



The Thematic Analysis for the Implementation of SDM Technique for Higher Academic Performance among Federal Universities in Northeast, Nigeria

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Abstract

The research explores the implementation of SDM techniques in Northeast Federal Universities in Nigeria, focusing on the role of the committee system, stakeholder satisfaction, socio-political and cultural influences, and strategies for enhancing SDM adoption. The study reveals that the committee system is crucial in fostering SDM by promoting collaboration, transparency, and shared responsibility among faculty, staff, and students whereas stakeholder satisfaction improves when SDM practices are implemented, as they lead to greater involvement, empowerment, and alignment with institutional goals. However, socio-political and cultural factors, such as traditional hierarchical structures and political influences, pose challenges to SDM adoption. Despite these barriers, local values of community and consensus offer opportunities for integration, hence, it is revealed that the strategies to enhance SDM include cultural transformation, capacity building, empowerment of lower-level stakeholders, and the establishment of inclusive decision-making structures. The study concludes that with strong leadership support and strategic planning, SDM can significantly improve governance and organizational effectiveness among Federal Universities in Northeast Nigeria.

Keywords: *Decision-Making, Thematic Analysis, Academic Performance, Northeast Federal Universities*

Introduction

SDM is a collaborative approach to organizational governance that integrates the perspectives of various stakeholders in decision-making processes. It promotes inclusivity, transparency, and shared responsibility, which are essential for achieving institutional goals in complex organizations such as universities. SDM is anchored on principles of transparency, accountability, and inclusivity, promoting a sense of ownership and commitment to institutional goals. (Stone-Johnson & Weiner, 2023).

As Nigerian universities grapple with challenges of governance, resource constraints, and stakeholder dissatisfaction, the relevance of implementing SDM techniques is necessary. Additionally, over the years, the concept of SDM has gained wide recognition as an effective governance strategy for improving performance and fostering inclusivity in the western world. Higher education institutions in Nigeria, particularly the Federal universities in the Northeast, face a range of systemic challenges that necessitate the adoption of SDM. These include inadequate funding, bureaucratic issues, academic staff strikes, and administrative inefficiencies, all of which have significantly hindered their

ability to deliver quality education. The traditional top-down approach to decision-making has often been criticized for alienating stakeholders, creating mistrust, and exacerbating conflicts.

Consequently, there is a growing need to adopt governance models that integrate diverse perspectives and promote participatory engagement. SDM offers a potential solution, aligning with global best practices to enhance institutional effectiveness and foster harmony among stakeholders. In the United States universities have successfully implemented functional SDM techniques through faculty senates, councils, and committees, enabling collaborative policy formulation and implementation. Similarly, European universities have embraced participatory governance models, integrating faculty, students, and administrative staff in decision-making processes. These practices have led to improved trust, reduced conflict, and a stronger alignment between institutional policies and stakeholder expectations (Owan & Omorobi, 2020).

In contrast, the governance structure of Nigerian universities remains predominantly hierarchical, characterized by centralized decision-making. Vice-Chancellors, governing councils, and other top-level administrators often make critical decisions with limited input from other stakeholders. This approach has led to frequent clashes between Academic Staff Unions and University management, prolonged industrial actions, and a decline in the global rankings of Nigerian universities. The absence of a participatory governance framework undermines efforts to build resilient institutions capable of addressing the dynamic challenges of higher education in the 21st century (Akuegwu, 2016).

The Northeast geopolitical zone of Nigeria presents a unique context for examining the implementation these techniques. This region has been significantly affected by insecurity, economic challenges, and infrastructural deficits, which have further compounded the challenges facing its federal universities. Despite these constraints, these institutions play a critical role in human capital development and regional socio-economic advancement. Implementing SDM techniques in this context holds promise for mitigating conflict, fostering inclusivity, and improving institutional outcomes. Despite its potential, the implementation of SDM in Nigerian universities is fraught with challenges. These include resistance to change, entrenched bureaucratic practices, and limited awareness of the benefits of participatory governance. Additionally, the absence of robust legal and policy frameworks to support SDM further complicates its adoption. Addressing these barriers requires a multifaceted approach, involving capacity building, stakeholder sensitization, and policy reforms. Lessons from international best practices can provide valuable insights into designing effective SDM frameworks tailored to the Nigerian context. This study focuses on the implementation of SDM techniques in northeast federal universities in Nigeria. It seeks to examine the extent to which these techniques have been

