



The Primacy of Decision Making for Teacher Performance in a Global Workplace

Sotonye Soye Asawo

Department of Educational Management
Faculty of Education
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Nigeria
sotysek@yahoo.com

Samuel Nariochukwu Owhondah

Department of Educational Management
Faculty of Education
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Nigeria
samuel.owhondah@iaue.edu.ng

Abstract

The paper focuses on the primacy of decision making for teacher performance in a global workplace. It undertook a conceptual review of the meaning and nature of decision making, the barriers to decision making, and the role of teachers especially in curricular decisions for achieving educational goals. The paper concludes that it is pertinent that managers of educational institutions recognize the importance of teachers in decision making on curricular and other administrative functions. And, recommends that both administrators and teachers should cooperate and be well-grounded in the decision making functions to enhance their capabilities in making quality decisions to achieve optimal productivity.

Keywords: Primacy, Decision Making, Teacher Performance, Global Workplace

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

Asawo S. S., & Owhondah, S. N. (2020). The primacy of decision making for teacher performance in a global workplace. *International Journal of Scientific Research in Education*, 13(4), 627-636.

Copyright © 2020 IJSRE

INTRODUCTION

Humans are daily confronted with a wide range of choices, and the ability to choose the most profitable path defines one's advancement. Decision making is very important in any human enterprise; one's personal development is closely linked to the decision taken on a daily basis. As an administrative function, decision making pervades all the functions of planning, organizing, directing or commanding, co-ordinating and controlling, staffing, reporting and budgeting (Okoroma, 2000). Daft (2001) describes the decision making process as the brain and nervous system of an organization. This suggests that it is a very central process in organizations and a basic task of both management and employees in the work place, with the school administrator and classroom teacher being no exceptions.

Bateman and Snell (1999: 80), stressing the importance of decisions, argued that “if you can’t make them, you won’t be an effective manager”. Buttressing this, Cohen and Fink (2001, p. 8) asserted that “the manager must be good at building relationships, gathering information, and making decisions – all of which affect future relationships, access to information, and future decisions!” Thus, the classroom teacher who is saddled with the responsibility of implementing educational goals as regards teaching and learning is expected to be conscious of this enormous responsibility and position themselves to intelligently choose between the alternatives available to them in terms of instructional materials, teaching methods, administrative decisions, etc. so as to have outcomes that are productive. To a large extent, the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful teacher could be in his/her decision making as it relates to teaching and learning and other administrative functions. Consequently, this theoretic paper seeks to x-ray the importance of decision making in work organisations, especially in this globalized setting, and its impact on teacher performance. It considers the decision making process, types of decisions, the teacher and decision making and barriers to effective decision making.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Decision Making

Decision making is a universal process, and one of the most central processes in organizations, and a basic task of management at all levels. It can be described as the process of choosing the best alternative for reaching objectives. Decision making is defined as “the process of thinking about a problem, idea and then making a choice or judgment” (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 1997, p. 352). Daft (2001) defines perceives organizational decision making as a formal process of identifying and solving problems. This process contains two stages of problem identification and problem solution. Peretomode (2012:476) defines decision making as “a process of choosing from among alternatives or alternative ways of achieving an objective or providing a solution to a problem”. In the view of Weirich, Cannice and Koontz (2008, p. 132), “decision making is the selection of a course of action amongst all possible alternatives; it is the core of planning. Thus, it is the process by which a course of action is taken. This is an intellectual process which involves selection of one course of action out of many alternatives.

In the light of the foregoing, it can be argued that decision making is a conscious act that involves choosing from two or more courses of action with the intention of achieving a desired outcome. In educational institutions, the quality of outcomes attained is often determined by the decisions on how to manage educational resources available, and the implementation of the decisions reached. A manager or school administrator has to take a decision before acting or before preparing a plan for execution. The administrator’s ability is very often judged by the quality of decisions taken. The effectiveness of management depends on the quality of decision making. In this sense, management is rightly described as “a decision-making process” (Davis, in Akrani 2010, p. 2).

This explains why scholars have established a strong link between the functions of management and decision making. For instance, Weirich et al. (2008) argues that decision making is the core of planning. This implies that decision making is not only embedded in the planning function of management but it has great significance for the planning function. For example, alternative plans are prepared to meet different possible situations. Out of such alternative plans, the best one (i.e., plan which is most appropriate under the available environment) is to be selected. In this case, the planner has to take correct decision. Hence, Drucker in (Akran 2010, p. 2) posits that it is the top management which is responsible for

all strategic decisions such as the objectives of the business, capital expenditure decisions as well as such operating decisions as training of manpower and so on. Without such decisions, no action can take place and naturally the resources would remain idle and unproductive.

