



Teachers' Participation in the Decision-Making Process at the Higher Education Level

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the practices of teachers' participation in the decision-making process and also to find out the factors that influence department members' participation in decision-making. To conduct this study, a qualitative research design and the descriptive method were employed. A total of 7 participants (4 teachers, 1 Head of Department, and 2 subjects' heads of department) were included in the study. The teacher and subjects' head respondents were selected by a purposive sampling method. The data were gathered through in-depth interviews with my research participants. The study found that teachers' involvement in all areas of the department decisions, in general, was unsatisfactory, and they participated most in issues related to departmental appointment problems and least in academic collaborations. The practice of encouraging teachers' participation in decision-making was found to be ineffective. Absence of effective leadership practices, lack of trust between teachers and the Head, lack of confidence of the Head, and most of the decisions were made without application of management decision-making techniques in this study.

Introduction

Internally, administrators, faculty, and students comprise the three pillars of a higher education institution, each with its own respective roles in the decision-making process. According

to Simon (1976), "decision-making is the process of selecting the best/most preferred and workable action among other options or alternative courses of action available, either

towards solving problems or the achievement of an objective. Decision-making is a sequential process ending in a single decision or a series of decisions (choices) that stimulate or cause some actions. Decisions arise out of many different conditions; some decisions are prompted by the performance of daily routine work, some come from the need to change or make more effective the objectives or strategies, and other decisions may be generated by unexpected occurrences (McGrath, 1986). Administrative sciences group three basic roles performed by leadership in any organization: interpersonal, informational, and decisional. Griffin (2000) includes leadership roles as technical, interpersonal, conceptual, diagnostic, communication, decision-making, and time-management. All these roles are closely interrelated; however, the important one is the decisional role.

Applying this line of thinking to this study suggests that multiple levels and factors of influence structure decision-making practice and participation in decision-making within organizations. According to Kanter (1977), organizational structures and an individual's role within the organization influence perceived participation in decision-making. Research supports the idea that larger departments are more likely to require decision makers to hold fast to formal decision policies than smaller departments (Scott, 1992). Sometimes they decide in their own interest by consulting stakeholders. Thus, institutions vary by the extent to which the decision-making is participatory or autocratic (Kukalis, 1991). If faculty members' participation is so central to the managerial and leadership process in academic departments, what constrains the more active involvement of faculty members? Scholars have identified a host of factors ranging from, for instance, department size, chairpersons' authority, gender (Denton

& Zeytinoglu, 1993), or faculty emotions such as confidence or fear (Collins, 1984). These constraints on participation might be more generally understood in terms of the formal and informal academic department structures within which they are embedded.

Decision-making is not simple; it encompasses technical aspects in the concerned administrative, organizational development, and the behavioral science have provided qualitative patterns and knowledge, including creative problem-solving, team building, force-field analysis, nominal group technique, brainstorming, goal-setting, management by objectives, theory 'X' and 'Y', checklists, analysis of participatory management, job evaluation, empowerment, management information system (MIS) and total quality management (TQM). Moreover, decision support systems and computers based on these programmed techniques are increasingly being used for making better decisions (Simon, 1947). Educational administrators may enhance decision-making capabilities by learning more about both qualitative and quantitative techniques and understanding their contributions to the decision-making process. Behavioral methods and quantitative techniques in organizations are closely related, and when applied to problems, they are essentially productivity tools (Foxley, 1980). It is the underlying premise of this study that the use of managerial techniques is of vital importance for a sound and effective decision-making process.

The ultimate goal of the application of management decision-making techniques is to enable administrators to make more rational decisions in the face of conflict, uncertainty, and unfavorable circumstances. Observably, the quality of teachers' instructional task performance is enhanced by their level of

awareness and involvement in the decision-making process. The rationale for teachers' participation in department decision-making is to facilitate better decisions, because teachers are the closest to the students and they know best how to improve their performance (Cheng, 2008). Thus, the study focuses on practices of teachers' participation in the decision-making process in the central department of education in Kirtipur.

