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An investigation into teacher participation in decision making in public secondary schools in Kenya: a case of baringo district

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ABSTRACT

Participatory decision making is a management style which can be identified as a motivator which can lead to increased productivity in organizations. The purpose of this study was to investigate teacher participation in decision making in secondary schools in Baringo district. Descriptive survey design was adopted. The study population comprised of 42 secondary schools, all the Head teachers, class teachers and teachers in these schools. The sample comprised 13 schools selected through simple random sampling, 13 Head teachers and class teachers who were purposively selected while 104 teachers were selected using simple random sampling technique. Data collection instruments comprised of questionnaire with closed and open ended questions and semi structured interview schedules. Data was analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively using descriptive statistics. The major findings of the study were that teachers were not involved in decision making as they desired; that most head teachers viewed participatory decision making negatively and indifferently; that teachers were willing to take part in decision making and that there are a combination of factors that hinder effective teacher participation in decision making.

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Introduction

Contemporary educational reform places the need for democratic school leadership which has emerged as an approach for nurturing a climate of enhanced stakeholder contributions and improvements in student achievement. Participatory management is one practice that can help to foster innovative ideas which model democratic practices like shared decision making resulting in extra effort and greater productivity. Participative decision-making has increasingly become the agreed-upon model around the world for the operation of schools, particularly those in the public education systems (Mokoena, 2011). The idea of effective participation in decision making in schools is also supported by Okumbe (1998) who affirms that group or participatory decision making process is recommended given that a broader perspective of knowledge and facts can be gathered very easily from a group and individuals who participate are usually more satisfied with the decisions made hence enthusiastically support them.

A participatory approach in school management has been acknowledged as an essential ingredient in the quest for better schools (Blase, 2001). In Schools, effective teacher involvement in decision making can be an approach of practicing participatory management. According to Mueller & Gokturk (2010), teachers can play a greater role in the overall success of the school when they commit to being active participants in decision making process. Teachers are the key figures in implementing the curriculum decisions which at the school level curriculum planning involves taking decisions on what to teach, how to teach it and who to teach. The entire system will benefit when teachers play an active role in controlling their work environment (Pashiardis, 1994). It is therefore imperative that setbacks to teacher's inclusion in decision making must be addressed if school goals and objectives are to be attained.

Research on teacher participation in decision making has been conducted worldwide. In Hong Kong a study conducted by Cheng (2008) presented findings from a study conducted in 20 secondary schools in Hong Kong to examine theoretically the causal relationship between teacher participation in decision-making and their affective outcome for developing a participatory decision model. From the results of the study, the researcher concluded that School administrators should encourage teacher participation in curriculum and managerial decision domains, as the intent of the School Based Model policy is to increase job satisfaction and to enhance greater commitment to the school policies. Studies conducted by Leithwood et al (2007); Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, (2004) suggest that increasing teacher influence in leadership and decision making tasks may improve schools significantly. Other research, however, suggest that teacher involvement in formal decision making or leadership roles will have limited impact on student achievement (Smylie, Conley, & Marks, 2002).

In South Africa, shared decision making in schools is no longer an option. The framework of shared decision making is embedded in South African Act (Act 84 of 1996). According to the Act, parents, teachers and learners should be given the opportunity of participating in decision making on educational matters. Despite this, there is a general dissatisfaction on how decisions are made in South African schools. A research conducted by Nkosana (2003) found out that many secondary schools in South Africa still adhere to pre-democratic formal lines of authority. Teachers among other stakeholders are dissatisfied on how decisions are made at the school level. Concerns raised by respondents were a clear indication that much is needed to be done

In Kenya, effective decision making in schools is being emphasized. Okumbe (1998) argues that millions of shillings go down the drain from the coffers of educational institutions due

to poor decision making. He suggests that educational managers need to be conversant with fundamental processes by which decisions are made in organizations so as to improve teaching and learning effectiveness. He further states that effective teacher participation is very important if maximum output is to be realized from them. Research conducted by Mualuko, Mukasa & Achoka (2009) on teacher participation in decision making in Makueni district revealed that teachers desired greater involvement than they are currently involved.