Decision-making, which lies at the core of the management process, is thus also necessary in organising, directing, controlling and staffing. In this light, like in the planning function, decision-making is also the core of these other functions. This suggests the importance of decision making in the whole process of management and administration because among others benefits, decision making brings about a better utilisation of resources, helps face problems and challenges, facilitates business growth, a key factor in the achievement of organisational objectives, increases efficiency, facilitates innovation and motivates employees. It is important to contextualize this discussion within the educational sector and this is the focus of the following section on decision making in education.

Decision Making in Education

Decision making in education is crucial. Perotomode (2012) stated that decision making is a central responsibility of the manager or school administrator at all levels along the hierarchy of the organization. Buttressing this assertion, Hoy and Miskel in Peretomode (2012, p. 476) considered deciding as “a *sine qua non* of management and educational administration because the school, like all formal organisations, is basically a decision making structure.

Decision making in education requires much discipline. The educational sector deals with human and material resources. The material resources in education include buildings, vehicles, and instructional materials, among others. In the face of insatiable needs and competing demands for available resources, the administrator would have to make decisions on how to efficiently manage the limited resources to achieve effectiveness. For instance, decisions have to be made on the needs of the human resources including staff and students. Evidences of population growth even in the face of dwindling resources have call to task the school administrator and heighten the need for satisfying decisions, in reconciling the opposing extremes of the needs of the staff and students. If the available resources are carefully utilized in the school to optimize the benefits of the staff and students, then standard will ultimately be improved. Decision making therefore plays a major role in motivation, leadership, communication and organizational change, and influences the performance of both staff and students in the school system.

Furthermore, all stakeholders at different levels have important roles to play in the decision making process. These stakeholders in some cases are involved in the decision making process through such recognized sub-structures that represent their interest. Examples include the Student Union Government (SUG) that represent the interest of students, the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) that represent the interest of Parents and Teachers, the Old Students’ Association or Alumni Association that represent the interest if the alumni, the Community Development Committee (CDC) that represent the interest of host communities, and Workers’ Unions that represent the interest of their staff members. The interest and roles of these stakeholder groups make decision making in schools simple and predictable in some cases, but complex and unpredictable in other cases. Thus, Peretomode (2012) identifies that school administrators make decisions under conditions of certainty, risk and uncertainty. This is explained below:

Conditions of Certainty: The administrator makes decisions with complete knowledge of probable outcome of each of the alternatives available to him because he has sufficient information to make decisions, and the expected outcome of the decision is known in advance.

Conditions of Risk: Here decisions are made with some probabilities of the outcome of each alternative. The manager is faced with unknown results, but is certain that the results will fall within a range of outcome.

Conditions of Uncertainty: Under this condition, the administrator has absolutely no knowledge of the probability of the outcomes of any of the alternatives; therefore have difficulties assigning probabilities to outcomes. Most managerial decisions fall under this condition.

Types of Decisions

Decisions often range from simple to complex, depending on the gravity of the identified problem. It could be in the form of a once for all nature to those of a routine and relatively trivial ones. Ansof in Cole (2004) identifies three major types of decisions namely: Strategic, operating and administrative decisions.

Strategic Decisions: These are decisions that set the principal goals and objectives of any organization. This is a basic long-term decision that establishes the relationship between the organization and its environment, specifying the products or services, and the target market or beneficiaries. Decisions made here are usually complex and require subjective judgements.

Operating Decisions: In this case, fewer variables are involved, and the decisions made are routine and repetitive in nature. They are short-term decisions which deal with the organization's output. To this end, it has the capacity to show results within short periods, and therefore tend to get more priority over other types of decisions.

Administrative Decisions: These decisions are essentially concerned with settling the organization's structure by establishing lines of authority and communication. Decisions arise from the conflicting demands of the strategic and operating decisions. Griffiths in Peretomode, (2012) suggested three types of administrative decisions to include:

- **Intermediary Decisions**, which can sometimes be considered as routine decisions. They originate not from the administrator making the decision, but delegated by a superior in the organization's hierarchy – e.g. is a directive from the schools' board to a school principal.
- **Appellative Decisions** are made by subordinates by referring issues to administrative heads for their opinion, or to receive directives about appropriate actions to take, and how best to handle certain issues where they may not have the final decision to deal with.
- **Creative Decisions** are concerned with significantly improving some aspects directly related to the organization. For instance, in education, creative decisions are concerned with improving some aspects of curricular programmes and admission policies.

Programmed and Non-Programmed Decisions

Cole (2004) distinguishes between two types of decisions, namely: as programmed and non-programmed decisions.

