

Students' and Teachers' Participation in Decision-Making and Impact on School Work and School Internal Discipline in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated students' and teachers' participation in decision-making in secondary schools and the consequent impact on their attitude to school work and school internal discipline in Nigeria. This was necessitated by the observed frequent breakdown of law and order in secondary schools alleged to be related to certain decisions taken without their inputs, usually forcing schools to be closed down for long periods thereby introducing serious wastages in the educational system. The responses of the randomly sampled 3,318 students and 612 teachers to the questionnaire used for data collection were analyzed to answer one research question and test six null hypotheses using frequency, simple percentage, mean, t-test, Chi-square and Pearson's r. Results showed that students and teachers, irrespective of sex, indicated alike a low level of participation in administrative creative decisions which influenced their attitude to school work and school internal discipline. Furthermore, low level of participation was found to have significant unwholesome impact on their attitude to school work and the school internal discipline thus undermining accomplishment of set instructional objectives/educational goals. It was therefore recommended that all school administrators in Nigeria should wisely adopt participatory decision-making for optimal goal attainment.

Keywords: Participatory Decision-Making, optimal goal attainment, school work, school internal discipline

Introduction

In the school system, like any other organization, decisions are made towards solving immediate and remote problems all aimed at achieving set goals and objectives effectively and efficiently. These decisions could bother on curricular/instructional programmes, transportation/communication systems, staffing, students/staff welfare, students/staff discipline, school plant maintenance, accommodation/health facilities, admission policy, budgeting, purchasing, gaming, extra-curricular activities, and e.t.c. The outcome of such decisions should be good quality teaching and good quality learning in a pleasant and conducive atmosphere. Decision-making can be defined as a choice made from among alternative courses of action that are available, either towards the solution of a problem or the achievement of an objective. All school administrators must engage in decision-making as it is a key responsibility of school leaders, and the way and manner in which they carry out this responsibility has a considerable influence on many facets of the school.

To effectively attain an enabling environment for teaching/learning in secondary schools, principals as the school administrators must possess a high level of imagination, vision, initiative, as well as be cautious to demonstrate a collective concern for fairness, boldness and love as they exercise their authority in making decisions. This would demand that subordinates are involved in decision-making as much as the situation allows. If the administrator understands the need dispositions of his subordinates as well as their values, aesthetics, and the general working environment, he will do well to determine the favourable limits of involvement. This is necessary because it has been observed that too much involvement of subordinates in decision making than they would have preferred is as detrimental as too little (Belasco and Alutto, 1972; Hoy and Miskel, 1987; Yukl, 1975; Nwogwugwu, 1986; Peretomode, 1992; Duze, 2007, 2005).

Ambrose and Heller (1972), Smith (1974), Ogundele (1995), Peretomode (1995), Duze (2005) noted that principals tend to be authoritative in making decisions, thus, denying the students and teachers the right to exercise meaningful control over the purposes and final social results of their studies. This denial, according to them, is the root cause of most students' and teachers' oppression, which in turn degenerates into breakdown of law and

order in schools. In the same vein, Coch and French (1973), Edem (1982), and Ukeje (1992), Duze (2007, 2005) stated that students' and teachers' adequate involvement in decision-making in schools is not only crucial to accepting, accommodating, and implementing change 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. Specifically, Ogundele (1995), Oluchukwu (1998), Duze, (2007), Ikediugwu (2007), Ofojebe (2007) observed that truancy, vandalism, violent protests, and incessant strike actions are some of the evils that have plagued most Nigerian secondary schools as a result of inadequate participation of students and teachers in decisions that directly or indirectly affect them.

According to them, Nigerian secondary schools have grown in numbers and population with corresponding increases in complexities and changes in human behaviours about many school concerns. For instance, the explosion in student population in recent years evolved a corresponding change in the social roles of both students and teachers, one of the most glaring being their militancy in issues that affect their work. Thus, students and teachers in Nigeria are no longer quiescent, passive, or conservative about school administration but rather vocal, active, and dynamic in matters that affect them and the entire educational system. This could probably be a reason why the incessant cases of unrest in our schools and institutions, with grave consequences on school work, are usually linked to administrative decisions made without their inputs. It is also commonly alleged that school administrators have continued to monopolize and "privatize" to themselves the decision-making process in Nigerian schools thereby making teachers unconcerned and uncommitted to effecting the decisions taken, and students angry and unhappy about the changes they do not buy. Thus, the problem of this study is to investigate students' and teachers' participation in decision-making and the impact on their attitude to school work and school internal discipline in Nigeria. The decision was based on the observation that most of the States in Nigeria so far studied separately (e.g. Anambra, Delta, Oyo, Oshun, Lagos) by various researchers belong to the top ten educationally-advanced States in Nigeria, but sadly notorious for their unsteady academic calendar due to incessant strike actions by teachers, students' unrest, high dropout rates, and not too impressive academic performance considering their vantage points in education (Duze, 2007; Ikediugwu, 2007; Ofojebe, 2007). These unwholesome developments could probably stem from the exclusion of students and teachers in making decisions that directly or

