

# Democratization of School Prefects in Selected Public and Private Secondary Schools in Ibadan South-West Local Government Area, Nigeria

**Titilope Olusola Olatuyi and Prof. P. A. Amosun**

*Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria*

## Abstract

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*This study was designed to examine the democratization of school prefects in selected public and private secondary schools in Ibadan South-West Local Government Area of Oyo state. The research design employed is survey design. A total of two hundred (200) respondents participated in the study. The instrument used was a self designed questionnaire ( $r= 0.86$ ). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings of this study revealed that the mode of selection of school prefects had influence on students' behaviour. It was recommended among other things that students' body should be allowed to elect prefects democratically, that the process should be free and fair to avoid any disruption of academic work due that might arise from the feeling of being shortchanged, if the process is not free and fair.*

**Key words:** Democratization, Prefects appointment, Public and private school administration

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## Introduction

The prefect system mode of discipline enhancement originated from the philosophy that; students were valuable underused educational resources in maintaining a given disciplinary climate. The prefect system was introduced in English school since the nineteenth century and still operates in many English schools in various ways. Though the functions of prefects today vary extensively, the importance of prefects in the authority systems of many schools are still noticeable. The prefect system is also a significant part of the educational experience that has to do with the development of character and responsibility. "

Eckstein (2021) indicated that prefects assisted the young and learned to use authority and younger students experienced the rule of their seniors before they moved on to exercise power to themselves. Prefects in secondary school were normally drawn from all senior forms. Apart from seniority, they were expected to do with good character and leadership qualities and also maintain a high standard of behaviour and a high standard of justice.

In Nigeria, secondary schools are categorized as; public schools which are established or operated by the Government while private schools as those established, owned or operated by private individuals, entrepreneurs and institutions. Secondary schools are managed

by Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education is in charge of decision-making and policy making whereas the school administration assisted by the senior teachers, head of departments and the prefects carry out the day-to-day administrative tasks. In secondary schools, prefects are student leaders who are elected or appointed and assigned with specific duties and responsibilities by the school administration.

In many British and Commonwealth schools, prefects have considerable power and effectively run the school outside the classroom. The roles and responsibilities of prefects are to assist in maintaining acceptable behavioral standards, discipline and order among students in the school (Berger, 2022). Prefects' responsibilities in Nigerian schools include; giving directions, management of daily routine, presenting students' issues for attention and action as well as enforcing school rules and regulations. The responsibilities and duties for position of the head boy or girl, assistant head boy or girl, games prefect, dining hall prefect, library prefect, labour prefect, dormitory prefect, social prefect and sport prefect are clearly defined (Otieno, 2010). Prefects like other students are expected to attain good grades in class tests and national examinations besides their responsibilities as prefects. Good grades can only be attained if they perform their academic work diligently. Prefects are supposed to observe academic discipline by doing and submitting

their homework on time, being attentive in class, preparing adequately for examinations and other activities related to academic pursuits.

Some of the prefects' responsibilities in Nigerian schools include; taking roll calls, reporting absentees, organizing co-curricular activities, awarding punishment for minor offences and ensuring that all students obey school rules and regulations at all times.

### Statement of the Problem

There are considerable factors in addressing the democratization of school prefects in selected public and private secondary schools. Students' involvement in governance is crucial since most of the decisions made in school affect them in many ways. Relatively, students should be encouraged to take part in the administration of the school, learn to cultivate democratic attitudes, right attitudes to work and a good sense of belonging to both the school and society at large; they should also learn to be self directing, responsible and law abiding. Basically, prefects play a critical role in the learning process of a school given that they are charged with students' welfare, coordination of co-curriculum activities, supervision of learning activities during morning and evening preps and when situation arises that they should do so. They also check for students' attendance to classes and other activities. Further, they are charged with dealing with minor cases of indiscipline. This implies that prefects act as a link between the students and the school administration. It also implies that they are in a position to detect indiscipline cases and report them to the administration as they have direct contact with the students unlike the administration. The rampant indiscipline cases in public schools question the influence of prefects in maintenance of discipline. This study has been prompted by these observations and seeks to fill in the gap by investigating the democratization of school prefects in selected public and private secondary schools in Ibadan South-West Local Government Area of Oyo state.

### Research Questions

1. To what extent do prefects serve as a link between students and the school administration?
2. Will democratization of selection of

secondary school prefects affect their popular participation in politics in the nearest future?

