amendments to the approved proposal, which have ethical implications, must be submitted to the committee for authorisation prior to implementation.</p> <p>Feedback regarding any adverse and unexpected events - Any adverse (undesirable and unintended) and unexpected events that occur during the implementation of the project must be reported to the Chair of the Social Sciences C-REC. In the event of a serious adverse event, research must be stopped immediately and the Chair alerted within 24 hours of the occurrence.</p>	
Authorised Signature	(
Name of Authorised Signatory (C-REC Chair or nominated	Dr Elaine Shari and 22 July 2011

Appendix II Information Sheet for Participants



UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

Sussex School of Education

Student Participation In Decision-Making In Senior High Schools In Ghana

Invitation

You are being invited to take part in a research study on the above subject. Please before you accept to take part or not, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please kindly read the following information carefully.

Purpose of the Study

Student participation in school governance has been generally accepted as a means to increasing the democratic process and providing avenue to address student issues. The Student Representative Council (SRC), the representative voice of the student body is thus expected to be part of the daily governance process in senior high (secondary) schools. The purpose of my study includes the following:

5. What forums are available for student participation in school decision making?
6. What levels of student participation do these forums provide?
7. What are the constraints to student participation in these forums?
8. What policy and practice implications can be drawn from this case study of student participation in decision making in senior secondary school in Ghana?

Why you have been invited

As a Director in the Ghana Education Service, you have direct supervision of policy implementation in the schools system. By virtue of your position you have engaged stakeholders in the schools on administrative and governance issues. Your views on the subject therefore will provide rich data for the study which could subsequently have implication to policy; hence the decision to invite you. The following categories of persons are also involved in the study

- Four heads of schools,
- Four senior house masters/mistresses,
- Eight staff with special responsibilities
- SRC executives/school prefects (eight from each school),

- Non-SRC members -final year students (six from each school).

Please, note that the decision to participate or not compulsory and is totally up to you. If you decide to take part you kindly requested to read and keep this information sheet and also sign the consent letter form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw any time and without giving any reason.

Methods of data collection

The methods for collecting data include interviews, focus group discussions and examining records like minutes of SRC meetings, memos, any written communication between your office and the SRC.

You will be required participate in the interviews which consists of two sessions each. Each of the first two will last a maximum of thirty minutes each. The second session is basically to clarify and confirm data at the previous session.

Risk(s)

In accepting to participate, kindly note that you risk your time in view of the busy schedule you have. This will obviously affect other plans and activities you have outlined for yourself. I do hope however that you will accept the invitation.

Benefits of the study

Accepting to participate in the study could be a form of review of school practices and probably update what has been the culture over the years. Secondly, data gathered from you could help in reviewing policy on students' welfare at various levels of school decision making in senior high schools. More importantly, however, the study will broaden our understanding of the importance and relevance of students' role and perspectives in the decision-making arenas in the school.

Assurance of Privacy and confidentiality

I will like to assure you that all information about you will be treated as private and confidential. In view of this pseudonyms will be adopted for your person and all the schools during discussion, reporting and storing of data collected from you.

How to opt-in

If you decide to opt-in, you will be required to read and sign the informed-consent form that will be provided you and also participate in the interviews that will be organised.

Organisers of the study

I am a research student of the University of Sussex Brighton. Consequently the study is being conducted for the Sussex School of Education, University of Sussex, Brighton. The research finding and report will therefore be submitted to the University of Sussex, for the award of the Professional Doctorate in Education (Ed. D).

Review of the Research

The research has been reviewed and approved by the Social Sciences Cluster Research Ethics Committee (C-REC).

Contacts for Further Information

If you need any clarifications before or during the research, you may contact my supervisor, Dr Louise Gazeley, Sussex School of Education, University of Sussex, Brighton, BN 1 9Q, Falmer, Brighton.

Thank you very much for reading the information sheet.

29th August 2011

Appendix: III: Indicative Interview Guides for Participants

Heads of Schools

1. How long have you been a head of school?
2. Tell me about your work. (*Listen and note significant issues for further probing*)
3. Do you find your work interesting? Any significant moment of nostalgia? Tell me about it. (Probe further)
4. Tell me about your experiences with teachers. (Probe further)
5. How supportive are they to your administration? How do you manage those who disagree with your views?
6. What are some of the things teachers do to help your administration? (Probe regarding the use committees. Lead the discussion to where students place in his strategies).
7. Are there any guidelines to ensure student representation and participation in the decision-making process of the school? (Probe)
8. Tell me about the SRC in your school. (Probe further).
9. What criterion is used to determine who serves on the student council?
10. How involved are you in organizing student council meetings? Do you attend their meetings? (Probe further)
11. How often are school durbars held in the year?
12. Do teachers attend school these durbars when they are organised?
13. What concerns do students usually raise at these forums?
14. How often is the suggestions box used?
15. Do the suggestions influence your decisions? [Probe further]
16. One of your students reports to you that their representatives on the Disciplinary Committee have been asked to leave a committee sitting. How will you handle that? (*Question intended to provide insight of the perception school heads have on student participation. Probe further on issues that would emerge from this discussion*).
17. You hear from the grape vine of an impending demonstration against the quality and quantity of food served in the dining hall? What will you do? (*Further probing*)

