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**STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN THE DECISION-MAKING  
PROCESS IN THE GHANAIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS**

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## STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS IN THE GHANAIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** *The study's purpose was to determine the extent of student participation in decision-making in higher institutions and the advantages it offers both students and the university administration. At Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), the purpose of the study was to identify the barriers to full student participation in decision-making.*

**Methodology:** *A quantitative approach was used in this study. The study used descriptive survey and sampled 136 out of 150 people that were the target group. Questionnaire was used to collect data which were analysed with SPSS statistical package (version 25). Descriptive statistics were used to present the data.*

**Findings:** *Findings indicate that student engagement in decision-making at the university was either little or nonexistent at all levels. Administrators are consistent in their opinions, however, students appeared to hold differing opinions. Administrators concur with the idea that student input should be greater in university governance to some level. The findings further indicate that student participation in institutional decision-making is confirmed by the students' current standing in university governance.*

**Unique contribution to theory, practice and policy:** *The Student Representative Council (SRC) needs to re-examine the functions and roles in light of current global trends. Where necessary, changes should be instituted to improve student contribution to university decision-making. In light of current global developments, the Student Representative Council (SRC) has to review its tasks and responsibilities. Changes should be implemented as needed to increase student input into university decision-making.*

**Keywords:** *Students, Participation, Decision-Making Process, Administrators, KNUST*

### INTRODUCTION

Making decisions is one of the many duties that administrators must perform. The ability of an organization to make decisions is crucial. Making a decision from a range of options has been effectively characterized as and nearly all managerial tasks are tied to it. Effective judgments are made to achieve zero faults in the manufacturing sector. To produce zero defects, this approach is currently also being applied to the service industry. Making decisions is an organizational activity with a significant impact on the objectives of the organization (Prasad, 2004). A further

observation made by Christine and Ardain in 1989 was that "participatory decision-making processes are vital to good urban government, which promotes quality, transparency, accountability, efficiency, and eventually sustainability" (p.1).

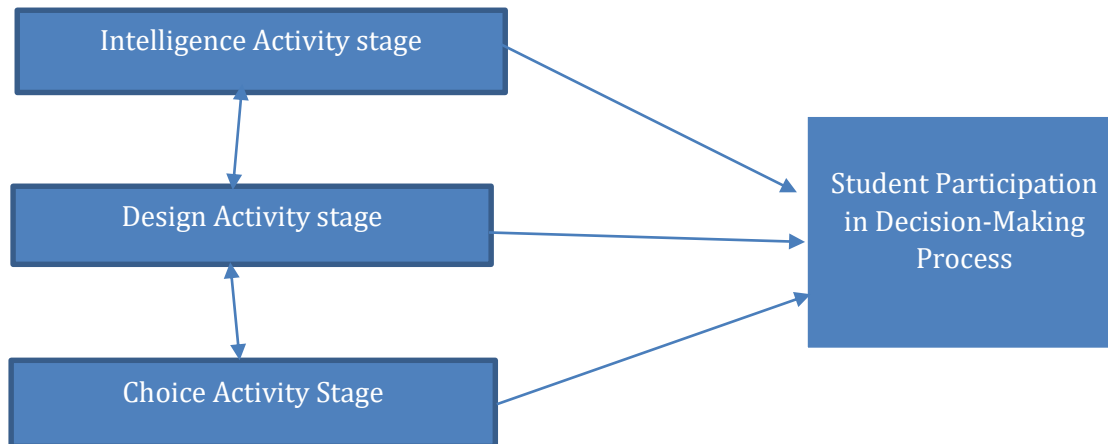
According to Hansen et al. (2003), in order to prevent any indication that the decision-making process has broken down, the relevant public who will be impacted by the decision must be included. This is due to the fact that "the chief executive officer's role is not to make choices; rather, it is to oversee the decision-making process to ensure that it operates at its best." (p.228). According to Gorton (1980), making decisions is a difficult process that takes a lot of time and effort. He continues to say that making decisions requires analytical thought and the use of pertinent sources of information and support. Gorton sees decision-making as the core component of management. Administrators must take considerable care when handling it, as a result. It entails choosing an alternative option, which is then put into practice to fulfil a number of goals (Gorton, 1980). In order to prevent any indication that the decision-making process has broken down, according to Hanson (1996), the relevant public who will be impacted by the choice must be involved.

