



Participation of Teachers in the Selection of School Prefects

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Abstract

The role of a teacher was to be a classroom manager responsible for student academic performance and daily behavior within the classroom. School matters outside classroom like policy planning and decisions making traditionally were not related to teachers but to school administrators like principals. The extent to which teachers participate in decision-making is a determining factor on their job motivation. The way principals relate with teachers is important in management of schools. Shared governance is identical to participative decision-making and it affects the stability of the school. The increasing emergence of participation in decision-making (PDM) in schools reflects the widely shared belief that flatter management and decentralized authority structures carry the potential for promoting school effectiveness. The study adopted a qualitative research methodology. Data was analysed using thematic content analysis. The study collected data by using multiple instruments such as interview schedules document analysis schedules. The sample consisted of five school heads and twenty teachers from five schools. The results indicated more participation of teachers in the whole process of prefects' selection. The study established that the higher the complexity of the issue, the more the decisions are concentrated in the hands of the inner most core while the lesser the significance of the decision the more it is likely to be thrown into the hands of the majority of the staff members in all the schools under study.

Keywords: School Prefects, decision-making, principals, teacher participation

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Background

Participation in a democratic manner motivate and mirrors the confidence that allowing teachers to participate in the school governance as an ethical necessity in the sense that individual teachers possess the right to impart some control over their lives and work (Dachler & Wilpert, 2008). Greater participation in school is in tune with democratic society and enhances commitment; better productivity and improved school performance. Among the motives for

improving teacher participation in decision-making is a way to augment the efficiency and productivity of the school (Hayes, 2012). School policies can be more responsive to the needs of the school when there is efficient teacher participation in the decision-making process. Teachers play a greater part when devoted to participate in the decision-making process more actively (Mokoena, 2011). This implies that teacher participation in decision-making



improves the schools' effectiveness as well as the quality of the decision.

Leithwood and Steinbach (2013) accordingly argue that head teachers ought to cultivate a school climate that is positive; joint planning and guarantee teachers' collaboration opportunity through better participation in decision-making at the school level. School head teachers have a responsibility for making school a better teachers' work place where they are autonomous enough to make decisions affecting their work life. They have the power to reassure or dishearten teacher initiative; as well as to put in place or hamper occasions for growing leadership skills among teachers. In this case, the current study sought to find out if principals share these enormous duties with teachers by allowing them to participate in making decisions (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2012).

What is the decision-making? The meaning of a decision is presented as "a process that weighs priors, evidence, and value to generate a commitment to a categorical proposition intended to achieve particular goals" (Gold & Shadlen, 2007, p.563). This meaning emphasizes the main aspects of decision making also trying to disclose how decisions are made. According to Gigerenzer and Gaissmaier (2011) the mind applies logic, statistics, or heuristics. Rules of logic and statistics are connected to rational reasoning and heuristics is connected to "error-prone intuitions or even irrationality" (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011, p.453). Whereas abstract decisions are shaped by circuits involved in abstract forms of behavioral planning (Gold & Shadlen, 2007), logical decisions depend on choosing the ways of thinking and behavior seeking to reach the aims, results, and ethical values (Baysal, 2009). Complex decisions are made using sources of evidence that come completely from memory (Gold & Shadlen, 2007). The origins of the decision-making are based on psychology and economics (Johansen & O'brien, 2015; Kable &

Glimcher, 2008). The economic approach offered the rationality models of choice and information processing theories (McFall, 2015; Galotti, 2002, Huitt, 1992). In other words, rationality models of choice (bounded rationality and procedural rationality), claim that humans use logical decision rules to maximize outcomes of scarce resources (McFall, 2015). Whereas bounded rationality approach highlights that humans have limited cognitive resources (McFall, 2015), procedural rationality approach refers to careful decision structuring by creating a list of options and considers the criteria to be used in evaluating and re-evaluating of those options (Galotti, 2002).

