

PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING AMONG TEACHERS IN THE KINTA DISTRICT OF PERAK

TAI MEI KIN

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the level of teachers' actual and desired involvement in decision making. It also sought to find out if there was a discrepancy between teachers' actual and desired involvement in decision making. This research was conducted using a survey method. The sample composed of 192 teachers who were selected randomly from 12 secondary schools in the Kinta district of Perak using a simple random sampling method. All subjects completed the Decision Involvement Analysis Questionnaire with 20 decision issues related to both the instructional and the managerial domains. All the 192 questionnaires distributed were returned, representing a return rate of 100%. The results of the study revealed that the teachers did not report a high level of actual involvement in decision making. The teachers' level of desired involvement was found to be higher than their level of actual involvement both in the instructional as well as in the managerial domain. However, most of the teachers experienced a moderately high level of actual PDM in the instructional domain compared with the managerial domain. Similarly, teachers experienced decision deprivation in the managerial domain as well as the instructional domain. Compared with the instructional domain, teachers experienced a higher level of decision deprivation in the managerial domain.

INTRODUCTION

According to Griffith (1959), decision-making is the heart of management. Indeed, decision-making process is a sine qua non for all schools as schools are basically decision-making structure (Hoy & Miskel,

1987). However, school decision making has been the province of administrators and teachers are often placed at the end of the education assembly line. Thus, educational reform movements have strongly advocated increased teacher involvement in school decision making in maximizing school effectiveness and educational outcomes.

Participation in decision-making (PDM) is not to replace the principals as school leaders, nor to resist administrators' opinion. Rather, it emerges for work with teachers, who are also deciding, acting and making a difference that is required for improving teaching and learning. Advocates of teacher participation in decision making believe that teachers should be active decision-makers, not simply technicians who only implement only decisions made by others. As teachers are closest to the work setting, they should be able to identify and solve structural and instructional problems effectively. Further, as work demands in education are rapidly increasing in complexity, teachers are now expected to go beyond the basics – to teach higher order thinking, problem solving, and the like. If teachers are to meet these demands, they must be given greater decision-making power in schools in order to exercise more judgement and choice (Prawat, 1991).

Advocates of PDM also viewed teacher participation in decision making as a right. According to Keith (1996), PDM is “an ethical imperative, rooted in the fundamental human right of agency — the power to work collectively and interdependently with others to co-construct our world” (p. 50). Likewise, Bottery (1992) affirmed that teachers should participate in decision making, not so much because of their expert knowledge or autonomy and involvement in a caring profession, but rather, education itself is an interactive process and teachers as human beings are deserved to be treated as such.

The purpose of this study was to examine the level of teachers' actual and desired involvement in decision making. It also sought to find out if there was a discrepancy between teachers' actual and desired involvement in decision making. The study addressed the following research questions:

- What was the level of the teachers' actual and desired involvement in decision making?

- Was there any discrepancy between teachers' actual and desired involvement in decision making? Specifically, to which one of the following decision condition did the teachers belong: decision deprivation, decision equilibrium, or decision saturation?

PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING

The decision-making process is a complex phenomenon. Lipham (1974) defined decision making as a process in which "awareness of a problematic state of a system, influenced by information and values, is reduced to competing alternatives among which a choice is made, based on perceived outcome states of the system" (p. 84). Lowin (1968), as cited in Conway (1984), defined PDM as "a mode of organizational operations wherein decisions, as to activities is to be implemented, were arrived at by those who were to execute the decisions" (p. 12).

In a logical sense, Conway (1984) claimed that PDM represents the intersection of two major conceptual sets, (a) the set of concepts associated with decision making wherein one or more actors determine a particular choice, and (b) the set of concepts associated with participation. According to Conway, decision making is any process wherein one or more individuals determine a particular choice, whereas participation refers to the sharing by two or more individuals in some action or matter. In educational settings, the concept involves two major clusters of personnel, the administrators with teachers and / or students, and the administrators with the citizenry of the community.

