

Strategies of Improving Decision-Making in Secondary Schools in Tanzania: Experiences from Education Stakeholders of Tabora Region

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Abstract: *Maintaining tasks of curriculum implementation in schools very important. This is based on the fact that the main function of a school is to offer teaching, learning and assessment to students. The school to achieve the goal of the intended curriculum, it should have good decision-making strategies. This paper intended to explore the strategies used to improve decision making in secondary schools in Tanzania effective curriculum implementation. The study used a mixed method research approach together coupled with sequential explanatory research design. The total of 394 informants were used involved in this study and data were collected through questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussion. The participants involved in this study consist of District Education Officers (DEO), heads of secondary schools, teachers, students and parents. The study findings show that schools can, to a larger extent, succeed in decision making through rational decision-making strategies which are characterized by participatory decision making, adherence to country's education policy and frequent training among heads of schools. The study recommended that heads of schools should abide by six stages of rational decision-making namely, identification of existing problems, gathering relevant information about problems, identification of alternative solutions, choosing best alternative solutions and making implementation and making evaluation about the whole decision making process. The referred stages ensure effective curriculum implementation decision making process among schools. The study also recommended that heads of schools should make decisions based on participatory way. It was further recommended that the Ministry of Education should conduct regular training on school supervision among heads of schools. Therefore, this study concluded that that decision making strategies should be carefully chosen and their implementation should be done step-by-step and all school stakeholders should be given chance to participate in decision-making regarding classroom teaching and learning and assessment mode.*

Keywords: Strategies, decision making, education stakeholders

1. Introduction

Decision making is a process of making selections from a number of alternatives to realize a desired outcome (Kerry, 2011). It is one of the greatest essential activities in which any organization leader should engage daily. The leaders need to improve their knowledge and skills on decision making and know themselves, their values and their abilities (Childkamp et al., 2013). The success of a school in curriculum implementation in an education organization, is highly linked to decision making strategies (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2009). Since decision making is so significant and has great impact on the operation of schools, it has been advised that heads of schools should have great knowledge about rational strategies of conducting decision making (Michael, 2011). Decision making is a means of life for any head of the particular school. The education stakeholders such as teachers, students and parents make some decisions which aim at ensuring the attainment of the school objectives (Johnsons, 2013). The quality of the heads of the school's decisions is the benchmark of their efficiency and standards in the schools. Therefore, the decision-making strategies are regularly linked with managerial know-how (Lawrence, 2012).

Thompson (2001) found out that participatory decision making is one of the strategies with the great impact regarding the way teaching and learning processes are conducted in a school. The involvement of teachers, students and parents in different steps of making decision helps the school to achieve its objectives. Hellinger and Murei (2009) found out that participatory decision making is a prime factor of improving participation of different

education stakeholders in teaching and learning in schools. Participatory decision making helps every stakeholder to play certain roles and become accountable to it. The way students, teachers and parents interact in choosing alternative solutions to school problems, determine the effectiveness of a school in classroom teaching and learning (King, 2001). Jordan (2005) found out that participatory decision making in a school has great impact on the curriculum implementation process. When different stakeholders are involved in school decision making, everyone plays his or her part depending on what they agreed upon when making decision. Zehie (2009) found out that the head of school who is competent in managerial issues is the one who often makes decisions in a collaborative way. The major means of improving competence of school leaders in decision making constitutes frequent training in school supervision.

Towler (2010) presented a rational model of a decision making which assumed that any decision should be rational for the attainment of good results in an organization. In schools, the leaders, sometimes, make decisions under certainty while they know their alternatives, outcomes and decision standards. They also have the ability to make the best choice and then, implement the decision reached. In some situations, the heads of schools make decisions under uncertainty situation in which some leaders are not aware of the real cause of the problem, what to do and what could occur in the future. Schoenfeld (2011) maintains that whether decision making takes place in certainty or uncertainty situation, the leader should follow six (6) steps as proposed by the rational model. The first step deals with the identification of the existing problem. The schools always aim to achieve teaching, learning and assessment