In the available literature, there is a conflict of evidence on teachers' collaboration on the participation level of faculty members' decision activities, and in addition, there have been few empirical studies on the department's role in recent years to provide confidence to the debate. There is a perceptual difference in what faculties think their role is and the actuality of their role (Sheridan, 1995). In this context, there are few studies of teachers' participation in decision-making processes in relation to the department activities in particular. Therefore, an updated study of the department's role in shared decision-making and involvement in teachers' decision-making is timely.

The department chairperson's role begins with the challenging statement that up to 80 percent of all administrative decisions made in colleges and universities are made by department chairpersons (Carroll & Wolverton, 2004). The Chairperson plays a central role in the decisions and productivity of institutions (Wolverton, 1999). Bowman (2002) suggests that the real work of academic chairpersons demands a diverse set of leadership capabilities. Therefore, the results of this study have important implications for department chairs and faculty members. The significance of this study lies essentially in reaching the following intended outcomes: To understand the department's decision-making

processes, to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that influence faculty members' participation in decision-making, and to help administrators consider the importance of faculty members' attributes when discussing and making decisions in departments. The result of this study will also help fill the gap in the literature related to academic department organization and teachers' participation in decision-making at the central department of education, T. U., Kirtipur.

The main purpose of this study is to explore the practices of teachers' participation in the decision-making process and to find out the factors that influence faculty members' participation in decision-making. It would be useful for enhancing commitment, individual and collective decision-making, improving communications, and enhancing the participation of teachers in innovative processes and change. The present investigation attempts to understand and integrate the research on department members' participation in decision-making within a broader framework that views the academic department as a social organization with its own structure. Teachers' perceptions and experiences within the social organization of the academic department play a crucial role in shaping their participation in decision-making in their departments. The following research questions were raised to guide the study and were used to fulfill the objectives:

How do teachers make decisions in the decision-making process? What strategies are adopted by teachers in the decision-making process? What are the ways of teachers' involvement in decision-making, and how to enhance female participation and provide equal opportunities in decision-making among males?

This study is delimited to full-time faculty only and does not involve part-time and personnel. This study is based on the HoD and teachers. This study focused on the department's decision-making practices, the participation of teachers in decision-making, and influencing factors of the decision-making process. To determine the population for the study, a list was generated of the central department of education, Kirtipur, HoD, subject heads, and teachers. A total of 7 respondents (1HoD, 2 subject heads, and 4 teachers) were included from the population in this study.

Review of Related Literature

This section provides a comprehensive review of the related literature on different aspects of teachers' participation in the decision-making process. The task of 'deciding' pervades the entire administrative organization. A general theory of administration must include principles of organization that will ensure correct decision-making, just as it must include principles that will ensure effective action (Simon, 1976).

Various authors define decision-making differently. While some authors (e.g. Newstrom & Pierce, 1990) focus on the process involved in decision-making, others (e.g., Hoy & Miskel, 1991) emphasize the problem solved during decision-making. On the other hand, some other writers (e.g., Irwin, 1996) focused on the actors involved in decision-making. Okumbe (1998) defines decision-making as the process of specifying the nature of a particular problem and selecting among available alternatives in order to solve the problem. Knezevich (1969) also defines it as a conscious choice action from among a well-defined set of often competing alternatives.

Decision-making is an important aspect of educational management. Some authors in the field of management suggest that management is decision-making. Decision-making is considered to be the 'heart of management'. In the process of planning, organizing, staffing, directing, reporting, controlling, and budgeting, a manager makes a decision (Newcombe & McCormick, 2001). Decision-making is applied in any of the organization's activities. Griffith (cited in Owens, 1987) has highlighted three important concepts concerning the nature of decision making. These are the structure of an organization is determined by the nature of its decision-making process, an individual's rank in an organization is directly related to the control exerted over the decision process, and the effectiveness of an administration is inversely proportional to the number of decisions that he/she must personally make.

Researchers and experts concerning decision-making have developed a way of classifying the different types of decisions based on the nature and purpose they serve. In this regard, Chiffith (as cited in Assefa, 1995) classified decisions into 'individual and group decisions, personal and organizational decisions, programmed and non-programmed decision intermediary, appellate and creative decisions, rational and non-rational decisions'. However, for the most part, these different classification systems are similar, differing mainly in terminology (Ivancevich et al., 2005).

