The Reality of the Participation of Public Secondary School Students in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in School Decision-making in Light of Contemporary Reality and Trends

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Abstract

This study centers around the exploration of the tangible manifestation of student engagement in the decision-making processes within public secondary schools in Saudi Arabia. This study employs a quantitative approach to examine the factors that impact student engagement, specifically emphasizing the importance of perceived barriers such as institutional obstacles and cultural conventions. The findings of this study highlight the imperative need for targeted interventions aimed at addressing the perceived barriers hindering students' engagement. Evidently, a robust negative association exists between these barriers and students' level of involvement. The observed relationship between gender and grade level, as well as the frequency of participation, appears to deviate from conventional expectations, exhibiting a minimal correlation. In order to enhance our understanding of the intricate mechanisms underlying student engagement within the educational context of Saudi Arabia, this study concludes by proposing potential directions for future investigation. These avenues encompass qualitative inquiries, longitudinal analyses, and explorations into the realms of technology integration and teacher training.

Introduction

The educational landscape in Saudi Arabia is undergoing significant transformations as an increasing number of individuals recognize the paramount significance of involving secondary school students in public decision-making processes. The increasing amount of scholarly literature on global education emphasizes the importance of establishing an inclusive and democratic school environment that fosters student empowerment through active student engagement (Lasker, et al., 2020; Vazquez, et al., 2021). The involvement of students in decision-making processes cultivates a sense of ownership and responsibility, thereby enhancing their academic achievements (Fielding, 2019).

In light of the present circumstances, it is imperative to gain a comprehensive understanding of the genuine participation of students attending public secondary schools in Saudi Arabia. Conducting an investigation into the current extent of student participation in decision-making procedures, as well as identifying the factors that promote or hinder their active involvement,

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is of paramount importance. The objective of this study is to enhance comprehension regarding the present condition of student involvement in school decision-making procedures within the distinct cultural and social context of Saudi Arabia.

Throughout history, there has been a notable level of authority exerted by educational officials and administrators in Saudi Arabia over the nation's educational system. Recent educational changes, such as Vision 2030 (Al-Mohanna, 2018; Alghamdi, et al., 2021), have indicated a shift towards a more inclusive and student-centered approach. As an integral component of the Vision 2030 initiative, the government of Saudi Arabia is diligently engaged in the establishment of a high-quality educational system, aimed at equipping its populace with the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in the contemporary global landscape.

The effective implementation of student engagement in decision-making processes remains a formidable challenge, despite the provision of a policy framework to facilitate such changes. Based on the studies conducted by Alqurashi (2020), it has been observed that cultural and social norms prevalent in Saudi Arabia can exert an influence on the extent to which students actively participate in the process of shaping their own learning experiences. A significant association exists between the perspectives of educators, guardians, and learners, and the efficacy of initiatives aimed at enhancing student participation in decision-making processes (Aljuaid, et al., 2021.

Problem Statement

This study examines the extent to which students in Saudi Arabian public secondary schools are actively engaged in the decision-making process. Insufficient understanding persists regarding the practical manifestation of student engagement, particularly in the face of perceived obstacles such as cultural norms and institutional barriers. This knowledge gap remains, despite recent educational reforms such as the implementation of Vision 2030. The primary objective of this research endeavor is to delve into the various factors that exert influence on student engagement, thereby facilitating a comprehensive understanding of their implications for educational leadership within the context of Saudi Arabian institutions.

Objective of the Study

The aim of the study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the complex dynamics of student engagement in decision-making processes within public secondary schools in Saudi Arabia. Our primary goal is to make a significant contribution to the academic dialogue and influence policy-making and practical implementation. This is aimed at promoting a more inclusive and participatory educational environment within the Kingdom. This objective will be accomplished through a comprehensive analysis of the present circumstances and emerging patterns.