Programmed Decisions. This type of decision is used for problems that are routine, repetitive and well structured; and the organization typically develops specific ways with rules and procedures on how to handle them. A programmed decision in an educational institution can be to calculate the Grade Point Average (GPA) within the academic session to determine students' academic standing. For this kind of routine, repetitive problem, standard decisions are made according to established management guidelines which could be written or unwritten policies that can be easily referred to. It requires much certainty regarding the cause and affect relationships.

Non-Programmed Decisions: These are used for novel and ill-defined situations with a non-recurring nature. They are typically one shot decisions that are usually less structured than programmed decision. By nature, non-programmed decisions are strategic and require subjective judgement, and cannot be easily assessed in quantitative terms. The decisions made in most cases translate into greater expenditure of resources. The procedures for this type of decisions are tolerance for ambiguity, intuition, and creative problem solving. The construction of new classroom facilities is an example of a non-programmed decision in an educational organization.

It is important to note that decision making has serious implications for organizational outcomes and individual performances. Consequently, it is necessary to identify some barriers that may impede making the right decisions.

BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE DECISION MAKING

The barriers to effective decision making are basically the hindrances that limit result oriented-decisions in an organization. Some of them are enumerated as follows:

- All too often when it comes to decision making, the theoretical basis proves unhelpful in real world situations. Traditional decision making theory is built on rationality, and utility maximization. These theories tend to ignore emotion, and when they do include it, assume that emotion and complexity can be handled.
- Another major impediment in decision making is that leaders often work with limited information, and this is often worsened by the scarcity of time, both of which conspire to mean that decisions and actions must follow in quick succession, without allowing time for full consideration.
- The toughest decisions are often those that seem to be made in a vacuum. In such situations, there are no reference points, no structure to rely on for cues or precedents. The lack of context or structure can also refer to the absence of values. Important decisions are also often those which require the examination of values more closely, or to reconcile them with seemingly conflicting values.
- Overwhelming volume of information can overshadow the ability to assess a situation reliably and in timely fashion. The numerous ways in which sequences of decisions may unfold can make it very difficult to make decisions. It is often very difficult for a leader to stay on top of every detail or have a readily available countermove.
- We often do not get feedback from subordinates, peers and supervisors. The lack of feedback can be a strong constraint to progress and innovation.
- In an increasingly globalized world, we come into contact with people whose perspectives, values, languages, etiquette and cultures may differ significantly from the one responsible for taking the decision. This can lead to misunderstandings which adversely affect decision making. Cultural differences may also directly influence decision making.

- There is the physical or biological basis to making decisions. The organ responsible for cognition and decisions is, of course, the brain. Brain functions may be adversely affected by aging, disease, or other physiological factors such as fatigue or chemical imbalance/depletion. Any of these can constitute barriers the decision making process.
- The human nature naturally brings with it a lot of psychological baggage to the decision making table. The manager sometimes tends to allow politically induced emotions to shape decisions. He allows ego to dictate directions and may respond impatiently, overreact or procrastinate.

The Teacher and Decision Making

Too often, decision making in education has been viewed mainly as an administrative function solely reserved for school administrators and managers especially for the purpose of resource allocation and utilization. But, scholars over time have recognized the need to consciously involve teachers in the decision making process because ultimately, even administrative decisions have far reaching implications for the teaching/learning process which the teacher implements. Samkange (2012) noted that the issue of teacher involvement in decision making is topical as they are becoming increasingly critical of the traditional bureaucratic and authoritative top-down method of administering and managing schools, and had observed that school heads involve teachers mostly in areas of routine decisions such as planning, syllabi interpretation and co-curricular activities, but involve them less and at times not at all in areas that they considered to be purely administrative or managerial such as supervision, finance and budgeting. Studies have however shown that involving teachers in the decision making process largely depends on leadership styles of the school administrator, motivational management styles, supervisory styles and behavioural systems in organizations (Samkange, 2012).

Owen (1970) in Okoroma (2016) posited that the quality of the decisions making processes in educational institutions can be enhanced when teachers are involved in decisions that affect them directly. This view had been captured earlier by ERN (1992) which revealed that teachers believed that greater authority over decisions directly influencing classroom teaching better enabled them to meet the needs of their students. Given such authority also increased their energy level and enthusiasm for teaching, which, in turn, increased students' interest and motivation to learn.

Teaching is fundamentally a decision making process. Hunter (1979) perceived teaching as a process of making and implementing decisions before, during and after instruction to increase the probability of learning. However, Shavelson in Youwen (2017) insists that any teaching act is the result of a decision, either conscious or unconscious as teachers make hundreds of habitual responses and spontaneous choices in the course of a teaching day. In that light, what distinguishes the exceptional teacher is not the ability to ask, or say, a higher-order question, but the ability to decide when to ask such a question.