adopted, the challenges encountered, and the outcomes achieved. By analyzing the experiences of stakeholders, including administrators, faculty, and students, the study aims to provide evidence-based recommendations for improving governance practices in Nigerian universities.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to ongoing efforts to reform higher education governance in Nigeria. By highlighting the benefits and challenges of SDM, the study can inform policy decisions and guide institutional reforms. Moreover, it addresses a critical gap in the literature, providing empirical insights into the practical application of SDM in a developing country context. As Nigerian universities strive to enhance their global competitiveness, adopting participatory governance models such as SDM can serve as a catalyst for institutional transformation. The implementation of SDM techniques in Nigerian universities offers a viable pathway for addressing the governance challenges that have hindered their progress. By fostering inclusivity, transparency, and accountability, SDM can enhance institutional performance, improve stakeholder satisfaction, and contribute to the broader goals of higher education development in Nigeria. This study provides a timely and relevant contribution to the discourse on university governance, offering practical insights for policymakers, administrators, and stakeholders seeking to build resilient and effective institutions in the Northeast geopolitical zone and beyond. The objectives of this study include the following:

Literature Review

In Nigerian Federal Universities, especially in the Northeast, governance structures have traditionally been centralized and hierarchical. This has often led to a lack of employee involvement, dissatisfaction, and inefficiency in decision-making (Adebayo & Ogunlade, 2021). Implementing SDM could address these challenges, fostering improved governance and institutional effectiveness. This review examines existing literature on Shared Decision Making, its relevance in higher education, the challenges of implementation, and its potential impact on Nigerian Federal Universities.

Review of Prior Empirical Literature

Hussein, Hassan, Hussein, and Hussein (2025) the study investigated the impact of knowledge sharing on the effectiveness of decision-making in the context of a university setting, the study used data collected from a sample of 40 employees and professors at the Presidency of the University of Technology using a questionnaire. Knowledge sharing was measured through three dimensions: collaborative environment, participation culture, and perceived values, while decision making effectiveness was assessed using contentment, work relationships, and personal preparedness.

The empirical results indicate that knowledge sharing is positively correlated with the effectiveness of decision making, and the dimensions of knowledge sharing significantly influence the dimensions of decision-making effectiveness highlighting the importance of fostering a collaborative work environment, encouraging participation culture, and promoting perceived values of knowledge sharing to enhance the effectiveness of decision-making processes within the university.

Lehane, Curtin, and Corrigan (2023) described the nature of teaching Shared Decision Making (SDM) within the context of Evidence Based Practice (EBP) to support development of contemporaneous EBP education programmes for healthcare learners. A scoping review following the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) guidance was conducted with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) used to guide reporting. The narrative overview of 23 studies provides insight into the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of teaching SDM within the context of EBP education, a minority of studies explicitly and concurrently incorporated EBP and SDM in terms of how programme content was organized, the study indicates that intentionally structuring learning activities in a manner which demonstrates the relevance and interdependence of SDM and EBP may mitigate ‘learning silos’ and enhance learners' abilities to make connections required in practice.

Li, Pyrkova, and Ryabova, (2017) the study aimed at developing and implementing model (structure) of effective doctor-patient interaction and its application when teaching future medical workers. The study adopts psychological-pedagogical experiment, which represents a task-oriented and organized process of communication skills improvement. At the beginning of the educational course and upon its completion, the students of the control and experimental groups were given psycho-diagnostic techniques to fill in, the results of which showed improvement of communication skills in the experimental group, the empirical result indicates that the study may be helpful to the teachers of psycho-pedagogical disciplines and during the development and implementation of interactive educational modules used during accreditation of health care professionals as well.

Keung, C.C. (2008) empirically examine the effect of shared decision-making on the improvement in teachers’ job development the study identifies a participatory model that help school administrators decisions for improving teachers’ affective outcomes, which result in quality decision-making. The study leverages the theoretically and causal relationship between teacher participation in decision-making and their affective outcome for developing a participatory decision model, and identify the decision domains that would assist school administrators to effectively involve teachers in decision-making under the school-based management policy. The study adopts the gathering of primary data using questionnaires, which were sent to 20 secondary schools in Hong Kong. A total of 335

teacher-completed questionnaires were collected from all the target schools. In the study, the theoretical model and questionnaires were constructed by synthesizing theories from literatures. Principal axis factor analysis and reliability test were used to validate the constructed validity and reliability of the questionnaires.