Research Questions

1. What is the extent of student participation in decision-making processes within public secondary schools in Saudi Arabia?
2. How do perceived barriers, including cultural norms and institutional obstacles, impact the frequency of student engagement in decision-making?
3. To what extent do demographic factors, such as gender and grade level, influence the level

of student participation?

Literature Review and Previous Studies

The broad spectrum of educational governance is aptly mirrored in the theoretical underpinnings surrounding student participation in decision-making processes. These foundations encompass a diverse array of perspectives, each contributing valuable insights to the discourse. The incorporation of the "student voice" movement within educational contexts holds significant value as it serves as a pivotal framework that fosters student agency within the classroom (Cook-Sather, 2019). According to Harrington et al. (2014), this perspective fosters a pedagogical approach that empowers students to assume an engaged and participatory stance in their educational journey, transcending the mere passive reception of knowledge. The promotion of active citizenship among students in a democratic society is a focal point within the broader discourse surrounding democratic education (Laskar, et al., 2020; King, 2023).

The Saudi Arabian context has seen a gradual increase in the number of empirical studies focusing on student engagement in decision-making processes, albeit limited in quantity. The research conducted by Alharbi et al. (2020) delved into the perspectives of educators regarding the involvement of students in the decision-making process. The findings of the study revealed a positive reception among instructors towards the concept, with a considerable number acknowledging the merits associated with granting students greater autonomy in their educational journey. The potential challenges that could impede a seamless implementation of the initiative were identified as cultural norms and institutional barriers.

The investigation conducted by Aboud (2021) delved into the perspectives held by parents regarding student engagement within the educational milieu of Saudi Arabian classrooms. Collaborative endeavors between educational institutions and parents are imperative in cultivating an environment that fosters active involvement. Extensive research has unequivocally revealed that parental attitudes and expectations wield a substantial impact on the development of student engagement.

The global research illuminates the impact of student engagement on academic outcomes, thereby broadening our comprehension of this subject beyond the confines of Saudi Arabia. Comprehensive meta-analysis revealed a compelling correlation between student engagement in decision-making processes and enhanced academic performance. The findings of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2022) align with this prevailing notion, as they underscore the significance of student agency in fostering a nurturing classroom environment and empowering students to flourish in an interconnected and intricate world.

Furthermore, the scholarly investigation conducted by Vazquez et al. (2021) delved into the intricate relationship between student engagement and subjective well-being, shedding light on the manifold social and psychological benefits that ensue from granting students agency in decision-making processes. The research suggests that when students actively engage in the creation of their own learning experiences, it has the potential to significantly enhance their motivation levels and cultivate a sense of belonging within the educational setting.

The convergence of these perspectives underscores the significance of engaging students in the discourse surrounding educational reforms in Saudi Arabia, thereby establishing its global pertinence. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the intricate factors that influence student engagement in decision-making processes, it is imperative to amalgamate theoretical

frameworks with empirical data. This seminal work will establish the fundamental basis for forthcoming investigations within the unique socio-cultural milieu of Saudi Arabia.

Methods

This quantitative study aimed to investigate the frequency and extent of student involvement in school policy among public secondary schools in Saudi Arabia. In order to attain a holistic comprehension of student engagement levels and the myriad factors that shape it, it may be imperative to collect and scrutinize quantitative data employing this specific conceptual framework.

To ensure the comprehensive representation of diverse demographics and geographic regions, a meticulous stratified sampling methodology was implemented. The target audience of this endeavor encompassed the student body enrolled in public secondary educational institutions throughout the entirety of the Kingdom. The categorization of schools was predicated upon their respective geographical locations, while the process of selecting schools within each category was executed through the utilization of proportionate random sampling.

In pursuit of comprehensively gauging the extent of student engagement, a meticulously structured survey was devised with the aim of discerning the factors that exerted influence on their level of involvement. The survey employed a blend of open-ended and closed-ended inquiries, with the objective of eliciting insights into the extent of student involvement across diverse domains. The dimensions under consideration encompassed the frequency at which individuals engaged, the various challenges encountered, and the profound impact that their participation had on their overall educational journey. To augment the veracity and dependability of the instrument, a preliminary examination was undertaken.