indirectly pertain to them in the immediate school environment and/or the outer educational system.

It was Medley (1981) who posited that a teacher's thinking and decision-making organize and direct a teacher's behaviour and form the context for both teaching and learning. It is also fearfully observable that what pertains to the teacher invariably pertains to the student, and of course, no teacher, no student, and vice versa. The two always almost consciously or unconsciously tie together even in emotions, needs and wants. It would therefore be too dangerous for the school administrator to have these two important categories of his cabinet on the other side of the wall. Anderson (1968) cautioned that a school principal is totally powerless against teachers (and students) when they act as a group. According to him, this powerlessness stems from the fact that it is difficult to dismiss tenured teachers. This invariably implies that a principal who fails to meet the expectations of the now militant duo may find his authority severely undermined if not openly flouted. This would be unhealthy for our schools and we do not want them manifested. Furthermore, Ogundele (1995) added that the idea that every individual must have some systematic means through which he can participate in decision having direct bearing to his being is fundamental to our democratic way of life and must be upheld. Also, the success of any organisation, he continued, is dependent upon satisfying the needs of the members of the organization as well as sustaining organizational goals. Therefore, participation in the decision-making process may be perceived as one method of satisfying individual work needs. Peretomode (1995) added that one major concern of educational administrators has been how to motivate, create and ensure a feeling of job satisfaction and high morale in their teachers and other subordinates since it is empirically known that motivated, satisfied teachers with high morale tend to be more committed to their duties and also more productive in their work. He therefore posited that since decision-making is a key responsibility of all school administrators, then, the decision-making style of the school principal can be used to bring about these much desired production-related factors. Different administrators employ different decision-making styles for reasons that may be best known to them. Some may take decisions all alone, others may consult with one or more confidants amongst the subordinates before taking decisions, while some others may adequately involve subordinates and they all make and take decisions collectively. It is this last case that is usually referred to as collective or participatory decision-making and usually accepted as a democratic arrangement.

The discourse so far made underpin the purpose of this study wishing to highlight the need for participatory decision-making in our schools for efficient and effective outcomes.

To guide the investigation five questions were posed as follows:

1. What is the most prevalent level of participation of students and teachers in decision-making in secondary schools in Nigeria?
2. Is the gender of students and teachers a discriminating factor in level of participation in decision-making and school internal discipline?
3. Does the level of participation in decision-making by students and teachers influence their attitude to school work?
4. Does the level of participation in decision-making by students and teachers influence school internal discipline?

From these questions, one research question was answered and six null hypotheses tested:

Research Question

What is the most prevalent level of participation of students and teachers in decision-making in secondary schools in Nigeria?

Hypotheses

H_01 : There is no significant difference between the responses of boys and girls to level of participation in decision-making and school internal discipline.

H_02 : There is no significant difference between the responses of male and female teachers to level of participation in decision-making and school internal discipline.

H_03 : There is no significant relationship between the students' level of participation in decision-making and their attitude to school work.

H_04 : There is no significant relationship between the students' level of participation in decision-making and the internal discipline of the school.

H_05 : There is no significant relationship between the teachers' level of participation in decision-making and their attitude to school work.

H_0_6 : There is no significant relationship between the teachers' level of participation in decision-making and the internal discipline of the school.

Methodology

The study design is the survey inferential type where there was no manipulation of variables but subjects selected through random sampling technique. The population of the study was all the students and teachers in all the public secondary schools in Nigeria at the time of the study. The schools were stratified along the six geo-political zones of Nigeria. The stratified random sampling was used to select a total of thirty-nine schools. All the students and teachers in the thirty-nine schools formed the study sample. Considering the large number of respondents involved, the sample size was further trimmed down through multi-stage random sampling to select equal numbers of boys and girls and male and female teachers. Thus the sample size used was 3,318 students (comprising 1,659 boys and 1,659 girls) and 612 teachers (comprising 306 males and 306 females).

