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RESEARCH ARTICLE

CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES IN MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION IN UGANDA

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ABSTRACT

Involvement of the community in school management may not necessarily improve education service delivery in schools. The purpose of this study was to conduct an empirical study on the challenges School Management Committees (SMCs) experience in monitoring the implementation of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Uganda. SMCs are mandated to participate and monitor all the activities that make a school operational. The research objective that guided this study was: to assess the challenges SMCs experience in their monitoring roles and how these challenges affect the implementation of UPE in Uganda. The questionnaire and interview guide were used as instruments to collect data. The results of the study seem to suggest that SMCs experience a number of challenges in their monitoring roles in schools of their jurisdictions that include the following: lack of knowledge and skills to do their monitoring work in schools, they lack expertise in financial management yet they are involved in financial budgeting that involves revenue mobilization and expenditures as well as financial controls. The study further found out that decision making seem to be dominated by influential members of the committee that most of the time biased decisions that are not crucial to the management of schools are taken due to lack of teamwork. The study also seem to suggest that SMCs have limited power and authority to take action regarding the way schools are run since the management and control of teachers remains in the hands of the central government with less inputs from the SMCs. The study recommends a need for policy makers to put in place the minimum requirements for one to be elected a member of SMC in terms of knowledge and skills especially in financial management. This creates a sense of efficient utilization of school funds and thus promoting teaching and learning in schools. The study further recommends that SMCs should be empowered to take corrective actions on issues concerning with the management of schools including the management and control of teachers. This empowerment creates a sense of ownership of schools that is likely to guarantee transparency and accountability in the way school resources are managed.

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INTRODUCTION

Universal Primary Education (UPE) is taken as key in many third world countries in their national development plans as it forms the base for the required knowledge and skills for the job market (Webster, 2000). It is against this background that countries have seen it vital to provide basic education to all children through Universal primary Education (UPE). This initiative has been emphasized in international forums on education, which include: the World Education Round Table Forum in Jomtien Thailand in 1990, the Dakar agenda for Action in Senegal in 2000, and the Millennium Summit in September 2000 which advocated Education for All (EFA). In this regard, developing countries have made remarkable attempts in the provision of access to basic education for all over the last two decades (UNESCO, 2009). To ensure the policy of education for all is achieved, various policies have been formulated and implemented that include capitation

grants that have proved effective policy instruments that have attracted and retained children from poor families in schools. On the other hand, there has been a policy of provision of inputs like classroom blocks, scholastic materials and instructional materials as well as the supply of qualified and competent human resource in schools (Hanushek, 2003). The UPE policy is to ensure that there is increased access to education by all irrespective of sexes, socio-economic status and geographical location. Its aim therefore is to make sure that resources are well distributed to ensure enough inputs needed to facilitate quality teaching and learning. To ensure that this is achieved, there was need for community participation through School Management Committees (SMCs) whose work is to participate in management of schools through developing and approval of development plans. They also participate in resource mobilization to complement the capitation grant from the government that is not sufficient. SMCs further monitor the way school resources

are utilized. Monitoring is vital as it tracks the progress of a program activities to ensure they are done in line with the program design. It is through efficient monitoring that resources are put to optimal use (Marriott and Goyder, 2009). Therefore SMCs that represent all the stakeholders of schools are taken as vital in management of schools through mobilization and monitoring of school resources to ensure the provision of quality education for better education outcomes (UPE Handbook, 2007). However, much as the SMCs have done a commendable work in management of school resources, they are faced with challenges that limit their capacity to operate according to their mandate. Can all these duties and responsibilities be undertaken without challenges? This study focused on the challenges SMCs experience in implementation of UPE in Uganda?

Statement of the Problem: Monitoring of school performance is vital for the successful implementation of any education program (Kayani et al., 2011). In Uganda the role of monitoring the basic education is vested in SMCs on behalf of all school stakeholders. While monitoring is supposed to be done with the intention of tracking the progress of the programme in order to put in place corrective actions, the study shows that monitoring has not improved the implementation of UPE in Uganda (ANPPCAN, 2009). This study therefore assumes that the implementation of UPE, if monitored effectively with no inhibiting challenges, may result in improving educational outcomes. Based on this assumption, the study aimed at exploring the challenges experienced by SMCs in monitoring the implementation of UPE in Uganda.