As pointed out by Newsrom & Pierce (1990) "the question of decision-making by individuals or involving others should not be determined by leaders' personal preference but by the nature of the problem and the situation". Group decision-making is sometimes referred to by other terminologies:

participative decision-making, collective judgment management, or plural management. According to Agrawal (1993), in a large and complex organization, most of the basic and strategic decisions are made by a group of managers rather than by individuals. This is because there is a great deal of information available in a participative decision-making process. This implies that groups can make a higher quality decision than individuals because different ideas come together from different groups and select the best from the given alternatives. Even if Simon (as cited in Vecchio, 1991) distinguishes decisions in terms of whether they are "fairly routine and well-structured or novel and poorly structured". For Okumbe (1998) "program decisions are made on routine problems, whereas non-programmed decisions are in response to problems which are either novel or poorly defined". Supporting this idea, Tripathi & Reddy (2002) have concluded that programmed decisions are the easiest for educational managers to make. Instead of thinking to bring some solution for a problem, HoD are required to make a programmed decision to implement a policy. It can thus be said that programmed decision has a limited opportunity when it comes to exercising creativity and independent judgment.

Teacher involvement in decision-making has been advanced for a variety of reasons. Most often, participation is thought to enhance communication among teachers and administrators and improve the quality of educational decision-making; it is also thought that participation may contribute to the quality of teachers' work life (Algoush, 2010). Furthermore, because teachers have an opportunity to be involved in and to exert influence on decision-making processes, their participation is believed to increase willingness to implement them in class, hence to promote educational productivity (Griffin,

as cited in Somech, 2010). Moreover, such participation builds trust, helps teachers acquire new skills, increases department effectiveness, and strengthens staff morale, commitment, and teamwork (Gardian & Rathore, 2010).

Mangunda (2003) also states that "participative management ensures that members in an organization take ownership of the decision, and are willing to defend decisions taken through collaborative means". White (as cited in Algoush, 2010) found five major benefits of the impact of increased decision-making authority on teacher work-life: (i) improved teacher morale, (ii) better-informed teachers, (iii) improved teacher communication, (iv) improved student motivation, and (v) increased incentives that serve to attract and retain quality teachers.

The quality of a decision is influenced by many situational factors. According to a research by Gorton (1987), factors which affect the decision-making process are: (i) amount of time available to make decision; (ii) availability of resources necessary to implement any particular alternatives; (iii) amount of information available to make a decision; (iv) ambiguity of the situation, including the alternative and potential consequences; (v) degree of organizational autonomy given for decision-making process; and (vi) amount of tension in the situation. Johnson & Scollay (2000) identify various factors other than the above-stated factors that influence the decision-making process as other factors. These are: a) time pressure, how much time the decision-maker has to make the decision; b) higher management attitudes; c) budget, the amount of money needed to implement the decision; d) personnel required people in number or skills, to effectively

implement the decision; and e) the reaction of subordinates.

The administrator plays a critical role in establishing and maintaining the institution's participative decision-making. Leithewood & Steinbach (1993) stated that Leaders who develop a positive climate ensure opportunity for teachers' collaboration and joint planning through greater involvement in decision-making. In developing a high involvement organization, managers must deliver information, knowledge, power, and rewards to employees (Lawler, 1992). Increased access to and use of this information are thought to improve the quality of curricular and instructional decisions (Smylie et al., 1996).

According to the human capital theory (Becker, 1975), employers make rational decisions in choosing their employees, and only those candidates with the best education and experience for the job are considered. Thus, according to the human capital model, faculty members' perceived participation in decision-making should be influenced by their level of education and their work experience. Organization structure can influence the choice and direction of faculty members' participation in decision-making (Scott, 1992). This suggests that the department organization plays a key role in participation in decision-making.

