

## Extent of Teacher Participation in School Based Fund Raising Activities

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**ABSTRACT** The study sought to investigate the participation of teachers in school based-fundraising activities in their respective schools. A qualitative interpretive research methodology was adopted. The sample of the study comprised of 5 school principals and 25 school teachers from 5 different schools in Gweru District. Data was collected through interviews, documentary analysis and observation of staff meetings. The study established that teachers participated in fund raising activities through various committees which they choose to represent them. However, some of the participating teachers have indicated that some of these committees were not effective at all. Teachers asserted that in most cases committee decisions were overruled by the school management in some of the schools. The study therefore concludes that some of the committee members do not approach other staff members before coming up with a decision.

### INTRODUCTION

Teacher participation in decision making is a trend that is set to transform top-down approaches which reduced teachers to tools of implementing policies and decisions without making any meaningful contribution (Bezzina 1997; Sabar 1985; Wadesango 2011). The idea of participation is applied in various parts of the world and Zimbabwe is no exception. Teachers work closely with students and have firsthand knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses, they are therefore the most valuable people to develop and implement policies (Kumar and Scuderi 2000). Teacher participation refers to the extent to which subordinates or groups who are affected by decisions are consulted and involved in making of decisions (Khoza 2003; Wadesango 2009). In other words, teacher participation in decision making refers to the decentralization of authority to the lowest appropriate level in the school where teachers participate in making decisions that affect them (Pearce et al. 2012; Beckmann and Visser 1999). Participation is not only about taking part in decision making process but it is also about being valued (Lilyquist 1998). Teachers feel rewarded when they are part of the decision making process.

Teachers can participate in decision making in different forms. Below are some of the types of teacher participation that can be employed in the implementation of school based decision making (Bailey 1991): (A) Quality Circles: Quality is a

small group concept that originated in industrial settings where the quality of the goods produced had to be controlled by special supervisors. The concept was modified to suit educational institutions where it refers to groups of staff members that have been divided into small groups which discuss problems pass along possible solutions and recommendations to the management of the school (Bailey 1991). According to Van Rensburg (2001), quality concepts operate from the principle that groups are more efficient in problem identification and problem solving than individuals.

(B) Site-based management committees: Supporters of school restructuring believe that if schools are to remain in harmony with the communities that they serve, they must allow for the participation of all stakeholders in question (Morse et al. 1997; Poster 1982; Rees et al. 2011). One forum for achieving this is to establish site-based decision management committees. These committees may be directly involved in decision making or serve in an advisory role to the principal (Morse et al. 1997). The rationale behind the involvement of these committees is to solve problems and make decisions that were previously the sole domain of management (Wall and Rinehart 1999; Wade et al. 2011). These committees must, however, be cautious about their decisions as the participants may not have the collective judgment, expertise or training necessary to understand the impact of their decisions on marginalized teachers (Morse et al. 1997).

The committees must therefore focus on mission-driven objectives rather than territorial imperatives (Banister and Bacon 1999). It is the researcher's opinion that schools with the majority of members without grounding in participation skills should create opportunities for the teachers (even the principal) to receive relevant training. The next section deals with decision making models.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### ***The Classical Model***

Classical decision theory assumes that decisions should be completely rational; it employs an optimizing strategy by seeking the best possible alternative to maximize the achievement of goals and objectives (Hoy and Miskel 2005). According to this model, the decision making process is a series of sequential steps: a problem is identified; goals and objectives are established; all the possible alternatives are generated; the consequences of each alternative are considered; all the alternatives are evaluated in terms of goals and objectives; the best alternative is selected—that is, the one that maximizes the goals and objectives and the decision is then implemented.

This model is an ideal, rather than a description of how most decision makers function. Most schools, in fact, consider the classical model an unrealistic ideal, if not naïve. Decision makers virtually never have access to all the relevant information (Hoy and Miskel 2005; Bush 2003). Moreover, generating all the possible alternatives and their consequences is impossible. This model is not ideal for a school situation because certain decisions should be made without delay hence not possible to obtain all information.

The weakness with this model is that it cannot be adopted when there is an immediate problem to be solved because the school has got to go through all the stages until the best alternative is identified. At times what may be identified as the best alternative may turn to be unsuitable to solve the problem at hand. It is a time consuming model meant for decisions which may not require immediate solutions. Imagine if there is a student boycott at the school, then the principal delays to make a decision, this may turn to be catastrophic as students may destroy school property whilst the school principal is busy

consulting. Its applicability has also been criticized by many scholars.