Bounded rationality models specify six common steps (antecedent conditions, recognizing the opportunity to make a decision, judgment and interpretation of the problem, surveying alternatives and action (McFall, 2015), procedural rationality – five steps (setting goals, gathering information, decision structuring, making a choice, and evaluating) (Galotti, 2002). Information processing theories present three continuous processes (inputs, processing, and outputs) that allow human experience compared to the metaphor of a computer (McFall, 2015), and indicates that decision making includes at least four phases (an input phase, a processing phase, an output phase, and a review phase) (Huitt, 1992). These classic economic models seek to explain not the process by which those choices are generated, but an individual's evident choices, and could be called "as if " models (Kable & Glimcher, 2008).

Rationale for Shared Decision-Making

Leadership involves decision-making, and if leadership is to be shared then it must be assumed that decision-making is also to be shared. The sharing of decision-making is not without merit and there is substantial support for this. In expounding the need to share in the decision making process, it would be



unproductive to continue with this train of thinking without considering the justification for shared decision-making. In presenting a rationale for shared decision making, Brost (2000) points out that traditionally decision making was used to democratise the workplace and to achieve community participation, parent participation and teacher empowerment. Sasaoka and Nishimura (2010) justify the devolution of implementation of policies as they are “aimed at improving education efficiency, equity and democracy” (p. 79). It is my contention that this rationale for devolution is appropriate when considering South Africa’s transformation agenda. However, Odden and Wohlstetter (1995) indicate that in response to public pressure to restructure how schools provide services to students, use resources, and improve student performance, the goal of shared decision-making (SDM) has shifted from democratising the workplace to increasing the schools capacity to improve. A further rationale on the need to devolve decision making to the lower structures of an organisation, is forwarded by Jones (1997), who contends that due to a disjuncture between educational policy and practice, “educators are now being asked to flatten organisational structures, reduce central office directives and permit employees the opportunity to take ownership for institutional decision making” (p. 76). No doubt in a school where level one educators are part of the decision making process, they usually take ownership of the decision and there is a greater chance that the decision would be implemented successfully. Similarly, Beadie (1996) lends credence to this thought by arguing that “shared decision making can help bridge the pedagogical and political gap” (p. 79). In this manner, educational reform mooted via political mandates have a greater chance of being successfully implemented at school level if educators feel that they played a part in the drafting of the decision.

The notion of devolution of power is supported by Rooney (2004), who posits that “decisions are best made as close as possible to the point of implementation” (p. 84). However, she cautions that for sitebased decision making to work it must connect to the reality of the school context. While, one may understand and align oneself with the rationale for decision-making, shared decision making will not be practised if those in formal leadership positions do not encourage, support and provide the space for others to also assume leadership roles.

Through teachers being part of the shared leadership and decision making process, “teacher leadership redefines school leadership from a single person role-orientated view to a view of leadership being shared and distributed throughout the organisation” (Chatturgoon, 2008, p. 11). For active engagement and a positive outcome, decision-making is a process and not a casual activity. An understanding of the how the process of shared decision unfolds follows.

The decision-making of school staffing, curriculum, or resource allocation had been conventionally made by school principals or members of administrative managerial teams. Teachers were usually excluded by school administrators in the process of decision-making and not endowed with the obligation to implement school policies. Merely informed of the results of decisions made, teachers might not clearly understand why or how those decisions were made. As they seldom had opportunities to be involved in these crucial matters, their isolation within classroom might bring about the alienation or misunderstanding between them and school. With the advent of teacher empowerment, teachers were expected to be given authority to be the ones having access to decision making about school significant matters. Schools would encourage teachers to participate in school activities outside the classroom, such as textbook



selection, curriculum development, learning assessment, student placement, personnel staffing, or professional development (Feir, 1985).

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on shared decision-making theory by Charles, Gafni and Whelan (1997) who posits that to reach a quality decision, one based on the best available evidence about the risks and benefits of each option, there ought to be an exchange of information between recipient of the decision and the decision-maker in a professional setting. Although the decision-making process focuses primarily on the individual decision-maker, groups make many of the decisions in schools (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2014). These groups may be called committees, teams, task forces or site-based councils. Very often, decisions are reached through consensus process rather than by majority vote (Straus, 2012). Making the move to shared decision-making is not an easy process, but has positive results in terms of faculty commitment, cooperation amongst group members, complete attachment to the decision made hence creating motivation for the common good of all stakeholders involved. Ownership of and commitment to such decision are essential if we are to restructure schools and revamp curriculum to meet the needs of students in the 21st century (Lunenburg, 2012, 2013). Teachers would feel motivated, appreciated, valued, honored, respected and devote their energy, talents, skills and time to ensure such decisions are achieved. In essence, teachers would be highly compelled to the achievement of decision they participate in making and create substantive change in the organization once they are part and parcel of the decision. Without commitment of teachers, reform efforts will be unsuccessful Herzberg (1966), in Motivation-Hygiene theory posits that there exist distinct factors which cause satisfaction (motivators) and dissatisfaction (hygiene). It can be argued that in a school