According to the Education Act of the laws of Kenya, (1970 revised in 1980), the Board of Governors (BOG) are mandated to audit and regulate expenditure by the administration to ensure that all the income received by the school is applied to the promotion of its objectives. The statutes presume that the members of the BOG and teachers are knowledgeable in the law, human resource management, accounting and project management. Wanderi (2008), states that it is unfortunate that these skills are not present in the administration of many public schools. He further argues that the Public Procurement and Disposal Act of 2005 grant teachers the power to control tendering and procurement in public schools. He observed that the Act is not practical in most public schools because they are managed by old, unenergetic retirees and semi literate businessmen who are ignorant of elementary law or basic concepts of public finance, human resource management and school management. He states that a managerial gap ensues in many public schools in rural Kenya. He also points out that there is dire need to change the training of teachers to include new subjects which will help equip teachers with elementary working knowledge of accounting, planning, financial and project management to empower them to actively take part in school management.

Concern over teachers' ineffectiveness in their performance is noted in many Kenyan public schools. Standard Education Team (2009) pointed out that teachers are the most influential resources in schools but their effectiveness in the recent times is questionable, taking into account poor performance in Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) and Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KSCE). Amid efforts to establish causes of poor performance, teacher effectiveness has come under scrutiny. Mullins (2005) states that staff participation in decision making leads to higher performance and which is necessary for survival in an increasingly competitive world.

Statement of the Problem

The foregoing background information shows that effective teacher participation in decision making in secondary schools needs to be improved. Okumbe (1998), states that educational managers need to be conversant with the fundamental processes which decisions are made in the organization so as to improve teaching and learning effectiveness.

Researcher's professional experience reveals that the locus of decision making in schools rests mainly with Head teachers, Board of Governors (BOG) and Parents Teachers Association (PTA). They make important decisions such as choice of curriculum material, type of test used to evaluate instruction, mode of teacher motivation and disciplinary decisions with minimal teacher involvement yet they are implementers on the ground. In many cases teachers are unwilling or lack interest in school decision making. This may lead to improper monitoring of students and may be one the causes of the recent schools unrests experienced countrywide. The teachers' indifference poses more questions than answers on the way forward in

teacher participation in decision making. It is against this backdrop that this study aimed at investigating teacher participation in decision making in public secondary schools in Baringo district with a view of coming up with ways of effectively involving teachers in decision making.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate teacher participation in decision making in selected secondary schools in Baringo district, Kenya. Decision making is an important management function which enables schools to run efficiently and effectively. If teachers are involved in decision making they will have a sense of well being and take pride in their roles and thus set tone for the students.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

- Are teachers willing to participate in decision making?
- Which areas of decision making are teachers involved?
- What are the factors that hinder effective teacher participation decision making in secondary schools?

Methodology

The study design was descriptive survey and its methodology was both qualitative and quantitative in approach. The study was carried out in Baringo District, which has 42 public registered secondary schools. The study population comprised of all the Head teachers, class teachers and teachers in these schools. About 30% of the schools were chosen using simple random sampling technique, that is, 13 schools (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999). From the sampled schools, 13 Head teachers and class teachers were purposively selected while 104 teachers were selected from of the sampled schools using simple random sampling technique. Data collection instruments comprised of questionnaire with closed and open ended questions and semi structured interview schedules. Questionnaires were administered to the sampled teachers while interviews were carried out on the Head teachers and class teachers of the sampled schools. Data was analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively using descriptive statistics. Data was presented using frequency tables and cross tabulations.

Results and Discussions

Teachers Willingness to Participate in Decision making

The major objective of the study was to investigate teacher participation in decision making in secondary schools. The first step towards achievement of this objective was to posit a dichotomous question in which the respondents were to submit a yes or no response to the question: Are teachers willing to participate in decision making? The findings are presented in the Table 1 below:

Table 1: Teachers Involvement in Decision Making

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	73	75.3
No	24	24.7
Total	97	100.0

Data collected and analysed indicated that 75.3% of the respondents were involved in some form of decision making whereas 24.7% did not participate at all in any form of decision in their schools. Although the percentage may be considered weak, their indifference can affect their productivity. Interview with teachers provided further insights into the reasons why teachers don't participate in decision making. The reasons listed by the respondents were varied and included lack of trust, divisions among staff members, victimization, and double standards by head teachers, fear, and principal's perception.

They mentioned ways that could enable them to fully participate in decision making which included: delegation, team building, empowerment, motivation, collective setting of standards, avoiding witch-hunting, opens administration and inclusion throughout the decision making process. From the reasons stated above, perhaps we can conclude that the success of teacher participation is more a function of the Head teacher.