should throw light on whether the forums designed for the student voice are actually working).

18. What are some of the nostalgic moments you've had with students? (Probe)
19. At which level of governance do you consider students to have the strongest influence? (Probe for further explanation).
20. Do you consider any factors that inhibit student participation in decision-making in your school? (Probe for explanation)
21. How has the students' front influenced or impacted on general school activities? (Probe).
22. There is the perception that students in senior high schools are not matured to be involved in decision-making issues relating to them. What are your views on this perception? (Probe further).

Senior House Masters/ Mistresses

1. What specifically does your work as senior house-staff entail? (Ask probing questions).
2. Your appointment places you in constant interaction with students. Are there any interesting moments you want to talk about? (Further probing questions).
3. Where do you place the student council within the structure of your schedule?
4. What is the role of the students on the feeding committee?
5. Do you offer any training to students and staff on the role and responsibilities of the student council and prefects?
6. What criteria do you use to judge the effectiveness of student involvement in on the committees? (Probe further).
7. How widely do you think these criteria are shared by other staff in the school?
8. The dormitory monitor reports to you that their representatives on the Disciplinary Committee have been asked to leave a committee sitting. How will you handle that? (This question is meant to open the discussion on space, power, and perception. Question intended to explore and gain insight of the perception school heads have on student participation. Probing questions would emerge from this discussion).
9. As the senior house master/mistress, a student informs you of an imminent demonstration due to students' dissatisfaction of the quality and quantity of food served. What will you do? (Probe).
10. Do you think it is important for students to be involved in various levels of decision making? (Probe).
11. In exactly which decision making processes in the school does the Student Council participate? (Probe)
12. What are your views on students' level of maturity regarding their participation in decision-making on issues relating to them? (Probe further).
13. How has the students' front influenced or impacted on general school activities? (Probe).

Dining Hall Mistress/Master

1. How long have you been the Dining Hall Master?
2. What does your work entail? (Probe for further details?)
3. What are the challenging moments of your responsibility? (Probe)
4. Your appointment places you in constant interaction with students. Are any nostalgic moments you want to talk about? (Further probing questions).
5. Are there any guidelines to inform student representatives of their roles and responsibilities on the Feeding committee?
6. How is this information obtained?
7. You are informed of an imminent demonstration due to the quality and quantity of food served in the dining hall. What will you do? (Probe).

Disciplinary Committee Chairman

1. How long have you been the chairman of the disciplinary committee?
2. Tell me about your experiences. (*Probe further with issues that will come up*). How do you manage your work as a teacher and that of the Disciplinary Committee Chair? (Do the two interfere with each other? Probe).
3. Your appointment places you in constant interaction with students. Are there any interesting or challenging moments you want to talk about? (Further probing questions).
4. How often does the committee meet? Do students attend these meetings regularly [*follow up with issues arising*]
5. How do assess students' performance at committee meetings? [*ascertain student's attendance and participation- probe further*]
6. What are some of the things you would want to change regarding the disciplinary committee? [*Probe to ascertain what they do specifically, students' voluntary suggestions penalties, for any voting rights . . .etc?*)]

Focus Groups (SRC)

1. How does one become a student leader in this school?
2. As executive members of the SRC your representatives on the school's Disciplinary Committee inform you that they had been asked to withdraw from the committee sitting to investigate a case involving two alleged offending students. What is your reaction to that decision? (probe further on issues that will emerge from the discussion)
3. Do you have representatives on the DC in this school? Follow- up if yes. Have you ever been invited to sit on the DC committee to discuss disciplinary issues involving any student?
4. Do you contribute to discussions?
5. Do you have any voting rights?
6. How did you become members of the SRC? (Probe for further clarification).
7. Were you given any training after your appointment/election? What kind of training were you given, if yes?
8. How often do you attend meetings? Are any teachers present at your meetings?
9. How do you get issues submitted to the school head?
10. What kind of support do you get from the school authority?
11. As executive members of the SRC, if you get to know that some students want to create confusion in the school, what will you do? (Probe further).