Purpose and objectives of the study: The purpose of this study was to conduct an empirical study on the challenges SMCs experience in monitor the implementation of UPE in Uganda. The objective of the study was:

- (i) To assess the challenges SMCs experience in their monitoring roles and how these challenges affect the implementation of UPE in Uganda.

Importance and justification of the study: The outcome of this study is of significant value to policy makers and administrators at government level as it may enable them revisit and revise the policies that can make UPE implementation work efficient. Challenges hindering SMCs in the success implementation of UPE may be identified and recommendations made to government on how to improve practice. Although a lot of studies have been done on school governance in many countries, there is scarce literature on the challenges experienced by SMCs in monitoring the implementation of UPE in Ugandan school context which motivated the researcher to undertake this study.

Literature Review: Various studies (Cheng and Mok, 2007; Bandur and Gamage, 2009) show that School Based Management (SBM) has proved to be the best policy that has registered an improvement in management of schools in both developed and developing countries. However, a policy mandating the involvement of various stakeholders in management of schools through SMCs, has resulted in a number of challenges that hindering the effective monitoring the implementation of UPE in Uganda.

Lack of skills by SMCs to perform their roles: Maile (2002) in South Africa, found that school governing bodies have the

challenge of illiteracy among members, which contributes to inefficiency in the way they do their work. In relation to illiteracy, Van Wyk (2004) found that many school governing bodies, especially in rural areas, do not have the knowledge and skills required to perform their roles effectively. That is the reason why educators have blamed the school governing bodies for failure to execute their roles and responsibilities in schools due to their low levels of education, which has resulted in wrong decisions being made in the governance of schools (Xaba, 2011). SMCs are faced with the challenge of undertaking technical roles for which they lack expertise in areas such as budgeting, expenditure planning and infrastructure development planning as well as lack of information on the roles of head teachers and teachers in schools (Pushpanadham, 2000). A study by Obonyo (2012) on the factors influencing the effectiveness of school management in public primary schools in Karemo division, Siaya County, in Kenya established that lack of managerial and budgetary development skills has affected the SMCs' role in the management of schools. SMCs are supposed to oversee the management of the schools on behalf of the government as well as representing the parents' interest in schools (MoES, 1998, 2007). Their monitoring role is intended to ensure the efficient delivery of UPE (MoES, 1998). However, SMCs find it difficult to effect their mandate of contributing to the development of schools in terms of advising on how the school resources should be used, how teachers should carry out their work and how a better learning environment for pupils is created owing to lack of expertise (Ayeni and Olusola, 2013).

Challenge of Influential members of the SMCs: In most rural areas, the duties and functions of the SMCs are undertaken by influential members who command respect and regard themselves as superior and/or the vocal members of the committee (Mbeni, 2005). This situation instils low self-esteem in those members who are not influential and thus renders them unable to contribute to the decisions affecting the school since they only remain observers when decisions are taken (Mbeni, 2005). In support of this assertion, Van Wyk (2004) observes that some members of school governing body lack confidence regarding their roles and duties, which makes them inferior to other members. To worsen the situation, some head teachers are not on good terms with SMCs and, as a result, they tend to hide information that is supposed to assist the SMC members in their monitoring work, and this has proved to be a challenge as some members simply attend the meetings when they are invited but do not make any contribution on decisions that promote teaching and learning in schools (Kiyaga, 2005). Mestry (2004) observes that there is insufficient teamwork between head teachers and school governing bodies since the head teacher is not interested in sharing the responsibility for school management for fear of losing power and authority in their school. Abigail, Mugisha, Serneels and Zeitlin (2012) observe that it is only through collective action by all those concerned with the monitoring exercise that monitoring activities can be undertaken for improved school performance. Where there is absence of collective action, some of the decisions taken are only in the interest of a few members of the committee (Prinsen and Titeca, 2008; Nemes, 2013). This could be the reason why, in many developing countries, some schools have continued to perform poorly in infrastructural development, have been involved in the purchase of sub-standard and insufficient instructional materials, have diverted funds to non-budgeted activities, and have continued to experience head teacher,

teacher and pupil absenteeism, resulting in failure to complete syllabuses and hence continuous decline in education performance (Prinsen and Titeca, 2008; Nemes, 2013).