#### ***The Administrative Model (A Satisfying Model)***

The classical models have severe limitations in a school situation and therefore it should not be surprising that more realistic conceptual approaches to decision-making in schools have evolved. The complexity of most organizational problems and the limited capacity of the human mind make it virtually impossible to use an optimizing strategy on all but the simplest problems (Hoy and Miskel 2005). Herbert (1988) was the first to introduce the administrative model of decision making to provide a more accurate description of the way administrators both do and should make organizational decisions. The basic approach is satisficing—that is, finding a satisfactory solution rather than the best one (Hoy and Miskel 2005). The weakness with this model is that the decision that may be taken may not produce the best desired results because decision makers are not worried by coming up with the best solution to a problem. But that as long as they are satisfied that the decision may solve the problem at hand, then they go for it.

Given limited resources in schools, it may be difficult to eradicate certain obstacles completely but it will be possible to minimize their impact. If for example, students strike over poor diet, it may not be possible to provide them with a top of the range diet but one can actually improve it in such a way that they may recognize and appreciate one's efforts.

#### ***The Incremental Model (A Strategy of Successive Limited Comparisons)***

This method of deciding can be referred to as the science of muddling through. This may be the only feasible approach to systematic decision making when the issues are complex, uncertain and riddled with conflict (Hoy and Miskel 2005). The process is best described as a method of alternatives and consequences, or a priori determination of either optimum or satisfactory outcomes. Instead, only a small and limited set of alternatives, similar to the existing situation, is considered. This is done by successively comparing their consequences until decision makers come to some agreement on a course of action (Hoy and Tarter 2003).

This model can be employed in schools. Instead of a clearly formulated set of goals and a comprehensive programme for their achievement; heads of schools make small, incremental changes in response to immediate pressures. In most cases, most attempted changes fail and the older is maintained. This model suggests that only small changes to the established tradition of a school are made in dealing with a problem (Hoy and Miskel 2005). One builds on an established tradition. Heads of schools must not always assume that whatever innovation they want to implement in their schools will be successful. They should not make drastic changes at once. However, it should be noted that schools are not independent and they also have to look at decisions made at the higher levels. With such decisions which will be policy related and should be implemented without delay, this model becomes null and void.

#### *A Contingency Model (The Right Strategy for the Situation)*

Four decision-making models have been discussed so far. Which is the best way to decide? There is no best way to decide just as there is no best way to organize, to teach, to do research or to do a myriad of other jobs (Hoy and Miskel 2005). As in most complex tasks, the correct approach is the one that best matches the circumstances, a contingency approach (Starkie 1989). The appropriate decision strategy depends on the information, complexity of the situation, time and importance of the decision (Starkie 1989). A simplified approach for selecting the appropriate decision model is proposed basing on three questions: (a) is there sufficient information to define a satisfactory outcome? (b) is there time to engage in a comprehensive search? (c) how important is the decision?

If there is sufficient information to define a satisfactory outcome, then satisficing is the model of choice. But depending on time and importance of the decision, the satisfying strategy can be truncated and adapted. If however, there is insufficient information, then adaptive satisfying is the preferred strategy. But again depending on time and importance of the decision, adaptive satisfying may be truncated or moderated by muddling through (Hoy and Miskel 2005).

This is a more ideal model to be adopted by school heads if they want to make meaningful

innovations in their schools although it cannot stand on its own. Heads of schools should know that there is no single best way to decide but the best approach is the one that best suits the circumstances. The way the school head responds to a demonstration by the whole school over a particular grievance is different from the way he/she responds to a demonstration by one class over the inefficiency of one of its teachers.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a qualitative interpretive methodology because it allowed the researchers to get the data directly from the subjects themselves by sitting with the respondents and hearing their views, voices, perceptions and expectations in detail. This strategy contends that knowledge is subjective and ideographic, and truth is context-dependent and can only be obtained after entry into participants' reality. The researcher recognised several nuances of attitude and behaviour that could not have been noticed if other methods had been used. A case-study research design was adopted. A case study is described as a form of descriptor research that gathers a large amount of information about one or a few participants and thus investigates a few cases in considerable depth (Thomas and Nelson 2001). Data were collected from 5 secondary schools in Gweru Education District in Zimbabwe. The population sample comprised of 5 secondary school heads and 25 secondary school teachers. In order to get an in depth of the analysis of the shared decision-making concept, a series of interviews were conducted over a 2 months period of time. To get further insights in the teacher participation in the decision-making processes in schools, the author observed two staff meetings at each school under study. The author was interested in observing the interaction of the participants as they took part in the shared decision-making process. Finally, various shared decision-making documents that were related to the shared decision-making process were examined.