goals. Each department in the school has goals such as increasing test marks and developing new methods of teaching. Establishing these goals becomes the basis for identifying the problem areas and deciding on paths of action and evaluating the decision consequences (Willey, 2015). The second step constitutes the proceeding step in the decision-making process, which creates alternatives to the problem. In developing these alternative solutions, the heads of schools must first specify the goals that they expect to achieve through their decision. When the school leaders have determined their problems, they can search alternative solutions in easiest means (Meshack, 2009). The third step in the decision-making process constitutes the evaluation of each of the alternatives generated in the second step. In evaluating some alternative solutions to problems, the head of the school must ask him/herself the following main three questions: (1) Are the alternatives rational? (2) Are the alternatives acceptable by each stakeholder? (3) What is the impact will they have on school stakeholders? (Grant, 2011). The chosen alternatives must be acceptable among those stakeholders who are expected to live with the impacts of the decision. The failure of the referred condition will, in turn, constitute the main reason for failure of the decision-making process in schools (Hastie, 2010). The fourth step constitutes choice of the best alternatives. The evaluation phase will have removed some of the alternatives but the most effective ones will remain (James, 2012). In this step, the source of decision should be based on how close the outcomes or consequences of the alternatives come to achieving the desired goals of the school (Mendel, 2011). The skilled school decision maker creates more alternatives from which to pick, as well as a better possibility of accomplishing the chosen alternative (Rita, 2009). The fifth step constitutes implementation of the decision. Once the head of the school has already chosen the best alternative, he or she faces the challenge of implementing the decision. The comprehensive decision can fail if implemented poorly. It is valuable to consider some recommendations for the effective implementation (Murry, 2012). Teddlie and Reynolds (2000) suggest that the school leader succeeds in the implementation of a decision if he or she considers the following alternatives: First, there is a need to ensure that the chosen alternatives are clearly understood by stakeholders. Second, there is a need to encourage recognition of the chosen alternatives which constitute necessary course of action. Third, there is a need to provide enough resources to ensure that the chosen alternatives succeed. Fourth, there is a need to establish practicable timelines for implementing the decision. Fifth, there is a need to allocate the responsibilities clearly for each respective stakeholder. Lastly, the sixth step, there is a need to evaluate the usefulness of the decision. When an implemented decision does not produce the results, there might be a number of causes which constitute improper definition of the problem, poor assessment of alternatives and inappropriate implementation of the chosen alternative solutions. Among these potential causes, the most common and serious mistake is an insufficient definition of the problem. When the problem is wrongly well-defined, the alternatives that are selected and

implemented, will not produce the desired results (Slater, 2011).

Based on the surveyed literature, it has generally been observed that the decision making strategies play a major role in curriculum implementation in schools. The heads of schools are urged to develop and implement better decision making strategies for the benefit of each school stakeholders. In Tanzania, little is known about the strategies which can be used for effective decision-making in secondary schools. Therefore, this paper aimed at filling the existing gap in the literature by seeking the answers to the following questions:

- 1) Why is it necessary to involve the key education stakeholders in the school decision-making process?
- 2) What is the importance of making a review and evaluation of the decision-making process?
- 3) To what extent does the adherence of education and training policy guidelines improve decision-making in secondary schools?
- 4) Why is it important to provide frequent training among heads of secondary schools?

2. Methodology

This study employed pragmatism philosophical research approach whereby both quantitative and qualitative data were collected, analyzed and interpreted. In pragmatism philosophy, mixed-methods research approach is used with the believe that using diverse types of procedures for gathering data brings a better and in-depth understanding of a problem which is under study (Morgan, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010; Lopez & Molina, 2011). In this study, the sequential explanatory research design was chosen under the assumption that it is an appropriate design which is aligned with mixed method research approach. With sequential explanatory research design, the researcher collects the quantitative data in the first phase which is followed by the second phase of collecting qualitative data. The qualitative data were initially used to interpret the quantitative data (Creswell et al, 2011). Almalki (2016) asserted that, in sequential explanatory research design, the qualitative data are mainly used to shed light on the quantitative data whereby more explanations are offered. Moreover, Creswell (2014) emphasized that, in the social research, the sequential explanatory design is used when the researcher wants to compare the quantitative results with qualitative data whereby the qualitative data are initially used to explain further the quantitative results for better understanding of the study findings.