There are two main decision models: one is 'the classical decision model,' and the other is 'the administrative 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 (Simon, 1947). According to the classical model, the decision-making process

is a series of sequential steps: (i) A problem is identified, (ii) Goals and objectives are established. (iii) All the possible alternatives are generated. (iv) The consequences of each alternative are considered. (v) All the alternatives are evaluated in terms of the goals and objectives. (vi) The *best* alternative is selected—that is, the one that maximizes the goals and objectives. (vii) Finally, the decision is implemented and evaluated. The classical model is an ideal (a normative model), rather than a description of how most decision makers function (a descriptive model). Most scholars consider the classical model an unrealistic ideal. Moreover, generating all the possible alternatives and their consequences is impossible (Simon, 1947). Given the rigorous limitations of the classical model, it should not be surprising that more realistic conceptual approaches to decision-making in organizations 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. Simon (1976) 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 satisfying—that is, finding a satisfactory solution rather than the best one. According to Simon (1976) administrative decision-making is a dynamic process that solves some organizational problems and creates others. Complete rationality in decision making is impossible; therefore, administrators seek to satisfy because they have neither the ability nor the cognitive capacity to maximize the decision-making process.

Effective administration requires rational decision-making. Decisions are rational when they are appropriate for accomplishing specific goals, and people typically try to

make rational decisions. Finally, rationality is limited not only by the administrators' information-processing capacities, but also by their unconscious skills, habits, and reflexes, as well as their values and conception of purpose that may deviate from the organization's values (Simon, 1976).

This study focused on the university-level decision-making process. What strategies can be adopted for teachers' participation, and which way the HoD could follow for equal involvement in decision-making? Which factors that influences among teachers and department head relationship in the decision-making process? The purpose of this study was to explore the practices of teachers' participation in the decision-making process and also to find out the factors that influence department members' participation in decision-making. Much more research has been done about school-level decision-making, but there is not much work done in the university-level decision-making process. In this context, this research explores the decision-making process at the higher education level and provides some suggestions for policymakers, planners, and stakeholders.

Methodology of the Study

This study was conducted using a qualitative phenomenological research design. This method was selected because it is appropriate when the study aims to get an exact description of the current status (Seyoum & Ayalew, 1989). The qualitative data collected were used to capture insights. The main benefit of the concurrent triangulation strategy is to provide the data collected during the study (Creswell, 2003). The Central Department of Education, TU, Kirtipur, was the study area of this study. In the 2019/20 academic year, there are 14 subject departments (heads) and

122 full-time faculty members (teachers). The total sample size of this study was 7 teachers. The responders of this study, 1 HoD, were selected from purposive sampling, 4 teachers, and 2 subject heads, respectively, were selected from the systematic random sampling techniques, and they were interviewed based on guideline questions and recorded on a voice recorder.

The researcher used data from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected from the HoD, teachers, and the subjects' teachers under study. In addition, journals and research articles were used as secondary data sources. The study employed two data gathering tools: individual discussion and semi-structured interviews. Then the second phase interview should be necessary correction was made to avoid ambiguity and confusion before conducting the final data collection. Then, the administered with the help of university teachers and the subject head of the department, following the provision of the necessary orientation by the researcher. Interview guidelines were checked first by the professionals in the area for completeness, clarity, and, consequently, necessary corrections were made based on their comments before the actual data collection. The discussion was constructed in the Nepali language. It is also more appropriate to draw out sensitive information (Somech & Lewin, 2005). In addition to the discussion, the study employed a semi-structured interview. A semi-structured interview is conducted with teachers. Thus, an interview guide (a written list of questions) will be prepared by the researcher and conducted in a face-to-face interaction. The Nepali language was used during the interview and later translated into English by the researcher. This is done to avoid misunderstanding between the informants and the researcher. A notebook was used to take down the

information provided by the informants. After the classification of issues, each of the issues was analyzed and interpreted. Besides this, the data were analyzed and interpreted qualitatively by describing or narrating the ideas provided by the respondents based on their themes. Researchers collected the data from the respondents personally and through personal contacts. Coding was done after the collection of data.

Result and Discussion

This study was designed to find out the teachers' participation in the decision-making process at the higher education level on HoD work and leadership. The findings exposed some disunity in the sense that factors influence teachers' participation in the decision-making process, and also in this study knew how to enhance female teacher involvement in departmental leadership. The study has also established that gender is not a discriminating factor when it comes to exercising one's right to make decisions that would affect one's life in the present and the future. Male and female teachers all indicated a low level of participation in the departmental decision-making process.