setup, collective decision making process are factors that give teachers satisfaction with their work and subjecting them to already made decisions as factors that prevent them from becoming satisfied. According to the theory, Herzberg argued that motivators and hygiene factors play a part in an employee's behavior at work. Participation of teachers in decision making alongside principal and other stakeholders would be a real motivator for job satisfaction.

Work becomes dissatisfying upon the reduction of hygiene factors. They are deemed as upkeep factors that are essential in an effort to avoid discontent but themselves do not contribute to the motivation and/or job satisfaction of the personnel. In the context of this study, and in accordance with Herzberg's view, hygiene factors only maintain the teachers in the job. A noisy work environment or unsafe working conditions will lead to dissatisfaction among teachers with their job but absence of the same will not. Teacher participation in decision-making process could ease the head teachers' increasing difficulties in handling individual teachers' problems. Many school principals would be involved single handedly address teachers conducts, problems and end up causing enmity with those individual teachers.

Methodology

The researcher in this study adopted a qualitative case study methodology. Qualitative researchers often study human action from the perspective of the social actors themselves (Prozesky and Mouton, 2005). Thus, in this particular research, the researcher gathered information from teachers themselves. The respondents were asked to give their views, opinions, perceptions and expectations with regard to the extent of their participation and involvement in decision making in their schools. The qualitative case study design was considered vital because of its idiographic nature. Instead of surveying large groups, the researcher took a close look at small groups in



their naturalistic settings using in-depth case studies. Thus, the researcher concentrated on few selected schools. The basic data collection techniques or strategies used in this study were individual interviews, observations and documentary analysis. The researcher looked for rich, detailed information of a qualitative nature through these strategies. The sample consisted of five secondary schools, five substantive secondary school heads and twenty qualified secondary school teachers. The sample was purposively selected.

Results

Prefects are elected to represent the school. They must fulfill important functions around the school by preventing students from causing damage to school property both inside and outside the classroom. They are expected to set standards which are an example to all students within the school. They actually assist with the smooth running of the school and maintenance of discipline. Therefore, there is need to select the high caliber of students who will not be a disgrace to the school. During the selection process, it is important to consider attributes like; self discipline, maturity, reliability and sensitivity. Therefore, this is a very important area in decision making.

All the respondents concurred that this was an area where all teachers were mostly involved in decision making. Below are some of the views of the responding teachers on the subject at hand:

R2 *This is where all teachers are involved. That means there is a very fair degree of involvement and participation of teachers in decision-making.*

R3 *Selection of prefects is done by teachers. In fact when it comes to the selection of prefects, our school head is keen to involve every staff member. Preliminary selections begin at classroom level where individual teachers are asked to nominate students*

they considered appropriate for these posts. When that is done, all teachers meet to choose prefects for that year.

Teachers are quite satisfied with the involvement of everyone in this area of decision-making. They think that they know their students more than the school administrators. Therefore, a better team of prefects could only be a result of valid data about each of the prospective prefects.

In order to get a clear picture of the situation, it was necessary that school heads be interviewed to establish their position in so far as the decision making process is concerned in the area of selection of prefects. All the school heads confirmed during the interviews that all teachers are involved in the selection of prefects. The heads added that at times the process involved students. It was brought to the fore that in such cases students are called to come up with a list of potential prefects. The school heads would proceed to verify it before ratifying the list. The amended list would then be brought before the whole staff for consideration. To this end, H1 had the following to share with the researcher:

Selection of prefects? The students themselves. They also vote for their prefects through the senior master and senior woman, and then we look at the list that will have been presented by the senior master/ woman as a collective body of staff, then we agree looking at the other qualities like intelligence, discipline and other things.

