

Full Length Research Paper

Improving decision making in schools through teacher participation

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The hierarchical structure that places head teachers at the apex of a pyramid of staff is a common feature in secondary schools in Kenya. In this arrangement, school heads are poised to use their superior knowledge and experience to direct and control the working of the entire school. This negatively affects efficiency and productivity of the schools because teachers work at half steam because they are not effectively involved in decision making to make them feel as part of the schools. Owing to the dynamics of professionalism and diversity of ideas in secondary schools occasioned by staffing schools with professionally trained teachers and the need to decentralize decision making to the lower levels, the hierarchical structure in management of schools is challenged. On many occasions head-teachers have been advised to involve teachers in decision making as a way of motivating them and to create a feeling of belonging. This study was designed to investigate the extent to which teachers were involved in decision making in comparison to their desired extent of participation. An ex-post facto study was designed. One hundred and twenty three teachers responded to the participatory decision making questionnaire. Data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. It was found that teachers desired greater involvement in decision making than they were currently involved. It was recommended that school managers should increase the extent to which they involve teachers in decision making to improve on the quality of decisions and boost their morale in their performance of duty.

Key words: Participation, decision making, management, teacher, participatory management, school management, head-teacher, department.

INTRODUCTION

The 8.4.4 system of education introduced in 1985 in Kenya where pupils spent eight years in primary school, four in secondary and four at the university introduced new dimensions in educational trends by, for instance, laying more emphasis on practical and technical subjects; training for self-reliance and attitudinal change towards appreciation of the dignity of manual labour (Sifuna, 1990). Coupled with the changes in the education system, is a changing society where for example, there are more enlightened students due to technological and social changes (Barth, 1990; Fullan, 1999). Fullan (2003) acknowledges that the context of school environment has changed tremendously such that the management styles should change too. Changes are also experienced in staffing where schools are staffed with qualified teachers

than ever before. Indeed in Kenya there are surplus teachers graduating from universities and colleges. The changes in the educational system call for rethinking, reformulating and restructuring of educational policies both at National and school levels. At school level the changes in education are a challenge to head-teachers and other educational administrators who might be harboring the traditional approaches to administration which according to Jones (1985) are autocratic and bureaucratic in nature. For effective decision making in schools, those in authority will not be expected to act like technocrats in different areas of school management. Rather, they are expected to display modern management styles, which are contrary to the traditional management approaches. The modern styles are bottom up, participative, consultative, team and task oriented. The styles also include listening and responding to the real needs rather than telling and prescribing (Bell, 1992). Due to the growing appreciation of the need for valid,

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knowledgeable inputs in administrative decision making from various organization levels, the need for involving stakeholders in decision-making is paramount (Wekesa, 1987). Among other groups, very important groups to involve in making decisions in schools are teachers who are the custodians of instruction, implementers of school policies and co-organizers for school activities along with head teachers. Further, the decisions made in schools affect them and as professionals and specialists in different subject areas, they are better suited to make the correct decisions having in mind what is required of them as teachers.

Different writers have argued in favour of participatory decision-making. Bachelor (1980), Armstrong (1984), Dwivedi (1988) and Maritim (1988), observe that involving subordinates in decision making improves the quality of the decision and the effectiveness of the organization which leads to achievement of the organizational goals.

Tyree (1969) arguing in support of teacher involvement in decision making says:

“if we accept the tenet that in a democracy those who are affected by decisions should participate in making decisions, the demands of the professional staff form a significant part in the decision making process in the School system... The days of the head teachers’ paternalism are fast coming to an end and in a democracy the school, like government, is of the people and by the people (p.35).”

Halliday (1993) observes that raising the flagging morale and motivation of teachers in most sub Saharan African countries is a major challenge because many teachers lack self esteem and commitment to their profession. He attributes this lack of self-esteem and commitment partly to lack of participatory management styles, which he claims are poorly understood or applied in Africa. Kenya’s teachers are no exception in this situation because they are at the end of the educational pipeline. They seem to be mostly recipients of decisions and instructions to be implemented at school level of decisions made either at National, provincial or district levels (Maranga, 1993).