It has been noted that the time spent at the college is a time for introspection and self-improvement as students attempt to establish their identities in the adult world. Gaidzenwa (1994) indicates that institutions must promote logical debate and discussion regarding governance on their campuses. The main concern of Gaidzenwa is that colleges should, to a significant extent, encourage all facets of the university community to refrain from using violence and force to resolve conflicts. According to Agebure (2013), there is widespread consensus that subordinates' active participation improves institutional management effectiveness. According to CAFA (1994), students who actively participate in institutional decision-making develop superior coping mechanisms for opposing viewpoints.

### **Herbert Simons Decision-Making Theory**

This study is underpinned by Herbert Simon's Decision-making theory propounded in 1947. The theory talks about how decisions are made. The theory is made up of three stages namely, the Intelligence stage, Design Activity stage, and Choice activity stage as seen below:

**Figure 1:** Herbert Simon’s Decision-Making Theory



**Authors’ Construct (2022)**

From Herbert Simon’s theory, the Intelligence activity stage may be likened to the legal framework in Higher Educational institutions whereby the statutes of the University make provision for students’ participation in decision-making in higher education institutions.

The Design Activity Stage is the period where the students are made to get involved in decision-making. They are, therefore, made to participate and share their thoughts with management of the University.

Choice Activity Stage is where students provide policy alternatives in order to select the most suitable course of action to promote harmonious relationships with management.

This Conceptual Framework by the Authors serves as a useful guide in investigating student participation in university decision-making. This framework is in line with the objective of the research which is to examine the extent to which student participation in decision-making impacts Ghanaian university effectiveness.

Several studies examined indicated a positive impact of participation of students in the decision-making process in Higher Educational Institutions in other countries (Luescher-Mamashela, (2013; de. Boer & Stensaker, 2007; Kaba & Barker, 2001). However, a recent study by Addo et al (2021) on the Ghanaian higher education landscape focused on students’ participation in university governance during a pandemic and not during normal times, which creates a knowledge gap. Again, the study used a qualitative approach which makes it difficult to generalise findings to an entire population. This also creates a methodological gap. This study, therefore, addresses the research gaps identified by examining the level of participation of students in the decision-making process in Ghanaian Tertiary Institutions. Findings may assist Ghanaian higher educational institutions to develop mechanisms for effectively involving students in university decision-making.

## METHODOLOGY

A descriptive sample survey was used as the study's methodology. The research was specifically undertaken by using a descriptive survey design to learn more about the characteristics and viewpoints of respondents regarding the existing level of student involvement in university decision-making. Administrators and student leaders at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) made up the target population.

For the study, a sample of 150 participants—120 students and 30 administrators—was selected. With the use of a lottery system, a simple random sample methodology was used with 20 student leaders from each college. This method involved placing 40 pieces of paper in a bowl, vigorously shaking it after each handpick, and selecting students from 1 to 20 to make up the sample. All colleges were subjected to this, and 120 students were selected from the College for the study. The 30 administrators were also chosen using purposive sampling since they had the required knowledge. In total, 150 respondents made up the study's sample size.

Copies of the questionnaire were delivered to respondents who were given two weeks to respond. Prior to the administration of the questionnaire, an introductory letter was submitted to the Registrar, KNUST who then permitted the exercise to be carried out. Table 1 gives the details of the number of questionnaires sent out and retrieved.

As can be seen in Table 1 below, out of the 120 questionnaires distributed to students, 108 were returned, or 90% of the retrieval rate. For the administrators, 30 questionnaires were distributed, and 28 of them were retrieved, representing a 93 percent return rate. In total, 136 of the 150 questionnaires that were distributed were recovered, representing a return rate of almost 91 percent. In conclusion, 91 percent of the surveys were successfully recovered. After copies of the questionnaire had been distributed to the chosen students and administrators, the questionnaire's content was thoroughly explained to the respondents to remove any ambiguities, suspicions, or partiality and to enable the respondents' independent opinions on the questionnaire items.