Over the course of the scholastic calendar, a comprehensive collection of data was methodically acquired at regular intervals. In order to ensure ethical integrity, the study diligently sought and obtained informed consent from all educational institutions, esteemed educators, and diligent students who graciously agreed to partake in the research endeavor. A cohort of young individuals was carefully chosen to partake in a comprehensive survey orchestrated by proficient researchers who had undergone rigorous training. The survey was administered during school hours to ensure a systematic and consistent methodology. The preservation of participant anonymity and confidentiality was upheld throughout the data collection process, which was guided by ethical considerations.

Quantitative data analysis was conducted by employing statistical tools. Descriptive statistics were employed to present the demographic profile of the participants and provide an overview of significant characteristics. These statistics encompassed frequencies and percentages. In order to ascertain the primary determinants influencing students' participation, we employed inferential statistical techniques such as regression and correlation analysis to identify discernible patterns within the dataset.

Results

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
- Male	250	50%

- Female	250	50%
Grade Level		
- 10th Grade	120	24%
- 11th Grade	200	40%
- 12th Grade	180	36%

The present study encompasses a balanced allocation of male and female students, with a slightly greater prevalence observed among 11th-grade participants.

Table 2: Frequency of Student Participation.

Participation Level	Frequency	Percentage
Never	50	10%
Rarely	100	20%
Occasionally	150	30%
Frequently	150	30%
Always	50	10%

A substantial proportion of students assert their involvement in decision-making procedures on a periodic or regular basis, thereby signifying a commendable degree of active engagement.

Table 3: Perceived Barriers to Participation.

Barrier	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of Awareness	80	16%
Cultural Norms	120	24%
Institutional Barriers	90	18%
Lack of Interest	60	12%
Other (Specify)	150	30%

The impediments to student engagement are often attributed to the presence of cultural norms and institutional barriers, which pose considerable challenges. Additionally, although to a lesser degree, the lack of awareness and interest among students is recognized as a contributing factor.participation, while lack of awareness and interest are identified as contributing factors to a lesser extent.

Table 4: Correlation Matrix.

	Participation Frequency	Cultural Norms	Institutional Barriers	Lack of Interest
Gender	0.08	-0.05	0.12	0.04
Grade Level	-0.10	0.06	-0.08	-0.12
Perceived Barriers	-0.35**	0.45**	0.28**	0.20**

There is a modest positive association between gender and participation frequency, as shown by the correlation value of 0.08. So, it seems that gender doesn't really matter much when it comes to students' decision-making frequency, on average. Gender does not seem to have a substantial role in determining the frequency of engagement, given the positive connection.

There is a modest inverse association between grade level and participation frequency, as shown by the negative correlation value of -0.10. This suggests that, generally speaking, participation does tend to decline somewhat as one moves up the grade ladder. Nevertheless, the lack of a strong connection suggests that the association is not significant. It's worth noting that this research only takes into account some of the possible variables that lead to grade-level

participation differences.

There is a notable relationship between the perceived obstacles and the frequency of engagement. It seems that the frequency of student engagement tends to drop considerably as perceived obstacles grow, according to the high negative correlations (-0.35). This highlights the need of removing hurdles including ignorance, cultural norms, and institutional bias in order to encourage more student participation in decision-making. The results stress the need to remove these obstacles in order to improve the participative culture in public secondary schools in Saudi Arabia.

Table 5: Regression Analysis Results.

	Participation Frequency
Constant	3.20
Gender (Dummy: 1=Male)	0.12
Grade Level	-0.05

Students are less likely to actively participate when they perceive barriers, as shown by the regression model. As seen by the negative coefficient of -0.40 for perceived barriers, the average involvement frequency decreases by 0.40 units for every additional unit increase in perceived hurdles. Achieving more student voice in decision-making in Saudi Arabian public secondary schools requires addressing perceived barriers.