A questionnaire, designated Decision-Making Involvement and Impact Questionnaire (DMMIQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was developed by the investigator and validated in face and content, by a jury of experts in the field of Educational Administration, and it has a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.86 computed after administration to 60 students and 20 teachers, involving equal numbers of males and females, who were not subjects of the study within an interval of two weeks.

The instrument has three sections – A, B, and C. Section A elicited demographic data, Section B measured attitude to school work, and Section C sought information on the internal discipline of the school. Sections B and C contain twenty items each matched with a Likert-scale 4-point response options of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). Maximum score for SA was four points for positively worded items and one point for negatively worded items. Similarly, Agree attracted three points, Disagree two points, and Strongly Disagree one point.

The instrument was administered and retrieved same day in each of the sampled schools visited with the help of well-briefed third parties in about three months. The students and teachers were monitored to ensure that they did not consult with anybody before completing their copies.

Frequency and simple percentage were used to answer the only research question raised while the t-test for independent means was used to test Hypotheses One and Two and the Chi-square and Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) were employed to test Hypotheses Three to Six using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) via the computer. Data were analyzed as they related to the research question and each of the null hypotheses and the results presented in Tables 1 to 6. Significance was established at the 0.05 level all through.

Results

Research Question: What is the most prevalent level of participation of students and teachers in decision-making in secondary schools in Nigeria?

The relevant data to answer this research question were analyzed and the result presented in Table 1. The three levels used in this study are similar to those of Duze (2005) referred to as decisional deprivation (Low) where subordinates participate in fewer decisions than they prefer to, decisional equilibrium (Medium) where subordinates participate in as many decisions as they desire, and decisional saturation (High) where subordinates participate in more decisions than they desire.

Results in Table 1 revealed that of the 3,318 student respondents, 2913 (87.79%) indicated low participation, 405 (12.21%) medium participation, and none indicated high participation. For teachers, 496 (81.05%) indicated low, 109 (17.81%) medium, 7 (1.14%) high participation in decision-making in the school. These implied that both students and teachers were grossly deprived from participation in decision-making in secondary schools in Nigeria.

Hypothesis One

To test null Hypothesis One, the respective means and standard deviations of scores for boys and girls were subjected to the t-test for independent means. The result of the data analysis was presented in Table 2.

The result in Table 2 showed that the calculated t-value of 1.046 was numerically smaller than the Z-critical value of 1.960. The null hypothesis was therefore retained. This meant that there was no significant difference between boys and girls in their responses to the impact that level of participation in decision-making had on their attitude to school work and the internal discipline of the school in Nigeria. Boys and girls agreed alike that

level of participation in decision-making impacted on their attitude to school work and the internal discipline of the school.

Hypothesis Two

In the same vein, the respective means and standard deviations of scores for male and female teachers were subjected to the t-test for independent means to test null Hypothesis Two. The result was presented in Table 3.

Null Hypothesis Two was retained since the result in Table 3 showed a lower calculated t-value of 1.006 than the Z-critical of 1.960. This implied that there was no significant difference between male and female teachers in their responses to the impact that level of participation in decision-making had on their attitude to school work and the school internal discipline. They indicated equally that level of participation in decision-making impacted on their attitude to school work and the internal discipline of the school.

Hypotheses Three and Four

Hypotheses Three and Four were tested by subjecting the respective scores from students' responses to Section B of the questionnaire on level of participation in decision-making and their attitude to school work (Hypothesis Three) and students' responses to Section C of the questionnaire on level of participation in decision-making and school internal discipline (Hypothesis Four) to the Chi-square Test of Independence statistic. The results of the data analysis via the computer utilising the SPSS was presented in Table 4.

From the data in Table 4, it would be seen that the computed Chi-square values for students were 34.13 for Hypothesis Three and 36.21 for Hypothesis Four. These computed values were numerically greater than the critical value of 7.82 at three degrees of freedom and alpha level of 0.05; hence null Hypotheses Three and Four were rejected. This implied that the level of participation in decision-making by students had a significant impact on their attitude to school work and the school internal discipline.

Hypotheses Five and Six

Also, to test Hypotheses Five and Six, the respective scores from the responses of teachers to Section B and Section C of the questionnaire on level of participation in decision-making on attitude to school work (Hypothesis Five) and school internal discipline (Hypothesis Six) were subjected to the Chi-square Test of Independence statistic. The result of the data analysis using the SPSS via the computer was presented in Table 5.