Conflict among stakeholders in the school: Ayeni and Olusola (2013) state that many SMC members have limited knowledge regarding how daily activities of the school are run and coordinated, how personnel administration issues are dealt with, how conflict resolution is handled and regarding other statutory matters in which they are expected to offer professional and technical inputs in decision-making to ensure sustainable improvement in the performance of schools. Furthermore, in many education systems in developing countries, there are tensions and conflicts between the roles of PTAs and SMCs (Dunne *et al.*, 2007). In Ghana, for instance, SMCs' roles and responsibilities have been found to conflict with those of PTAs. This happens as a result of an overlap in roles and responsibilities that causes one group to operate beyond its mandate. Ramani and Zhimin (2010) observe that role conflict involves real differences in role descriptions between individuals who are dependent on social systems. This conflict undermines SMC members in effectively carrying out their monitoring role (Dunne *et al.*, 2007). Conflict between SMCs and PTAs brought about by unclear roles and responsibilities in schools is reported in Mexico and Malawi where both PTAs and SMCs have similar roles and duties and conflict arises mainly with respect to who is responsible for the mobilisation and utilisation of money in schools (Dunne *et al.*, 2007). The continued tension between PTAs and SMCs was responsible for the suspension of the former (Bray, 2000). In Uganda, the introduction of UPE empowered the SMCs in the governance of schools and one of the roles of PTAs, i.e. collecting funds from parents to supplement teachers' salaries, was proscribed by the government. Still, there is no clear boundary of operation between SMCs and PTAs, which has hindered the smooth governance of schools (Suzuki, 2002). Similar conflict arising from lack of coordination in the decisions used to govern schools between PTAs and Boards of Governors (BOGs) was reported in Kenyan schools (Word Bank, 2008). Nana, Milindzo and Adjeri (2009) reveals that insufficient orientation of SMCs and PTAs regarding their roles and responsibilities was responsible for the tension and conflict between them that eventually hinders teaching and learning in schools.

Kindiki (2009) observes that the essence of the devolution of school management was to advance decision-making on the governance of schools. The same view was expressed by Heystek (2003). This decision-making was entrusted to school governing bodies. However, some SMCs and PTAs have exceeded their mandate and have even taken over the role of operations management in school, which has resulted in tension and conflict between head teachers and school governing bodies (Onderi and Makori, 2012). Tension and conflict among the stakeholders in the schools concerning the roles played by each were also reported by (Huber, 2011). Cases of frequent interference by school governing bodies in the specialized governance of schools were reported in South African schools where school governing bodies were accusing the head teachers of not involving them in the teaching and learning process (Heystek, 2011). However, the jurisdiction of school governing bodies does not extend to participation in specialised governance of schools (James *et al.*, 2011).

Lack of a participatory approach by SMCs in executing the duties of the school: Jerry and Anne (2008) observe that programme managers are often asked to develop monitoring systems that measure the aims and objectives of their programme without involving stakeholders under the participatory approach. This often creates a challenge during the implementation stage as it becomes difficult for other stakeholders who did not participate in the design to understand the extremely complex social development objectives stakeholders are hoping to address within any project or programme, or to establish the logical links between the problem and purpose statements, the objectives and activities (Jerry and Anne, 2008). As a result, implementation of the monitoring framework becomes a problem. This view reflects Uganda's situation where the monitoring system is designed by the MoES, which then requests SMCs and other stakeholders to implement it in monitoring school activities (MoES, 2007). The fact that the stakeholders are requested to implement a complicated system in whose design they did not participate and whose aims and objectives are not clear to them means that implementation becomes a challenge (Jerry and Garbutt, 2008).