This study employed both quantitative and qualitative sampling procedures in accordance with the mixed method approach. The simple random sampling procedures were used in obtaining the participants for filling the questionnaires whereby each unit of the sample was selected entirely by chance (Bryman, 2012). The composition of the sample size consisted of 36 heads of secondary schools, 110 teachers, 169 students and 72 members of school boards. Simple random sampling procedures were used in this study in order to eliminate

bias by giving all individuals from different schools an equal chance to be chosen and participate in the study. This study also employed the purposive sampling procedures in order to obtain the participants for interviews. In this study, the respondents who were purposefully selected for interview included 7 Districts Education Officers (DEO), 36 heads of secondary schools, 2 members of the student's counsel from 36 secondary schools, 36 academic deans and 5 members of the school board from 36 secondary schools. This study employed purposive sampling procedures in order to produce the sample that could logically be assumed to represent the population enough knowledge about the strategies of improving decision-making in secondary schools. The data were collected using closed-ended questionnaires and interview schedules. The quantitative data were analysed through descriptive statistic method for and thematic data analysis method for qualitative data.

3. Results and Discussion

The presentation and discussion of the study findings are organized in four (4) major themes. Those themes were concurrently matched with the research specific objectives and research questions of the study. The recurring themes and sub-themes were merged to get manageable themes which included involvement of key education stakeholders in school decision-making process, importance of making review and evaluation of decision-making process adherence of existing education and training policy for quality decision making in school and importance of frequent training among heads of schools.

Involvement of Key Education Stakeholders in School Decision-Making Process

This part aimed at examining the views by the respondents on whether it is important for the school to involve key education stakeholders in the decision-making process or not. With reference to administered questionnaires, the responses by the respondents were as follows:

Table 1: Involvement of key education stakeholders in school decision-making process

Factors	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Disagree	35	8.9
Strongly disagree	18	4.6
Agree	101	25.6
Strongly agree	230	58.4
Undecided	10	2.5
Total	394	100

Source: Field Data (2021)

With reference to Table 1, it is showed that many respondents strongly agreed regarding the importance for the school to involve different education stakeholders in the decision-making process. Alongside with these quantitative findings, the researcher wanted to get in-depth explanations as to why it is important for different education stakeholders to be involved in the decision making process through interviews. One of the heads of secondary schools had this to say:

... Through involving students, the varieties of alternative solutions will be obtained by the teachers and parents through gathering information about the school problems. This will help the head of the school to solve the identified problems easily and quickly with big success (Interview with head of the school, 2021).

One of the parents had the following comment regarding decision making in relation to the curriculum implementation:

... There is no way through which a school can succeed in curriculum implementation if the head of a school has no tendency of involving the key stakeholders such as parents in the decision-making process. We as parents are not trained as teachers but we know many things that can help a school to succeed in classroom teaching and learning process (Focus Group Discussion with parents, 2021).

With the reference to the first narrative above, it has been found out that the involvement of different education stakeholders in school decision-making is one of the strategies of improving decision-making in relation to classroom teaching and learning practices. The second narrative above revealed that the parents know many things which can help a school to succeed in curriculum implementation. If they are not very much involved in decision-making, it is impossible for the school to succeed in teaching and learning practices. These findings are in line with Birdsall et al. (2014) who found out that the involvement of diverse education stakeholders in the decision-making process is a major technique that helps a school leader to identify the ideal problems that hinder teaching and learning practices. On the other hand, James and Kennedy (2007) revealed that the success of a school depends on how the school leader involves parents, students and teachers in searching best alternatives for solving the existing school problems. The study which was conducted by Kerr (2009) in Finland concluded that participatory decision making in a school is a major strategy that can help school leaders to tackle the problems which are related to classroom teaching, learning and assessment.

Importance of Making Review and Evaluation of Decision-Making Process

This section presents and discusses the respondent's views on the extent to which it is important for the school to make the review and evaluation of the decision-making process. Based on the surveyed administered questionnaires, the responses of the respondents were as follows:

Table 2: Importance of making review and evaluation of decision-making process

Factors	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Disagree	11	2.8
Strongly disagree	14	3.6
Agree	155	39.3
Strongly agree	208	52.8
Undecided	6	1.5
Total	394	100

Source: Field data, 2021

With reference to the findings presented in Table 2, it was indicated that the majority of the respondents believe that it is important for the school to make the review and evaluate the decision-making process. Additionally, through open-ended questions the respondents were asked to provide more information about why it is important for a school to make the review and evaluation of the decision-making process. During interview, one DEO had this to say:

... It is important for a school to have a tendency of reviewing and evaluating the outcome of decisions regularly. This should have made because it may help a leader to learn and understand some issues which will help him or her to improve his or her decision-making capabilities in the future (Interview with DEO, 2021).