3. Do students have preference for democratization method of prefect selection over appointment?

### Significance of the Study

This study would provide insight to those involved in administration on ways of improving students' discipline in secondary schools. The principals, deputies and teachers of secondary schools may find the finding of this study helpful in that they may be able to establish the committed prefects' body as suggested by all the school stakeholders. Also, this study is quite essential in that, it would provide a lens on the evaluation of the effectiveness of democratization on school prefect-ship system in so far as it produces vocal, vibrant and active leaders. Basically, since students are the most extensive users of the school facilities they could be a good source of information and ideas on how to improve school facilities if given the opportunity to do so.

### Scope of the Study

The scope of this study was restricted to selected public and private secondary schools within Ibadan South-West Local Government Area of Oyo state.

### Literature review

Prefects play a very important role in the control of the students and management of schools. They carry out the implementation of instructions from the administration and teachers. In Most schools prefects play an important role in the organization and discipline of the school outside the classroom (Otieno, 2010). In good performing schools like Starehe Boys Centre, prefects are also efficient and effective so that the role of teachers is limited to teaching and carrying out other academic duties.

According to Njogu (2014), prefects provide the link between the administration and students. Among indiscipline students, prefects are "enemies" but to the disciplined and focused ones, they are people who sacrifice their time to

serve others without expecting a reward. Wachira (2004) claimed that in some cases, instead of prefects helping to maintain discipline, they are usually used by the head-teacher. "It was found out that they played the role of teachers and even gave examinations to fellow students.

Empirically, the challenge of social control and of democratic socialization are two key issues facing education at present (Effrat and Schimmel, 2018). Some democracy is firmly entrenched in the Constitution; however, this is of little consequence if the citizens do not live and practise these values. As Effrat and Schimmel put it: American schools and educational systems talk the talk of democracy, but, at best, they limp the walk". There would seem to be a direct parallel with Kenyan schools. The 'traditional approach' in many schools has been of an autocratic nature (McLennan and Thurlow, 2018). This means that the rules were decided on by the principal, or a few senior people, and were not open to discussion. Depending on the age of the school, many of these rules could be long-standing and in some cases 'dated'. Pupils entering the system are expected to take note of the rules and if they break them, they can expect to be reprimanded and punished. There is little empathy in this approach and pupils are expected to comply. Research has indicated that pupils prefer participative decision-making and want to contribute meaningfully to school codes of conduct and structures (Mabeba and PrinSloo, 2020), Having input into the rules promotes commitment to those rules (Denton, 2003). The criticisms of this approach were that it was time-consuming, that communication from the committee to the whole student body was not easy and that a turnover of the school administration resulted in new leaders who had to learn about the process afresh each time. Collaborative rule-making can do more than just promote co-operation in the classroom; it can be a very powerful introduction to the workings of democracy. The 'democratic socialization challenge' is for schools to produce citizens who are equipped to contribute to, participate in, and appreciate the democracy within which their society functions (Effrat and Schimmel, 2018).

Machogu, (2019) also carried out a study which sought to find out prefects' administrative

role on students' discipline in public secondary schools in Masaba South District, Kenya. The study was guided by five objectives: to examine the selection procedure of prefects on students' discipline, to examine the roles undertaken by prefects on students' discipline, to examine the training programmes in schools for enhanced prefects' administration on students' discipline, to examine the strategies prefects use in dealing with challenges they face in the day-to-day administration of the students' affairs, and to examine decision making practices prefects employ on student's administration. This study employed a descriptive survey design. The study population consisted of 20 principals, 100 teachers and 200 form 3 students. Data was collected using questionnaire. A positive relationship was obtained with a coefficient of 0.753 for principals, 0.879 for teachers and 0.841 for students: The study established that prefects play a pivotal role on student's discipline and this can be improved with proper selection, job descriptions and basic training. The study also revealed that prefects undertake different roles delegated by the school administration. They also provide a useful link between the administration and the students. The study recommended that the school administration should formulate and facilitate duties and responsibilities of respective prefects, have clear basic training programmes, involve students in decisions that affect them and strengthen guidance and counseling departments to support the prefects where necessary.

Levenson (2020) carried out a survey on once a head prefect, always a head prefect. The findings of the survey shows that most captains of industry were already ambitious, and on the route to success, at school. It shows that 90 per cent of chief executives and board-level directors held roles such as head boy or girl, or prefect, with many holding more than one position of responsibility. In fact, 50 per cent of those surveyed captained sports teams, while 37 per cent were debating society speakers and 28 per cent had a lead part in a school performance. As well as showing that you need an ability to play the power-trip game and to get into positions of authority as quickly as possible in order to succeed in life, the survey results illustrate very well how one opportunity leads to another, and

how, unless we intervene to ensure all children are given opportunities, it is easy to get left behind from an early age.

