



Participation of Teachers in the Organisation of Sporting Activities in Schools

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Abstract

One of the topical issues in education debate in Zimbabwe is the question of teacher involvement in decision-making. Teachers are becoming more critical of the traditional bureaucratic and authoritative top-down method of administrating and managing schools. Teachers, like other citizens are becoming more and more aware of their rights. As such, teachers are demanding that they be involved in the decision making process, not only in their schools but in national education issues as well. Involving subordinates in decisions may improve the quality and acceptance of decisions when participation fits the constraints of the situation. The purpose of the study was to investigate the extent to which school principals involve in school based decision-making processes of sporting activities. The study adopted a qualitative interpretive research approach. Five schools were sampled and data were collected through interviews. It emerged from the findings that teachers in the five schools are fully involved in decisions that are related to sporting. This is plausible, the reason being that it is these teachers who probably are coaches and trainers of various school based sporting disciplines. Therefore, one finds that teachers get specialised in sporting activities, thus giving them greater command of both the child and the sporting activity. The findings above depict that teachers in all the five schools under study are empowered to make decisions in certain areas as mentioned above although some of the participating teachers do not consider such areas as critical in decision-making.

Keywords: Sporting Activities, school leadership, decision-making, management teams, teacher participation

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Background

The decision-making of school staffing, curriculum, or organization of sporting activities 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 and sporting activities. Teacher empowerment could include extrinsic power and intrinsic power (Wilson & Coolican, 1996). The extrinsic power concerned with the phenomenon that teachers had the status of affirmation, the knowledge they need, and the process of participatory decision-making. The intrinsic power was involved with teachers' attitude and confidence in displaying their capacity of mastering their own work, and the representation of intrinsic power counts on teachers' own self-determination and sense of self-efficacy a lot. In this regard, the role of a teacher had been transformed into an active participant from a passive practitioner by the practice of teacher empowerment. In addition, Caldwell and Spinks' (1992) classification of teacher empowerment was similar to Wilson and Coolican's (1996). According to Caldwell & Spinks (1992), teachers' empowerment derived from two sources, authority and expertise. Authority meant the authority of school councils or boards shared with teachers while expertise dealt with teachers' acquisition of professional knowledge and skill about decision making. Wilson & Coolican's (1996) extrinsic power was related to Caldwell and Spinks' (1992) offer of authority to be involved and their intrinsic power was concerned with the possession of expertise to cope with decision-making.

School based management is all about empowerment of teachers to make decisions about how the school should operate.

Therefore teachers must be delegated the authority to participate in school based decision-making processes (Mosoge and Van der Westhuizen, 1998:80). Teacher empowerment is therefore a transfer of

decision-making authority of key school issues to people (teachers) who in the past had looked up to an authority to make decisions for them.

The new dispensation in educational leadership calls for shared decision making by all the critical stakeholders. Teachers are inter alia stakeholders of a school system hence should occupy the central space in decision-making (Beckmann and Blom, 2000:02; Daun, 2003b). The prima facie intent of this dispensational call is to increase the productivity of schools. With improved output, schools become more satisfying work places. Teacher participation is a trend that is set to transform 'top-down' approaches, which reduced teachers to tools of implementing policies and decisions without making any meaningful contribution. It encourages teachers to improve the quality of their profession and workplace, which may result in a less stressful, more satisfying and motivating environment.

Several benefits of teacher participation in decision-making have been identified. Kumar & Scuderi (2000) assert that teacher participation in decision-making: enables teachers to become active participants in school management process. As a result, teachers will have a wider and greater ownership of the school, its vision and its priorities. This probably explains why most of the participating teachers are committed to their work. They are taking their schools as their second home. They feel to be part and parcel of their organisations; enhances effectiveness, efficiency and productivity

The Concept Decision-Making

The concept decision-making is very wide in scope and tends to be elusive. Before one gets into action, it is assumed that the individual has to make choices out of a number of alternatives. Carver (1980) defines decision making as the process of identifying a problem, creating a systematic alternative, testing the alternatives and selecting the best for implementation.