The study views selection of prefects as an important aspect because these are the people that are going to assist staff members in the maintenance of discipline and order in the schools. In the meetings attended by the researcher, the process of selection of prefects was carried out by the whole staff in all the participating schools. Teachers were asked to nominate their choices from a long list given by students and those nominated were voted for by the whole staff in order to come up with the



best caliber of prefects. The above observation was also confirmed by the information that was obtained from staff minutes as well as circulars in the heads' files. Staff minutes revealed that selection of prefects in all schools involved every one. The researcher came across a memo which was in one of the school heads' files impressing upon teachers to start thinking about suitable prefects for the coming year. However, teachers did not think that this was an important area in decision making.

Discussion

It was established in this study that teachers are also involved in certain issues of school governance such as selection of prefects at committee level. Teachers are represented in these committees by their fellow members. It emerged that all participating schools have established such committees. This is an indication that teachers have a say in the process of selection of prefects. Teachers are expected to work hand in hand with SDA committees in order to bring sanity in schools. Teachers in the participating schools are therefore involved in school governance issues in partnership with school development committees. According to Statutory Instrument 87 of 1992, major stake holders should have power in school management and such people include the school head, school teachers and the community represented by SDA/SDC.

Van Rensburg (2001) advocates that if schools are to remain in harmony with the community that they serve, they must allow for the participation of all stake holders in decision making. Rensburg further asserts that one forum for achieving this is to establish sit-based decision management committees comprising of parents and teachers. According to Morse, Berger and Osnes (1997), these committees may be directly involved in decision making or serve in an advisory role to the principal. The rationale behind the involvement of these committees is to solve problems and make

decisions that were previously the sole domain of management (Wall and Rinechart, 1999).

The idea that teachers in this study participated in decision making either as a group or in committees such as disciplinary committees, is also supported by Hewitson (1998), when he asserts that administrators should identify other areas of active participation, such as building level curriculum committees, timetabling committees, greater involvement of all teachers in grouping of students, the establishment of discipline policies, equipment and textbook selection. Teachers may want to participate in decision-making in all areas in which they have the expertise as well as a personal stake but there is a dilemma in teacher participation caused by work load. According to research done by George and Davis in Britain, cited by Riley (1984), teachers were found to exercise more control over their classrooms. However, teachers' influence in education matters diminished further when the relevance of such matters was removed from the classroom. This was caused by the fact that teachers had a big workload and they wanted to concentrate more on their key result areas.

The fact that participating teachers are involved in decision making in certain areas either as a group or in committees is also supported by Decalo (1994). All teachers should take part in decision making because the school like other formal organisations is basically a decision making forum (Sergiovanni and Starrat, 1983). Decisions should be made at the level closest to the people who will be affected by them. Since teachers are affected by most decisions made in the school and are key actors in implementing the decisions, they should therefore be given a chance to participate in the decisions influencing their activities (Rezabeck, 1999). Weiss (1992) regards decision making as a process of identifying a problem, creating alternatives, testing the alternatives and selecting the best alternative for implementation. This process can not be done



by one person but by all stakeholders who will be affected by the decision that will be taken hence the need for teacher participation in decision making in many school critical areas.

It has been established in this section on areas in which teachers participate in decision making that in certain areas such as selection of prefects, streaming of students and setting up of operational committees, teachers were fully taking part. In this regard the participating heads adopt the collegial leadership model which advocates teacher participation in decision making in certain issues as elaborated above and at the same time the formal leadership model when dealing with policy issues like meting out of corporal punishment. Formal leadership models give the school head the autonomy to make unilateral decisions in certain issues.

Conclusion

It was established in this study that teachers who are allowed to participate in the decision making processes in terms of important matters such as selection of prefects and so forth are reported to reflect a high level of organisational commitment. Moreover, teachers who are encouraged to participate democratically in decision-making process are reported to be more positive and committed to the school as an organisation. They show enthusiasm for the school, pupils and parents. They are willing to take on projects or to work as teams and are creative and innovative as they have co-ownership of their participatory decision-making.

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