### Methodology

This study adopted ex-post facto design. This design, dealt with research variables that had already occurred and thus cannot be deliberately arranged and manipulated through the intervention of the researcher. Ex-post facto study is aimed at discovering possible causes for the phenomenon being studied, by comparing subjects in whom a character is presented with similar subjects in which it is absent or present at a lesser degree. The study aimed at observing and describing the behaviour of the subjects under study without influencing it in any way and therefore considered the descriptive A total of two hundred (200) respondents participated 100 each from from both the public and private secondary schools that conduct election for the appointment

of school prefects and those that appoint their prefects. That is, 100 respondents each from the two selected secondary schools. In this study, a questionnaire ( $r=0.83$ ) was used. The researcher visited the selected schools for the main study and was granted permission for the administration of the questionnaires. More so, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and those who were willing and ready to participate were given the questionnaire to complete while others were interviewed orally. The researcher also gave assurance of confidentiality to the participant. Data were analyzed using descriptive, inferential statistics, frequencies and percentages and presented as tables.

### Results

**Research Question 1:** To what extent do prefects serve as a link between student and the school administration?

**Table 1:** Prefects as Link between Students and School Administration

S/n	Statements	SA (%)	A(%)	SD(%)	D(%)	Mean	S.D
1	School prefects act as an intermediary between the school management and students	100 (50%)	87 (43.5%)	4 (2%)	9 (4.5%)	1.61	0.77
2	Prefects help in supervising extra-curricular activities	42 (21%)	120 (60%)	28 (14%)	10 (5%)	2.03	0.74
3	Prefects discipline students that disobey school rules and regulation	110 (55%)	37 (18.5%)	40 (20%)	13 (6.5%)	1.78	0.98
4	Prefects help in the implementation of Administrative instructions	85 (42.5%)	20 (10%)	15 (7.5%)	80 (40%)	2.45	1.38
5	Prefects do not relay complaints of student to the school management	60 (30%)	25 (12.5%)	25 (12.5%)	90 (45%)	2.72	1.30
6	Prefects bring up ideas which are put into practice for extra-curricular activities	52 (26%)	33 (16.5%)	30 (15%)	85 (42%)	2.74	1.25
<b>Grand mean = 2.22</b>							

Table 1 shows the extent to which prefects act as a link between students and the school administration. The table indicated that 100(50%) of the respondents strongly and 87 (43.5%) agree that prefects serve as an intermediary between the school management and students. It is also seen that 120 (60%) agree and 42 (21%) strongly agree that prefects help in supervising extracurricular activities. However, it is seen that 90 (45%) disagree and 25 (12.5%) strongly disagree that prefects do not relay

complaints of students to the school management, while 85 (42%) disagreed and 30 (15%) strongly disagreed that prefects bring up ideas which are put into practice for extracurricular activities. This implies that prefects serve as a link between students and the school administration.

**Research Question 2:** Will democratization of selection of secondary school prefects affect their popular participation in politics in the nearest future?

**Table 3:** Democratization of Secondary School Prefects and their Participation in National Politics in future

S/n	Statements	SA (%)	A(%)	SD(%)	D(%)	Mean	S.D
1	Democratically elected secondary school prefects are likely to engage in politics in the nearest future	102 (51%)	70 (35%)	18 (9%)	10 (5%)	1.68	0.84
2	I have seen and heard some of prefects discussing Nigerian politics	75 (37.5%)	106 (53%)	10 (5%)	9 (4.5%)	1.76	0.74
3	Most of our political leaders in Nigeria have history of prefectship in their secondary schools	62 (31%)	97 (48.5%)	22 (11%)	9 (4.5%)	1.99	0.89
4	As a result of the reward, and prestige attached to the title of a prefect, most students develop the urge to contest and win	120 (60%)	55 (27.5)	6 (3%)	113 (56.5%)	1.62	0.93
5	Most student don not like voting	10 (5%)	16 (8%)	61 (30.5%)	113 (56.5%)	3.38	0.83
6	Most student feel that there was an electoral rigging in case where their preferred candidates did not win election, hence they get discouraged in the future election	60 (30%)	107 (53.5%)	13 (6.5%)	20 (10%)	1.96	0.87
<b>Grand mean = 2.07</b>							

Table 2 shows will democratization of selection of secondary school prefects affect their popular participation in politics in the nearest future? The table indicated that 102 (51%) strongly agreed and 70 (35%) agreed that democratically elected secondary school prefects are likely to engage in politics in the nearest future. Also, 97 (48.5%) agreed, and 62 (31%) strongly agreed that Most of our political leaders in Nigeria have history of prefectship during their secondary school days.

However, 107 (53.5%) agreed, and 60 (30%) strongly disagreed that most students feel that there was an electoral rigging in cases where their preferred candidates did not win election, hence they get discouraged in future elections.