**Table 1. Distribution of Questionnaires Sent Out and Returned**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Questionnaires Distributed</b>	<b>Questionnaires Returned</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Students	120	108	90.0%
Administrators	30	28	93.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>91%</b>

The collected data were statistically analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 25. Data from the completed questionnaire were checked for consistency using Cronbach Alpha Test. The open-ended questions were grouped based on the responses given



by the respondents. Descriptive statistics indicating frequencies and percentages were used to present the results in tabular form.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Level of involvement in Decision-Making at KNUST

#### Students' Involvement in University Financial Management

The results shown in Table 2 below illustrate how respondents felt about the respondents' current level of involvement in financial decision-making at the university. The involvement of KNUST students in financial management is shown to be minimal at best. The findings showed that while administrators represent 69.9 percent of student leaders, the bulk of them only have a minimal level of engagement in decisions about academic user fees. The findings showed that the majority of students and administrators, representing 53.7 percent and 57.1 percent, respectively, indicated a low level of involvement in the decision-making process for the determination of residential user fees. The findings typically show that student leaders and administrators believe that students play a significant role in financial decisions like paying tuition. When it comes to making decisions on the amount of money to be paid as school fees, students usually have one representation in the committee (Student Union Leaders) who have a vote each. This generally shows a lack of fair representation of students when it comes to making decisions on fees and other financial obligations.

**Table 2 (a) Present Level of Student Involvement in University Financial Management**

Financial Management Area	<u>Level of Involvement</u>			Total
	<u>High</u>	<u>Low</u>	<u>No Involvement</u>	
	S	S	S	
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N %
Academic fees	9(8.3)	55(51.0)	44(40.7)	108(100)
Residential fees	8(7.4)	58(53.7)	42(38.9)	108 (100)

S – Students, N - Frequency, % - Percentages

**Table 2 (b) Present Level of Student Involvement in University Financial Management**

Financial Management Area	<u>Level of Involvement</u>			<u>Total</u>
	<u>High</u>	<u>Low</u>	<u>No Involvement</u>	
	A	A	A	
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N %
Academic fees	7(25.0)	19(67.9)	2(7.1)	28(100)
Residential fees	10(35.7)	16(57.1)	2(7.2)	28(100)

A- Administrators, N - Frequency, % - Percentages

### **Academic Affairs Management Decisions**

The study examined the extent of student involvement in the administration of academic issues. Table 3 below presents the results.

Respondents' Opinions on the Current Level of Student Involvement in Academic Management Decisions are shown in Table 3(a).

**Table 3 (a)**

Academic Management Area	High	Low	No involvement	Total
	S	S	S	
	N %	N %	N %	N %
Development of Curriculum	9(8.4)	46(42.6)	53(49.0)	108(100.0)
Assessment of Academic Staff	25(23.2)	52(48.1)	31(28.7)	108(100.0)
Teaching and learning Materials	10(9.3)	68(62.9)	30(27.8)	108(100.0)
Grading and Certification	0 (0)	2(1.8)	106(98.2)	108(100.0)

Views of respondents on the current degree of student involvement in academic management decisions are presented in Table 3(b).

**Table 3 (b)**

Academic Management Area	High	Low	No involvement	Total
	A	A	A	
	N%	N%	N%	N%
Development of Curriculum	0 (0)	15 (53.6)	13 (46.4)	28 (100.0)
Assessment of Personnel	17 (60.7)	8 (28.6)	3 (10.7)	28 (100.0)
Teaching-learning Materials	8 (28.7)	15 (53.7)	5 (17.6)	28 (100.0)
Grading and Certification	1 (3.6)	7 (25.0)	20 (71.4)	28 (100.0)

On the question of curricular development, students' leaders rated it 42.6% and 49.0% respectively for low involvement and absence of participation in decision-making, while administrators rated it 53.6% and 46.4% respectively. In general, the results reveal that the majority of students' leader and administrators in KNUST believe that students are not much involved in curricular



development of the University. This is particularly true because it is generally believed that curriculum development goes beyond what students can comprehend. This supports Adesina's (1980) postulate that "the task of curriculum is one of the basic responsibilities of those who manage the educational enterprise" (p.158). It means that students per se do not have much hand in the development of curriculum.

On the issue of assessment of personnel, the Quality Assurance and Planning Unit, KNUST has instituted a policy of quality control where students are made to assess the performance of the university staff. The results show that majority of students' leaders indicated low level of involvement while majority of administrators indicated high level of participation of students. In this case, there was a missing gap between what students perceived and what administrators perceived. This points to the fact that students should be more engaged when it comes to decisions on these issues and whatever management is doing in this regard, it should be open for students to partake. According to Rebore (1982), staff development is crucial for any organization. Okumbe (1990) also emphasizes the necessity for updating, which is accomplished via evaluation.