Basically, analysing teacher decisions can lead to a better understanding of learning and management of the classroom. Teacher decisions can be examined by asking what effective teaching is, the standards used to guide the professional development of teachers and how the teacher can be a reflective decision maker. Overtime, scholars have argued that teachers can be involved in a wide range of decision making including planning decisions, practicing decisions, class management decisions, decisions about implementation, evaluative decisions, and interactive decisions (Youwen, 2017).

In the classroom context of decision making, Youwen (2017) highlighted that the content of teacher decision making is related to several layers of items which include curriculum, teaching method, classroom management and evaluation of students, and that

such decisions can be made with regards to the cognitive ability and experience of the teacher, the environment and the context necessitating the decision. In the classroom teaching, Jiang in Youwen (2017) noted that teacher decision-making is regarded as some sort of “professional autonomy” and “self-specific performance”, and the purposes for teacher instructional decisions are basically to achieve the target of education, and promote the development of students and teacher professional development.

The CSB/SJU Education Department (2016) buttressed that teachers make hundreds of decisions each day and recognizes purposeful decision-making at the heart of effective teaching. Therefore, teachers need to consistently make professional decisions which help all students to achieve their full potential as persons and as responsible world citizens in a democratic society. While it may be a daunting responsibility for teachers to be involved in budgetary, purchasing, staffing, etc. decisions, to a large extent, they can play a leading role in influencing instructional materials decisions.

It has been observed that effective teachers make decisions that address diverse issues (CSB/SJU Education Department, 2016). Consequently, it is expected that:

- Teachers should understand the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the disciplines they teach, so that they will be able to make the subject matter meaningful for their students
- The understanding of learning and developmental processes of each student is required by the teachers to choose optimal ways that encourage their students’ intellectual, social, and personal development
- Teachers recognize how differences among students can influence their learning; make instructional decisions that reflect to their students’ backgrounds and exceptionalities
- Teachers use their knowledge of instructional strategies to decide upon and employ those which are most likely to encourage their students’ critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills
- Teacher decisions should encompass the use of their knowledge and skills to create just, disciplined learning communities that can motivate students to achieve personal and academic success through positive social interaction and active engagement in their learning.
- Teachers are expected to use effective verbal, nonverbal, and media communication techniques to foster their students’ learning.
- Teachers should plan and effect instruction as they decide what content they will teach, to whom they will teach it, in what ways they will do so, and with what effect
- The use of information provided through formal and informal assessment methods to make instructional decisions that will support their students’ continuous development is advocated.
- In the classroom, teachers are to critically reflect on the effects of their instructional decisions on the performance of their students, on the practice of their colleagues, and on the actions of others in their learning communities, using those reflections to direct and sustain their professional renewal.
- Teachers enhance their effectiveness as educators by working together with their colleagues, their students’ parents, and members of their school community to create and sustain a positive learning environment that can enhance students’ learning and well-being.

In making curricular decisions, Trahan (2016), suggested ten steps classroom teachers can take to have a big impact on the materials they use in their classroom:

Deepen your understanding of the Standards: Teachers need to know the standards and how they build on each other, and develop deep familiarity with the standards in the different grades they teach. This will help them know what to look for (as well as red flags) when reviewing potential instructional materials.

Personalize your curriculum: Careful analysis of current materials and available resources allows teachers to make decisions about their curriculum on a daily basis. This helps teachers be more selective in choosing materials that have a direct correlation to the learning goals they have for their students.

Ask for evidence: Teachers have a right to know if the materials they're being asked to use with students have been vetted for quality, accessibility, and alignment to the expected standards. Teachers should ask that decision makers to share the completed review tools used in the review and selection process, so that they are clear on the strengths and weaknesses of the instructional materials.

Create your own supplementary materials: Teachers can assist in creating supplementary materials or textual supports for existing curricular materials in order to make them more personalized. This can improve the value and impact of the materials while staying within the financial boundaries of the school system.

Share, share, and share: Teachers can take the initiative to share materials which have been found to be a resource that is beneficial and aligns with the standards of the school(s) and teachers where it is shared. They can offer to print or email it to colleagues and explain how it was used and the results achieved.

Make use of free resources: Effective teaching takes place when teachers avail themselves of all opportunity especially with regards to resources and sites with free open educational resources.

Reduce, reuse, and revisit: With your knowledge of your schools' budget and priorities, teachers will know that purchasing new materials may not be an immediate option, so they can set their goals accordingly. In the short term they can aim to reuse existing materials, supplementing them to make them to improve their quality, and choosing to advocate for new materials at an opportune time.