At the school the head teacher is placed in a position of responsibility and authority where all major decisions; curriculum and instruction, management of student discipline, school organization and staff personnel matters, financial matters, school and community relations among others are centered on his/her office (Ministry of Education, 1975). This makes him/her wield a lot of power in line with the view that, ‘I have the responsibility I must have the power’ (Musgrove, 1971). To assist the head-teacher in decision making and policy formulation and implementation is the Board of Governors, which deliberates on important decisions like hiring of support staff and budgeting for the school (Education Act. Cap. 211, 1980). This kind of structure leaves out the inputs of most of the implementers of the school policies, the teachers, in making decisions.

Statement of the problem

Kenyans who have a stake in education expect schools to be effective and successful in a bid to achieve the educational goals. To effectively run a school, the head-teacher is central in setting the tone of the school. The head-teacher employs management style, which ensures effective teaching and learning by teachers and children respectively. One of the hailed management styles is participatory management. In this style, the subordinates have a stake in decision-making; there is good communication and delegation of responsibility and authority.

Bloomer (1991) observes that centralized machinery, which plans, organizes, directs, supervises and evaluates its operations, is ineffective. However, it has been observed by Maranga (1993), Kenya’s educational machinery is highly centralized both at the national and school level. At the school level, Griffin (1994) suggests that any school head that wants to succeed must avoid falling victim to the sheep syndrome in which teachers are seen as a faceless herd to be led, directed and instructed without any creativity and knowledge to contribute to the success of the school. Wanjiku (1985) and Mwangi (1986) have complained that head-teachers do not involve teachers in running their schools. Yet, Dimmock (1985) notes that effective schools adopt collegial and professional rather than hierarchical stances in making decisions and problem solving where the input of the expert is sought. This is the expectation by the teachers at a time when we have had an influx of professionally trained graduate teachers in the schools that have a stake in running their schools. But, are these teachers involved in decision making to the level of their satisfaction in different school issues in Kenya?

Theoretical framework

This study was based on human relations and the human resources models of management. These models form the dual-model theory advanced by Miles (1975). According to Miles (1975), managers subscribe to two of the three management models. The three management models are: the traditional model, the human relations model and the human resources model. The traditional model emphasizes controlling and directing. The underlying assumption is that members of the enterprise comply if tasks and procedures are specified and members are properly trained and paid (Cascio, 1989).

The human relations model is modified and gives attention to social and egoistic needs. It recognizes the fact that fair treatment and pay are not enough. Managers here emphasize controlling although preventive steps are also taken to obtain the desired contribution of organizational members. The human resources model sees the manager as a developer and facilitator to help subordinates achieve performance aims. There is a great deal of participation in goal setting. Further, if problems

occur, several factors rather than a single cause are advanced as potential reasons for the difficulties. Although self-direction and self-control are important to this model, the need for other control is also recognized.

Extensive research by Miles (1975) led to the conclusion that managers actually subscribe to two models: one for subordinates and the other for themselves hence the adoption of the human relations and human resources models. The following is a summarized comparison of the human relations and human resources models on attitudes towards people, amount of participation and expectations as advanced by Miles (1975) cited by Sergiovanni and Carver (1980) and Cascio (1989).

Attitude towards people

The human relations model accepts the fact that people share a common set of needs: to belong, to be liked and to be respected while the human resources model professes that people not only share the needs to belong and be respected, they also desire to contribute effectively and creatively to the accomplishment of worthwhile organizational objectives.

Secondly, people want to feel useful to their organization according to the human relations model. The human resources model has it that people not only feel useful to their organizations, but they are capable of exercising far more initiative, responsibility, and creativity than their present jobs, or work circumstances require or allow. According to the human relations model people tend to co-operate willingly and comply with goals if the needs to belong and liked are fulfilled. The human resources model professes that the capabilities to contribute to the achievement of the objectives represent untapped resources, which are presently being wasted.

Kind and amount of participation

According to the human relations model, the task of the school executive is to make subordinates know that they are useful and important members of the team; to explain his/her decisions and to discuss subordinates' objections to his/her plans. On routine matters, he/she encourages his/her subordinates in planning and in decision making. Members of a department should be allowed to exercise self-direction and self-control in carrying out plans. The human resources model on the other hand advances the view that the executive's basic task in reference to subordinates is to create an environment in which subordinates can contribute their full range of talents to the accomplishment of the school goals. He/he allows and encourages subordinates to participate in important as well as routine decisions and he/she works to expand the areas where subordinates exercise self-direction and self control as they develop and demonstrate the greater insight

and ability.

