Determinants of teacher involvement in decision making process by secondary school principals in Nyahururu sub-county, Kenya

J. Kanjogu Kiumi, C. Chemnjor, M. Karanja Macharia

Department of Curriculum & Educational Management, Laikipia University, Kenya

Email address
kiumijk@yahoo.com (J. K. Kiumi)

Citation

Abstract
Teachers play a critical role in education dispensation in any learning system or school for that matter. This has the implication that successful learning outcomes are contingent upon level of teacher inclusion when key decisions are being made in a school. However, there is an emerging view that Kenya’s secondary school principals tend to make unilateral decisions, a factor that has been linked to challenges relating to below average academic performance by learners, learners’ indiscipline and teacher turn over in some of the affected schools. Nonetheless, factors that could be predisposing principals to an exclusive leadership behavior are not yet clear. This is what informed the study. The study selected three variables, specifically principals’ leadership style, teachers’ level of professional training, and teaching experience with a view to determining the extent to which they could be influencing principals’ willingness to involve teachers in decision making. Using ex-post facto research design, data were collected from 180 teachers through a self-delivered questionnaire and subsequently analyzed through ANOVA statistic at .05 alpha level. Level of teacher involvement was significantly influenced by principals’ leadership styles (p<.05). However, involvement level was not significantly influenced (p>.05) by teachers’ level of professional training and teaching experience. The study offers useful insights on how principals can enhance participatory decision making so as to attain desired learning outcomes in their institutions.

1. Introduction

Formal education is one of the prime movers of a nation’s development process. This observation rests on the fact that education enhances workers productivity and individuals’ capacity to play an active role in the political affairs of a nation (Kiumi, 2012).

Kenya’s basic education sector comprises two levels of learning - primary and secondary sub-systems (Republic of Kenya, 2013). The latter prepares learners for further education and training in post-secondary institutions. In this regard, secondary schools in Kenya are perceived as the best placed institutions for laying
the foundation for the development of human resources capable of making positive contribution to the country’s development process (Republic of Kenya, 2012a). This undoubtedly explains why secondary education takes a considerable share of Ministry of Education (MoE) budget. For instance, unit public spending at secondary education was 3.8 times higher than that of primary education in 2010 and constituted 58% of GDP per capita (Republic of Kenya, 2012a).

The high premium placed on secondary education has the implication that educators in the sector-specifically school administrators and teachers need to ensure that learners move successfully through the curriculum. This observation is grounded in the belief that positive learning gains are dependent on the degree to which learners acquire the planned or intended experiences, knowledge, skills, ideas and attitudes that are aimed at enhancing their capacity to function effectively in the society (University of Zimbabwe, 1995).

It needs to be realized that there are three factors which influence quality of curriculum implementation –the teacher, instructional materials (e.g. textbooks, teacher guides, students’ workbooks, etc), and physical facilities such as classrooms, laboratories and libraries. While teachers are the active agents of curriculum delivery, instructional materials and physical resources play a passive role (Chiku & Makumure, 2000). This observation intimates that teacher input is a critical correlate of curriculum mastery by learners. This is in view of the fact that besides subject matter delivery during instructional process, teachers also influence learners indirectly through role modeling which has an additive effect on learning gains (Tyree, 1996; Ogott & Odera, 2012).

Hanson (2002) has averred that schools are social organizations whose principal participants are administrators (or principals in this context) teachers and students. Therefore, a school’s quality of learning outcomes depends a lot on how effectively teachers play their role expectations in the school. However, it is instructive to note that teachers do not act in a social vacuum. Rather, they operate within the leadership environment created by the principal which may either be accommodating or unobliging in regard to teachers’ suggestions on how the schools promulgated goals can be achieved.

An inclusive leadership climate is typified by principals who exhibit a positive orientation towards teachers. Such principals subscribe to the view that teachers have a wide range of talents, and willingness to use them to better the school (Copland, 2003). In such a school environment, teachers are highly likely to be more open with suggestions, and by implication will be more committed to play their role expectations in the school to the benefit of learners. Okumbe (1998) lends support to this observation by pointing out that a working environment where teachers’ opinions are valued and adequately complimented by the leader raises teachers job satisfaction and motivation whose by product is increased learning achievement. This is the selling point for successful principalship career. Bush (2003) has indeed asserted that most successful school managers in Britain involve their staff in all major policy decision matters.