Lack of financial management skills by SMCs to perform their roles: For effective running of schools, financial management is vital and it should be the duty of a person in a position of authority to carry out those management actions (regulated tasks) connected with the financial aspects of schools and having the sole purpose of achieving effective education (Mercy and Kubaison, 2014). Similarly, Joubert and Bray (2007) describe a school's financial management as the performance of management actions connected with the financial aspects of a school for the achievement of improved school performance. What is common in these definitions of financial management is that a connection is made between the management tasks and the financial issues in a school. The phenomenon is that the management of school finances involves the task of budgeting, coordinating, communicating and motivating, as well as controlling (Clarke, 2007). It is the obligation of the school head to ensure accountability and efficient utilisation of school funds, yet many lack the knowledge and skills necessary for managing school funds (MoES, 2012). Good financial management in schools is vital for a better functioning school (Goetz, Durband, Halley and Davis, 2011). It is, therefore, the financial management in schools that determines the competence of school governing boards (Yau and Cheng, 2014).

A better functioning school is determined by the way in which its resources are effectively and efficiently managed in a transparent and accountable way (Antonowicz, 2010). One of the great challenges facing SMCs is the difficulty of managing school finances due to lack of financial expertise (Antonowicz, 2010). Govender (2004) observes that it is not insufficient financial resources that are a problem in providing education services but rather the lack of the capacity to plan, budget and control the available finances that has proved to be a serious challenge faced by SMCs in effecting their mandate. Kiprono, Nganga and Kanyiri (2015) observe that SMCs have failed to deliver to the expectations of other education stakeholders owing to lack of the capacity to plan, budget, control and account for the use of school resources. Involving the communities in the management and administration of an education system is a sure way of achieving education outcomes (Kamba, 2010). Azeem (2010) observes that owing

to poor community participation in financial management and in major decisions affecting schools, governments have wasted substantial resources that are sent to manage schools because in many schools the resources are misallocated and, as such, there is no value for money. Bashaasha, Najjingo and Nkonya (2009) found that what affects SMCs' perception was lack of accountability and transparency in the management of funds in schools brought about by power imbalances between school administrations and committee members. The situation is worsened by SMCs' failure to access information that is relevant for their monitoring work as a result of lack of cooperation between SMCs and school administrations. In such a situation the school administrations regard most of the committee members as illiterate and, therefore, unable to know how school activities are run, especially in rural areas, which has made the monitoring role of SMCs insignificant (Bashaasha, Najjingo and Nkonya, 2009).

Research Design: In order to explore and have a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of the challenges experienced by SMCs in the implementation of UPE, a case study design was used in this research. Case study involves rigorous and comprehensive qualitative and quantitative data collection about the case under study (Luck, Jackson, and Usher 2006). In this study, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to enhance the understanding of the problem under study. Conceptually, this study used explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, a recommended mixed methods designs in educational research that contains two distinct phases (Creswell, 2003). In this study, data collection was done in two phases. In the first phase, numeric data was collected and analysed using descriptive statistics. Emerging issues from quantitative analysis were studied further qualitatively under phase two and there after integration of both quantitative and qualitative analysis was done and interpreted in line with research problem.

Target Population: The target population for this study were SMC members in Mbarara District, western part of Uganda. These SMCs are charged with the responsibility of ensuring that UPE implementation succeeds in their areas of jurisdiction. Eight schools were selected and from eight schools, 96 SMC members were selected to participate in the study under quantitative phase one. In phase two, eight chairpersons of SMCs from eight selected schools participated in the study. School head teachers were excluded in the study because they are ex-officials on the committees but also they are directly involved in the management and utilization of school resources. So involving them in the study could have compromised the quality of data collected since some vital information could not be accurately given.

Sampling procedure: Teddlie and Yu (2007) revealed that in a study involving schools, schools can be purposively selected, then both the survey and non-survey data collection methods be used in selecting subjects to participate in the study. Therefore, from the eight selected schools targeting SMC members, government schools had thirteen members, foundation body schools, some had eighteen members and one school had twenty members. A large representative sample using simple random sampling technique in which each individual in the population had an equal probability of being selected was used. In this study, a total of 96 questionnaires were administered to generate quantitative data for generalization within the population of the study in the first

phase and 8 members of SMCs from all sampled schools were selected to be interviewed. In eight selected schools, a chairperson of SMC was selected, and where the chairperson was absent or not willing to participate in the study, the vice chairperson was selected. The chairpersons and their deputies were selected to participate in the study because they were regarded as more knowledgeable about the subject matter under investigation.