Areas of Teacher Participation in Decision Making

In a quest to understand whether teachers were involved in decision making process, teachers were asked to indicate their involvement in different areas. Table 2 shows a list of decision making areas in schools. The list is not exhaustive since schools have different decision making areas. The areas listed in the questionnaire are basic in any school setting. Teachers were thus asked to rate their involvement in the listed decision making areas. The results are presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Areas of Involvement in Decision Making

Level of decision making in;	Very High %	High %	moderate %	Low %	Very Low %
Disciplinary decisions	12.9	18.6	30.9	14.4	20.6
Curriculum implementation	39.2	27.8	21.6	6.2	5.2
Financial decisions	3.1	5.2	9.3	15.5	67.0
Co-curriculum	12.4	22.7	34.0	19.6	11.3
Tendering	9.3	12.4	12.4	14.4	51.5
Teacher welfare	34.9	37.5	13.0	7.5	7.1
Enrolment	11.3	12.4	18.6	22.7	35.1
Total	14.9	16.6	22.8	15.8	29.9

Results from this study revealed that involvement in disciplinary decisions is average. Thirty point nine of the teachers felt that involvement was moderate, 20.6% very low, 14.9% low and 12.9% very high. From these findings, it is clear that teachers are not fully involved in disciplinary decisions. From the interview schedule, a teacher cited a case in his school where class teachers are not involved in dealing with their students' discipline problems. This may be due to the fact that some teachers are 'underestimated' in some disciplinary decisions as cited by a teacher in an interview response. Thirty nine point two percent (39.2%) indicated that involvement in curriculum implementation was very high, 27.8% high, 21.6% moderate, 6.2% low and 5.2% very low. It is clear that teachers are effectively involved in decisions dealing with curriculum implementation. This is because teachers major role in school is curriculum instruction hence they have the expertise to make such decisions.

In financial decisions 3.1% of teachers indicated very high involvement, 5.2% high, 9.3% moderate, 15.5% low and 67% very low. It could therefore be noted that teachers are not effectively involved in decisions dealing with finances. In the interview schedule responses, most teachers felt that they were not involved in financial decisions because head teachers, as a teacher observed, in the interview feel that teachers are not trained to handle financial issues in the school. Asked if they desired to be involved, a teacher observed that some class teachers have the expertise which can help the head teacher make successful financial decisions and therefore willing to be involved. Interviews with the head teachers revealed that they were not very comfortable with involving teachers in financial decisions. One head teacher commented that there would be no consensus because of involving many teachers with varied views. In decisions dealing with co-curriculum 12.4% of teachers indicated very high involvement, 22.7% high, 34.0%

moderate, 19.2% low and 11.3% very low. These findings suggest that teachers' involvement in co-curriculum decisions is average.

In tendering 9.3% of teachers indicated very high participation, 12.4% moderate, 14.4% low and 51.5% very low. These findings suggest that most teachers are not involved in tendering decisions. Interviews with teachers provided more information on teacher dissatisfaction on how tendering decisions are made in their school. A teacher commented that tendering decision making area is a 'no go zone' for teachers in their school. Another teacher complained that tendering has not been done in their school for the past three years. Many teachers indicated that corruption thrived in tendering and it mainly involved the head teacher and the BOG members. Asked why they should be involved, a teacher stated that it was very important for teachers to choose curriculum instruction materials and other important items because they know what is best for their students. Dissatisfaction in involvement in tendering decisions is apparent from the teachers' responses.

In teacher welfare 34.9% of teachers indicated very high participation, 37.5% high, 13.0% moderate and 7.5% low and 7.1% very low. This distribution shows that most teachers are involved in their welfare issues. In decisions dealing with enrolment 11.3% of teachers indicated very high involvement, 12.4% high, 18.6% moderate, 22.7% low and 35.1% very low. The highest percentage of teachers felt that their participation is minimal. More substantial information was gathered from interview with teachers. Most teachers were dissatisfied with how head teachers replaced students who leave school before completion of the four-year period and the form one admissions. A teacher reported that head teachers admit students without consulting teachers. He added that teachers are just surprised when they find new students in class. Another teacher stated that replacements, which the head teachers make, lower the teachers' morale because from observations, these new students entry behaviour is very poor. A teacher suggested that interviews should be conducted when admitting new students. The findings show that there is a general dissatisfaction in how decisions are made in schools.