The official policy on education delivery in Kenya provides that teachers should be actively engaged by school administrators during the formulation and implementation phases of school policies (Ministry of Education, 1987: Republic of Kenya, 2013). However, contrary to this policy, some principals tend to direct and instruct teachers without caring to determine whether such directives are productive or not (Griffin, 1996). This view is corroborated by studies done in Kenya (e.g., Muraya, 1981; Ndiku, 1995; IPAR, 2008; Bosire, Sang, Kiumi, & Mungai, 2009).

The aforementioned studies observed that exclusive decision making pattern characterized principals in most secondary schools in the country. This scenario, the studies noted is the antecedent of contemporary challenges pertaining to staff stability in some schools, and the twin problem of students’ indiscipline and low performance in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) exit examinations.

The foregoing observations on decision making pattern in Kenya’s secondary schools brings to the fore one critical question: what factors could be linked to principals’ propensity to prefer a centralized decision making pattern? To answer this question the study construed three independent variables as potentially significant in determining level of teachers’ involvement by principals in decision making. These were: leadership style preferred by the principal, teachers’ level of professional training, and teaching experience.

In order to establish whether there was only link between the three independent variables and principals’ level of inclusiveness in decision making, the following objectives were developed;

1. To find out whether principal’s level of inclusiveness in decision making is influenced by his/her preferred leadership style.
2. To determine whether principal’s level of inclusiveness in decision making is influenced by teachers’ level of professional qualification.
3. To establish whether principal’s level of inclusiveness in decision making is influenced by teachers’ level of teaching experience.

Three assumptions were made at the outset regarding the expected outcomes of the study. The assumptions were stated in the form of three null hypotheses which were tested at .05 alpha level. The hypotheses were stated, thus:

HO₁: Principal’s level of inclusiveness in decision making is not influenced by his/her preferred leadership style.

HO₂: Principal’s level of inclusiveness in decision making is not influenced by teachers’ level of professional training.
HO$_3$: Principal’s level of inclusiveness in decision making is not influenced by teachers’ level of teaching experience.

2. Conceptual Framework

Conceptual framework is a set of ideas or mental map for that matter which is used by an investigator to structure the research process (Kiumi & Kibe, 2013). A conceptual framework, therefore shows the investigation pathways in regard to data collection and data analysis.

The study was grounded in the reasoning that teachers’ perceptions on the extent to which principals enlist their input on decision making matters is a reliable estimator of principals level of inclusiveness. Based on this cognition, the study premised that teachers’ perceptions on principals’ level of inclusiveness (dependent variable) is contingent upon principals’ leadership styles, teachers’ level of professional training, and teaching experience. The study further hypothesized that teachers’ chronological ages and gender (extraneous variables) may moderate either positively or negatively the relationship between the independent and dependent variables focused by the study.

Marczyk, Dematteo, & Festinger (2005) have averred that extraneous variables have the potential of generating rival/competing hypotheses that might explain the results of a study thereby confounding its internal validity. In this regard, the study controlled the two extraneous variables through randomization (Christensen, 2004). This entailed selection of teachers in the sampled schools through simple random sampling. This sampling procedure ensured that all teachers (irrespective of gender or age) had an equal chance of being included in the sample. The conceptualized relationship between the independent, dependent, and extraneous variables is schematically depicted in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. Hypothesized interaction between variables subsumed in the study.](image)

3. Methodology

The study utilized descriptive research design of the ex-post facto type. Ex-post facto research design is applied in a situation whereby the independent and dependent variable(s) have already interacted. Therefore, the investigator cannot manipulate the independent variable(s) with a view to determining its/their effect on the dependent variable(s). In this regard, the effect of the interaction between the independent and dependent variables is determined retrospectively (Kerlinger, 1986). The design was deemed ideal in the sense that the study sought to determine retrospectively the influence of principals’ leadership styles, teachers’ professional experience, and teaching experience (independent variables) on principals willingness to involve teachers in decision making (dependent variable).

4. Instrumentation

Data were collected through a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire was personally delivered to a sample of 191 teachers. The sample was drawn through simple random sampling technique from a targeted population of 380 teachers based on Krejcie and Morgan’s (1970) table for determining sample sizes from given populations.

The option to self-deliver the questionnaire was preferred because the researchers presumed that they would get an opportunity to, establish rapport with the respondents, explain the purpose of the study and clarify issues that may be unclear in the instrument (Best & Kahn, 1993). This approach to data collection had a positive impact on response rate (93% male respondents, and 97% female respondents). This represented an aggregate response rate of 95%.