Respondents' engagement in decision-making with regard to teaching-learning materials was minimal. According to Gaidzenwa (1994), it is crucial for members of the university community to comprehend and accept the fact that discussion and consultation are preferable to compulsion when promoting good governance. Students and university administrators need to redesign their approaches to problem-solving, encouraging everyone to engage in prolonged conversations and debates whenever feasible Gaidzenwa (1994) (P.42).

After completing a programme, a certificate is well-deservedly given. Table 4 demonstrates how respondents' opinions on the subject of grading and certification were stated in relation to 98.2 percent of students and 71.4 percent of administrators, respectively, suggesting no participation. Students who are teaching courses are not permitted to grant themselves credentials in any form. The university administration has the authority to make decisions in this area.

### **Administrative/Managerial Affairs Decisions**

The degree of student participation in administrative decision-making is displayed in Table 4. Students and administrators, who made up more than half of the respondents, reported little engagement in decision-making in the areas of student discipline, student welfare, and hall administration given (52.8 percent and 58 percent, respectively). The respondents' statement of students' poor engagement in behavior management and welfare is an unexpected finding. However, students have the democratic right to decide on issues that directly impact them. These issues concern their well-being and discipline. Academic democracy, or the right to participate, is the same thing as academic decision-making, according to Mazrui (1978). This finding implies that the majority of students are disenchanting with their administrators and student leaders. Majority of students (60,2%) claimed minimal involvement in the administration of the hall and the creation of policies at the administrative level, although administrators surprisingly indicated significant involvement. In terms of policy development, student welfare and disciplinary matters, and residential hall management, students generally seem to have little influence on the university's

administration. Even though students are the immediate beneficiaries of these decisions, management often makes the majority of these decisions with little to no student input.

**Table 4 (a) Level of Involvement in the Administrative Decision**

Level of Participation	High S N %	Low S N %	No Involvement S N %	Total N %
Policy Formulation at the Administrative level	10(9.3)	34(31.4)	64(59.3)	108(100)
Student Discipline	25(23.1)	57(52.8)	26(24.1)	108(100)
Student Welfare	22(20.3)	65(60.2)	21(19.5)	108(100)
Hall Administration	21(19.4)	54(50.0)	33(30.6)	108(100)

**Table 4(b) Level of Involvement in the Administrative Decision**

Level of Participation	High A N %	Low A N %	No Involvement A N %	Total N %
Formulation of Policy at the Administrative level	7(25.0)	18(64.3)	3(10.7)	28(100)
Student-Discipline	12(42.9)	15(53.5)	1(3.6)	28(100)
Student Welfare	22(78.6)	5(17.9)	1(3.5)	28(100)
Hall Administration	20(71.5)	6(21.4)	2(7.1)	28(100)

### **Benefits to General Management of Student Involvement in University Decision-Making**

Table 5 displays the findings of the respondents' opinions on the advantages of student involvement in general university administration decision-making. Table 5 reveals that in all six of the indicated items highlighting the advantages of student involvement in decision-making at the Academic Board level, student leaders displayed an average of 65 percent and above. The majority of administrators (60.7% on average) also concur that students' engagement will increase their adherence to the institution's programmes, while just 20% on average disagreed. On their part, students concurred that 70% of student engagement will increase their commitment to the institution's programmes, while (22%) disagreed. This could be in favour of the 1998 University Rationalization Committee (URC) proposal that the university democratise its administration. Greeve (2003) asserts that one crucial aspect of organisations is the prevalence of collective decision-making over individual decision-making. Even when managers act independently, information and counsel from other team members impact their choices. According to Invancevich et al. (1994), a significant amount of decision-making occurs in most organizations today through organisations with titles like committees, teams, task forces, and quality circles.

The rising complexity of organisations and the vast quantity of information required to make informed judgments are two factors contributing to this propensity toward collaborative decision-making. The encouragement of positive interactions between students and other university departments received more responses from students and administrators, with 75.0 percent of respondents from students and 16 (57.0 percent) from administrators expressing a benefit to a great level. This is consistent with the claim made by Oke et al. (2010) that excluding students from decision-making in the classroom might make it impossible to prepare for and carry out school objectives, which can result in a lack of adequate human, material, financial, and physical resources. One of the primary ways in which students are represented in university decision-making, according to Luescher-Mamashela (2013).