Research on PDM in education has focused primarily on two areas, PDM and satisfaction, and PDM and its impacts. Empirical research found that teachers have at times perceived PDM as leading to greater job satisfaction (Duke, Showers, & Imber, 1981; Emrick & Petterson, 1978; Lipham, Duristan, Rankin, 1981; Mackenzie, 1983; Pratzner, 1984). For instance, a study conducted by Mackenzie (1983) and Pratzner (1984) addressed participatory school management by teachers and principals, based on collaborative planning, collegial problem solving, while constant intellectual sharing also supported the conclusion that a positive relationship exists between teacher participation and job satisfaction. In local, Ho (1997) had examined the relationship between PDM and job satisfaction in ten schools in Melaka State. The study found significant positive linear relationship between PDM and job satisfaction.

Besides, studies conducted by Conway (1976) and Driscoll (1980) found that teachers neither expect nor want to be involved in every decision; in fact, too much participation can be as dissatisfactory or detrimental as too little. Further, the study conducted by Mohrman et al. (1978) in Midwest concluded that teacher satisfaction is not simply related to the degree to which they participate but also the types of decisions in which they participate. A practical implication is that efforts to increase teacher influence should focus on particular kinds of decisions.

The second major focus of research on PDM is to examine the impacts and benefits from involvement. According to Wood and Caldwell (1991), PDM fosters new relationships between teachers and administrators. Through PDM, leadership no longer resides exclusively in administrative positions. The breakdown of traditional hierarchical models of organization enables barriers between administrators and teachers to be replaced by communication with openness, honesty and trust. Consequently, teachers are provided with chances to meet and make them heard. Thus, PDM stimulates closer relations among faculty members and is critical to organizational effectiveness which can lead to a more coherent school culture (White, 1989).

According to Bredeson (1989) and Thierbach (1980), increased teacher involvement in the decision-making process support a sense of professionalism. As teachers become more involved in the decision process, their attitudes towards their workplaces and toward themselves as professionals would improve. Duke, Showers, and Imber (1980) suggested that teachers could gain a greater sense of shared ownership if teachers are empowered and see their suggestions and expertise being recognized and rewarded through PDM, a feeling of being part of a collective enterprise would be achieved. Consequently, teachers will become committed and duty conscious as they are responsible for the outcome of their decisions.

Research also found that PDM would create workplace democracy. According to Imber (1983), PDM might improve schools by making them democratic places in which to work. Teachers may derive satisfaction from exercising their right to decide how they will spend work life and more so, if they feel their involvement in decision making actually make a difference.

Further, it has been found that changes in the decision-making structure will foster changes in teaching practice, and consequently lead to higher levels of students' achievement (Miller, 1995). Teachers who are closest to student learning are more familiar with students' needs and are best equipped to make educational decisions (Taylor & Levine, 1991). Besides, since teachers are the closest to the implementation of such decisions, participation would enable teachers to solve curriculum problems promptly and to apply corrective measures at appropriate times and immediately provide feedback on or about to decisional effectiveness (Dandero, 1997). Thus, if teachers participate in school decision making, better decisions will be made and as a result, student achievement will improve.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants in this study were secondary school teachers. The participants nested in 12 schools randomly chosen from 49 schools in the Kinta district of Perak. 16 teachers were selected at random by using simple sampling method from each of the 12 schools or a total of 192 teachers were identified.

All the respondents or 192 teachers were completed the questionnaires. The response rate was 100%. The respondents included 49% (n=94) of Malays, 37% (n=71) of Chinese and 14% (n=27) of Indians. 60.9% (n=117) of the sample were female and 39.1% (n=75) were male. The respondents constituted 69.8% (n=134) of graduate teachers and 30.2 % (n=58) of non-graduate teachers. 45.3% (n=87) of the respondents were less experienced teachers (10 years and below of teaching experience) whereas 54.7% (n=105) were experienced teachers (more than 10 years of teaching experience). The age of the respondents ranged between 26 to 54 years old with a mean of 37.02 (SD=6.20).