The questionnaire had three sections labeled A, B, and C. Section A gathered data on teachers’ characteristics, specifically gender, age, professional qualification, and teaching experience. Section B had 20 five-point Likert scale items which measured principals’ leadership styles. The items generated respondents (teachers) mean perception scores on principals’ leadership styles which were obtained by dividing an individuals total score in the 20 items by 20.

Based on respondents’ mean perception scores, principals’ leadership style (PLS) index was generated whose value ranged from a possible minimum mean score of 1 to a possible maximum mean score of 5. The mean scores were grouped into three-thirds which were categorized into three dimensions of PLS, namely autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire as shown in Table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Perception Score</th>
<th>PLS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-1.6</td>
<td>Autocratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7-3.3</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4-5.0</td>
<td>Laissez-faire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section C had 25 five-point Likert scale items in which respondents were requested to indicate the extent to which they were involved by principals in decision making. Using the procedure which was applied in regard to mean scores elicited from items in section B, respondents’ mean scores in section C generated principals level of inclusiveness (PLI) index whose value ranged from a possible minimum mean score of 1 to a possible maximum mean score of 5.
The mean scores were aggregated into four quarters which were categorized as “low”, “moderate”, “high”, and “very high” level of inclusiveness as shown in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mean Perception Score</th>
<th>PLI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.0 - 1.2</td>
<td>very low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 – 2.5</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 – 3.8</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9 - 5.0</td>
<td>very high</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Reliability and Validity of the Research Instrument

When a concept has been operationally defined, it implies that a measure of it has been prepared (Bryan & Cramer, 1997). Consequently, the instrument designed to measure the concept should be both reliable and valid. Although estimation of the two measures have inherent challenges in social science research, effort must be expended by a researcher with a view to ensuring that the instrument he/she intends to use is both reliable and valid.

Reliability has two aspects-external and internal reliability. The former denotes the degree of consistency over a measure over time. In other words, it is a measure of the extent to which an instrument is capable of generating similar results when used more than once to gather data from a given sample under consistent conditions (Wiersman, 1995; Brown, 1996). This aspect of reliability was estimated through test-retest techniques whereby the instrument was first administered to 38 teachers (10% of the targeted population) and subsequently administered to the same subjects after three weeks.

Scores from the two instrument administration conditions generated a correlation coefficient of $R = .82$ (or 82%). This implies that the instrument’s external reliability was high since the items were “hanging together”. The 38 teachers were excluded during the sampling exercise owing to their prior knowledge of information that was targeted by the instrument. This guarded against data dilution and by implication external invalidation of the findings.

Internal reliability is particularly critical when using multiple-item scale. It addresses the question of the extent to which the scale is measuring a single idea (or construct for that matter) and hence whether the items in the instrument are internally consistent. The instrument’s internal reliability was determined using Cronbach’s alpha. The objective was to assess whether items in the instrument were really measuring level of principals inclusiveness in decision making as perceived by teachers. The alpha obtained was .831 (or 83.1%). This has the implication that the items internal reliability level was high (Marczyk, et al. 2005).

Validity is a measure of the degree to which an instrument measures what it claims or purports to measure (Brown, 1996). In other words, it is an estimation of the extent to which items in an instrument represent the universe or domain being investigated (Key, 2002). Validity estimation is, therefore crucial for it determines whether or not the targeted human behavior can be explained with accuracy. In this regard, the instrument’s content validity was of much interest to the researchers. To validate the instrument, five lecturers in the Department of Curriculum and Educational Management, Laikipia University and five practitioners (specifically five secondary school principals) were requested to identify content areas to be captured in the instrument. Based on this expert opinion, extensive literature search was carried out on the suggested content areas. Furthermore, utmost care was taken to ensure that the items were prepared in line with the objectives of the study.

6. Data Analysis

Nominal scale data (i.e., data pertaining to teachers’ gender, age professional qualification, and teaching experience) were analyzed through frequency counts and percentages. Teachers’ rating of principals’ leadership style was analyzed by use of arithmetic mean ($\bar{x}$).

Interval data, specifically data from the multiple–item scale on PLI were examined using ANOVA test with a view to determining the truth or falsity of the three null hypotheses which were germane to the study.

7. Results and Discussion

The results herein are discussed in relation to respondents’ characteristics, principals’ leadership styles, and hypothesis testing.

8. Respondents’ Characteristics

This section highlights respondents’ characteristics. These are summarized in Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6 with respect to gender, age, professional qualification, and teaching experience respectively.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data in Table 3 shows that over two-thirds (69%) of teachers in the study sample were males while a third were females. This indicates that distribution of teaching posts in the study area was skewed in favor of males.