With regard to reviewing and evaluating the decisions that have already been made, one teacher had this to say:

... Reviewing and evaluating the decisions that have already been made is one among the major strategies of improving decision-making in a school. This is due to the fact that evaluating the outcome of the decision making process helps the school leader to correct some of the practices while the chosen alternatives are under the implementation process (Interview with the teacher, 2021).

In similar vein, one of the students had the following comments regarding the review and evaluation of the decision making:

... To review and evaluate the decision-making is inevitable if the school leader wants to succeed in teaching and learning processes. This is due to the fact that through making a review and evaluation of a decision-making process, the school leader will be able to determine the weaknesses and strengths of the chosen alternatives while their implementation it is under way. (Interview with the student 2021).

With reference to what has been said by different respondents above, it has been noted from the first respondent that when the school leader reviews and evaluates the decision making process, it helps him or her to learn some lessons for the improvement of the future decisions. Alongside that, the narratives of the second and third respondents emphasize that the school leader can be able to identify some of the weaknesses and strengths of the chosen alternative solutions and make modification while their implementation is under way. This will ensure the success of the decision-making process. Omarli (2013) had similar findings in that that the behaviour of reviewing and evaluating decision making process in a school helps the heads of school to succeed in different areas of curriculum implementation. Thus, reviewing and evaluating the decision-making process is inevitable if the school leader wants to be effective. In addition, Wango (2009) and Okumbe (1998) suggest that the decision-making process is not complete if the decision maker does not make the review and evaluation of the entire process. Through evaluating the decision-making process, the leader can correct some of the practices while the chosen

alternatives are under implementation process, hence the decision-making yields the expected results.

Adherence of Education and Training Policy for Quality Decision-Making in School

This part presents and discusses the respondent's opinions on the extent to which the adherence of education and training policy can produce quality decision-making in schools. Table 3 presents more details of the respondent's responses on the adherence of education and training policy for quality decision-making in school.

Table 3: Adherence of education and training policy for quality decision-making in school

Factors	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Disagree	9	2.3
Strongly disagree	8	2.0
Agree	83	21.1
Strongly agree	277	70.3
Undecided	17	4.3
Total	394	100

Source: Field data (2021)

Table 3 shows the responses by different informants on the importance of adhering to the guidelines of education and training policy for quality decision-making in schools. The study findings showed that most of the education stakeholders strongly agreed that abiding by the guidelines of education and training policy of the country yields effective decision-making in secondary schools. In accordance with this finding, the researcher wanted to get further details during focus group discussion and interviews. Different informants gave some reasons regarding abiding by the guidelines of education and training policy. For instance, one parent had this to say regarding abiding by education and training policy:

... Abiding by education and training policy of a country is one of the strategies of improving decision-making in school. This is due to the fact that it helps the school leader to establish the rules and procedures which should be followed for quality decision-making which can create the conducive environment for teaching and learning. Without doing so, the schools will lack arrangement and mechanisms which are necessary for effective curriculum implementation (Interview with the parent, 2021).

One of the heads of schools had the following observation regarding the education and training policy guidelines:

... Education and training policy guidelines of the country should be respected by each education leader because it is the one which provides the directions in which decisions should be made (Interview with the head of school, 2021).

Moreover, one DEO had this to say with regard to adhering to the education policy of a country:

... Adhering to education policy of a country is inevitable if the school leader wants to succeed in curriculum implementation. The main reason behind the curriculum implementation success is that education policy provides the laws and rules that govern the operation of the whole

school systems. Therefore, the initiatives of the heads of the schools to adhere to education policy is one of the strategies of improving the decision-making in schools (Interviews with DEO, 2021).