Expectations

According to the human relations model, the expectations for subordinates are: To share information with them and involve them in school decision making to help satisfy their basic needs for belonging and individual recognition. Satisfying those needs would improve faculty morale and will reduce resistance to formal authority. This will reduce friction and make the school executive's job easier. On the other hand the subordinates' expectations in the human resources model are that the overall quality of decision making and performance will improve as school executives make use of the full range of experiences, insight and creative ability which exists in their schools. Subordinates will exercise responsible self-direction and self control in the accomplishment of worthwhile objectives that they understand and have helped establish. Organizational members will be satisfied as a result of improved performance and the opportunity to contribute creatively to this improvement. The human relations and human resources models stress the need to consider expertise, experience, creativity, willingness and all positive aspects of subordinates in an organization hence the need to consider teachers as able and willing to participate constructively in decision making in schools. The human relations and human resources models of Miles (1975) in this study give guidance to the head-teachers to focus on the teachers in decision-making. The models call for obtaining the organizational members contribution in achieving organizational goals and urge managers to allow subordinate to participate fully in the organizational matters because these are the expectations of the subordinates.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the actual and desired extent of teacher participation in decision-making in issues, which affect them in their schools.

Research question

Is there a significant difference between the actual and desired extent of teacher participation in decision making in different school issues of: Curriculum and instruction, student personnel, school organization, school and community relations, financial matters, staff personnel?

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference between the actual and

desired extent of Teacher participation in decision-making in different school issues.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out in Kilome and Kaiti Divisions of Makeni District in Kenya. Simple random sampling was done to select twelve schools from the 31 schools for the study; six schools from each division. A total of 123 teachers in the selected schools were used in the study. The 123 teachers formed 37.5% of the total number of teachers in the two divisions. To collect data for the study the researcher used a questionnaire- the Participatory Decision Making Questionnaire (PDMQ). The questionnaire had two sections. Section A sought the respondents' biographical data such as; the level of professional training, the office he/she holds in school and years of teaching experience.

Section B had statements on different schools decision tasks identified as curriculum and instruction, student personnel, school organization, school and community relations, personnel issues and financial matters of budgeting and acquisition of resources. Against each statement the respondent indicated the extent of his/her involvement in decision making as well as his desired extent of involvement classified as deeply involved,-4, moderately involved-3, sometimes involved-2 and not involved-1. At the end of the questionnaire was a blank space, which offered the respondents a chance to give any other comments they thought, would enrich the study.

Reliability and validity of the research tools

To ascertain the reliability of the questionnaire, piloting was done in two secondary schools in Kabarnet Division where 40 questionnaires were distributed and 32 returned. The split half method was used to calculate the reliability coefficient using the Pearson product formula. The reliability coefficient obtained was later subjected to the Spearman Brown prophecy formula to obtain the reliability of the full test (Koul, 1984). A correlation coefficient of 0.73 was obtained and this was found to be reliable. Content validity was ascertained during the piloting of the questionnaires and in consultation with educational management specialists, Moi University, Kenya.

Procedure

The researchers distributed the questionnaires to the respondents and collected them after two weeks. Two hundred questionnaires were distributed and as indicated above 123 questionnaires were responded to and returned. Seventy seven questionnaires were not returned either due to non-response or absenteeism of the respondents when the researchers went back to collect the questionnaires.

Findings

The type of data collected in the study included teachers' responses on their actual and the desired extent of participation in decision making in different school issues classified as: curriculum and instruction, student personnel, school organization, school and community relations, staff personnel and finance. More findings were obtained from the comments given by teachers from the open ended section of the questionnaire.

Means were computed from the scores awarded to the different levels of involvement where; Deeply involved was scored - 4, Moderately involved -3, Sometimes involved-2 and Not involved-1. The means computed were used to make comparison and establish whether there was a difference between the actual and desired extent of teacher participation in decision-making. To test the significance of the difference noted, a t-test for related measures was computed. The t- test was used to test the null hypotheses that: There is no significant difference between the actual and desired extent of teacher participation in decision making.