The noted staffing disparity is consistent with an earlier finding by Kiumi (2012) which showed that the ratio of male to female teachers in his study sample was 7:3. Similarly, Kiumi, Wanyoike & Kibe’s (2013) study indicated that an overwhelming majority of teachers (78%) in their study sample were males while 22% were females.
An examination of the data in Table 4 reveals that majority of teachers (48%) were in the 30-39 years age bracket. They were followed by teachers (32%) who were in the 40-49 years age range. Very few teachers were in the 20-29 (11%) and 50-60 (9%) years age brackets.

The general picture that emerges from the table is that nearly a third (39%) of teachers were below 40 years of age implying that they were relatively young. This has implications on school management in light of the fact that younger teachers are more likely to participate in school-based decision making than order teachers. For example, a study by Chapman (2003) revealed that majority of teachers in school decision making committees in Australia were in the 30-40 years age group. This is attributed to the fact that younger teachers have high need deficiency, specifically the need to achieve in order to make an impact in the school (Okumbe, 1998).

Based on the foregoing observations, it can be reasoned that majority of teachers in the study area have a high potential that can be harnessed by principals through consultation and consensus building. Bypassing such youthful teachers when making decisions may lower their job satisfaction. This may not augur well for learners’ progression through the curriculum and by implication learning achievement.

Table 4. Age-wise Distribution of Respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (in years)</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An inspection of the data captured in Table 6 shows that almost two-thirds of teachers (62%) had more than ten years of teaching experience. It is also learnt that proportion of teachers who had been in the teaching career for less than eleven years (38%) was relatively small.

On the whole, it can be inferred from the table that majority of teachers had reached career maintenance stage since it was endorsed by only 15% of the teachers. This has the implication that a significant proportion of teachers in the study sample have the potential to assist their schools as long as principals create inclusive managerial environments in which teachers’ views on how to improve school outcomes are valued.

Table 5. Respondents’ Distribution by Level of Professional Qualification.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of professional Qualification</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diploma in Education</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors Degree in Education</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters Degree in Education</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the data presented in Table 7, it is notable that 55% of teachers perceived their principals to be autocratic. This may suggest that slightly over half of teachers were making limited contribution in regard to decision making process in their school (Hoy & Miskel, 2008).

Another sizeable proportion (30%) of teachers rated their principals favorably on the democratic dimension of leadership. However, it appears that laissez-faire leadership behavior was not prevalent among principals in the study area since it was endorsed by only 15% of the teachers. This implies that there were principals (albeit few) who were inclined towards free rein leadership approach. This approach offers workers (in these context teachers) complete freedom to make decisions. This is the most passive and indeed least effective style of leadership (Bush, 2003; Hoy & Miskel, 2008).

9. Results of Hypotheses Testing

The study tested three hypotheses using ANOVA statistic. The results of testing the three hypotheses are presented below:

H01: Principals level of inclusiveness in decision making is not influenced by his/her preferred leadership style.

Table 8 summarizes the results of ANOVA test with respect to H01.
It is also noteworthy that the difference in significant (p<.05). Consequently, Ho was accepted and conclusion made that PLI and teacher’s level of professional training were statistically independent.

Ho: principal’s level of inclusiveness in decision making is not influenced by teachers’ level of teaching experience. Table 10 presents results of ANOVA test with respect to Ho

Table 9. ANOVA Summary on Teachers’ Rating of PLI by Teachers Level of Professional Training.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of professional Training</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>$\bar{x}$</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diploma in Education</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.707</td>
<td>.393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors Degree in Education</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>2.655</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters Degree in Education</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2.502</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>2.621</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A closer examination of the data in Table 9 indicates that the highest rating of PLI was by diploma trained teachers ($\bar{x}=2.707$) followed by holders of Bachelors ($\bar{x}=2.655$), and Masters ($\bar{x}=2.502$) degree. The pattern of teachers mean score rating on PLI seems to suggest that the probability of a teacher being involved by a principal in decision making decreases with increase in teacher’s level of professional training. Nonetheless, although level of teachers’ professional training had an influence on PLI, the difference in the mean scores by teachers with different levels of professional training was not statistically significant (p>.05). Consequently, Ho was accepted and conclusion made that PLI and teacher’s level of professional training were statistically independent.

The third hypothesis held the assumption that there was no link between PLI in decision making and teachers’ level of teaching experience. It is clear from Table 9 that global rating ($\bar{x}=2.650$) of PLI by teachers with different years of teaching experience was somewhat high.

