

ABSTRACT

Student Empowerment: Two Student Fora as Avenues for Authentic Student Voice

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This study sought to evaluate two fora—the Student Council (SC) and the Prefectural System (PS)—to ascertain to what extent they provided students involved with opportunities for "student voice" or student role in the decision making and change efforts at a denominational secondary school in Trinidad and Tobago. It specifically sought to assess the extent to which students were able to converse with and engage school leaders, and the impact that these encounters had on the development of agency, belonging, and competence in council members and prefects. Participants were a purposeful sample of four students: the head male and head female prefects, the president, and an executive member of the Student Council. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Findings indicated that 1) although the PS has discipline as its main goal, prefects reported changes in their leadership abilities, sense of belonging, and the quality of their relationship with adults as a result of their prefectship; 2) conversely, council members at the school, although expressing frustration at not having the SC validated by school leaders, reported changes in their behaviour as a result of forming relationships, more so with other students in the SC but also with caring adults; and 3) PS students who formed closer relationships with adults experienced greater outcomes of agency, belonging, and competence.

Keywords: Leadership; Secondary school students; Student councils; Prefects; Trinidad and Tobago