Factors that Hinder Effective Teacher Participation in Decision Making

The study sought to find out factors that hinder effective teacher participation in decision making. In order to ascertain this, eight possible factors were listed in the questionnaire for teachers. The respondents were asked to indicate their significance in constraining effective decision making. Table 3 presents the factors and the significance it has on hindering decision making in schools.

The results from this study revealed that the factors with very high significance are school climate 59.8%, management style 44.3%, implementation of past decisions 41.2% and teacher expertise 39.2%. Factors with high significance are organizational structure 33.0%, nature of task 37.1% and communication 28.9%. The study also indicates that 25.8% of the respondents felt that physical facilities did not hinder participation in decision making though some 14% indicated that it had very high significance.

The respondents were asked to mention other factors not listed in the questionnaire that hindered decision making in their schools. The factors listed include lack of motivation, recognition, head teacher skills in handling decisions, and support from the student body.

Table 3: Factors that Affect Effective Decision Making in School

Significance	Very Little		Little		Moderate		High		Very High	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Physical facilities	25	25.8	21	21.6	20	20.6	17	17.5	14	14.4
School climate	0	0.0	5	5.2	20	20.6	14	14.4	58	59.8
Nature of task	2	2.1	5	5.2	23	23.7	31	32.0	36	37.1
Communication	3	3.1	5	5.2	26	26.8	28	28.9	35	36.1
Organization structure	5	5.2	8	8.2	20	20.6	32	33.0	32	33.0
Management style	3	3.1	4	4.1	14	14.4	33	34.0	43	44.3
Teachers' Expertise	4	4.1	5	5.2	24	24.7	26	26.8	38	39.2
Implementation of past decisions	8	8.2	5	5.2	17	17.5	27	27.8	40	41.2
Total	50	6.4	51	6.6	164	21.1	208	26.8	303	39.0

From the interview responses teachers stressed on the role of the head teacher in facilitating effective decision making. A teacher said that without the head teacher's stake, effective decision making cannot take place. From the findings above, it is clear that there is a combination factors that hinder teacher participation in decision making.

Conclusions

Teachers emphasized on the importance of the head teacher's role in enhancing their decision making skills. Some teachers indicated that they don't participate in decision making as expected because of the principal's perceptions. Some head teachers perceive participatory decision making negatively. Other reasons why they are not willing to participate effectively in decision making include witch hunting, victimization, divisions among staff members, fear and double standards by head teachers. The research showed that teachers are willing to be involved in decision making but are not fully involved as they desire. They feel that they will fully participate if the head teacher facilitated it since it makes them feel empowered and committed. It can therefore be concluded that teachers desire to be involved in decision making if under favourable conditions.

Teachers were also found to have different levels of participation in different decision making areas. They are moderately involved in curriculum and instruction, co-curriculum and their welfare decisions. Most teachers are involved in the implementation level. Teachers desire to participate throughout the entire process up to the implementation level. Some head teachers and other stakeholders like the B.O.G and P.T.A formulate policies that are passed on to teachers who implement them involuntarily. This affects the teachers' commitment and morale. Dissatisfaction is apparent in teachers' involvement in decision making in school finance, tendering and enrolment.

Another conclusion that was drawn from the study is that there are combination of factors that hinder effective teacher participation in decision making. These include school climate, lack of recognition, head teachers skill in handling decisions, communication, how the past decisions have been handled, nature of task, fear, alienation, teacher expertise and victimization.

Recommendations

This study had various shortcomings and thus the following recommendations were made based on the study findings:

i) The study found out that many teachers are not involved in decision making areas as they desire. The areas teachers desire

involvement in financial matters, tendering, student discipline and enrolment. It is therefore recommended that head teachers fully involve teachers in such decisions. It is also recommended that teachers should go through more specialized in-service training to gain professional status and authority not just influence in their decision making areas.

ii) The findings also found out that teachers are willing to take part in decision making in their school. It is recommended that head teachers should create decision making opportunities for teachers.

iii) The study also found out that there are combinations of factors that hinder effective teacher participation decision making. It is recommended that despite all these constraints, all teachers should participate in decision making. Head teachers should encourage teachers to participate and empower them to be leaders

Suggestions for Further research

The following areas of study were recommended for further researcher;

i) Impact of students involvement in decision in curbing discipline problems

ii) The role of BOG involvement on school decision making process.

iii) Effects of teacher participation in decision making on improving student performance.

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