The data further reveals that the highest rating of PLI was by teachers who had less than 11 years of teaching experience followed by teachers who had more than 20 years of teaching experience. The lowest rating was by teachers who were in the 11-20 years range of teaching experience. This appears to suggest that teachers in 1-10, and 21-30 years of teaching experience brackets are more likely to be involved by principals in decision making compared with their counterparts in 11-20 years experience bracket. However, the mean score rating of PLI by teachers with different years of teaching experience were not significantly different (p>.05). In this regard, Ho was confirmed and conclusion made that PLI and teachers’ level of teaching experience were statistically independent.

10. Summary of Findings and Conclusions

i. Majority of teachers (69%) were males implying that there was no gender parity in distribution of teaching positions in the study area.

ii. Nearly two thirds (59%) of teachers were below 40 years of age. This indicates that schools in study area were staffed with relatively young teachers.

iii. An overwhelming majority of teachers (74%) had a Bachelor’s degree in education. This implies that schools in the study area were staffed with teachers who had requisite competencies to make a positive impact in their schools.

iv. Two-thirds of teachers (62%) had more than ten years of teaching experience. This indicates that a significant proportion of teachers had the capacity to offer productive ideas in regard to the day-to-day
running of their schools.

More than half (55%) of teachers perceived their principals to be autocratic. This appears to suggest that principals in the study area have not fully embraced consensus building approach in decision making process.

Principals’ leadership styles had a statistically significant influence (p<.05) on PLI. Specifically, inclusiveness was higher in schools led by laissez-faire principals followed by democratically led schools. The lowest level of inclusiveness was in schools under autocratic principals. This seems to suggest that principals who have a positive orientation towards teachers are more likely to bring teachers on board when making decisions on school matters and vice versa.

Although the influence of teachers level of professional training on PLI was statistically insignificant (p>.05), diploma in education trained teachers rated principals more favourably compared with bachelors and masters degree holders. The latter had the lowest rating of principals’ willingness to engage teachers in decision making. This finding appears to imply that the likelihood of teachers being involved by principals in decision making decreases with increase in teachers’ level of professional training.

Teachers level of teaching experience had no statistically significant influence (p>.05) on PLI. However, teachers with less than 11 years of teaching experience and those with more than 20 years of experience had a favorable rating of PLI compared with teachers who were in 11-20 years range of experience. This may imply that principals are more likely to consult the relatively less experienced and more experienced teachers when making decisions compared with teachers whose experience may be described as moderate.

**Recommendations**

Findings generated by the study have important implications and lessons in regard to staff-based decision making process in secondary schools. Three major observations can be inferred from the findings. First, autocratic principals are less likely to involve teachers in decision making compared to laissez-faire and democratic principals. Secondly, highly trained teachers, specifically teachers with masters degree in education are more likely to be kept in the periphery when decisions pertaining to school affairs are being formulated. Thirdly, moderately experienced teachers (11-20 years of experience) are less likely to be incorporated by principals during decision making compared with lowly (less than 11 years) and highly (more than 20 years) experienced teachers.

Drawing from the foregoing observations, this paper makes the following recommendations with a view to promoting participatory decision making in secondary schools in the study area and by implication other parts of the country.

First, principals need to realize that autocratic leadership behaviors’ may nature an exclusive decision making pattern in which the principal takes the center stage at the expense of the much needed teacher input. This may trigger demotivation and consequently social loafing by teachers to the detriment of desired learning gains. In this regard, principals should embrace a teacher-oriented leadership approach in which teachers are given an opportunity to take an active role in the school.

Secondly, there is no denying that highly trained teachers are more productive in a school as long as their knowledge and skills are tapped by the leader. In this regard, principals need to upgrade their level of engagement with graduate and post graduate trained teachers. This will go a long way in enhancing quality of school outcomes.

Thirdly, principals need to note that each teacher brings to school unique competencies that may have a positive additive impact in a school if properly harnessed. Consequently, all teachers (irrespective of their teaching experience) should be brought on board particularly when critical decisions touching on students learning are being deliberated. This will help to achieve the desired synergy in the school.

Fourthly, institutions tasked with the role of teacher management, specifically Ministry of Education, and Teachers Service Commission should enhance principals’ leadership skills through workshops and seminars. Some of the areas that could be captured during such training forums include, human relations skills, consensus building in a school, and the place of teachers in the decision making facet of school management.

**References**


[34] University of Zimbabwe. (1995). *Curriculum Implementation Change and Innovation.* Harare: Centre for Distance Education.