Structural equation modeling was applied to validate the participatory model and estimate the correlation among the variables. The results showed that a multi-dimensional decision was identified by the structural equation modeling, the relationship among the variables of the model were also explored. The three-dimensional decision model includes instructional, curriculum and managerial domains; and the variables of the affective outcome include job satisfaction, job commitment and perception of workload. All the affective outcomes were related to the form and extent of teachers' participation in decision-making.

Theoretical Foundations

There are essentially two theoretical foundations that serve as the basis for decision making in organizations. Participative Decision-Making Theory posits that involving individuals at all levels of an organization in decision-making fosters ownership, motivation, and better outcomes (Vroom & Yetton, 1973). In educational settings, this theory underscores the importance of engaging faculty, administrative staff, and students in governance processes. Institutional Theory highlights how organizational norms, structures, and cultural contexts shape decision-making processes (Christian, 2013). In Nigerian universities, institutional frameworks often dictate governance practices, which can either facilitate or hinder the adoption of participative approaches like SDM.

These theories emphasize the importance of stakeholder involvement in decision-making processes to ensure legitimacy, fairness, and efficiency. In the context of higher education, SDM aligns with the principles of collegiality, which advocate for collective input and shared responsibility in governance. By fostering collaboration among stakeholders, SDM techniques can address the governance gaps that have plagued Nigerian universities, creating a more conducive environment for academic excellence and institutional growth.

The Interplay between SDM and Nigerian Higher Education

Decision-making in Nigerian Federal Universities has historically been top-down, with Vice Chancellors and Senior Administrators dominating governance, this approach often excludes faculty and students, leading to discontent and inefficiencies. Emerging studies show that universities adopting SDM experience improved staff engagement and decision quality (Akinwale & Igbokwe, 2022). For example, the University of Lagos' partial adoption of SDM has reportedly enhanced staff collaboration and reduced

administrative conflicts (Adebayo & Ogunlade, 2021). Student participation in university leadership positively impacts leadership effectiveness, a study examining 12 universities in South-West Nigeria found a significant relationship between student involvement in decision-making and leadership effectiveness, suggesting that inclusive governance models can enhance institutional performance (Adesoji & Jeremiah, 2015).

The committee system is a prevalent mechanism for facilitating SDM in Nigerian universities. It democratizes decision-making by allowing representation from various university sectors, ensuring that diverse perspectives are considered. This system promotes shared governance and enhances managerial accountability (Christiana, 2013). Effective information management systems are crucial for successful SDM. A recent studies highlighted a significant relationship between information management systems, SDM patterns, and university management, underscoring the importance of efficient information flow in participatory governance.

Implementing SDM in Nigerian Federal universities faces challenges such as entrenched bureaucratic practices, resistance to change, and limited stakeholder capacity. Nigerian universities are often characterized by rigid bureaucratic structures that hinder participative governance (Agboola & Ayodele, 2022). In the community setting, it has been established that Traditional hierarchical systems resist participatory governance; traditional leadership styles in Nigerian institutions often conflict with SDM principles. This cultural resistance poses a significant barrier to implementation (Okonkwo & Anikwe, 2023). Effective SDM requires training stakeholders on participatory governance practices, however, such training is often lacking in Nigerian universities (Akinwale & Igbokwe, 2022). Additionally, limited funding and infrastructure hinder Shared Decision Making implementation.

The Benefit and Impact of Shared Decision Making Models to Nigerian Universities

S/No	Benefit		Impact	
	Indicators	Author (s)	Benefit	Impacts
1	Governance	González & Firestone, (2021)	SDM ensures diverse perspectives are considered, leading to balanced and effective decisions	Bush & Glover, (2022) SDM enhances institutional performance by aligning decisions with stakeholder needs and strengthens internal communication, reducing conflicts and fostering collaboration.
2	Staff Satisfaction	Johnson et al., (2020)	Participatory approaches empower staff, boosting morale and productivity	Mbon & Ekpenyong, (2020) SDM fosters a sense of ownership among employees, improving job satisfaction and reducing turnover. For academic staff, involvement in governance promotes innovation and academic freedom.
3	Institutional Accountability		Transparent decision-making builds trust among stakeholders and strengthens institutional reputation	Stone-Johnson & Weiner, (2023) Involving students in decision-making improves their sense of belonging, engagement, and academic performance.

