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*Full Length Research Paper*

# Assessing the desired and actual levels of teachers' participation in decision-making in secondary schools of Ethiopia

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**This study was conducted to assess the desired and actual levels of teachers' participation in decision-making process in Ethiopian secondary schools. For this, the study employed a cross-sectional survey design collecting data from sampled secondary school teachers (n = 258) found in Assosa Zone, Benishangual Gumuz Regional state, Ethiopia. Stratified sampling method was applied to select participants from eleven randomly selected secondary schools located in the seven districts and one town administration of Assosa Zone. The data were collected from sampled teachers using a standardized self-administered questionnaire and analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test. The findings of the study indicated the presence of significant differences between teachers' desired and actual levels of participation in decision-making in their respective schools. This means that the teachers' participants reported more desire to involve than they actually did so in decision-making process. The researchers therefore, concluded that the decision-making process in the studied schools did not seem participatory and the efforts made by school management to empower teachers were not satisfactory. To cope with these challenges, the researchers recommended the need to conduct further study in order to scrutinize the major reasons for the low participation of teachers in decision-making. This would enable schools to devise effective strategies in order to enhance educational experience of students through improving teachers' levels of participation in decision-making.**

**Key words:** Decision-making, teacher participation, Ethiopia.

## INTRODUCTION

The success and failure of any school is largely dependent on the groups that makes it up, and effective utilization of the intellectual abilities of these group or human resources helps the development of such an organization or schools (Olorunsola and Olayemi, 2011). Thus, decision making has been observed to be the heart of administrative process and leadership in schools.

In the school system, like in any other organization,

decisions are made towards solving problems aimed at achieving the stated goals of the schools effectively and efficiently. These decisions may be related to students/staff discipline, curriculum implementation, resource utilization, school policy or extra-curricular activities. Good schools depend on administrators recognizing that teachers are capable of being responsible for their students' learning. Such schools also empower teachers with the ability to make the decisions on how to best accomplish success (Raudonis, 2011). This entails that school leaders should involve teachers in the decision-making processes as they are the ones closest to student achievement (Lashway, 2003).

The United Nations Education, Science and cultural Organization (UNESCO) document asserts that without the participation of teachers, changes in education are impossible (UNESCO, 2005). This preposition confirms that teachers are the corner–stone of school activities. Moreover, it can be said that the quality of school performance largely depends upon teachers who occupy the most important place in the teaching learning process. Therefore, the involvement of teachers in decision–making is likely to motivate them to exert their mental and emotional energy in a group situation that may contribute to group goals and shared responsibilities.

Teachers play crucial role in the teaching learning process. They are the guardians of instruction, implementers of school policies and co-organizers of school activities. Thus, the decisions made in schools directly or indirectly affect teachers. This implies that "teachers are suited to make better decisions having in mind what is required of them as professionals" (Mualuko et al., 2009).

Teachers can take a larger role in the overall success of the school when they become committed to active participate in the decision-making process. A number of researchers have studied the relationships of teachers' increased involvement in decision–making with a number of important school variables. In relation to this, Smylie (1996) stated that participation improves teachers opportunities in acquiring new knowledge and insights.

One of the reasons for involving teachers in decision-making is that it improves the overall performance of the school. Involving teachers in decision-making process is a means to increase the productivity and efficiency of an educational organization. Pashiards (1994) in this regard, explained that increasing the level of teacher participation in decision-making process makes school policy and management more responsive to societal needs.

Participation in decision-making can also make teachers feel a sense of ownership to the decision and belongingness to their institutions. In this regards, Kumar and Scuderi (2000) asserted that 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 and motivated to carry out their task. Another benefit of participating teachers in decision-making is that it promotes the culture of democracy in the school. Imber and Duke (1984) argued that greater participation in school was in tune with democratic society, and this led to enhance commitment, improve performance and better productivity in the school.

The benefits of involving teachers in decision-making is not only limited to making them feel a sense of ownership about the consequences of the decision. Chinelo (2007) stated that teachers' adequate participation in decision-making in schools is not only crucial to accepting, accommodating, and implementing decisions, but also contributes a great deal to the maintenance of internal discipline in schools, positive attitude to school work, as well as improving the quality of future decisions. The involvement might further promote teachers' commitment to these school policies and increase their motivation to implement as well (Smylie and Tuermer, 1992).

In sum, the participation of teachers in decision-making pertinent to any aspect of school operation has a positive impact on school performance. School principals are therefore, expected to encourage teachers to actively participate in decision-making so that informed decision can be made at school level. This study therefore assessed the desired and actual levels of teachers' participation in decision-making in Ethiopian Secondary schools, particularly focusing on the desired and actual levels of teachers' participation in decision-making in the secondary schools at Assosa zone.