Focus Groups (non-SRC)

1. How were your student leaders appointed to their positions?[probe further]
2. What are some of the assignments they perform?[probe further]
3. How often are meetings held between your leadership and school authorities?[
probe to ascertain whether they get feedback from reps.]
4. How do you pass on information to your school authorities?
5. How often are school durbars organised? How are discussions held?[probe]
6. Does the SRC organise student forums? Do teachers also attend these student
meetings [probe further]
7. How do you find student staff relations in the school?
8. What kind of support do you get from the school authority?
9. How will you assess the performance of your leaders?[probe further]

Appendix: IV Extracts from Transcribed Data

TRANSCRIPT OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION CONDUCTED ON 31ST MARCH, 2011

Extracts from Mantsewe School

DG: What are the functions of the SRC in this school?

RSPN: The SRC is ...mainly responsible for the.. is the mouthpiece of the ... serves as channel or link.. whatever the students have...to the school Administration, students grievances and problems.

Comment; [the SRC is portrayed as intermediary btn staff and Stds]

DG: What are some of those grievances?

RSPN:...problems with school development...teachers.. for example teachers who are not performing well enough as is expected , for one or two reasons... the SRC meets and talks about some of these issues and send report to the administration...and development projects..... the SRC sends suggestions to the Administration when students need one or two things.

RSPN: I was in form 2 then ...the main F2 rep...then. ... what we did was to interrogate the student and later sent the report to the main staff DC... to look into the case.
:Comment[**SRC playing the role of providing info**].

DG: The main DC?

Std.: Yes the main DC is made up of staff- the teachers.

DG: What does the student DC do?

Std: OK, the SRC DC interrogates offending students and sends reports to the School DC.

DG: What cases, for example?

RSP: ...a case between a student and a teacher...there was some disagreement between them and it's like the two quarrelled....resulting into a ...quarrel.. the DC sat on the case and before we knew they had passed judgement and punished the student.....they did not listen to our point of view...on what we saw...when a case arises... because the person is staff...

DG: What did you do?

Std. Nothing . they are your teachers. . see.see ...we don't feel good...the student on the staff DC is not working...sometimes you don't really understand...how they

sit on the cases..before you realise the student has been suspended.....we don't know how to explain this to our people...they make us feel awkward.

Comment:[non-participation in DC issues]

Std....it's not the best...if we don't sit on the main DC ..how can we explain to other students if they ask us.....sometimes you feel betrayed...you wonder how many people sit on the case..

Comment:.[concern of non-participation]

DG: How did you resolve the problem?

Std.: we told our patron and he said he would take the matter up with the School authority... for now a student committee has been set up... ...so now if the student leadership has any case....**[Bureaucracy?]**

DG: Can any of you tell me about the UN Rights of the Child?

Std.: Yes ... I think we do.. see we have the learning problems...I'll like to say I know because we know what affects us as students...so we can tell how these problems can be solved...

DG: Can you tell me about the UN Rights of the child? Article 12
.....(SILENCE)...

Comment:.[stds. lack knowledge on child rights]

DG: How do you request for audience with the headmaster?

Std.:as for that we can.... because we have gone through mentorship.... we've learned from the past SRC and we interact with other prefects in other schools.....when the prefects select us, they take us through mentorship...they integrate us into the system... by the time they leave the scene we become conversant with the work.

Std.: When we went to the teacher, he said (inaudible)... we had to go to the Forestry Department to give us the botanical names of the trees...sometimes we need money to do our projects, we have to keep going to the headmaster several times before....before they give us our own money.....they kill our morale.**[Std concerned about non-participation]..**

DG: Were your views on the issue sought? Were you asked to sit in?

RSPN: No. No. no. **[little participation in disciplinary issues]**

DG: Couldn't you present a recommendation to the school authority on some of these issues?

Std: They won't act on them. We go and sit with the headmaster and discuss some of these issues.He tells us he will look at them, but in the end nothing happens to our suggestions.

Comment: [no feedback on issues reported to sch. authority]

DG:On which other committee do you serve?

Std. : The feeding committee.

Std. The dining prefects are supposed to be on the committee.

DG.: Supposed?

Std: Yes we're not asked any question. We don't know how the menu is planned. We don't know when decision on our food is taken. Our students complain about the quality and quantity of food. The food we eat is not enough. But all we are told is the administration is working on our complaints.

Std. The headmaster? He won't mind us at all. We talk to the dining hall master instead, but he can't do much.