Learn from successes and failures (and share with colleagues): Teachers can take decisions to openly discuss their successes (and failures) in the classroom, opportunities to bend an ear (or two) with their colleagues and share experiences with the current materials they are using. Such sessions with colleagues can amend their lesson plans to remove lessons that aren't effective.

Be vocal about what you want: Teachers should advocate for what you need in the classroom and convey those needs to administrators and/or publishers. Publishers often are open to feedback. Administrators need to hear from the classroom about what is necessary to achieve and succeed as a school. Teachers should look for opportunities to speak with

administrators, share views in public forums (through platforms like school board meetings, newsletters, etc.), and integrate themselves into the decision making process.

Have confidence in your expertise: Teachers have a strong voice and are immensely influential. No one knows the students like their teachers do. They have responsibilities to advocate for their students by sharing their opinions. Thus, they need to be courageous in their advocacy and confident in their expertise. The first step toward influencing instructional materials decisions is for the teachers to believe you deserve to be heard.

Pezaro (2016) suggested that teachers can be guided to make professional decisions in the classroom. This implies that teachers must be encouraged to use research to guide them in making decisions about their practice and be given the time, space, and access they need to evaluate research critically, and purposefully, to inform their decisions. This lends credence to Hunter (1979), that professional decision making is closely related to effective teaching because it is based on research plus experiential wisdom. He stressed that being aware of decision making as a process and understanding the dynamics of the process will inevitably contribute to effective teaching. This to an extent encourages research informed decision making rather than evidence based practice.

The scenarios portrayed so far suggests that participation in school decision-making will give teachers more experience, give them room for presentations and speaking professionally. The implication is that teacher turnover will be low and the reciprocity will be enshrined in the school system as teachers and school heads maintain a reciprocal open door relationship in decision making.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the meaning of decision making, and its importance for teachers in education. Types of decisions, barriers to effective decision making, decision making in education and the implications for the teacher were also discussed. Decision making, especially curricular decisions is shown to be an accepted part of teacher autonomy and development. It is pertinent that classroom teachers as major stakeholders in educational institutions be well grounded in their decision making functions to maximally achieve set goals.

SUGGESTIONS

Giving the importance of decision making in every industrial setting, especially the education industry, where teachers are the major stakeholders, it is hereby suggested that:

- Managers and school administrations should view their relationship with teachers more as collaborative, giving them room to take decisions that bother on their primary responsibilities.
- Supervisory duties should be clinical, involving the teacher and the supervisor at all the different stages .in an in-class support system designed to deliver assistance directly to the process aimed at staff development and improving instruction.
- Effective decision making within the school should include all stakeholders, with very clear instructions given to those who are to ultimately implement the decisions reached.

REFERENCES

- Akrani, G. (2010). Label: Education, management study notes <https://kalyan.city.blogspot.com.ng>.
- Bateman, T. S., & Snell, S. A. (1999). *Management: Building Competitive Advantage*. The McGraw-Hill Company.
- Cohen, A. R., & Fink, S. L. (2001). *Effective behavior in organizations: Cases, concepts and student experiences*. McGraw-Hill Irwin.
- Cole, G. A. (2004). *Management theory and practice*. Thomson Learning
- Daft, R. L. (2001). *Organization theory and design* (7th Ed.). South-Western College Publishing
- ERN. (1992). *The effects of teacher decision-making power*. *Educational Research Newsletter & Webinars*, 5(4).
- Fayol, H. (1917). *General and industrial management*. E. Pinat.
- Hunter, M. (1979). *Teaching is decision making*. www.ascd.org.
- Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1997)
- Okoroma, N. S. (2016). *Perspectives of educational management, planning, & policy analysis*. Minson publishers.
- Peretomode, V. F. (2012). *Theories of management: Implications for educational administration*. Justice Jeco Printing & Publishing Global
- Pezaro, C. (2016). *Teacher decision –making: what information is needed*. Retrieved from <https://npjscilearncommunity.nature.com>.
- Wehrich, H., Cannice, M. V. & Koontz, H. (2008). *Management: A global entrepreneurial perspective*. The McGraw-Hill Publishing Company.
- Samkange, W. (2012). Teacher involvement in decision making: A case for school administration and management in Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Social Science and Education*, 2(2), 20-30.
- The CSB/SJU Education Department (2016). *Teacher as reflective decision-maker conceptual model*. <https://www.csbsju.edu>
- Trahan, L. E. (2016). *Decision making that matters*. www.wachievethecore.org/aligned/decision-making-that-matters-a-teachers-perspective.