Management of schools: Teachers’ involvement in decision making processes

Newman Wadesango¹ and Anass Bayaga²

¹Walter Sisulu University, East London, South Africa.
²University of Fort Hare, East London campus, South Africa.

Accepted 29 November, 2012

Management in all business and organizational activities is the act of getting people together to accomplish desired goals and objectives using available resources efficiently and effectively. The purpose of this study is therefore to establish effects of insignificant teacher’s participation in the management of teaching load allocation in the Gweru District of Zimbabwe. The study adopted an interpretive qualitative research methodology and a case study research design. A purposive convenient sample of twenty five school teachers and five school heads from Gweru District formed the study. Data were collected through face to face interviews and documentary analysis. The study began the process of data analysis by transcribing verbatim audio taped interviews. The results were cross-checked with the participants. The study established that teachers were not involved in the allocation of teaching load in most of the participating schools. It also emerged that if a teacher is deployed to teach a subject where he/she has lower competence, what happens is that the teacher may underperform or teach the wrong things altogether.

Key words: Schools, teacher’s participation, decision-making, decentralisation.

INTRODUCTION

A number of educational reforms have been implemented all over the world and Zimbabwe is no exception. Democratization and decentralization are concepts that are rooted in the neo-liberal philosophy which advocates for the enhancement of equal opportunity for all people to make their own decisions and develop their own skills, interests and personalities (Brouillette, 1997; Sayed, 2002; Hoy and Miskel, 2005; Hoy and Tarter, 2003). In Zimbabwe, there have been some debates on democratization and decentralization which led to the development of policies meant to increase teachers’ participation in decision making in schools. However, despite these developments, teachers’ participation in decision making in Zimbabwean schools is regarded as insignificant (Wadesango and Shumba, 2009).

Benefits of participation

The following benefits entail the importance of participation in decision making in education (Kumar and Scuderi, 2000:2; Dimmock, 1993; Shed and Bacharach, 1991; Technikon, 1998; Khoza, 2003). Participation 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 priorities. Teachers will then be motivated to carry out their tasks; participation leads to a higher level of meaningful involvement of teachers and their teams in the decision making process. Participation accords teachers opportunities for professional development in decision making skills.

*Corresponding author. E-mail: nwadesango@wsu.ac.za.
Participation is a proactive approach to information sharing among teachers and it makes teachers become good decision makers; participation nurtures teachers' creativity and initiative, empowering them to implement innovative ideas. This makes decisions more likely to be acceptable and more likely to be implemented because they reflect and serve the interests of the people responsible for putting them into action; participation results in increased trust between senior management and the teachers. This results in the development of more inclusive partnerships among heads and teachers and there is harmony, trust, competence and joy in such an environment; participation is good for the schools' long range planning; participation improves the quality of managements' decisions since there is greater diversity of views and expertise as inputs to decision making and participation enhances effectiveness, efficiency and productivity by improving the schools' ability to respond rapidly to problems or opportunities in their environment. The current study looked at the outcome of teacher's participation in decision making in teaching load allocation.

STRATEGIES OF PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

Teachers can participate in decision making either as individuals, in committees or in staff meetings as a group. Chan et al. (1997) discuss teachers' participation in a decentralized/devolution system as follows.

Participation at individual level

This level of participation involves individuals who carry out tasks and make decisions while pursuing the school's goals. This decision making area closely relates to an individual teacher's performance within the classroom (example choice of teaching materials) and teaching schedule (example time table, classroom activities and preparation of lessons). This strategy is normally used by some administrators when they consult (a) experienced teachers in their individual capacity and (b) those teachers with the required expertise and skills when dealing with particular issues (Chan et al., 1997; Wadesango, 2011).

Participation at group level

This level of participation focuses on the interaction among school members as teams, groups or departments. The decision making area at this level of participation includes issues that mainly relate to functioning of groups, for example subject committee. This committee will be in charge of ordering textbooks, promotions within the department, supervision of members and other issues; extracurricular activity groups: this committee will be in charge of sports, entertainment and school trips and groups that handle discipline and disciplinary issues. Committees are a way to formally draw together people of relevant expertise from the whole staff complement. The advantage is that this strategy widens viewpoints and sharing out of responsibilities (Chan et al., 1997; Goldhammer, 1982; Wadesango, 2011).