**Respondents' Opinions on the Benefits of Student Involvement in Academic Board (and its Committees) Decision Making to General University Administration are presented in Table 5(a).**

Involvement of Students in Decision-making	Agree S N%	Undecided S N%	Disagree S N%	Total S N%
Opportunity for training students in parliamentary behaviour	71(65.8)	18(16.6)	19(17.6)	108(100)
Increases students' commitment to the institution's programs	70(64.8)	22 (20.4)	16(14.8)	108(100)
Encourages positive interactions between students and other university groups	81(75.0)	11 (10.2)	16 (14.8)	108(100)
Improves the quality of the information used to make choices that are compiled from all university departments	66 (61.1)	24 (22.2)	18 (16.7)	108(100)
Reduces or gets rid of student discontent	65(62.2)	25 (23.1)	18(16.7)	108(100)
Enhances smooth management activities	65(60.2)	25 (23.1)	18 (16.7)	108(100)

S – Students

**Respondents' Opinions on the Advantages of Student Involvement in Academic Board (and its Committees) Decision Making to General University Management are shown in Table 5(b).**

Student Involvement in Decision-making factor	Agree		Undecided		Disagree		Total	
	A		A		A		A	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Stimulates opportunity for training students in parliamentary behaviour	13	(46.4)	5	(17.9)	10	(35.7)	28	(100)
Increases student's commitment to the programmes of the institution	16	(57.1)	9	(32.1)	3	(10.8)	28	(100)
Enhances healthy relationships between student and other sectors of the University	16	(57.1)	5	(17.9)	7	(25.0)	28	(100)
Enhances the quality of decisions inputs that are collated from all sectors of the University	20	(71.4)	4	(14.3)	4	(14.3)	28	(100)
Reduces or gets rid of student unrest	22	(78.6)	2	(7.1)	4	(14.3)	28	(100)
Enhances smooth management activities	17	(60.7)	7	(25.0)	4	(14.3)	28	(100)

#### A – Administrators

The administrators' comments make it abundantly obvious that there is a need for student involvement in university management and that it is appropriate for them to be represented on university committees. It's interesting to notice that neither set of respondents gave extremely high marks for not participating. Studies have revealed a beneficial connection between students' active participation in decision-making and efficient organisational management. The results are also consistent with those of Oke et al. (2010), who claim that the main issue facing our universities is the exclusion of students from decision-making, and with Ajayi's (1991) assertion that the importance of student involvement in decision-making in universities cannot be overemphasized due to the ripple effect on students' overall academic achievement.

#### Factors that Impede Students' Participation in University Decision-Making

According to Table 6, 77.8% of the students who replied said that their participation in decision-making is negatively impacted by their fear of victimization and intimidation. According to Lansdown (2001), administrators and other adults believe that kids lack the maturity to participate in conversations in a meaningful way. According to Lansdown, pupils who experience such

embarrassment find it extremely difficult to engage in any conversation and are thus expected to submit rather than to question authority. As a result, the youth need to be given a voice. The cultural life of Africa and the spread of Christianity, according to Asiedu-Akrofi (1978), "upholds the concept that children must be seen but not heard" (p.150). Concerning the second point, 48% of the students concurred that their hectic academic schedules prevent them from participating completely. Intriguingly, the opposite was true in 48 cases, or 44.4%. Students strongly disagreed with the idea that they lack experience and background knowledge, with 84 out of a possible 100 responding in the affirmative. However, Zuo and Ratsoy (1999) found that a lack of information and experience, immaturity, and student indifference are some of the elements that hinder students' engagement in decision-making. Additionally, Kaba and Barker (2001) discovered that pupils who talked well were treated seriously, with the ability to communicate clearly being associated with intellect. Students who disagreed with the claim that there is no legitimate reason for them to become engaged comprised 65.8%.