In accordance with the narratives by different education stakeholders above, it has been noted that abiding by the education and training policy of a country is inevitable if the school leader wants to succeed in educational leadership. All narratives given above showed that education and training policy provides directions among school leaders on how to govern the school especially how to make the decisions on what to do and by which means the curriculum should be implemented. This finding corroborates with Petronilla's (2017) and Philemon's (2016) findings which observed that the school leader who abides by the guidelines of the country's education and training policy is always effective in decision-making. Thus, the study recommended that to abide by the guidelines of education policy is one of the strategies of improving the decision-making in the school. Similarly, Rindsley (2010) concluded that abiding by the country's education policy among the heads of schools benefits all education stakeholders since the daily decision-making process is effective and so, does the curriculum implementation in schools.

Importance of Frequent Training among Heads of Secondary Schools

This section presents and discusses the opinions by the respondents on the importance of providing frequent training among the heads of secondary schools. Table 4 presents more details on importance of frequent training among heads of schools.

Table 4: Importance of frequent training among heads of schools

Factors	Frequency (N)	Percent (%)
Disagree	19	4.8
Strongly disagree	28	7.1
Agree	56	14.2
Strongly agree	272	69.0
Undecided	19	4.8
Total	394	100

Source: Field data (2021)

The findings presented in Table 4 show that the majority of the respondents believe that regular training among heads of schools is important for effective decision-making in schools. In accordance with such findings, the researcher obtained more details about the reasons for frequent training among the heads of schools through interview. One the heads of the schools had this to say during the interview:

... I think the frequent training among the heads of schools is very crucial because it helps us to update our knowledge and skills on how to supervise schools. Without training, we shall remain static with the old strategies of making curricular related decisions (Interview with head of the school, 2021).

In line with the above observation, one of the parents had this to say:

... Based on my little knowledge, frequent training among the heads of schools is inevitable if we want our schools to be effective. This is due to the fact that frequent training may help the school leaders to cope with this era of globalization whereby every education stakeholder wants to be involved in school affairs. Therefore, this is one of the strategies that can improve decision making in schools for effective curriculum implementation (Interview with parents, 2021).

In support of frequent training of the heads of schools had the following observation:

... Quality decision making in school is not an overnight practice but a process which is developed and strengthened over a long period of time. Thus, frequent training among the heads of schools constitutes one of the major strategies of improving decision-making for effective curriculum implementation in schools (Interview with head of school, 2021).

With reference to the narratives by different respondents above, it has been noted that frequent training constitutes one of the strategies of improving decision-making in schools. Therefore, all the respondents emphasize that frequent training among school leaders is inevitable in order to ensure effective decision making in schools. With regard to the findings by Mtaka (2017), it was showed that regular training is the better strategy which can boost the knowledge and skills on how the decisions concerning classroom teaching and learning are made among the school leaders. On the other side, Anthony and Mery (2017) and Ernest and James (2018) found out that one of the benefits of regular training among the heads of schools is effective curriculum implementation. Moreover, William & Hellen (2019) revealed that frequent training among school leaders is one of the tools which can help the school to be rational wherever the decisions concerning teaching and learning are supposed to be made. Therefore, the regular training among school leaders is inevitable for the benefit of the schools in general.

4. Conclusion

Generally, decision-making is the central role of the head of the school because he/she is the one who regularly makes the relevant decisions in collaboration with different stakeholder's order to achieve the objectives of the school. Therefore, since the main objective of the school is to implement the curriculum, the head of the school needs to have enough skills and knowledge pertaining to strategies which can help him or her to make good decisions. With regard to modern world of globalization, it is high time for the heads of schools to opt the following strategies for effective decision-making in schools: Firstly, the key education stakeholders should be involved in the decision-making process regularly. Secondly, the decisions should be made with the respect to the stages of rational decision making model. Third, is

regularly abiding to guidelines of education and training policy and fourth is to attend frequent training on school leadership and supervision.

5. Recommendations

Based on the obtained findings, several recommendations were made. Firstly, the District Education Officers (DEO) should ensure that every head of the school has to make decisions through participatory way. Secondly, the education quality assurers should ensure that every head of the school has to abide by the guidelines of education and training policy. Thirdly, the Ministry of Education should regularly conduct training among the heads of secondary schools as a means to improve their knowledge and skills at school supervision. Therefore, decision-making processes in secondary schools will be effective, hence effective curriculum implementation.

Conflicts of Interests

The author certifies that he has no financial interests.

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