Source: *Author Compilation, 2025*

Methods

The study adopts a thematic approach which tend to analyze and interpret a problem by identifying and exploring the root cause of problem under investigation to provide a comprehensive understanding and practices. The approach leverages the identification of affiliation that between an issue and gives deeper understanding of a subject matter.

The population includes key stakeholders in the decision-making processes of Northeast Federal universities, such as: University administrators (e.g., Vice-Chancellors, Deans, Heads of Departments), Academic and non-academic staff, and student representatives involved in governance structures. Stratified Random Sampling is used to ensure representation across various stakeholder categories and a purposive sampling method is employed for selecting participants for qualitative interviews, targeting individuals with direct experience in SDM.

A Semi-structured interviews is adopted to provide a deeper insights into stakeholders' experiences and contextual factors influencing SDM practices. The questions are designed to assess; the level of stakeholder involvement in decision-making., perceived effectiveness of SDM techniques and Barriers and facilitators to SDM implementation. The questionnaire and interview guide are validated by subject matter experts to ensure reliability and construct validity. The Expected Outcomes form analytical techniques using thematic approach are:

- i. Identification of current level of SDM implementation in Northeast Federal universities.
- ii. Analysis of factors promoting or hindering SDM practices.
- iii. Recommendations for improving SDM frameworks to enhance governance and stakeholder satisfaction.

Result Analysis

As outlined earlier, thematic analysis will be used to analyze the data accrued. Hence find below a table detailing the questions from the interview, the sample response excerpts, the key themes derived, and evaluation/implications of the response data.

SN	Question	Sample Response	Themes	Implication/Inferences
1	What is the level of stakeholder participation in decision-making processes in NFU?	Stakeholders are actively involved in all levels of decision-making, including strategic planning, policy formulation, and operational decisions.	Levels of Stakeholder Participation	Responses highlight limited stakeholder engagement in governance processes, often due to hierarchical decision-making structures. Faculty and students report minimal influence on strategic decisions but greater involvement

				in operational-level decisions through committees.
2	What are the perceptions of university administrators, faculty, and students regarding the effectiveness of SDM?	Very Effective: SDM practices lead to improved transparency, trust, and institutional outcomes, with significant contributions from all stakeholders.	Perceptions of SDM Effectiveness	Administrators perceive SDM as a potential tool for improving trust and institutional performance. Faculty and students express skepticism, citing inconsistencies in implementation and lack of genuine inclusivity.
3	What decision-making techniques are predominantly used in NFU?	Decisions are made by senior administrators with minimal or no input from other stakeholders.	Predominant Decision-Making Techniques.	Bureaucratic and top-down approaches dominate in most universities. Committee-based decision-making emerges as the primary avenue for SDM, although its effectiveness varies by institution.
4	What are the key barriers to implementing SDM in these universities?	Resistance to Change: Stakeholders are reluctant to adopt new decision-making practices.	Barriers to SDM Implementation	Key barriers include resistance to change, entrenched bureaucracy, lack of awareness, and limited stakeholder capacity. Respondents also note external challenges such as political interference and funding constraints.
5	What are the primary facilitators that support the adoption of SDM?	Organizational Culture: A culture that promotes innovation, collaboration, and flexibility is essential for adopting new methodologies. Organizations that value continuous improvement are more likely to adopt SDM.	Facilitators Supporting SDM Adoption	Availability of well-defined governance structures and policies. Strong leadership support for participatory governance. Increased training and sensitization on the benefits of SDM.
6	How does SDM impact institutional governance and organizational effectiveness in NFU?	Enhanced Stakeholder Engagement by involving a broader range of stakeholders, SDM promotes inclusivity in decision-making processes.	Impact on Governance and Effectiveness	SDM fosters transparency, enhances decision quality, and reduces conflicts when implemented effectively. Inadequate SDM practices contribute to discontent and organizational inefficiencies.
7	What role does the committee system play in fostering SDM within these institutions?		Role of the Committee System	Committees provide a platform for diverse voices but are often constrained by lack of autonomy and resources. Faculty and student representatives suggest empowering committees with more decision-making authority.
8	What is the relationship between SDM practices and stakeholder satisfaction	Facilitating Representation and Inclusivity	Stakeholder Satisfaction	Stakeholders report higher satisfaction levels when their input is valued and reflected in outcomes.