Instrumentation

For the purpose of this study, the Decision Involvement Analysis Questionnaire (DIAQ), which was developed by Thierbach (1980) was used in data collection. The DIAQ is concerned with measures of the independent variables of decision condition, interest, and expertise assessing respondents' perceptions of their actual and desired involvement and interest and expertise in 20 decision issues. Factor analysis indicated that 8 of the 20 decision issues pertained to the instructional domain (technical) while 12 were pertained to the managerial (school wide) domain. A four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = low to 4 = high was used for each question in both instructional and managerial domain. The possible range for each measurement of participation of decision making, or the actual and desired extent of participation in 20 decision issues is between 20 and 80. The reliability of the original instrument had a Cronbach Alpha of 0.79 to 0.92.

The DIAQ was bilingual (English and Malay languages). As an additional step toward establishing the validity of the instrument, a panel of two experts, one who was a specialist in the Malay language and the other a specialist in the English language reviewed all the instructions and questionnaire items. Some of it was revised based on the comments made by the panel.

Prior to the investigation, a pilot test was conducted. A total of 20 secondary school teachers who were not part of the sample were requested to give comments and suggestions. The Cronbach Alpha reliability technique was used by the researcher to obtain the reliability of the DIAQ. In the pilot test, the reliability of the DIAQ was .94 whereas the Cronbach's Alpha, which found in the actual survey for DIAQ was .95.

Procedure

Prior to the visit, fresh notification of the researcher's intended visit was sent out to the schools concerned. Then, the researcher personally approached the principals of the 12 schools, and provided sufficient information regarding the purpose of the survey and the importance of the teachers' participation and feedback. The questionnaires were collected from the principal five days after they were administered. A total of 192 questionnaires were returned which represented a return rate of 100%.

All data received from the survey were coded and entered into SPSS for analysis. Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis was adopted in this study. Data were computed to obtain scores, means and standard deviation for each measurement of decision participation. To answer research question number 2, a discrepancy scale of participation was computed to explain the discrepancy between actual extent and desired extent of teachers' PDM. The score of discrepancy was calculated by finding the difference between actual extent and desired extent of PDM. The score of discrepancy was calculated for 20 decision issues, instructional and managerial issues. The possible range was -60 to +60. A positive value indicates decision saturation; a negative value represents decision deprivation whereas zero means decision equilibrium in the decision issues.

RESULTS

Teachers' Actual and Desired Involvement in Decision Making

Generally the teachers did not report a high level of actual PDM although they demonstrated a higher level of desire to be involved in decision making. In fact, the teachers reported a higher level of desired involvement than actual involvement in PDM in the instructional as well as the managerial domain. Besides, most of the teachers reported a moderately high level of actual PDM in instructional domain than in managerial domain.

Discrepancy between Teachers' Actual and Desired Extent of Participation and General Decision Condition of PDM

Most teachers experienced decision deprivation in their daily teaching life. Teachers are deprived from PDM in the instructional as well as managerial domain. However, teachers experienced a higher level of decision deprivation in the managerial domain compared to the instructional domain. The frequency distribution of scores for the general decision condition of teachers is shown in Table 1.

Table 1
Frequency Distribution of General Decision Condition

Decision Condition	n	%
Saturation	13	6.8
Equilibrium	5	2.6
Deprivation	174	90.6

DISCUSSION

The results of this study have made several noteworthy findings about PDM. First, the teachers' level of desired involvement was found to be higher than their level of actual involvement both in the instructional as well as the managerial domain. The crux of the problem seems to lie in the fact that the ideas of PDM were not disseminated thoroughly and effectively in schools. In fact, teacher empowerment was highlighted since 1993 in our agenda on "Vision of Education", and constitutes a paradigm shift from the bureaucratic approach, aiming at reforming the existing educational administration. However, in view of the prevalence of the top-down approach and the bureaucratic organizational structure in our school settings, the extent of decision-making responsibility devolved to school was often severely limited. As a result, most of the teachers experienced decision deprivation.

This finding is in line with the results of the studies conducted by Thierbach (1980) and Rice and Schneider (1994) that teachers continued to desire more participation in decision making than they are currently afforded. In fact, similar findings were found in the research conducted by local researchers such as Francis (1997), Ho (1997), Jaid (1998), Lau (1999), and Tor (1998). Be that as it may, this showed that decision deprivation appear to be a common feature in our secondary school management.