Stoner and Freeman (1992) also note that “ the basic process of rational decision making involves diagnosing, defining and determining the sources of the problem, gathering and analyzing the facts of the problem, developing and evaluating alternative and converting the alternative into action” (p 254). Musaazi (1982) concurs with the above definition of the concept decision-making. For Musaazi (1982) decision making is a process which involves identifying and selecting a course of action to deal with the specific problem. When teachers involve themselves in extracurricular activities, they have the ability to not only positively impact students, but also positively impact the relationships they have with students, the school culture in which they work in, and their own perceptions of their abilities (Wadesango, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

A number of theories have been advanced to explain decision-making, school administration and management. Such theories include the rational theory and the science of muddling through (Bowora and Mpofu, 1995). In addition to these, there are such theories as the rational comprehensive theory, the incremental theory and the mixed scanning theory (Anderson, 1994). They all attempt to address the issue of how managers and administrators make decisions in organizations. Bowora and Mpofu (1995) further note that “in a school the authority to make or direct the making of decisions is not vested on the head. As a complex structure, decisions in a school are achieved through committees, task forces, study groups and review panels”. This brings in the notation of shared decision making in such organizations as schools. Within the context of shared decision making, the process of decision making itself revolves around issues of participation in problem solving and making decisions (Owens, 1995). Participation is viewed as contributing to the achievement of organizational goals. Participation is defined as

the mental and emotional involvement of a person in a group situation that encourages the individual to contribute to group goals and to share responsibilities (ibid). In that respect, shared decision making is perceived as contributing to the utilization of the manpower at the disposal of the school head. It also gives a sense of belonging and ownership of goals and responsibilities, as it is generally believed that workers’ participation in planning and decision making raises morale and productivity (Chakanyuka, 1996).

Ngara in Teacher in Zimbabwe, January 1995 states that decision-making is the problem that confronts the human being throughout life. There is need to develop the trait of a decision maker at an early stage in life, and this can be done in a democratic school environment (ibid). Stoner and Freeman (1992) concur that involvement of subordinates in decision making increases productivity and reduces resistance to change. These are contributions also noted by Adedeji (1990) and Zvobgo (1997). However, there is also literature to suggest that teacher involvement has its own problems and limitations. One such problem is that not all teachers would want to be involved in decision making at school level. Some teachers may be frustrated by being involved in areas that they have no proper training and knowledge. On the other hand, it has to be noted that time is valuable; as such subordinates should only be involved when the benefits are greater than the likely costs in time, money and frustration (Stoner and Freeman, 1992). There is also the issue of jurisdiction. Individual schools and teachers have jurisdiction only over those decision making areas that are assigned to them by design or omission (Owens, 1995)

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

Sports organization entails the coordination of various school sporting operations or activities. This is normally done by a sports committee headed by a sports master/director. The sports master/director must have vast experience in the organization and administration of the events of the sport and extensive experience in other related sports activities. The sports director will be the link pin in sports issues between teachers and the administrators. Once appointed by all staff members in a staff meeting, the sports committee will serve until the end of year.

The sports committee is comprised of the sports director and any other four members of staff as office bearers. Their duties among others include; compiling the sports calendar for the year, allocate coaches to different sporting disciplines, organize friendly games with other schools, organize transport and food

for competitors for away games, maintain law and order during inter-house competitions and make sure that coaches train pupils during practice sessions. The sports committee receives sports requirements from coaches and submits them to the administrators for action. The sports director is an ex-officio member of the school finance committee.

All the respondents agreed that the organization of sports was in the hands of a sports director who made decisions on the day to day running of the department. According to the respondents, the sports director is a member of staff who is elected by all the staff members from among the teachers and that his/her term of office runs for a full year. It further emerged that the sports directors in most cases do not make unilateral decisions. Sports directors also make decisions in consultation with either the head or the deputy head of the school as echoed below.