This section deals with the data transcription, coding, drawing the themes, and interpretation of each theme. The theme was made based on the data obtained from a total of 7 respondents. All the data obtained through interviews based on guideline questions was recorded on a voice recorder. Data interpretation and discussion were carried out by considering the theories discussed and the phenomenon works reviewed in the literature. In this study, firstly, find out the three main global themes and organizational themes from basic themes that support the topic, and interpret every theme to tie up teachers' participation in the decision-making process.

Teacher's Participation in Decision-Making Process

Teachers' participation in decision making to encouragement in their teaching activity and good performance through their involvement. Provide proper orientation on the right duties and responsibilities of individual teachers in each area of decision-making and involve them to bring a change in the teaching-learning process and other related issues of department activities. Establish a collaborative relationship among teachers in which they can share their ideas and learn from each other concerning their professions to bring an attractive environment and promote teaching and learning. Provide training to teachers in the form of workshops, seminars, and so on, so that teachers become competent and skilful to participate in the areas that concern them and make the department efficient and effective in achieving the objectives of the university.

Supporting the above ideas, Robbins (2003) lists the following methods by which administrators can build trust in their employees and propound each of them as follows: (i) Practice openness, (ii) Be fair (iii) Speak your feeling (iv) Tell the truth (v) Show consistently (vi) Fulfill your promise (vii) Maintain confidence (viii) Demonstrate confidence. In references to the decision-making process, my participant expresses their experiences as follows:

I have attended one meeting where about 25 percent of teachers participated in the meeting. The agenda was related to quality management in the final exam. Whereas all interested teachers state their views as suggestions. HoD requests all teachers to support in the examination as an invigilator.

As already stated by Moharman et al. (1992), the HoD is widely believed to be crucial in the successful operation of a participative decision-making system in an organization. If properly practiced, academic and administrative roles by leaders, these factors can promote teachers' involvement. In relation to decision making, one of the subject heads states that: *Subject head meetings occurred frequently in the department. Especially, meeting agendas were concern to practice teaching, thesis viva, class routine, internal examination, and teaching improvement. HoD raises the agenda among other subject heads and discusses openly. There is no hierarchical limitation in the meeting. Own issues were raised freely. The decision takes place in a participative.*

This statement, the HoD has applied the democratic decision-making strategies in his department. All the subject heads are important in decision-making. Agendas were particularly focused on the improvement of quality education. In this reference, the HoD stated that

Subject head and other teachers don't feel afraid and uneasy to put their own words in the meeting," it seems there is no structural and hierarchical limitation among staff and HoD for the organizational decision making. My next participant subject head, P2, added in the statement of HoD that "HoD is very flexible and always respects others' issues and takes decisions collaboratively in discussion with all stakeholders.

In relation to the decision-making process, HoD shared his experiences that:

Important decisions of the department take place through collaboration and coordination with the representation of pressure groups such as the professor association, different ideology-based professor associations, and

student representatives. Their mandates are important for implementation; otherwise, there would be a problem implementing the decision in the department.

His experiences show that HoD involves the entire stakeholder that take place a significant role in decision making, and his leadership seems to be in collaboration with the stakeholders of the organization. It seems decisions are not made based on specific rules and regulations of the organization because stakeholders' interference, especially political base association, is directly involved.

Influencing Factors of Teachers' Participation in Decision-Making Process

Teachers' participation in department decision-making depends largely on leaders' ability and interest to delegate tasks to teachers, as well as to train and involve them in all areas of decision-making. To carry out these tasks effectively and efficiently, leaders should be equipped with the appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitude. As indicated in the findings of the study, however, the HoD does not have training related to leadership and management, and failed to involve teachers. To alleviate these problems, the Ministry of Education needs to recommend that HoD training in educational leadership, currently started by the government with a program, be encouraged by Universities, as a long-term solution. The researcher recommended that rather than commenting at a distance, the teacher and subject head have to be involved both physically and mentally in decision-making. As shown in the findings of the study, the absence of a participative and democratic leadership style was mentioned as one of the constraints in involving teachers in decision-making. Department chair is strongly advised to involve teachers in preparing the department plan so that teachers can have a say on the overall academic plan.