**Table 6 Factors that impede student participation in university decision-making**

Impediment	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Total
	N%	N%	N%	N%
Students are not given the platform to participate	80 (74.1)	12 (11.1)	16 (18.8)	108 (100)
Students have fears of intimidation	84 (77.8)	8 (7.4)	16 (14.8)	108 (100)
Students' busy academic schedules do not permit	52 (48.2)	8 (7.4)	48 (44.4)	108 (100)
Students lack the knowledge base experiences	14 (13.0)	10 (9.3)	84 (77.7)	108 (100)
Students do not have any legal basis for getting involved	25(23.1)	12 (11.1)	71 (65.8)	108 (100)

### **Factors that Can Enhance Students' Participation in University Administration**

The distribution of respondents' opinions as criteria that might improve students' involvement in university decision-making illustrates the disparities between students' and university administrators' perspectives on student involvement in management or administration. The respondents' perspectives on how to increase the existing degree of student engagement in university decision-making are broken down in Table 7 in descending order. Students overwhelmingly expressed agreement with the measures assessing how student engagement in university decision-making may be improved. The requirement for more numerical representation



in the institution's decision-making is demonstrated by responses from administrators and student leaders that are, respectively, 60.2% and 53.6% higher in proportion.

Under the student-administrators' ratio increment on decision-making bodies, 91.6% of the students agreed while 53% of the administrators also agreed with the increment. On every committee, students are always underrepresented, which is to their detriment. Increased participation will encourage them to join since they will gain support from their fellow participants while they are defending a stance that is not in their best interests. These results are consistent with 1999 research by Zuo and Ratsoy, who discovered that administrators may encourage students to participate in decision-making by increasing the participation of students on particular committees. Administrators said that 75.0% of students should only participate in committees such as the chaplaincy board, academic board, and residence committee.

With more than 80% of administrators saying that they disapproved of the recommendation, it is clear that they (administrators) do not share the students' viewpoint on the idea that they should welcome more student input during decision-making sessions.

**Table 7(a). Enhancement of Student Participation in Decision-Making**

Items	Agree S N%	Undecided S N%	Disagree S N%	Total S N%
Students should have representation in all decision-making bodies	65 (60.2)	25 (23.1)	18 (16.7)	108(100)
There should be a higher student-administrator ratio in the decision-making body.	99 (91.6)	6 (5.6)	3 (2.8)	108(100)
Students ought to be represented on committees that solely address issues affecting students.	71 (65.7)	7 (6.5)	30 (27.8)	108(100)
During meetings when decisions are being made, administrators ought to be more collaborative and open to receiving input from students.	71 (65.7)	7 (6.5)	30 (27.8)	108(100)

**Table 7(b). Enhancement of Student Participation in Decision-Making**

Items	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Total
	A	A	A	A
	N %	N %	N %	N %
Students should have representation on all decision-making bodies	15(53.6)	9(32.1)	4(14.3)	28(100)
There should be a higher student-administrator ratio in the decision-making body.	15(53.6)	2 (7.1)	11(39.3)	28(100)
Students ought to be represented on committees that solely address issues affecting students.	21(75.0)	1(3.6)	6(21.4)	28(100)
During meetings when decisions are being made, administrators ought to be more collaborative and open to receiving input from students.	25 (89.3)	1(3.6)	2(7.1)	28(100)

## CONCLUSION

Respondents to this research believed that student engagement in decision-making at the university was now either little or nonexistent at all levels. Administrators are consistent in their opinions, however, students appeared to hold differing opinions. This raises the possibility that either students are denied the opportunity to engage in university governance or they are unaware of the ways by which they are to do so. Administrators concur with the idea that student input should be greater in university governance to some level. According to administrators, the implementation of user fees should unambiguously promote the participation of students in university decision-making. Student participation in institutional decision-making is confirmed by the students' current standing in university governance.

Additionally, there is a perception that students are now lacking in knowledge, particularly about their student leaders' attitudes toward student welfare and punishment. This demonstrates unequivocally that some student populations do not feel included in administration. Student involvement in university decision-making is commendable because it provides advantages for overall university administration, such as providing students with training for future governance, fostering an environment that is favourable to academic work, and greatly reducing student unrest.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is suggested that administrators and student leaders meet to talk about how university administration may promote inclusive governance to enhance decision-making based on the study's findings. As a result, the two parties will be encouraged to find a practical level at which students' participation in university governance may be achieved. It is necessary to conduct a detailed evaluation of the students' union's powers and responsibilities within the governance structure and to compare it to the global trend at the time. This will make it possible for them to continue interacting with students and administrators in the same way they now do, increasing their efficiency at KNUST. Once again, administrators and the executive members of students' union need to continually raise the level of student and administrator understanding of university governance and the place of students within the framework. Additionally, university administrators might strengthen democratic administration in Ghana's higher institutions by including students on the Academic Board and other committees. Further research should be conducted on other universities in Ghana to find out about students' participation in the university decision-making on a national scale.

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