Std.: As for this school. Before you are aware the menu has been planned and we don't even know when it was done.

Commenr: [std voice not catered for on menu planning]

Std.: It's difficult talking about food issues in this school. When we talk they say we are disrespectful.

Std. We pay for the meals, so we have to be part of the planning, Then we will not talk

Comment: [Concern for non-participation].

DG. Why?

Std.: He asks us to see the patron or sometimes the senior housemaster or the Assistant head.

Std. This school. . . The protocol is too much. Even our cases, before they get to the head the time is already past.

Comment[bureaucracy?]

Issues Arising

- Std as intermediaries
- Stds. as members on committees
- Non participation in disciplinary issues
- Non engagement in feeding decision-making
- Bureaucracy
- Split in disciplinary committee

DINING HALL MASTER AYEAPPE SCHOOL
Extracts

DHM: There's a committee I work with. First of all there is the dining hall committee comprising the dining hall master, the SRC, the dining hall prefect and the assistant, we also have the matron. So we have a strong committee that oversees that affair of the dining hall. The dining hall master chairs the meetings of the committee.

DG: Who are involved in planning the menu?

DHM: The administration and the matron are part of the planning of the menu. The committee comes in when the menu is being prepared. **[Committee not part of planning]**

DG: How?

DHM. Usually we ask the matron to plan the menu and present to the senior house master who is also a member of the committee. He will scrutinize it and make changes on it.

DG: When does the committee get involved in the planning?

DHM: Normally when the senior house master looks at it what we do is meet with the matron to explain what informed the choices made.

Comment: **[stds. input not accounted for in menu planning]**

DG Is that after the senior housemaster has made his input?

DHM: Yes

DG: Are students also present in this meeting?

DHM: Erm . . . Not really.

DG: The students on the committee, what exactly is their role on the committee?

DHM: Usually we inform them of what has been placed on the menu so they can tell their peers. **[std reps as conveyors of decision]**

DG: Students are not part of the discussion with the matron?

DHM: No

DG. At what time are they involved then?

DHM Normally we explain to them how the menu was prepared so they can inform the student populace.

DG. : Is that how you involve them?

DHM. Ermm. . once we explain to them what went into the menu and they understand they are able to explain to the students.

DG. You could do that explanation yourself?

DHM. Yes but that is the way it is done in the school. The prefects explain to the students most of the time.

DG. What is the reason for telling them what was planned?

DHM. I think it is important that they know what their meals are serving for the term. Once they know there will be no surprises.

DG.: Beside explaining to their peers, what else do they do on the committee?

DHM. Ermm well. We don't want them to spend too much time on these issues. We don't bother them too much because of time and also because of the schedule of meetings.

Comment:[stds. have little opportunity in deciding on feeding issues. Stds are informants]

DG: How do you handle such situations?

DHM: Normally we have to use the SRC because if the students see the representatives who are part of the affected group trying to resolve the issue they find it easier. So when students' tempers flare, we go to them (the students' representatives) because they are closer to the students. They calm the students down and explain the actual situation to them. From the structure of the SRC, every class has a representative. So it's a broad-based committee. Sometimes problems arise when I'm not on campus and the student's representatives step in to resolve the issue. The SRC is doing well.[Use SRC to achieve admin objectives?]

DG: On which occasions do you meet with students as members of the committee?

DHM: Usually when there is a delay in serving food and the kitchen staff give us early notice, we invite them to let them know the situation..[Use of SRC to achieve admin objectives?]

There was once a menu they didn't like so they prepared a different one, wrote a letter and attached to it, served the dining hall master and later presented it to the Headmistress. Some changes were made concerning the food. They are working assiduously.

DG: How do students interact with you at these meetings?

DHM: because they are students, when they are meeting with the dining hall master, the matron or the headmistress, they sometimes show fear when expressing themselves but we know how to handle them so at times we use a series of questions to know their views on certain matters. Sometimes when it gets to sensitive matters, the headmistress will leave so that those who are close to the students will be able to deal with them.

DG: how has the SRC impacted on school administration, school governance, decision making, general school life?

DHM: they are on the ground so sometimes they carry out some disciplinary actions like improper dressings and lateness to school. The punishment though does not include lashing the students. So they are part of the school administration.[Stds reps monitor students' discipline]

DG: What are your views on perceptions that students are not mature to participate in decision making?

DHM: students are in school to learn given the chance to be part of the decision-making process is also a learning process. Adults sometimes go wrong so giving students the chance to make an input into school administration is a good idea. They are supposed to be given the chance to make suggestions and when they go wrong we correct them so as to do the right thing. We have to give them the chance to participate on decision-making to prepare them for their future life. They have to be given the chance to partake in every activity in the school.