The school leader involves and gives clear information to teachers on the issues related to activities. Department leaders should create quality time for collaborative goal-oriented and knowledge-driven discussions to get teachers' input in decision-making.

In relation to the influencing factors of teachers' participation in the decision-making process, one of my participants explained that:

Decision making is directly influenced by professional pressure groups (employer associations, professor associations, and students' associations) as well as different ideology-based associations that pressure for inappropriate, unjustifiable decisions that are in favor of their associations or political associations. Sometimes an individual's egoism and personal differences influence decision-making.

This information shows HoD can't decide the specific rules and regulations because educational institutions are highly influenced by politics, and politics are not under ethics and the system. Sometimes, simple problems become great issues due to personal egoism and personal bias. There are multiple professional pressure groups, and they have their own concern and claim. The department can't address its issues due to the different interests of the pressure group, as the decision is pending.

Female teachers' participation in the decision-making process

HoD plays a critical role in establishing and maintaining teachers' participative decision-making. Leithewood and Steinbach (1993) stated that the head develops a positive climate, ensures opportunity for teachers' collaboration and joint planning

through greater involvement in decision-making" (p.49). This section now turns to a consideration of the specific role of the HoD in developing and sustaining a participative approach to decision-making within the central department. In developing a high involvement organization, the manager must deliver information, knowledge, power, and rewards to employees (Lawler, 1992, p.255). A decision group leader facilitates communications between individuals and integrates the incoming responses so that a united response occurs. Information about the department and work, and knowledge of the field, as well as power, should be shared with teachers to increase their participation by allowing them the opportunity to participate in making decisions that affect their work (Organ & Batema, 1991).

Participants of the female teacher group are significant to every organization. In the department, teachers from female teachers have not been involved in the decision-making process yet, in my observation during this study.

Some of the political lobbies and groups' members are being involved, but most of the female teachers don't like to be involved in different lobbies. So, females voice is in shadow and decisions are not inclusive and friendly. Female 'teachers' needs, interests, and experiences are different from means so they need to be involved for their voices and issues that the men never raise representation of females in decision-making enhances the democratization culture and would be effective for the resolutions of various issues.

No has yet achieved full equality of female teachers in department heads, so they continue to suffer from discrimination and

unequal rights and opportunities in the higher education level decision-making process.

Despite the government policy and rhetoric towards supporting the idea of equal educational opportunity for girls and women, the reality in Nepal is that females have lower enrollment and success at all educational levels. The cumulative effect is that the postsecondary sector is becoming highly stratified, with women making only marginal inroads into a male-dominated system. As Acharya (2003) mentioned, educational programs were geared toward girls and women. With the growing number of girls entering education, it is important to create opportunities for girls to successfully persist through the system

Conclusion

However, teachers' participation in implementing curriculum and instruction was found to be relatively high. In general, the final analysis of the result, however, reflected that the degree of teachers' participation in decision-making was found to be the least in the department. This implies that less attention was given to teachers' contribution to the efficiency and effectiveness of the department. Moreover, this affects the quality of education in particular. However, from this finding obtained, it can be concluded that there might be misperception in identifying teachers' roles and responsibilities by both teachers and HoD, that is, they might consider the role and responsibility of teachers as teaching and learning activities only, and other activities of the department as the role and responsibilities of the management of the whole department. The study has reported that most of the factors that hinder teachers' involvement in decision-making are related to the poor management role of the administrator. This is because the HoD had not taken training in fields related

to educational leadership and management. From this finding, it was concluded that the HoD might lack the necessary leadership skills, knowledge, and attitude to attract teachers toward department decision-making. Decision-making practices in the department are not made on the basis of a specific technique because of bureaucratic culture and political interference. There are no set criteria for the appointment of the teachers, subject heads, and HoD; therefore, it has become a political post. Teachers were not authorized and involved properly in decision-making, especially in departmental matters like instructional policies, determining goals, and work plans. It is evident from the findings of the study that an average number of both subjects' heads and teachers are effective in decision-making, while the majority of the teachers showed strong commitment to instructional task performance.

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