Research Instruments: Quantitative data was collected using the questionnaire. This instrument was appropriate because all the participants to the study were literate and therefore understood what the tool demanded. The Instrument contained the standardized questions that needed standardized answers which were vital for ease of analysis. Qualitative data was collected using structured interview that was conducted by the researcher.

Validity of the Research Instruments: In this study, the face validity was conducted. The face validity was established with the help of the SMC peer review group totalling to thirty-five in number. They were asked to review the items on the questionnaire and assess the extent to which they reflected the meaning they are expected to measure. This process was followed by rewording some statements that were seen not to be appropriate. For qualitative study, credibility was ensued by staying longer at sites to verify data collected, then enhanced by the provision of in-depth description of data to enable readers to make their own interpretations. A detailed description of the researcher's interaction with participants in the field, including challenges encountered and how these were dealt with, also enhanced trustworthiness of the study. Prolonged engagement in the field as well as member checking ensured trustworthiness in the case of interviews (Creswell, 2008).

Reliability of the Research Instruments: For quantitative data, reliability was ensued by measuring the internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951; Nunally, 1978), which reflects the homogeneity of a scale. Trustworthiness was guaranteed in qualitative data where the researcher constantly referred to verbatim utterances of participants, thus providing primary data which every reader could use to assess the accuracy of conclusions reached. Trustworthiness and the credibility of the study depended on its truth value, consistency and transferability.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Quantitatively majority of the participants (70.1%) revealed that SMC members lacked knowledge and skills to do their monitoring work in schools of their jurisdiction, 52.1% agreed that members of SMCs lack expertise in the area of financial management. On whether decision-making from monitoring activities was done collectively by members of SMCs, 72% disagreed. This was explained by the fact that influential members of the SMCs were found to be taking some decisions on behalf of others, explained by the response of 63.6%. The study further revealed that SMCs worked with head teachers that lacked financial management skills at 63.2%. Yet another challenge was that SMCs did not meet regularly to monitor how school activities were run (69.1%). This was explained by lack of commitment since members of the SMCs work on voluntary basis with no financial benefits as a motivator. On whether there is teamwork among members of SMCs in

executing their monitoring roles, 76% disagreed that it did exist yet Abigail, Mugisha, Sermeels and Zeitlin (2012) observe that it is only through collective action by all those concerned with the monitoring exercise that monitoring activities can be undertaken for improved school performance. Where there is absence of collective action, some of the decisions taken will only be in the interest of a few members of the committee (Prinsen and Titeca, 2008; Nemes, 2013). Further, majority of the participants (64.1%) agreed that SMCs did not know how schools were run owing to lack of knowledge and skills. Finally, majority (64.6%) of participants agreed that that SMCs lacked the mandate to take corrective action in schools. However, the study did not find any conflict between PTA and SMCs in executing their monitoring roles in schools. Instead (82.2%) agreed that there was a collaborative effort where all the school activities and decisions were taken jointly. The findings from the interviews suggest that the challenges faced by SMCs in monitoring the implementation of UPE were categorised as policy issues and administrative issues. On the policy issues the study found out that SMCs are constrained in doing their work by limited power and authority to take action regarding the way schools are run. This is due to the fact that the government policy on UPE is to ensure that no child is sent away for non-payment of school fees and lack of scholastic materials and yet the funds government sends to schools are not adequate. The management and control of teachers remain in the hands of the central and local governments with less input from the SMCs, which hinders teaching and learning. The findings also reveal that some SMCs have low levels of education, which limits their ability to contribute and make decisions that are relevant to the development of schools. This is so because the Education Act 2008 is silent on the level of education and experience required for somebody to be voted a member of a SMC. So the community simply elects somebody who is influential regardless of their education levels which leads to wrong decisions being undertaken that hinders teaching and learning.