Second, most of the teachers experienced a moderately high level of actual PDM in the instructional domain but did not report a high level of actual PDM in the managerial domain. This showed that teachers were interested to get involved in making decision for which they have expertise. In fact, teachers were more knowledgeable and skillful in instructional decisions. As they have the expertise and skill to improve the deci-

sion, they were more likely to be involved and consequently their involvement was moderately high in the instructional decisions. This was affirmed by the study conducted by Robertson (1993) which revealed that teachers have little desire to be involved in decision making unless it relates to classroom practice.

In relation to the theoretical concept about area of decision — “zone of indifference” introduced by Barnard (1938) and Bridges (1967)— an area of decision content in which an administrator’s decision will be accepted unquestionably by an individual although he or she has little or no interest in the outcome, the above result strongly indicated that managerial issues were located inside teachers’ zone of indifference. This was an area of decision in which teachers had little interest and if a principal involves teachers in such area, teachers’ participation would be less effective. In contrast, instructional issues were outside teachers’ zone of indifference in which teachers had more interest and if they are involved in such decision making, their participation would be more effective. Based on these propositions, Barnard (1938) and Bridges (1967) suggested that a principal should take account of matters falling within individuals’ zone of indifference. Similarly, Rice and Schneider (1994) also affirmed that effective participation of teachers in decision making required principals to determine which issues were located in teachers’ zone of indifference and which issues were not, in order to maximize organizational benefits.

Third, this study also found that teachers experienced decision deprivation in both instructional and managerial domain. However, compared to the instructional domain, teachers experienced a higher level of decision deprivation in the managerial domain. This result is generally consistent with the observation of previous researchers (Bacharach et al., 1990; Francis, 1997; Ho, 1997; Jaid, 1998; Lau, 1999; Mohrman et al., 1978; Rice & Schneider, 1994; Tor, 1998).

According to Mohrman et al. (1978), teachers reporting greater deprivation regarding managerial decisions might be because “they perceived inadequate control over instructional activities and were generalizing these feelings of deprivation to all other types of organizational decisions” (p. 26). This type of feelings of deprivation in managerial decisions may decrease if teachers perceive greater control over those decisions that are more directly related to their work. Thus, teachers may see participation in managerial decisions as a “buffer” against attempts made by adminis-

trators to reduce any influence gained by the teachers in the instructional decision making. Teachers may see this as a need to safeguard their influence over classroom practice.

In sum, the major finding of the study clearly showed that teachers desired more autonomy to participate in decision making in their teaching profession. This strongly implied that after years of attention and advocacy for teacher empowerment, situation where teachers' desire for greater participation in decision has not improved over time. As mentioned, the legacies of bureaucratic, hierarchical regulations in schools combined with a looseness of common parlance of PDM have remained the main barriers to the successful implementation of PDM. No doubt, at present, professional teaching through greater participation in decision making cannot be accomplished without restructuring efforts or reforms toward the system itself. Therefore, it is imperative that concerted effort must be given by the Ministry of Education to establish plans that allow guiding the concerned implementation, or it would fail to effectively contribute to the process of the development of PDM.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bacharach, S.B., Bamberger, P., Conley, S.C., & Bauer, S. 1990.

The dimensionality of decision participation in educational organizations: the value of multi-domain evaluative approach. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 26(2): 126-67.

Barnard, C. 1938. *The functions of the executive*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bredeson, P.V. 1989. Redefining leadership and the roles of school principals: responses in the professional work life of teachers. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA, 27-31, ED: 304 782.

Bottery, M. 1992. *The ethics of educational management*. London: Cassel.

Bridges, E.M. (1967). A model for shared decision making in the school principal-ship. *Educational Administration Quartely*, 3(1): 49-60.