## Statement of the problem

The meaningful participation of teachers in decision-making has a positive impact on the overall performance of schools (Blase and Kirby, 2000). Udoh and Akpa (2007) also assert that where teachers are adequately involved in decision-making process, there would be commitment and adequate support with the principal, and the realization of the school goal will be easy as apathy and opposition within the school are likely to be minimized. However, many questions have been raised as to the extent to which teachers can be involved in decision-making at school level (Wellington, 2012).

Furthermore, not all teachers would want to be involved in decision-making at school level. Some teachers may desire to be involve in decision-making while others may be less interested in it. However, there is a dearth of study that attempted to examine the desired and actual level of teachers' participation in decision-making and their determinants.

The purpose of this study therefore is to investigate the extent to which teachers desire to and actually participate in decision-making process. The study further attempts to answer the following research questions:

**Table 1.** Reliability analysis of the decision-making factors.

| Decision domains | Number of Items | Reliability coefficient |
|---|---|---|
| Operation of the schools | 10 | 0.84 |
| Curriculum and instructional techniques | 10 | 0.83 |
| Teacher development issues | 10 | 0.80 |
| Student-teacher relationships | 10 | 0.86 |

1. What are the desire and actual levels of teachers' participation in decision-making process in the secondary schools of Assosa zone?
2. Is there a significant difference between teachers desired and actual levels of participation in decision-making in the secondary schools of Assosa Zone?

## Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to assess the desired and actual levels of teachers' participation in decision-making in the secondary schools of Assosa zone, Ethiopia.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research design

The present study employed a cross-sectional survey design. This design was found appropriate as it described teachers desired and actual levels of participation in decision-making.

### Sampling

There are 17 secondary schools in Assosa zone. For this study, the researchers selected 11 schools using simple random sampling technique specifically a lottery method. Out of the total of 258 teachers in the 11 sampled secondary schools, 155 (60 %) were selected using proportional stratified sampling technique.

### Instrumentation

The researchers adopted and used standardized questionnaire used by Lee (1999) to measure teachers desired and actual level of participation in decision-making (Lee,1999). The questionnaire consists of 40 decision-making statements that are grouped into four domains, namely:

1. The operation of the schools.
2. Curriculum and instructional techniques.
3. Teacher development.
4. Student-teacher relationships.

The researchers also tested the questionnaire in order to ensure its validity and reliability. Accordingly, the study distributed the questionnaire to 30 teachers, and found the questionnaire to be reliable. The questionnaire was dispatched to 155 teachers, and152 (98%) teachers returned properly and completely filled

**Table 2.** Description of range of teachers' participation in decision-making.

| Extent of participation | Mean |
|---|---|
| Low participation | ≤ 2 |
| Moderate participation | 2 - 3.5 |
| High participation | ≥ 3.5 |

Source: Lee (1999).

questionnaire. The instrument was also checked for its reliability. Table 1 shows reliability coefficient of items in the four domains of decision-making. As shown in Table 2, the reliability coefficients for the different decision –making factors ranges between 0.80 to 0.86. These reliability coefficients are high score values indicating the high level of consistency of the factors.

### Data analysis

The data collected from the sample population were systematically coded, tabulated and organized for analysis. The coded data were entered in to Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 17 for analysis. Mean and standard deviation were used to describe the data. In addition, t-test was used to see if there is statistically significant difference between teachers actual and desired level of participation in decision-making. This study further adopted the following range used by Lee (1999) to analyze teachers desired and actual level of participation in decision-making (Table 3). The condition of participation is measured by the mean difference of the desired and actual participation of teachers. This study adopted 1 unit of the mean difference as significant value.

## RESULTS

### Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Descriptions of the demographic characteristics of the respondents have provided some basic information about the sample population involved in the study. The demographic characteristics of the study groups were examined in terms of sex, educational qualification and years of teaching experience.

As illustrated in Table 4, out of 152 respondents 13 1(86.2%) and 21 (13.8%) were males and females respectively. The number of female respondents is very low compared to their male counterparts in the sampled

**Table 3.** Condition of teachers' participation in decision-making.

| Condition of participation | Mean difference * |
|---|---|
| Deprivation | ≥1 |
| Equilibrium | -1-1 |
| Saturation | ≤-1 |

*Mean difference; desired participation; actual participation (Source: Lee, 1999).