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Fund raising is the process of soliciting and gathering money or other gifts in-kind by requesting donations from individuals, business or charitable organizations. Government grants and

school fees paid by pupils are not enough to sustain schools in today's harsh economic conditions in Zimbabwe. Often, fund raising projects can help schools to accomplish their goals more quickly and easily. Responding teachers from all schools agreed to the notion that teachers are involved in decision making in the area of fundraising through the various committees that they choose. All the participating teachers conceded that they get involved in the selection of a committee that runs fundraising events. This is shown in the following responses.

*R7, There is a committee that is selected to the fundraising with the guidance of the school head. The chairperson is elected during the same meeting. In this school the term of office of this committee is twelve months. However, the same committee can be dissolved in cases of maladministration or embezzlement of funds. These members are empowered to decide what fund raising strategies to adopt; however, they are not allowed to commit the funds to any use before it is receipted. When they need any funds they request for it through the office of the deputy head. It is necessary that I indicate to you that this committee can approach any staff member for assistance during their functions.*

*R10 Fundraising activities are done by all members of staff but the school head and the fundraising committee will be in the forefront but all the members of staff are also involved in fundraising activities.*

It emerged that the responding teachers from all schools are involved in fundraising activities through their representatives who will constitute the fund raising committees. Most of the responding teachers are quite comfortable with that arrangement since they are the ones who choose a committee to help with the fund raising activities. In a research conducted by Hewiston (1998), it was discovered that respondents desired to be involved in shared or joint decision-making process. At each organizational level, teachers have expressed a desire, not to make decisions, but rather to influence or make recommendations. Hewiston (1998) also asserts that, the administrator could identify other areas of active participation, such as building level curriculum committees, timetabling committees, streaming of students, the establishment of discipline policies, equipment and textbook selection. According to Pearce et al. (2011), such committees need not necessarily be permanent or

extensive in powers, but rather be identified as offering additional avenues for teachers to be actively involved in the running of their schools.

The responses from the participating teachers agreed with the views of their school heads in terms of teachers' involvement in the selection of the fund raising committee. Two of the school heads made the following comments:

*H1 As I pointed out earlier on, school heads are democratic. They involve teachers in setting up a fundraising committee and it is this committee that works closely with the head in all matters of finances. For accountability of funds, the school secretary as well as the school bursar fully take participation because as you know public funds should always be accounted for till the last cent*

*H2 We have a fundraising committee that is mainly comprised of teachers. All teachers are involved in the selection of the fundraising committee and usually we don't have a permanent committee, like this time when we are intending to have a speech and prize giving day, there is a committee selected. But funds are administered by the school management team assisted by the school bursar for accountability.*

It emerged from the findings that fundraising activities were organized by the fundraising committee while the management of the funds in all participating schools is the responsibility of the school heads. However, in all the participating schools, the fund raising activities are engineered in consultation with the school heads which implies that these committees are not autonomous to make their own decisions. The fund raising committee's term of reference is confined to one calendar year. Teachers are required at the beginning of each year to choose a fundraising committee. The committee then chooses its chairperson and secretary. The committee will then look at the fund raising modalities. Hapse et al. (1992) as cited by Savery et al. (1992), after carrying out a pilot study of steel workers in the United Kingdom, concluded that workers feel reluctant or less concerned to participate in decision making where they lack expertise or where they do not have a personal stake in the outcome. The cited studies show that it is not wise to exclude subordinates in making decisions outside their zone of acceptance (Wadesango 2011; Wade et al. 2011). For instance, Williams contends that: "the urgent cry for black power that emerged during the 1950's and 1960's was rooted in a sound



principle; people must have a voice in the conditions affecting them" (Williams 1998: 47).

