ENCOURAGING TEACHER PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING: THE NEXT NEEDED EDUCATIONAL REFORM

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Abstract
Teachers could play a better part in the overall success of the institution when they put them to become active participants in the decision making process. Teachers should have the feel that they have more to do for the institution than just teaching. Moreover, the entire system of education will benefit when teachers render an active and interactive role in their working environment. This paper aims to explore the value of teacher’s participation in three domains of decision making, namely Management, Instructional and co-curricular activities were analyzed and the result revealed that teachers were more interested to take decisions on instructional domain compared to other two. This further leads the investigators to analyze the reasons behind why teachers reluctant to participate in decision making. This submission also suggested some mechanism to empower teachers to develop a self drive to be part of the decision making process.

Introduction
Teacher participation in decision-making is one of the recommendations of institutional based management policy. School based management (SBM) is a proposal to decentralize and de-bureaucratize control of institutions and to promote teacher participation in decision making within institutions (Guthrie, 1986). An assumption of institution based management is that if decisions are made closer to the client, better decisions will be made and greater satisfaction and commitment will prevail (Conley, 1991). The extent to which teachers are involved in decision making in institutions, as well as the nature of the decisions being made, are important indicators of the degree to which institutions have changed from the previous education system since the introduction of institutional based management.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
• To explore the value of teacher’s participation in decision making for institutional effectiveness.
• To analyze the teacher’s involvement in different domains of decision making from the perception of teachers
• To find out the reasons for teachers’ reluctance to participate in decision making from the perception of teachers

Methodology
Design of the study
The study followed a survey method using the technique of semi structured interview. A semi-structured interview is open, allowing new ideas to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the interviewee says. The interviewer in a semi-structured interview generally has a framework of themes to be explored. The interview was conducted by the second author of the article based on three domains of decision making, namely management domain, instructional domain and curricular domain as these are the major domains which is related to the academic performance and the teaching learning process. It took four days to complete the interview procedure. Many new ideas were brought up by
prompting the interviewees. Percentage analysis was used as statistical technique.

Sample

The investigator selected 30 teachers of Government Colleges randomly from two districts of Kerala state. The sample was selected from the districts of Malappuram and Kozhikode as the two districts belong to Malabar region and also to avoid error in the selection of the sample.

Results

Value of Teacher’s Participation in Decision Making for Institutional Effectiveness

Promoting forms of participation in decision making increase teachers’ actual involvement in decisions concerning their duties and opportunities for development and also provide for more sharing on issues concerning the institutional management. Hence it is noteworthy to highlight the various dimensions of advantages regarding the participation of teacher’s in decision making. On reviewing the literature and based on the reflections of various teachers, the investigators identified those values which are listed below.

- **Job satisfaction**: shared decision making led to increased job satisfaction and commitment. Several researchers have indicated that teachers’ participation in decision-making is positively linked to job satisfaction (Alutto and Belasco, 1973). Participation in decision making, increased teachers’ levels of satisfaction in teaching and enthusiasm for the educational system, and created a positive attitude towards participation. Schneider (1984) found a significant relationship existed between levels of teacher involvement and job satisfaction.

- **Job commitment**: Hung and Lui (1999) believed that if teachers were involved in the setting of educational institution goals and the decision making process, they tend to be committed members of staff. Involvement in decision making also creates ownership, commitment and a sense of empowerment, as collaboration leads to new roles.

- **Self-esteem**: Increasing teachers’ participation in decision making could be an effective management strategy that could satisfy teachers’ self-esteem and self-actualization.

- **Perception of workloads**: Decision sharing on the institutional site is time consuming. Workload may be one of the major costs of participatory decision making. In certain circumstances, in the event of specific problems, group decisions are superior, but it is a time consuming process. Clune and White (1989), David (1989), and Raywid (1990) found that when the extra time and energy demanded by planning and decision making are balanced by real authority, teachers report satisfaction, even exuberance.

- **Affective aspects**: Critics have said that much participatory management is ‘involvement for the sake of involvement and that as long as subordinates feel they are participating and are being consulted, their ego needs will be satisfied and they will be more cooperative’ (Ritchie, 1974)

- **Increased educational outcome**: There is a direct positive relationship between increased institutional based decision making and increased educational outcome Chapman (1990). Through participation in decision making, knowledge and creativity as well as increased feelings of trust and self control are enhanced through greater commitment.