Participation at school level

The decision making area at this level includes areas that affect the school as a whole, example, setting school goals; formulation of school policies; formulation of admission policy; compilation of school budget; personnel management and staff development programmes. The advantage with this type of strategy is that groups can generate a greater number of alternatives that are of a higher quality than the individual. Group decision making may also lead to a greater collective understanding of the eventual course of action chosen. This promotes a sense of ownership (Chan et al., 1997; Wadesango, 2011).

STEPS IN THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS

Decisions are concerned with problem solving. The process of decision making can be considered to consist of steps beginning with problem identification and ending with the evaluation of its outcomes. Smit (1992) identifies the following six steps in the decision making process: (a) identify and define the problem; (b) analysis of the problem (b) generation of alternatives (c) evaluation of alternatives (d) selection of best alternative (e) implementation of the decision and (f) evaluation and control of decision. The above steps are discussed in detail as follows:

Step 1: Identify the decision to be made. It is realized that a decision must be made. A problem is regarded as an obstacle to the achievement of organizational goals and is therefore an obstacle that needs to be overcome by decision makers. An internal process of trying to define clearly the nature of decision you must make is gone through.

Step 2: Gather relevant information. Most decisions require collecting pertinent information. The real trick in this step is to know what information is needed., the best sources of information and how to get it. Some information must be sought from within yourself through a process of self-analysis; other information must be sought from outside yourself, books, people and other sources.

Step 3: Identify alternatives. Through the process of collecting information, identify two or more possible paths of action. New alternatives can be constructed via...
imagination and information.
Step 4: Weigh evidence. Draw on your information and emotions to imagine what it would be like if you carried out each of the alternatives to the end. Evaluate whether the problem identified in step 1 would be helped or solved through the use of each alternative. Place the available alternatives in priority order, based upon a chosen value system.
Step 5: Choose among alternatives. Once all the evidences have been weighed, appropriate alternatives may be selected. A combination of alternatives could be employed.
Step 6: Take action. Take now some positive action which begins to implement the alternative chosen in step 5.
Step 7: Review decision and consequences. In this step experience the result of the decision taken and evaluate whether or not it has solved or helped to solve the problem in step 1. If yes, then stay with the decision; if no, repeat certain steps of the process in order to make a new decision (Smith, 2003). This is the process that decision making in schools should follow in a decentralized environment.

METHODOLOGY
This study adopted a qualitative interpretive research methodology. The study concentrated on the qualitative form since this research aimed at elucidating what the participants had to say with regard to decision-making in their natural settings. In this regard, it was imperative that a methodological perspective be adopted to allow the findings to develop “from the data itself rather than from preconceived, rigidly structured, and highly quantified techniques that pigeonhole the empirical social world into the operational definitions that the researcher has constructed” (Creswell, 2002). The problem identified in this study demanded that the participants themselves be allowed to freely express their feelings, views and opinions. To this end, Sherman and Webb (in Ely, 1991) provide the following definition... qualitative implies a direct concern with feelings, experiences and views as lived or felt or undergone...”
This study adopted a case-study research design. A case study is described as a form of descriptor research that gathers a large amount of information about one or a few participants and thus investigates a few cases in considerable depth (Thomas and Nelson, 2001). Purposive convenience sampling of twenty-five school teachers and five school heads from Gweru Education District was adopted in the selection of participants for this study.

Data collection instruments
The researchers looked for rich, detailed information of a qualitative nature. The methods that were used to gather information for this study were concerned with seeking participants’ written and verbal information on the way problems are solved and decisions are taken in their schools. Therefore, the strategies used produced descriptive data based on insights rather than statistical data where hypothesis testing is involved. Three types of strategies that were used to provide the data for this study were: individual interviews, observation of staff meetings and document analysis.