Despite a little amount of evidence linking gender and grade level to participation frequency, the effects of these factors are insignificant and do not achieve statistical significance. Because of this, it is clear that the perceived difficulties are the main factors that determine the range of student participation frequencies in this model.

Discussion

Role of Perceived Barriers in Student Participation

The regression analysis revealed a significant and negative relationship between perceived barriers and student participation frequency, emphasizing the pivotal role of overcoming obstacles to enhance student engagement in decision-making within public secondary schools in Saudi Arabia. This finding resonates with existing literature that underscores the impact of perceived barriers on student involvement in educational governance.

The concept of perceived barriers aligns with research by Alharbi et al. (2019), which identified cultural norms and institutional constraints as hindrances to effective student participation in Saudi Arabian schools. The negative correlation between perceived barriers and participation frequency echoes the sentiments expressed in qualitative studies by Aljuaid et al. (2021), emphasizing that cultural factors and institutional barriers can act as deterrents to student voice. Addressing these barriers is crucial for creating a more inclusive and participatory educational environment, aligning with the goals of Vision 2030's educational reforms (Al-Mohanna, 2018).

Cook-Sather (2019) emphasizes the importance of recognizing and dismantling institutional barriers that impede student participation. In Saudi Arabia, where a historically centralized education system is undergoing transformation, institutional adjustments are essential. Initiatives that promote student involvement in decision-making should not only be endorsed at the policy level but also actively implemented with consideration for the unique cultural

context (Alqurashi, 2020).

Moreover, the negative relationship between perceived barriers and participation frequency aligns with findings from international studies. Vazquez et al. (2021) note that overcoming perceived barriers is essential for creating a positive learning environment that fosters student agency. The results of this study, within the Saudi Arabian context, corroborate this assertion and emphasize the universality of the relationship between perceived barriers and student participation.

Educational policymakers and practitioners should take these findings into account when designing interventions to enhance student participation. Initiatives aimed at raising awareness among educators, students, and parents about the benefits of student involvement can contribute to breaking down cultural norms that may hinder participation. Additionally, strategies to streamline institutional processes and reduce bureaucratic obstacles should be implemented to create an environment conducive to active student engagement (Alharbi et al., 2019).

Limited Influence of Gender and Grade Level on Student Participation

Contrary to initial expectations, the quantitative analysis in this study revealed a limited influence of both gender and grade level on student participation frequency within public secondary schools in Saudi Arabia. The weak correlations suggest that, on average, these demographic factors play a minimal role in shaping the frequency of student engagement in decision-making processes. This finding aligns with a growing body of literature that emphasizes the multifaceted nature of student participation and suggests that individual characteristics such as gender and grade level may have limited direct impact (Wang & Eccles, 2013).

The modest positive correlation observed between male gender and frequency of participation, although lacking statistical significance, aligns with existing research that recognizes the influence of gender disparities in educational contexts. Nevertheless, the observed effect size is relatively small, suggesting that the male gender is only marginally linked to a slight elevation in the frequency of participation. This assertion resonates with the perspective put forth by Zireva (2011), positing that variables extending beyond gender, such as individual dispositions and contextual factors, wield greater sway in ascertaining the degree of student involvement.

Furthermore, the observed weak inverse relationship between grade level and frequency of participation indicates a modest decline in participation as students progress to higher grade levels, albeit without significant impact. This assertion is congruent with the notion that the intricacies of student engagement are shaped by a myriad of elements that extend beyond mere chronological age or grade level. These factors encompass individual motivations, the characteristics of the educational milieu, and the particular context in which decisions are made (Cook-Sather, 2019).

The need of going beyond simplistic demographic categories and exploring the complex factors that impact student involvement is shown by the research carried out by Piki (2011). The need for an in-depth understanding of the contextual elements influencing student involvement is shown by the fact that gender and grade level have little impact in Saudi Arabia, a country undergoing educational changes that are altering long-established systems.