				Inconsistent practices lead to frustration and reduced morale among faculty and staff.
9	How do socio-political and cultural factors in Northeast Nigeria influence the implementation of SDM?	Cultural Hierarchy and Authority: In many parts of NFU, there is a deep respect for hierarchical authority and centralized decision-making. This traditional cultural structure can present challenges to the adoption of SDM, as individuals may be less inclined to share decision-making power with others, especially those in lower positions.	Socio-Political and Cultural Influences	Cultural deference to authority in Northeast Nigeria often hinders open dialogue and inclusivity. Regional insecurity limits stakeholder engagement and prioritizes stability over participatory practices.
10	What strategies can be developed to enhance the adoption and effectiveness of SDM in Nigerian universities?	Cultural Transformation and Awareness Campaigns: To overcome resistance to change, universities should implement programs that educate staff, faculty, and students about the benefits of SDM.	Strategies for Enhancing SDM	Recommendations include capacity-building initiatives, policy reforms to institutionalize SDM, and pilot programs to showcase benefits. Creating transparent feedback mechanisms to monitor and improve SDM practices is emphasized.

Source: *Author Compilation (2025)*

Conclusion

This study has explored the implementation of SDM techniques in northeast federal universities in Nigeria, with particular attention to the role of the committee system, the relationship between SDM practices and stakeholder satisfaction, the influence of socio-political and cultural factors, and the strategies for enhancing the adoption and effectiveness of SDM. Through the analysis, several key findings and insights have emerged.

First, the committee system plays a pivotal role in fostering SDM within Nigerian universities by providing a structured, collaborative framework for decision-making. Committees bring together diverse stakeholders, including faculty, staff, and students, ensuring that decisions reflect the collective input and interests of all relevant groups. This inclusive approach enhances transparency, accountability, and shared ownership, which are central to the principles of SDM.

Second, the relationship between SDM practices and stakeholder satisfaction is highly positive. When SDM is effectively implemented, stakeholders, including faculty, staff, and students, report greater satisfaction due to the participatory nature of the decision-making process. Stakeholders feel valued and empowered when their voices are heard, leading to a sense of ownership and commitment to institutional goals. This sense of

involvement directly correlates with higher levels of engagement, motivation, and organizational cohesion.

Third, socio-political and cultural factors in Northeast Nigeria have a profound impact on the implementation of SDM in universities. Cultural norms that emphasize hierarchy and centralized authority can present challenges to SDM adoption, as these traditional values may conflict with the collaborative and decentralized nature of SDM. However, the region's strong community ties, shared values, and respect for collective decision-making can also serve as enablers, provided that these cultural elements are integrated into SDM frameworks in a way that respects local customs. Political influence further complicates the process, as university governance may be swayed by external political pressures that prioritize top-down decision-making.

Lastly, several strategies can be developed to enhance the adoption and effectiveness of SDM in Nigerian universities. These include cultural transformation through awareness campaigns, capacity building and training for all stakeholders, empowerment of lower-level participants, and the establishment of inclusive decision-making structures such as cross-departmental committees. Transparency in communication, strong institutional support from leadership, and the use of technology to facilitate collaboration and information sharing are also critical to ensuring that SDM is adopted effectively. Addressing gender imbalances and structural barriers will help ensure that SDM is inclusive and accessible to all members of the university community.

The implementation of SDM in Northeast Nigerian universities holds great potential to improve governance, enhance stakeholder satisfaction, and foster a more inclusive and collaborative decision-making environment. However, for SDM to be fully realized, it is essential to consider the socio-political and cultural context and develop strategies that address local challenges while promoting the core values of shared responsibility and collective decision-making. With strong leadership support, strategic capacity building, and a commitment to inclusivity, SDM can significantly contribute to the transformation of governance and organizational effectiveness in these institutions.

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