Interviews
Semi-structured interviews were used in this study. This method was preferred because data were gathered systematically and the researchers were assured that no data were omitted. Through the use of interviews, the interviewer was able to elaborate on issues and questions as well as clarifying the meaning of statements, answers or questions that may not have been clear to the interviewee. Through the use of semi-structured interviews, respondents were able to express themselves freely since the main purpose of this study was to let respondents narrate their experiences with regard to teachers’ recruitment policy. In the process the study was able to get rich thick data from participants and this increased the validity of the findings of the research. During the interviews, certain issues respondents tended to leave unexplained were effectively probed. By so doing the study was able to gain a detailed understanding of the respondents’ opinions rather than would be the case when using mailed questionnaires.

Documentary analysis
Various documents that were related to teacher’s recruitment practices were examined. Such documents included public records, personal documents and physical material already present in the research setting. Documents helped the researchers to uncover meaning, develop understanding and discover insights.

Ethical considerations
According to Creswell (1994), a researcher has an obligation to respect the rights, needs, values and desires of the respondents. The research was therefore conducted with respect and concern for the dignity and welfare of the informants. The individual’s right to decline to participate was respected in this study. The researchers ensured that the purpose and activities of the research were clearly explained to the participants. The authors of this document ensured that promises and commitments were honored by safeguarding participants’ identities.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY
Teaching load allocation involves the deployment of the subjects to teachers usually at the beginning of the year. It was necessary to examine this area of decision making process because any blunder may negatively impact students’ performance. In most cases the responding teachers from four of the five schools indicated that they were not involved in decision making areas on teaching load allocation. The respondents further revealed that such decisions were a prerogative of the school head, deputy head and Heads of Departments (HOD) with the exception of three schools where respondents were consulted in such decisions. Below are representative responses from the responding teachers who participate in teaching load allocation:

my observation, this is done by the head, deputy and HODs. Teachers in this school are not involved in this process. You only see the information on the notice board. There is no room to complain; even if you are not
happy, the decision will be binding.
R13-----The headmaster and deputy head are the only two people involved in this critical decision making area. Teachers are not consulted at all and at times their friends are given very good classes whilst if you are not in the camp, you are given the worst classes. We are not happy at all and to make matters worse we can’t complain because once you do so, the next thing is to find yourself in serious troubles.

The responses above tend to concur with the earlier view that the school management teams in some schools make certain decisions in the schools without consulting teachers. Teachers revealed that they are keen to be involved in decisions of teaching load allocation. To them, this is one of the areas of their expertise. They wanted their HODs to facilitate meetings in which teachers rationalize the allocation of teaching loads. They felt that democracy would prevail if as groups of individuals were to participate in mapping out a ‘best practice’ strategy of allocating lessons. They went on to say that they were rational professionals who would make allocative decisions in a manner that would maximize the performance of their students. It emerged that there were a number of problems that arose as a result of consulting HODs alone in this area. One of the problems was cited by R11 when she asserted that “—a certain teacher was deployed to teach a subject he did not specialize in at college and most of the students failed his subject at the end of the year”

Some of the responding teachers indicated that they only come to know of their teaching loads from the time table that is produced by the administration. This shows that teachers in most of the participating schools are not consulted in this area of teaching load allocation. In the same vein, teachers asserted that at times one is allocated a subject one was not trained to teach. The researcher’s view is that such practices tend to undermine the schools’ ability to make maximum use of the human resources at their disposal. The opinion above is supported by one of the responding teachers (R14) who made the following comment:

Teaching load allocation is normally done by the head in consultation with the deputy as well as the HODs. Worse still, the professionals who do the actual teaching are left out in the dark.

In an attempt to verify the validity of the claims by the responding teachers, it became prudent that school heads be asked to provide their views on the same issue. The holding situation was that all the school heads concurred that they involved teachers in this area. Two of the heads admitted that teachers were represented by their HODs when such decisions were made. The school heads’ position can be summarized in the following response from H3, who had to say that, the HODs and the head would agree and make amendments as they see fit. The other three heads confirmed that HODs were required to sit down with all teachers in the department and make suggestions as illustrated below:

H1-I involve all my teachers in his critical decision making area, however there are certain times when I just call the HODs to finalize teaching loads without involving teachers. HODs will be representing their teachers, therefore teachers should not complain because they will be represented.