Analyzing Teacher Involvement in Different Domains of Decision Making

Table 1

Results of Teachers’ Willingness to Involve in Decision Making Based on Three Domains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains</th>
<th>Subdomains</th>
<th>Willingness (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management domain</td>
<td>Human resource management</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial management</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strategic management organizational design</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional</td>
<td>Setting class learning objective</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>domain</td>
<td>Selection of instructional objective</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructional design</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curricular domain</td>
<td>Institutional based curricular development</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subjects and modules offered to each class</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Setting academic regulations</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The findings of the study revealed that teachers had a greater desire to be involved in instructional decisions than in curricular domain and managerial decisions. This result was similar to the findings from Conley’s (1991) and Smylie’s (1992) studies, which reported that teachers tend to express more desire for participation in decisions that relate to classroom instruction than for participation in administrative and management decisions. Teachers were less active in decisions in the managerial domain than the instruction or curricular domain. The study by Jongmans, Biemans and Beijaard (1998) confirms this finding; it reported that teachers were unlikely to be involved in educational policy making and were rarely involved at all in administrative policymaking.

Why teachers perceive themselves as participating less in decision making?

Considering the wide advantages of teacher’s participation in the decision making in various domains as mentioned earlier, there is a need to analyze the major reasons behind why teachers are not showing willingness to participate in decision making for the proper management of educational institutions. The major reasons which are identified from the responses of teachers through the technique of interviewing are highlighted below

- **Work load**: Findings suggest that teachers did not want more decision making responsibility than they already had, and that they associated it with a higher workload. This is not surprising, as more decision making about instructional materials in the classroom must involve a heavier workload.

- **Issues**: In the opinion of most of the teachers they want to be confined to themselves and many of them believe that telling opinions in decision making lead directly or indirectly to controversial issues among their colleagues or between themselves and the head of the educational institution.

- **Lack of collegiality**: For a complete and selfless involvement in the decision making process one should be ready to accept the views of others and one should have that open mind to accept the criticisms in a healthy way. Lack of collegial interaction among teachers always hinders the teachers in participating in the decision making process of institutions.

- **Competing professional beliefs**: Competition itself is motivating force in the enhancement of professional development of teachers in one or the other way if it is viewed positively by encouraging each other. Unhealthy competitions always distort the democratic atmosphere of the educational institutions and will make the teachers reluctant to participate in institutional based decision making as opined by teachers in the interview.

- **Working environment**: In the opinion of some of the teachers they are exhausted, frustrated and has no motivation to participate. If you don’t have faiths in an idea you will neither make sacrifices nor take action to further it. A stress free environment is necessary for the participation of teachers in the decision making process of educational institutions.

- **Institutional culture**: Institutional culture is a barrier as perceived by some of the teachers. There is a need to cultivate a culture of participation. Top-down institutional decision making approaches won’t do anything good. Decision making bodies are being used by a few heads to dictate instructions rather than share in decisions in the opinion of some of the teachers.

- **Time**: Teachers for various reasons, especially those related to benefits to teaching and time costs, may find it difficult to participate fully in the institutional based decision making. The institutional community may also be confronted with barriers to participation.

- **Unfamiliarity**: Teachers haven’t been initially trained to express their opinions or to make decisions. Rather, they have been conditioned to execute instructions without any discussion.

**HOW TO OVERCOME ?**

The discussion on the identifying constrains lead the investigators to suggest some practical measures.

- More opportunities for teacher participation in planning and policy formulation will facilitate and commit the teachers to their effective implementation and evaluation.

- Educational administrators should engage teachers in all the decision domains, but especially the decision area of pedagogy.

- Teachers prefer to concentrate on teacher related concerns for instance curricular and instructional issues, and it is through this preference that teachers may be committed to participate in a decision making process.
It should be in the interest of the administrators to encourage participation, as the intent is to increase job satisfaction and to enhance greater commitment to institutional policies, thus fostering adaptation to change.

Create a democratic atmosphere and give opportunities for collegial interaction with entrusted duties for the teachers.

Conclusion
As teachers in the sample perceived themselves to be in a state of decision deprivation under the institutional based management policy, these findings suggest the importance of legitimate, authentic teacher involvement in decision making. When teachers do not perceive their decision involvement to be influential, their involvement will decline, as will their overall job satisfaction and commitment. If the education authority and institutional heads in Hong Kong are committed to implementing institutional based management policy, they need to know why teachers perceive themselves as participating less in decision making than they would. The result of the study gives us the conclusion that teachers are less interested to take decisions in the management related matters as they find themselves less comfortable in engaging in such duties. They believe that this domain is not related to them and their expression of views is not a major concern in that domain. Change should be made in this aspect and establishing the participation of teachers in making decisions regarding the matters related to the domains is essential.

References