**Table 4.** Sex, academic qualification and years of service of respondent teachers.

| Demographic variable | | N | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | 131 | 86.2 |
| Sex | Female | 21 | 13.8 |
| | Total | 152 | 100 |
| | Diploma | 18 | 11.8 |
| Qualification | Degree | 117 | 77.0 |
| | Master | 17 | 11.2 |
| | Total | 152 | 100 |
| | ≤ 5 years | 45 | 29.6 |
| | 6 - 10 | 49 | 32.2 |
| Experience or service year | 11 - 15 | 25 | 16.4 |
| | 16 - 20 | 21 | 13.8 |
| | ≥21 | 12 | 7.9 |
| | Total | 152 | 100 |

secondary schools. This is due to the underrepresentation of female teachers in the secondary schools of the study area. Similarly, as one can see in the same table, 117 (77%), 17 (11.2%) and 18 (11.8%) of teachers are Bachelor Degree, Master's Degree and Diploma holders, respectively. The guideline of the Ministry of Education has indicated that secondary school teachers should possess a minimum of first degree academic qualification (MoE, 1994). This indicates that existence of teachers in the secondary schools with level of education below the standard set by the MoE there are teachers below the standard in the targeted secondary schools.

Table 3 also shows that 45 (29.6%) and 49 (32.3%) of teachers have a served for 5 years and below, and 6 to 10 years respectively. On the other hand, only 12(7.9%) of the teachers had a service year of 21 and above. This might indicate that the respondents have reasonable length of teaching experiences that enables them to give adequate information on the practice of involving teachers in decision-making in the sampled schools.

As noticed from Table 4, teachers desire to participate in decision-making regarding school operation being high

($\bar{X}$ =4.41, SD 0.377) while their actual participation in decision-making on the same issue was low ($\bar{X}$ =1.32, SD =.246). The mean difference between teachers desired and actual level of participation in decisions related to operation of schools was very high ($\bar{X}$ =3.09). This shows that there is a significant difference between the desired and actual level of teachers' participation decisions related to school operation. This means that teachers desire more involvement in decision-making than they were actually involved in issues related to school operation.

The same table depicts that teachers have higher desire ($\bar{X}$ =3.90, SD =.36) to participate in decision-making on matters related to curriculum and instruction while their actual level of participation was moderate ($\bar{X}$ =3.19, SD =.39). The difference between the mean score of teachers desired and actual level of participation in matters related to curriculum and instruction is $\bar{X}$ =0.71.

This implies that teachers were actually participating to the level they aspire to participate in decision-making on

**Table 5.** Comparisons of actual and desired level of teachers participation in decision-making.

| Domains of participation in decision-making | Desired level of participation (DLP) | | Actual level of participation (ALP) | | Difference (DLP – ALP) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $\bar{X}$ [a] | SD [b] | $\bar{X}$ | SD | $\bar{X}$ |
| Operation of school | 4.41 | 0.38 | 1.32 | 0.25 | 3.09* |
| Curriculum and Instruction | 3.90 | 0.36 | 3.19 | 0.39 | 0.71 |
| Teacher development issues | 4.28 | 0.28 | 1.36 | 0.24 | 2.92* |
| Teachers–students relationships | 4.19 | 0.30 | 1.84 | 0.34 | 2.35* |

[a]Mean; [b]Standard deviation.

curriculum and instruction related issues.

Table 4 also depicts that teachers highly desired ($\bar{X}$ =4.28, *SD*=.28) to participate in decision-making in issues related to their professional development while their actual level of participation on the same issue was low (($\bar{X}$ =1.36, *SD*=.24). The difference between the mean score of the desired and actual level of participation of teachers in decision-making on issues pertinent to professional development is $\bar{X}$ =2.92 which implies that they desire more involvement than they were actually involved in.

As noticed from the same table, teachers desire to participate in decision-making regarding student-teacher relationship was high ($\bar{X}$ =4.19, SD=0.30) while their actual level of participation in decision-making on the same issue was low ($\bar{X}$ =1.84, SD =.34). The difference between the mean score of the desired and actual level of participation in issues related to student-teacher relationship was $\bar{X}$ =2.35. This shows that there is significant difference between actual and desired level of teachers' participation in the student-teacher relationship. Teachers desire more involvement than they were actually involved in the student-teacher relationship.

In sum, the result shows that teachers had a higher level of desire to participate in decision-making in all the four domains however, their actual level of participation is low except on matters related to curriculum and instruction. This shows that teachers were not provided with sufficient opportunity to actually participate in decision-making in the schools though they have higher desire to participate.

As noticed from Table 5, teachers desire to participate in decision-making regarding school operation was $\bar{X}$ =4.41, SD 0.377 while their actual participation in decision-making on the same issue was $\bar{X}$ =1.32, SD =.246. This difference between teachers desired and actual level of participation in issues related to school operation is statistically significant (t (151) =16.5, P =.000).

The same table depicts that teachers have higher desire ($\bar{X}$ =3.90, SD =.36) to participate in decision-making on matters related to curriculum and instruction while their actual level of participation was moderate ($\bar{X}$ =3.19, SD =.39). This difference is statistically significant (t (151) =16.5, P=.000). Table 6 also shows that teachers highly desired ($\bar{X}$ =4.28, SD=.28) to participate in decision-making related to their professional development while their actual level of participation in decision-making on the same issue was low ($\bar{x}$ =1.36, SD=.24). This difference is statistically significant (t (151) =107.3, P=.000).