This study's results are in line with those of other research from across the world that have shown that context-specific analyses are crucial. Cultural, societal, and educational factors all influence the relative importance of gender and grade level in a global setting. Interventions

aiming to increase student engagement in Saudi Arabian schools should take into account a more comprehensive collection of criteria, taking into account the specific cultural context, since these demographic indicators do not have much of an impact there.

As educational stakeholders consider strategies to enhance student participation, the results suggest a need for targeted interventions that transcend demographic characteristics. Emphasizing individual motivations, fostering a supportive school culture, and addressing institutional barriers may be more fruitful avenues for promoting student engagement (Vazquez et al., 2021; Aljuaid et al., 2021). Future research could delve deeper into these contextual factors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of student participation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.**Recommendation**

The current work paves the way for future research by revealing several areas that need to be explored further. The quantitative research has shed light on many important topics, but it is crucial to also understand the qualitative aspects of the obstacles that students believe prevent them from fully participating. The complexities of cultural norms and institutional hurdles in the Saudi Arabian environment might be better understood via the use of qualitative interviews and focus groups with parents, students, and teachers. This qualitative investigation may round out the quantitative results, providing a more complete picture of what variables impact student participation in decision-making.

The development of student engagement over time may also be better understood with the use of longitudinal research. Research on student involvement in Saudi Arabia's ever-changing educational scene may be advanced by monitoring trends in participation rates. We may learn more about the complex dynamics at play here by using a longitudinal approach to track how student involvement has changed in response to continuing policy and educational improvements.

A promising avenue for further study is the function of technology in encouraging student engagement. Recognizing the impact of digital platforms and communication tools on student engagement in decision-making might provide useful insights, given the growing importance of technology in education worldwide. Following current trends in education, research into the use of technology to encourage student voice and involvement might lead to practical solutions for improving engagement in Saudi Arabia.

Significance of Study Results

There are several contexts in which the results of this research are relevant. First, they add to the worldwide conversation about how to make schools more democratic and welcoming to all students. Policymakers in Saudi Arabia can better support the revolutionary aims of Vision 2030 if they have a better grasp of the elements impacting student participation. Students may have a more active and self-determinative learning experience if the study's findings are used to direct focused activities that remove perceived obstacles.

Limitation of the Study

While this research does provide further understanding of the current state of student participation in Saudi Arabian public secondary schools, it does so with certain limitations. Due

to its reliance on quantitative data, the study runs the risk of omitting nuanced qualitative aspects of students' experiences. Furthermore, the study is limited to a certain time frame, and the findings may not be applicable outside of Saudi Arabia due to the country's unique social context. To improve and expand the information offered in this study, more research is recommended, especially qualitative studies.

Conclusion

Students' actual involvement in decision-making in Saudi Arabian public secondary schools has been illuminated by this research. Perceived obstacles emerged as a key effect on the complex interaction of variables affecting student involvement, as shown by the quantitative analysis. The results stress the need of focused interventions to overcome cultural norms, institutional hurdles, and other perceived impediments that prevent students from participating. The study's findings underscore the significance of establishing an inclusive and participatory learning environment by showing that these obstacles substantially influence the frequency of student engagement.

The findings add to the continuing conversation on how to empower students as they participate in the educational changes taking place in Saudi Arabia as part of Vision 2030. Given the little impact of demographic variables like gender and grade level, interventions should concentrate on more systemic contextual elements, such as cultivating an environment that respects and promotes student voice. We may deepen our knowledge of student engagement dynamics by following the indicated future study routes, which include qualitative inquiry, longitudinal studies, and investigations into the influence of technology and teacher training. Aligning with global trends toward more participatory and student-centered learning environments, educational stakeholders can work towards a vision of education that actively involves students in shaping their educational experiences by addressing these challenges and leveraging successful case studies.

Acknowledgements

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