Teachers desired to be allowed to participate in all decision-making areas more than they were currently involved. The hypothesis that, there is no significant difference between the actual and desired extent of teachers participation in decision in different decision making tasks was rejected. The results are presented in Table 1 below.

Qualitative responses on the wish for teachers to be more involved in decision making than they were involved were expressed in some of the following quotations:

"I would like to express here that I would like to feel fully integrated in the running of the school in all spheres to cultivate that sense of belonging and to be able to identify with it as part of me but not to be dictated upon. The head-teacher should incorporate most of us in decision making other than be dictated upon even in tendering, building use, trips etc."

Another teacher who expressed the same view said

"A head-teacher should sometimes allow his or her colleague teachers to make decisions and also implement them in case of non-sensitive issues. In so doing, the teachers will feel motivated to offer more in the school since they perceive it as their own property."

Full participation in decision making in secondary schools was called for by a teacher who said:

"For decision making to succeed in schools, teachers should participate fully and everybody should be involved in decision making."

A one man show in decision making in schools is totally opposed by the following idea which compliments the generally shared view that teachers should not be ignored in decision making in schools. The teacher said:

"Decision making for a school should not be left to the head teacher and his deputy. Other teachers need to be involved so that the term collective responsibility can be meaningful. Secondly, before decisions are made teachers ought to be consulted for their opinions and criticisms. The criticisms are expected to be positive."

The following idea goes against the idea of a seriously

Table1. Summary for the actual and desired extent of teacher participation in decision making and t-test computations to test the significance of the difference.

Variable	N	X1	X2	$\sum D$	ED^2	Df	t-o	t-c	S (.05)
Cur and instruction	123	2.23	3.23	120.87	159.31	122	19.23	1.98	S
Student personnel	123	2.44	3.20	91.23	119.10	122	12.98	1.98	S
School org.	123	1.82	2.49	86.39	109.31	122	11.96	1.98	S
School/comm. relations	123	1.37	2.20	93	220	122	8.32	1.98	S
Financial matters	123	1.41	2.23	138	176.5	122	21.58	1.98	S
Staff personnel	123	1.83	2.59	95.2	128.94	122	12.45	1.98	S
All variables	123	1.81	2.67	102.62	124.72	122	16.86	1.98	S

Key

V = Variables, N = Total Sample; X1 = Means of the actual extent of participation, X2 =Means of the desired extent of participation, $\sum D$ = Sum of the difference of means, $\sum D^2$ = Sum of the difference of means squared, Df = Degrees of freedom t-o Observed t –value, t- c critical t-value, S-significance level at (0.05).

centralized decision-making. The teacher says:

“Most schools hold policies that are colonial and backward. This is more pre-eminent in small schools where the administration is felt greatly. In small schools few responsibilities, unlike in big schools, are given to teachers. The same is experienced by students hence a kind of dictatorship or its equivalent.”

The comments given by teachers above are a manifestation of the generally perceived view that teachers in secondary schools in Kenya are not involved in decision making to the extent, as they would wish to be. Some of the teachers’ comments suggested how teachers should be involved in decision-making. The comments suggest the need to be deeply involved in decision making where deeply involved is interpreted as a situation for delegation of decision-making, decision making in committees or in a joint staff meeting. In their comments teachers desire to participate in decision-making in committees composed of experts and in staff meetings. A teacher in charge of games had the following to comment:

“Co-curricula activities are very important and I suggest that a permanent committee of different coaches be given all powers to run the games department.”

Departmental committees featured in some comments. The following comment suggests the need for departmental committees to run curriculum and instruction matters.

“It is a common feature that some teachers are left out in decision making in some issues like selection of text books and evaluation of the examination results. Teachers views should be taken seriously especially in examination matters.”

A volunteer teacher from Britain attached to one of the schools commented as follows:

“My ideas of running a school are based in a different system and culture where participation in decision-making is a whole school issue based on a committee system. I would like to recommend the same.”