On administrative issues, the study found out that there is lack of cooperation among the key stakeholders in schools, which hinders the efficient management of schools. The analysis further reveals that SMCs do not take full control of the way in which school activities are run and the school funds are spent, which is responsible for the misappropriation of school funds. The analysis further shows that SMCs do not have the full mandate to take all the decisions on the activities of the schools, which is likely to curtail their commitment to do their monitoring work. The findings also reveal that, much as decision-making in schools is done through the participatory approach by involving all the stakeholders, there are members whose views dominate other members' views. This shows that the decisions taken in schools by SMCs may not be democratically arrived at by all members, an indicator that inappropriate decisions are likely to be taken that may hinder the development of schools. The findings from the analysis, therefore, reveal that lack of financial expertise in the area of financial management, lack of knowledge and skills on how schools are run, lack of a mandate to take corrective action in schools, irregular meetings of SMCs, dominance by influential members of committees, which are of policy and administrative issues were found to be the main challenges affecting the implementation of UPE. The findings are in support of Maile (2002), who asserts that school governing bodies have a challenge of illiteracy among members, which contributes to inefficiency in the way they do their work. In

relation to illiteracy, Van Wyk (2004) found that many school governing bodies, especially in rural areas, did not possess the knowledge and skills needed to perform their roles effectively. The finding is also in support of Xaba (2011) who governing bodies have failed to execute their roles and responsibilities in schools owing to their low levels of education, which has resulted in wrong decisions being made in the governance of schools. The findings further are in support of Pushpanadham, (2000) who asserts that SMCs are faced with the challenge of undertaking technical roles for which they lack expertise in areas such as budgeting, expenditure planning and infrastructure development planning as well as lack of information on the roles of head teachers and teachers in schools. The finding is also in conformity with that of Mbena, (2005) who found out that in most rural areas, the duties and functions of the SMCs are undertaken by the influential members, who command respect and regard themselves as superior and/or the vocal members of the committee. This situation puts those members who are not influential and with low self-esteem in a position where they are unable to contribute to the decisions, which affects schools since they only remain observers when decisions are being taken. In support of this assertion, Van Wyk (2004) also observes that some members of school governing bodies lack confidence regarding their roles and duties, which makes them inferior to other members. Ayeni and Olusola (2013) state that many SMC members have limited knowledge about how the daily activities of schools are run and coordinated, how personnel administration issues are handled, how conflict resolution is undertaken and other statutory matters in relation to which they are expected to offer professional and technical inputs to enable decision-making for sustainable improvement in the performance of schools. A better functioning school is determined by the way in which its resources are effectively and efficiently managed in a transparent and accountable way (Antonowicz, 2010). One of the great challenges facing SMCs is managing school finances resulting from lack of financial expertise affects planning and budgeting in the utilization of school resources that are insufficient (Antonowicz, 2010). It is, therefore, the efficiency of financial management in schools that determines the competence of school governing boards (Yau & Cheng, 2014).

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to conduct an empirical study on the challenges experienced by SMCs in monitoring the implementation of UPE in Uganda. The objective of the study was to assess the challenges SMCs experience in their monitoring roles and how these challenges affect the implementation of UPE in Uganda. The findings reveal lack of the mandate by SMCs to effectively implement the findings of the monitoring activities, which limits their capacity to take corrective decisions affecting their schools. As much as the education Act 2008 mandates the SMCs to undertake certain duties and responsibilities in schools, the power and authority to run schools still lie with the local and central government but not at school level. The findings also reveal that, much as decision-making in schools is done through the participatory approach by involving all the stakeholders, there are members whose views dominate other members' views. This shows that the decisions taken in schools by SMCs may not be democratically arrived at by all members, an indicator that inappropriate decisions are likely to be taken that may hinder the development of schools. The findings of the study therefore

concludes that the challenges affecting effective implementation of UPE in Uganda are of policy nature as well as administrative nature.

Recommendations

- The government should put in place the minimum level of knowledge and skills with a bias in financial management for one to be elected a member of SMC. This helps in budgeting for the school resources, controlling expenditures, ensuring essential facilities are place and this promotes teaching and learning for better education outcomes.
- The government should empower and give mandate to SMCs and the communities to take corrective actions on issues concerning with the activities of the schools that promotes teaching and learning. This empowerment creates a sense of ownership of schools that is likely to guarantee transparency and accountability in the way school resources are managed.
- The challenge of dominance by some members of the school management committee, should be administratively handled through encouragement participatory approach in and collective approach in the way decisions are arrived at and implemented. This creates collective responsibility that eliminates inferiority complex of some members in decision making. This harmony creates a conducive environment for effective teaching and learning.

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