The result in Table 5 showed that the computed Chi-square values of 34.87 for Hypothesis Five and 35.05 for Hypothesis Six were greater than the critical value of 7.82 at three degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, null Hypotheses Five and Six were rejected. This meant that the level of participation in decision-making by teachers had a significant impact on their attitude to school work and the school internal discipline.

Based on these findings, further analysis was done using the correlation coefficients of the variables to determine the extent and direction of the relationship. The result of the computer analysis using the SPSS was presented in Table 6. This showed that the variables had strong, positive and direct relationships.

Discussion

This study was designed to find out the impact of students' and teachers' participation in decision-making in secondary schools on their attitude to school work and school internal discipline in Nigeria. The findings revealed some interesting and disturbing trends in the school system. Interesting in the sense that even little boys and girls, between the ages of nine and twelve, in the Junior secondary schools who also participated in this study knew what it entails to be involved in school decision-making, hence their corporate responses did not significantly differ from those of the adults who were indeed their teachers. This is against popular belief that JSS students are too young to want to be involved in decisions that are taken in the school. The study has also established that gender is not a discriminating factor when it comes to exercising one's right about decisions that would affect one's life in the present and the future. Boys and girls, male and female teachers all indicated low level of participation, meaning that they were indeed grossly deprived from participating in decisions that pertain to them directly or indirectly in the school system.

It is however, disturbing that school principals still monopolize decision-making in secondary schools in Nigeria despite literature that is replete with known and huge benefits to be derived from participatory decision-making. It is worrisome that Nigerian school administrators who ought to know better about the best leadership styles for achieving optimal followership and support from subordinates for optimal goal attainment are still more autocratic than democratic in decision-making. This finding tallied with those of Lawrence (1980) carried out in former Gongola State (now Adamawa and

Tarabe States), Nwogwugwu (1986) in Anambra State, Ogundele (1995) in Oyo and Oshun States, Peretomode (1995) in Delta State, Oluchukwu (1998) in Plateau State , Duze (2007, 2005) in Delta and Anambra States respectively. They concluded that most of the principals studied were not democratic in their administrative behaviour where decisions affecting almost all facets of the school administration were taken without involving the teachers.

Besides, the school is a social system in which various interactions take place. These interactions border on political, social, economic, and cultural inclinations as well as on traditional, religious and economic ones. All these, whether singularly or corporately bear on the type of decisions that take place. Students and teachers, apart from being important inputs in the school system, form the largest network of interactions in any given school. This is why Duze (2005) aptly noted that if school principals continue in their autocratic leadership style, there is the likelihood that the benefits of group or participatory decision-making will continue to elude our schools and keep us behind the doors of educational efficiency. She lamented that despite myriads of research findings advocating greater involvement of teachers and students in administrative decision-making, the story still remains the same in almost every secondary school in Nigeria. She therefore wondered whether research findings were unavailable to schools or that the Nigerian secondary school system is simply resistant to change. The answer to this calls for further research.

Furthermore, both students and teachers have today, become more awaken to one concept of the Need Hierarchy Theory (Wahba and Bridwell, 1976) that any needs assessment begins and ends with the user. Therefore, any decision taken, especially those that directly and immediately concern them, without their inputs, is bound to face indifference or nonchalance or outright disregard and non-compliance, thereby tending to blot out the much needed conducive and enabling environment for effective teaching and learning.

However, the third/fourth and the fifth/sixth hypotheses tested showed that when students and teachers are decisionally deprived, they tend to have negative attitude to school work which in turn leads to indiscipline in the school. This finding agrees with those of Ambrose and Heller (1972), Belasco and Alutto (1972), Lawrence (1980), Ogundele (1995), Peretomode (1995), Oluchukwu (1998), Duze (2007). They variously found that attitude to school work tends to be directly related to the level of involvement in

decision-making in the school while the school internal discipline is often the off-shoot of attitude to work. Ogundele (1995) for example, noted that the that the inability of school principals to carry along the teachers in their decision-making procedure and administrative behaviour might have been responsible for the attitude of detached resignation and aloofness generally observed among secondary school teachers as well as the resultant cases of indiscipline usually associated with secondary school students and teachers in Nigeria. From the findings and this discourse, it is obvious that most of the root causes of growing indiscipline and break down of law and order in Nigerian secondary schools can now be located in the administrative styles of secondary school principals who refuse to share decision-making adequately with students and teachers.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, we make the following conclusions:

1. That students and teachers were grossly deprived from participation in decision-making in secondary schools in Nigeria.
2. That gender was not a discriminating factor to the problem of this study. This implied that boys and girls as well as male and female teachers did not differ significantly in their opinions about the impact the level of participation in decision-making could have on their attitude to school work and the school internal discipline.
3. That when students' and teachers' are not allowed to participate adequately in decision-making in school matters it impacts considerably on their attitude to school work affecting effective teaching/learning in the school, and also influences the internal discipline of the school affecting obedience to school rules and regulations and adherence to law and order in the school.
4. That a higher level of participation in decision-making enhances positive productive work and high school internal discipline while a lower level creates discord in school work and chaos in the school environment since the latter case seriously undermines their interest, commitment, motivation, morale, satisfaction and acceptable behaviour in the school.

Implications and Recommendations

Decisions taken by anybody at all can have short- and long-term effects on the lives of those concerned. When all concerned are not sufficiently involved in making decisions that affect them directly or indirectly, the implications could be far-reaching for the educational system and the society. The resultant problem could go from mere truancy and delinquency to serious criminal activities or from simple peaceful protests and demonstrations to a total breakdown of law and order characterized by violence, arson, and murder, moving from the walls of the school to the walls of the society.

In the secondary school therefore, it is necessary that all concerned functionaries, especially the school principals, should avoid making sole, arbitrary, and emotional decisions that are detrimental to optimum goal attainment. To do this, they would need to gather all available data or information concerning a matter to be decided upon and put them into proper use by doing a thorough homework as to where they would be most effective in carrying subordinates along in making or taking decisions that pertain to the smooth running of the school. This becomes easier and possible when the principals tap from the ideas, knowledge, opinions, and suggestions of their staff and students, and make them understand that their inputs count in making administrative decisions. It therefore becomes imperative that school principals, more than ever now, involve students and teachers in decision-making to an appreciable level if set objectives must be effectively and efficiently attained especially with Nigeria's "Vision 20-20-20" staring at our schools and waiting to be accomplished largely through education. This way, the prevalent autocratic decision-making process in schools would be cast aside and our school system would begin to enjoy the huge benefits entrenched in participatory decision-making, which has long become the vogue in developed economies.

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Table 1: Level of Students' and Teachers' Participation in Decision-making in Secondary Schools in Nigeria

Level of Decisional Participation	Students (N = 3,318)		Teachers (N = 612)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
High	2,913	87.79	496	81.05
Medium	405	12.21	109	17.81
Low	-	-	7	1.14
Total	3,318	100	612	100

Table 2: Secondary School Boys and Girls and their Level of Participation in Decision-making (N = 3,318)

Variable	N	X (Mean)	SD	Df	t-cal.	Z-critical	Decision (p ≤ 0.05)
Boys	1,659	12.54	6.54	3316	1.046	1.960	Not significant
Girls	1,659	12.21	6.18				

Table 3: Male and Female Teachers and their Level of Participation in Decision-making (N = 612)

Variable	n	X	SD	df	t-cal	Z-critical	Decision (p < 0.05)
Male Teachers	306	15.58	5.94	610	1.006	1.960	Not significant
Female Teachers	306	15.34	5.28				

Table 4: Students' Level of Participation in Decision-making: Attitude to School Work and School Internal Discipline (N = 3,318)

Level of participation Variable	X ² _{Cal.}	X ² _{Table}	Decision (p ≤ 0.05)
Attitude to school work	34.13	7.82	Reject H ₀₃ (Significant)
School Internal Discipline	36.21	7.82	Reject H ₀₄ (Significant)

Table 5: Teachers' Level of Participation in Decision-making and their Attitude to School Work. (N = 612)

Level of participation Variable	X ² _{Cal.}	X ² _{Table}	Decision (p ≤ 0.05)
Attitude to school work	34.87	7.82	Reject H ₀₃ (Significant)
School Internal Discipline	35.05	7.82	Reject H ₀₄ (Significant)

Table 6: Correlation Coefficients of the Related Variables

	1	2	3	4
1	1.000	0.582*	0.530*	0.506*
2	0.582*	1.000	0.514*	0.557*
3	0.530*	0.514*	1.000	0.563*
4	0.506*	0.557*	0.563*	1.000

*Implies significant at 0.05 level.

- (1) Decision-making/Attitude/students (+ve) (2) Decision-making/Attitude/teachers (+ve)
 (3) Decision-making/Discipline/Students (+ve) (4) Decision-making/discipline/teachers (+ve)