The above comments by the teachers are a representation of the views and feelings in relation to the practice of participatory decision making in the schools. The comments clearly reveal that teachers would like to be involved in decision making more than they are currently involved.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study conform to the findings of other studies by Karue (1980), Muraya (1981), Allen (1982), Miller (1984) and Maritim (1988) where teachers expressed the need to be involved in decision making more than they were actually involved. This clearly confirms that the need for more teacher participation in decision making is crucial in schools owing to the advantages which include: increased rate of output production; making use of expert knowledge in decisions; producing positive staff morale and commitment; improved employee relations; staff developing a sense of ownership; improved quality of management decisions; making teachers improve the quality of their profession and workplace resulting into a less stressful, more satisfying and motivating environment; staff are adequately prepared for any changes in their lives by being involved in the decision making process (Armstrong, 1984; Dwivedi, 1988; Bell, 1992; Halliday, 1993; Bezzina, 1997; Fullan, 2003).

The model of management advanced by Miles (1975) is complimented by the comments given by teachers and the findings obtained from the analysis in that people not

only feel useful to their organization but they are capable of exercising far more initiative, responsibility and creativity than their present jobs or work circumstances require or allow. The same model on the kind and amount of participation professes that subordinates believe that they are useful and important members of the team. This is the same thing teachers are saying when they desire more involvement in decision making.

Teachers' views about head teachers depict the traditional kind of executives who, to a higher degree, centre power and authority on themselves (Jones, 1985). Teachers desired executives (head-teachers) who create an environment in which subordinates can contribute the full range of talents to the accomplishment of school goals. This is evident from the data analyzed, which shows that the desire for involvement in decision-making is higher than the actual extent of involvement. Some of the teachers' comments further confirm their interpretation about their head-teachers.

The above findings that teachers desire more participation in decision making than they are actually involved and the comments which confirm the desire to be involved more in decision making could be because of some fears by head-teachers. Wekesa (1994) argues that some head-teacher could be in fear of allowing teachers to participate in decision making lest they lose their authority in running their schools to the teachers. However, this should not be the case because if teachers are allowed to make decisions on matters that affect them, they would be more comfortable and they will be motivated to work hard to achieve what they have contributed in deciding upon.

The suggestions and comments presented in the findings allude to the fact that there is no one best way of involving others in decision making. Bell (1992) argues that different decisions require different choices of who to involve and when. Conley (1989) posits that participation is not something which can be simply structured but something that is constantly negotiated between teachers and administrators. He suggests that teachers and administrators should identify ways of negotiating the terms of their zones of influence, giving each more voice in decisions previously left to the other. From the varied comments given, this study recommends Conley's (1989) idea and urges constant negotiation in decision-making in various school matters depending on the circumstances and the issues to be decided on.

Conclusion

From the findings obtained in this study it was found that the actual extent of teacher participation in decision-making was less than the desired extent of teacher participation in decision-making. This difference was found significant in all the variables of curriculum and instruction, student personnel, school organization, financial matters, school and community relations and staff per personnel. It was,

therefore, concluded that teachers desired more involvement in decision-making than they were actually involved.

Recommendations

On the strength of the foregoing findings and conclusions, it was recommended that: Teachers should be actively involved in decision making in their schools so as to encourage, motivate and utilize their wide range of experience, expertise and personal characteristics and capability. Teachers should be involved more in decision making in their schools as an opportunity for training them to gain more experience and confidence as they execute their duties. This will make them develop some sense of responsibility because they will feel trusted by the head-teachers and those other people in authority. The head-teachers should change their attitudes towards teachers and treat them as colleagues and co-managers in running their schools. This will motivate the teachers to feel that they are part of their schools and they will support all the decisions made. Training of head-teachers on participatory decision-making should be encouraged.

Further, teachers form part of the stake holders in schools hence there is need to carry out an equivalent of this study to investigate the position of other stakeholders especially parents and students among others. Importantly, the current study did not investigate the effect of teacher participation in decision making on school outcomes such as student performance hence a study to investigate such a relationship is thus recommended. A study on head-teachers' views on how they involve teachers in decision making and the problems they face in relation to practicing participatory decision making is also recommended. Lastly, it is also recommended that a study be carried out on the relationship between the extent of teacher participation in decision making and teacher performance of duty.

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