As shown in Table 6, teachers reported a high desire to participate in decision-making regarding student-teacher relationship was high ($\bar{X}$ =4.19, SD=0.30) while their actual participation in decision-making on the same issue was low ($\bar{X}$ =1.84, SD =.34). The difference between teachers actual and desired level of participation in decision-making in matters related to teacher-student relationship is statistically significant (t (151)=63.2, P=0.000). Generally, the difference between teachers desired and actual level of participation in decision-making in the four domains is statistically significant.

## DISCUSSION

One of the major findings of this study is that teachers' participants did report a low level of actual involvement in decision-making. In relation to this, several studies have come up with similar findings. Sorensen and Baum (1999), for instance, reported that even in schools that have well trained teachers in management, the head teachers and the overall school management boards usually find it more difficult to entrust the teachers with opportunities that will involve teachers in the direct management of school operations.

The present study finding is also congruent with the earlier study of Bush et al. (1980), who stated that the average intensity of teachers' participation ranges from

**Table 6.** A t-test on actual and desired level of teachers' participation in decision-making.

| Domains | Desired | | Actual | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $\bar{X}$ | S D | $\bar{x}$ | S D | sig | t |
| Operation of school | 4.44 | 0.356 | 1.32 | 0.246 | 0.000 | 88.2 |
| Curriculum and Instruction | 3.90 | 0.353 | 3.19 | 0.398 | 0.000 | 16.5 |
| Teacher development issues | 4.28 | 0.280 | 1.36 | 0.234 | 0.000 | 107.3 |
| Teachers–students relationships | 4.19 | 0.295 | 1.85 | 0.345 | 0.000 | 63.2 |

none participation to sometimes participating in decision-making related to administrative issues. Low participation of teachers in decision making may also result in teachers behaving as if they are strangers within the school environment and lose sense of commitment and dedication to the school (Ndu and Anogbov, 2007). Wolfson (1998) in the same way also asserted that boredom and frustration at work is often the result of teachers' lack of involvement in decision making.

The other finding of this study is that most teachers have a higher level of desire to participate in decision-making though this was not fully captured in actual practice in the studied schools. This implies that the actual state of teachers' participation in decision-making in the sampled school was deficient compared with the teachers participants desire to involve in decision-making. This finding is in line with the finding of Rice and Schneider (1994) who found that deprivation state of teachers' participation in decision-making dominates the other states of decision-making, and concluded that teachers typically desire more involvement in decision-making in schools than their respective school administrators (management bodies) gave them.

Schneider (1984) in his study also found that teachers reported lower levels of actual involvement and higher levels of desired involvement in managerial issues, particularly in those pertaining to determining the administrative and organization structure of the school, determining the procedures to be used for teacher evaluation, selecting departmental chairpersons or team leaders, evaluating subject departments or teams, hiring new faculty members, setting and revising school goals, and establishing school wide policies. Chan (1997) study which was based on the response from 84 teachers over 45 decision issues showed that the actual involvement of teachers in decision making was less than they desired.

In recent years, an international trend has emerged towards decentralization, devolution and greater autonomy for schools within publicly funded systems of education with the goal of improving the quality of education (Beare, 1991; Beare and Boyd, 1993). In the same vein, the Education and Training Policy of Ethiopia asserts that Educational Management is decentralized (MOE, 1994). One of the key features of decentralized education management is the greater involvement of stakeholders at the grass root level including teachers. Nevertheless, the finding of this study revealed low level of teachers' participation in decision making, and the existence of significance difference between the desired and actual level of teachers participation in decision making.

Such low involvement of teachers in decision making may negatively affect teachers' motivation, job satisfaction and commitment which in turn impede students learning

## Conclusion

It was clear from the findings of this study that teachers' level of involvement in decision-making was low. This implies that decision-making process in the schools was centralized and decisions are made in the schools with a lesser amount of input from teachers. Furthermore, in the sampled schools, teachers desired more involvement in decision-making than they actually used to involve. This means that schools did not provide teachers with enough opportunity to participate in decision-making though they did desired most. This entails that the decision-making process in the studied schools was not participatory, and efforts made by school management to influence teachers' actual involvement in decision-making was not satisfactory.

## RECOMMENDATION

The participation of teachers in decision-making process is crucial for the betterment of the school performance. Hence, the school management body should devise strategies by which teachers can participate more in the decision-making process. In order to devise such strategies, the researchers recommend further study to identify major reasons for low participation of teachers in decision-making process in schools.

## Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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