- Conway, J.A. 1976. Test of linearity between teachers' participation in decision making and their perception of their schools as organizations. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 21: 130-39.
- Conway, J.A. 1984. The myth, mystery and mastery of participative decision making in education. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 20: 11-40.
- Dondero, G. 1997. Organizational climate and teacher autonomy: implication for educational reform. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 11(5): 218-221.
- Driscoll, J.W. 1980. Trust and participation. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 16(1): 93-106.
- Duke, D.L., Showers, B.K., & Imber, M. 1980. Teachers and shared decision making: The costs and benefits of involvement. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 16(1): 91-106.
- Duke, D.L., Showers, B.K., & Imber, M. 1981. Studying shared decision making in school. In S.B. Bacharsch (Ed.), *Organizational behavior in schools and school districts*: 313-315.
- Emrick, J.A., & Petterson, S.M. 1978. Follow-up evaluation of the San Jose teacher involvement project. Los Altos, CA: John A. Emrick.
- Francis, V.R. 1997. A survey of male and female teachers' involvement in decision making in four secondary schools in the Klang Valley in Selangor. Unpublished master thesis, University of Bristol, Bristol.
- Griffiths, E.D. 1959. *Human relations in school administration*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crafts, Inc.
- Ho, B.T. 1997. Teacher empowerment: an empirical analysis of the relationship between participation in decision making and job satisfaction. Unpublished master thesis, International Islamic University Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia.

Hoy, W.K., & Miskel, G.C. 1987. Educational Administration. New York: Random House.

Imber, M. 1983. Increase decision-making involvement for teachers: ethical and practical considerations. *The Journal of Educational Thought*, 17: 36-42.

Jaid, S. 1998. A survey on reported actual participation and expressed desire for participation in decision making amongst teachers in government and aided secondary schools in Malaysia. Unpublished master thesis, University of Bristol, Bristol.

Keith, N.Z. 1996. A critical perspective on teacher participation in urban schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 32(1): 45-79.

Lau, S.T. 1999. Teachers' participation in decision-making process in secondary school. Unpublished master thesis, University of Malaya, Selangor, Malaysia.

Lipham, J.M. 1974. Making effective decisions In J.A Culbertson, C. Hensen, & R. Morrison (Eds.), *Performance objective for school principals*. McCutchan, CA: 83-111.

Lipham, J.M., Duristan, J.F., & Rankin, R.E. 1981. The relationship of decision involvement and principals' leadership to teacher job satisfaction in selected secondary schools. Technical Report No. 571. Madison: Wisconsin Research and Development Center for Individualized Schooling.

Lowin, A. 1968. Participative decision making: a model, literature critique, and prescriptions for research. *Organizational Behaviour and Human Performance*, 3: 68-106.

Mackenzie, D.E. 1983. Research for school improvement: an appraisal of some recent trends. *Educational Research*, 12: 5-17.

Miller, E. 1995. Shared decision making by itself doesn't make for better decisions. *The Harvard Education Letter*, 11(6): 1-4.

- Mohrman, A.M., Cooke, R.A., & Moharman, S.A. 1978.
- Participation in decision making: a multidimensional perspective. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 14: 13-29.
- Pratzner, F.C. 1984. Quality of school life: foundations for improvement. *Educational Researcher*, 13(3): 20-25.
- Prawat, R.S. 1991. Conversations with self and settings: a framework for thinking about teacher empowerment. *American Educational Research Journal*, 28(4): 737-57.
- Rice, E.M., & Schneider, G.T. 1994. A decade of teacher empowerment: an empirical analysis of teacher involvement in decision making, 1980-1991. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 32: 43-58.
- Robertson, S. 1993. The politics of devolution, self-management and post-Fordism in schools. In J. Smyth (Ed.), *A socially critical view of the self-managing school*. London: The Falmer Press.
- Taylor, B.O., & Levine, D.U. 1991. Effective schools' project and school bass management. *Phi Delta Kappan*: 72, 394-97.
- Thierbach, G.L. 1980. Decision involvement and job satisfaction in middle and junior high schools. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin – Madison.
- Tor, S.H. 1998. Teachers' involvement in decision making: a study of secondary schools teachers in Temerloh, Pahang. Unpublished master thesis, International Islamic University Malaysia, Selangor, Malaysia.
- White, P.A. 1989. An overview of school-based management: what does the research say? *NASSP Bulletin*, 73: 1-8.
- Wood, P., & Caldwell, M. 1991. Teacher empowerment policy: the view from the ground [On-line]. Available: pitt.edu/~mmccclure/NEA/siteview