DG : looking at your context are there any lapses that you have identified in students participation?

DHM: Yes. Let me link this one to the dining hall. Once the prefects came to me requesting for special diet for the prefects. I told them it couldn't work and they were annoyed because they were thinking they were doing their best in helping with the running of day-to-day activity of the school so they think they have to be treated on a different way. **[stds seeking selfish objectives?]**

Notations from these.

- On Feeding: non participation of students
- Discipline: little participation, provision of info
- Attitudes: SRC Self seeking
- Use students to achieve admin goals

HEADSMaster SCHOOL: MAWUDOR SCHOOL

DG: In what ways do you involve students?

HM: We have so many ways. One is to do with discipline. Basically when you come to the disciplinary committee they are on the panel. We do this because they are the people who are with the students on the ground. Because they are part of the decision-making process it is very difficult to challenge whatever verdict they come out with. Most of the time when the students are going contrary to the law, they are there.

Comment:[Membership on disciplinary committee]

When it comes to the dining hall food committee, they form the major part of the panel. On daily basis, they write a full report because they are the ones who eat the food. Aside the dining hall masters, we have a very big notebook in which they write daily comments about the food they eat. Because of these reports, it becomes easy for the matron to also assess the situation. **[Membership on the feeding committee]**

On the compound we have immediate supervisors on the ground who link up with the prefects to do everything. The major part of the work at the house level and everywhere are supervised by students. So if the teachers are not present at certain ceremonies, the students are in control even though sometimes there can be excesses. **[Std as charge de affairs]**

DG: How are the prefects selected or appointed to their various positions?

HM: What we do here is give them a chance to advertise themselves, after which they are nominated. After the nomination they are vetted by their various students who know them better. Before the vetting a lot of people including teachers sign their nomination forms. After the student vetting is the teachers vetting. After the teachers vetting, those we believe are fit for the positions are put forward. The aspirants stand before the rest of their colleagues and tell them what they will do if they are voted into power. After the manifesto the students are given the chance to do proper election. All the prefects except the chaplaincy prefects are elected this way. **[Democratic election of prefects]**

DG: So how does the SRC as a body come into play in decision-making?

HM: They monitor students and report. But I must admit that sometimes the way they handle the issue brings about a little conflict. Of course these things happen in a democratic society but the most important thing is how they are to be resolved. But a good point is that the SRC checks the students and prevents excesses. **[Stds serve admin objectives]**

DG: The head prefect is the SRC president?

HM: Yes and supported by the assistant prefects.

DG: How do you reconcile the roles of the student prefects and that of the student council?

HM: What happens is that, at a point in time when we see things are not moving on well between the two groups we call them and advise them; the counsellor is also there. He finds time and advises them. If the prefects also think they don't like the way they handled by the SRC, they come over to the administration and we see how best we can solve the issue. We just want them to feel they are one of the same people so that nobody steps on another's toes.

DG: Can any student walk into your office and talk to you about any problem?

HM: Yes but most of the time we prefer them going to the counsellor or the assistant head academic instead.[**Following structures?**] Some students even wait and meet me when I'm walking about on the compound with their problems. So the opportunity is there for the students interact with me.

DG: How much information is given the students to help them in their work?

HM: On daily basis we meet here for devotion and announcements are made. We also give students the chance to prepare and deliver sermons during these devotional times. On a daily basis, the prefects also make announcements. We make them feel like adults in the decision-making process.

DG: Have you had occasions where a student comes to you and complain about a decision you made earlier?

HM: Yes. This is usually in writing. As a leader when you receive such letters, you don't just throw them into the garbage. The first thing you do is to do proper investigation and know whether what the student has said is true or not. Information from the grapevine is very important for every leader.

DG: Besides their membership on committees, do they perform any other activities?

HdM: They hold soiree and invite others schools to participate with them. They organise fund raising activities also. Every year the outgoing SRC embarks on a project which is funded solely by them. They discuss their plans with the school administration and we offer our advice. The SRC has been very supportive in that. They provide poly tanks, chairs for the staff common room and some other projects. This has been helpful to the school. [**SRC supporting school through fund raising activities**]

DG: How has this impacted on student behaviour and performance and teaching output?

HM: They are doing very well. The teachers and the students are assessed. The students are assessed during examination. The teachers are assessed during class meetings. So if a teacher is not very regular in class or is not punctual or is unable to deliver on a topic, he is assessed.

Issues Arising

- Std. membership on school committees
- Opportunity to comment on issues through writing.
- The use of systemic structures