The process of fund raising entails how funds will be raised. Fund raising activities can be in the form of among other things; a sponsored walk, raffle draws, beauty contests, soliciting for funds from the business community which is regarded as professional begging and hand selling whereby one buys a product and inflates the price when reselling it. However, although the committee initiates the fund raising activities, they are required to get back to the rest of the members with their proposals for ratification as echoed by R7- "*there is a committee which is selected which runs that of cause with the approval of the rest of the staff members and the school head.*"

Also in SDA committees, teachers are represented by one of their members who remains a member of that committee for a certain period of time which is normally two years. SDA committees always organize fund raising activities in their schools in order to boost up their coffers. SDAs are in charge of the schools' infrastructures therefore in order to be able to maintain these physical infrastructures, they need huge amounts of money. The money that they realize from levies paid by students is not adequate enough to sustain their activities and therefore there is need to engage themselves in fund raising activities so as to boost up their coffers. This implies that whenever there is an SDA fundraising activity, teachers will be participating through their member who will be attested to the SDA committee.

However, it has been discovered that most of the SDA/SDC committees are not autonomous to make their own decisions as their decisions are always overruled by the school management. The rest of the staff members will be required to attend such SDA organized functions so as to maintain law and order. SDAs deal with issues of governance which are very crucial for schools to function as self managing organizations. Schools have been mandated to establish these associations so as to assist school heads in running the institutions. It is believed that some of the school associations have developed their schools to levels that central Government alone would not have managed. One of the key factors for successful decision making is consultation with those who will be affected by the decision (Chung 1988; Pearce et al. 2011; Wadesango

2009). That being the case, teachers should also be consulted and their contribution taken seriously in decision making in schools. In a study conducted by Chivore in Zimbabwe (1995), on teacher participation in decision making, it was found that teachers wanted to be involved in planning their activities and felt that they had ideas to contribute and those ideas should be considered by their heads in coming up with a final decision. Chivore's (1995) findings concur with Pejza's view as quoted by Savery et al. who contend that: "people who participate in and help formulate decisions will support them...; they will work hard to make them go because they are their ideas" (Savery et al. 1992: 19).

In one of the meetings which was attended by the researcher, the issue of fundraising was on the agenda. Teachers were asked to select the fund raising committee in that meeting. Staff minutes revealed that whenever there was a school function such as speech and price giving, a committee was selected to spear head fund raising activities. Minutes obtained from all participating schools indicated that such committees were selected by the whole staff board. In one of the schools, the minutes demonstrated that teachers were greatly involved in the fund raising decision making area. Take for example, the minutes read, '*the staff agreed to have a road show in order to raise funds for the children who were in difficult circumstance*'. In the same meeting, the minutes read that the staff had set their fund raising calendar of events for that term. The impression one gets from such minutes is that teachers are involved in decision making in the area of fund raising although everything has to be approved by the school administrators first. In some minute books, minutes showed that teachers were even forced to attend SDA fundraising activities. It was also established that in some schools, committees were not effective in certain areas as school management teams retained all power. Some of these committees were not autonomous to make final decisions.

It was also established that all participating teachers were involved in governance and management issues such as fund raising activities, formulation of school budget and the determination of levies to be charged. There are committees established in each school which comprise of teachers and SDA members and such committees are responsible for the above operations. Teachers are therefore represented by their fel-

low members in each of the operational committees and their participation is through their colleagues.

The partnership between the community and schools has led to the establishment of various SDA sub-committees such as the fund raising committees and school finance committees. This partnership has also contributed positively to the concept of self-reliance in schools. Most of the participating schools are now self-reliant since they are able to organise their activities and raise cash to boost their school coffers. Schools, through their SDAs have developed their schools very well. The concept of devolution of power to school level was a noble idea since schools are also organisations which should be autonomous in many respects.

### CONCLUSION

Participating school teachers are meaningfully involved in the decision making process in critical issues areas such as the planning of fund raising activities as individuals or committees or as a group. Teachers also participate in school governance issues through their members who will be representing them in those committees. Teachers' suggestions were either considered or not depending on the nature of the issue at hand and its sensitivity. Some of the teachers are however not happy because they are not consulted by committees before a decision is made. They indicated that some of the committees were not effective at all as most of their decisions were dominated by the school management's ideologies. Teachers pointed out that they would be happy if committees consulted them all the time before arriving at a decision. They also indicated that committees should be granted the autonomy to make unilateral decisions in certain issues.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The major recommendation of the study is that in most cases all school based fundraising committees should be granted the autonomy to make unilateral decisions in critical issues.

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