**Research Question 3:** Do students have preference for democratization method of prefect selection over appointment method of selection

**Table 3:** Students' Preference for Prefect Selection

S/N	Questions asked	Responses
1.	How are your prefects selected?	40% said by democratization method while 60% said by appointment.
2.	Are you satisfied with the mode of selection?	45% said yes, they are satisfied. While 55% said they are not pleased.
3	If yes, state reason(s) why	They prefer democratic mode of selection because it gives them the platform to exercise their voting rights and to be able to make personal choice on those they want as prefects.
4	If no, give reasons	They prefer by appointment because it makes it more interesting and encourages them to perform well academically since it is the major license to becoming a prefect. And that it will not make them prone to favoritism when it comes to election.
5	Do your prefects do what is expected of them most times?	75% were of the opinion that their prefects do not do what is expected of them as it was assumed that they do not know. They meddle into other prefects' duties. While some prefects concentrate more on their academics and place little or no attention to their prefect duties.
6	Are your prefects punished severely when they disobey school rules and regulations?	95% of them said disobedient prefects are dealt with mercilessly in their schools.
7	If your response to Q6 is yes, what type(s) of punishment?	The general view states that their punishment stems from open reproach on the assembly, beating, punishment like sweeping junior classes, suspension from school for certain period of time to displacement from the post of their offices.
8.	Will you like to be a prefect and Why?	Majority (98%) said yes because of the prestige it has while still in school and after leaving the school.

Table 3 shows the students' preference for democratization method of prefect selection over appointment. Investigations showed that appointment is used as a means of selecting prefects in some schools while election is being conducted for students to make their choices on who they prefer as their prefect(s). It is also noticed from the table that 55% of the interviewed students do not like the way the management and teachers of the school appoint their prefects. However, 45% of the students made their opinion known that the appointment selection is best preferred by them as it encourages and motivates them to perform brilliantly well in their academics as it is the main license to being appointed as a prefect, else they may not be lucky when it comes to election as their fellow students might not vote for them. In addition, 75% of them were in support of the fact that their prefects do not do what is expected of them in most cases but rather meddle into other prefects' duties. 95% agreed that disobedient prefects are dealt when the need arises with punishments ranging from open reproach on the assembly to displacement from the post of office. With the trend of things, 90% desired to become prefects because of the prestige it has both while in school as a prefect and after leaving school.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Findings on the prefects as link between administration and students revealed that the respondents agreed that prefects act as intermediary between the school administration and the students. It is also seen that prefects help in carrying out administrative instructions, and they strongly agreed that prefects discipline students who disobey school rules and regulations. However, they strongly disagreed that Prefects bring up ideas which are put into practice for extracurricular activities, and are not consulted before major decisions are taken by the school management. This finding is in line with that of Machogu, (2012) on influence of prefects' administrative role on students' discipline in public secondary schools in

Masaba South district, Kenya, where it was reported that prefects undertake different roles delegated by the school administration, which provide a useful link between the administration and the students. Prefects play a pivotal role on student's discipline and this can be improved with proper selection, job descriptions and basic training. It is recommended that the school administration should formulate and facilitate duties and responsibilities of respective prefects, have clear basic training programmes, involve students in decisions that affect them and strengthen guidance and counseling departments to support the prefects where necessary. In reference to Sithole (1998), the first is that prefects must remain passive and receive instructions from parents and teachers. This view will mean that policies must be designed by adults and prefects are to follow them to the letter. The second viewpoint suggests that prefects can participate but only to a certain degree (Squelch, 1999; Magadla, 2007). In support of this view, Huddleston (2007) suggests that there is a tendency among some teachers and school leaders to define the issues which affect prefects quite narrowly. When prefects are involve in the formulation of school rules and regulations, school governance becomes easier for school administrators.

The findings with respect to the influence of democratization of school prefects and students political participation in the nearest future revealed that respondents strongly agreed that democratically elected secondary school prefects are likely to engage in politics in the nearest future. They also agreed and strongly agreed that most politicians and leaders have history of prefectship in schools. This finding is in tandem with the findings of Levenson, (2005) who carried out a survey on once a head prefect, always a head prefect, where it was reported that most captains of industry were already ambitious, and on the route to success, at school. It shows that 90 per cent of chief executives and board-level directors held roles such as head boy or girl, or prefect, with many holding more than one position of responsibility. In fact, 50 per

cent of those surveyed captained sports teams, while 37 per cent were debating society speakers and 28 per cent had a lead part in a school performance.

### Conclusions

The research findings concluded that democratization of school prefects have not been selected in a relatively fair manner by the school administration. It was also concluded that prefects were not properly inducted by the school administration. Finally, prefects have been acting as link between school administration and students through consultative meetings, supervision and feedback.

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