R1 The deputy head and the sports master also take part in the decision making process. The director makes certain decisions with help from the sports committee. However the sports director can not decide to hire or take students to a match before such trips are sanctioned by the school head.

R6 It's the sports master although there is a need to consult the head and the deputy. The director is a link pin and is assisted by the sports committee

R11 The same applies. There are various teachers who are involved in different sporting disciplines in liaison with the sports committee. So sports organization here is for the sports director.

Most of the teachers are quite satisfied in the manner in which they are involved in the decision making in this regard. However, two of the teachers from the same school argued that they should be given more autonomy to make decisions on sporting activities in their school. Put in the respondent's own words R6



expressed the following sentiments: “we want to be free to choose suitable days for training rather than this being done by heads without us being consulted. We also want to be consulted in as far as the sports calendar is concerned”. The participating school heads made the following statements with regard to organization of sports:

H1 Sports organization, at the beginning of each year, we select house masters as well as the sports master through school teachers. These members will then constitute the sports committee. The sports committee will come up with policies on sports organization. The administration team will just be there to guide so that we limit the number of sports outings per term in line with our budget

H2 We have a sportsmaster, the one who just came in and left this paper here, is the one who organizes sports, in conjunction with other members of staff, then they inform the administration what they would have agreed upon.

The sentiments above show that sports directors in all schools under study have been given the mandate to make certain decisions. However, they have to be accountable to their management teams which is common or rather the norm in all organizations. Sporting activities usually involve funds and these are public funds which must be accounted for and this could be the reason why school heads do not give sports directors full autonomy in their decision-making faculty. In most of the meetings attended, teachers were asked to choose new sports committees. In three schools, the serving committees were given a vote of confidence and their terms of office were extended. The sports committees were mandated by the administration to come up with a sports calendar for the following year. In the other two schools, new committees were selected by the whole staff compliment. Documents reviewed indicated that sports committees in all schools were free to organize sporting activities but

that such activities should be sanctioned by the administrators. This is logical considering that schools are organizations where the rule of law ought to prevail.

However, teachers did not consider this as a critical decision making area.

In order to get a clear view of the extent to which teachers are involved in decision-making in their schools, it became necessary that the researcher focused at other major areas in which teachers are engaged in decision making

Discussion

It emerged from the findings that teachers in the five schools are fully involved in decisions that are related to sporting. This is plausible, the reason being that it is these teachers who probably are coaches and trainers of various school based sporting disciplines. Therefore, one finds that teachers get specialised in sporting activities, thus giving them greater command of both the child and the sporting activity. It is this expertise that schools need in order for children to benefit more. Denying teachers to make decisions on the actual training, setting up of teams and coaching teams may destroy the morale of teachers. Once that happens, the sporting disciplines may suffer a great loss. Once teachers are demotivated, they may develop a negative attitude towards the school. The net effect is that teachers may feel greatly marginalised and disinterested in the school’s mission. This may trigger a wave of withdrawal leading to a high staff turnover.

Management specialists have always attributed high staff turnover to poor working relations. A teacher who is poorly motivated may not put much effort in the school activities. Hence the school may fail to achieve its set goals. Parents, teachers and students may rise against the head. Cases have been witnessed where pressure from the teachers, students and the community have forced the school head either to resign or transfer to some other school.



Slatter (1993), warns that workers feel reluctant to participate in decisions when they lack expertise but are readily available for decisions in which they have a personal stake in the outcome. Denying teachers their involvement in the decision making process may deny the teachers that personal touch and ego that makes them feel proud to participate in commitments that lie outside the classroom set up. However, it was indicated that in certain issues, committees did not have the autonomy to make unilateral decisions in some of the schools.

Conclusion

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. Teachers who are allowed to participate in the decision making process in terms of important matters (for example the management of the school) are reported to reflect a high level of organisational commitment not only in the community but also in their day to day life. Therefore, greater involvement of teachers in decision-making creates a framework for commitment. Commitment leads to the continuous self-renewal of the organisation for the benefit of the community. A learning organisation is likely to be very effective and efficient in goal attainment.

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