The staff meetings attended gave workable insights into how decisions are made in the area of teaching load allocation. This particular issue was on the agenda of all five schools under study. As has been echoed by most of the teachers it was observed that in four of the participating schools, it was either the head of school or the deputy head who announced the teaching loads for the coming year. However in one of the five schools, chairpersons indicated that HODs had been consulted. In the same school, indications were that departments had made their recommendations to the school head as the deputy head announced that the administration had adopted their proposals without any changes.

The study also reviewed minutes of staff meetings which had been held in each of the five schools under study. Indications were that in only one school, it has always been the trend that departments were asked to sit down and come up with their proposals in this area of teaching load allocation. However, the minutes did not indicate if HODs consulted teachers in their departments. The researcher also came across a circular on the staff notice board written by the deputy head to HODs impressing upon them to quickly hold their end of year departmental meetings and submit their staff requirements for the coming year. However as for the four schools, the responding teachers’ sentiments in the interviews were confirmed as information in the minute books on teaching load allocation seemed always to be in the form of announcements. Statements such as the school head announced the teaching loads for 2004, 2005 and so forth were very common in the minutes.

DISCUSSION

It was found in this study that in four of the five participating schools, teachers were not involved in subject and teaching load allocation. The idea that teachers in most of the schools are not involved in subject deployment and the teaching load allocation is a wrong practice all together. One cannot resist imagining cases where teachers are deployed to the least preferred classes or subject areas. If a teacher is deployed to teach a subject
where he/she has lower competence, what will happen is that the teacher may underperform or teach the wrong things altogether. Once concepts are mystified, children may get confused further. Elmore (1990) notes that poor teaching creates misunderstanding and misunderstanding has socio-emotional effects on the learner. The learner becomes exasperated, temperamental and may withdraw from school.

The point is, better schools tend to produce better students and schools become so because of their ability to make the right decisions at the right time. Such decisions are a result of a protracted decision making process; such a process is to found on full involvement of the various stake holders, and teachers are the greatest stake holders in a school set up. The mechanics of how teachers’ involvement can be maximised is another issue. The teacher may also compensate his/her weaknesses by being emotional, beating children and thus making learning hard to pursue if not allocated to his/her area of specialisation. However, in the other three schools, teachers were involved in the teaching load allocation through their HODs. This confirms what was found by McGrath (1992) in his study in Canada. McGrath found out that a higher percentage of teachers were interested in areas of teaching load allocation since they had a personal stake in the outcome and they regarded it as one of the areas of their expertise.

Management strategies in the context of school hierarchical structures do not just encourage delegation, but also demand participation in areas in which teachers command expertise and a personal stake and it is after this end that democracy strives. Some problems require individual and others group decision making and therefore school heads’ actions are justified. Indeed, as pointed out earlier on, teachers may not take delight in cases where decisions on issues of teaching load allocation are made on their behalf. They want to engage their decision making faculties at their organisational levels. They want to demonstrate to their superiors that they command both pedagogical and administrative skills which can be harnessed for the benefit of the organisation. According to Wadesango (2011), this is true if one considers that there are several leaders within the school who may not be managers. Such informal leaders may have a great audience than the school head. Failure to acknowledge and commit such potentials in decision making may see such leaders working against the school head and the entire system may collapse.

**Conclusion**

The study established that most of the teachers in the participating schools were not consulted in the area of teaching load allocation. Therefore, teachers desired more involvement in critical issues as mentioned above. They wanted to be consulted before a decision is taken. This is a critical decision making area. They were keen to be involved or rather consulted before a decision on teaching load allocation has been finalized. Therefore, it can be concluded that teachers in four of the five participating secondary schools are insignificantly involved in issues which are considered as strategic by teachers like teaching load allocation. The study established that teachers further wanted their views to be heard and acknowledged by the school system.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study recommends teacher’s empowerment in decision making. This implies that teachers need the opportunity and space to participate in decision making at a level that is beyond the classroom. Such involvement leads to teachers’ creativity, contributing to the running of their schools.

**REFERENCES**


