

## Exploring the Lived Experiences of Teachers in Participatory Management

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<p><b>Corresponding Author</b> Shenna Liz G. Sararaña</p> <p>Department of Education, Philippines</p> <p><b>Article History</b></p> <p>Received: 15 / 04 / 2025</p> <p>Accepted: 28 / 04 / 2025</p> <p>Published: 02 / 05 / 2025</p>	<p><b>Abstract:</b> This study explored the impact of participatory management practices in schools, focusing on the experiences of teachers regarding their school heads' leadership styles. Participatory management, characterized by empowerment, shared decision-making, and stakeholder collaboration, had gained prominence as an effective approach to enhancing organizational effectiveness and fostering stronger relationships between employees and employers. However, challenges persisted in the true implementation of these practices, particularly in educational settings where school heads often failed to involve teachers in key decision-making processes. This research addressed the gap in understanding the influence of participatory management on teachers' behavior, morale, and overall effectiveness. Conducted in Cotabato Province, Philippines, the study employed a phenomenological research design, interviewing 15 teachers to gather insights into their lived experiences. The findings revealed three key themes: Teacher Empowerment, Shared Decision-Making, and Encouraging Stakeholder Collaboration, which highlighted the positive effects of participatory management on teachers' confidence, professional growth, and their active involvement in school improvement initiatives. The study emphasized the importance of inclusive leadership and collaborative decision-making in fostering a thriving educational environment.</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Participatory management, teacher empowerment, shared decision-making, stakeholder collaboration.</p>
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## INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, there has been a growing trend of employees seeking more involvement in decision-making processes, aiming to become integral members of their teams. This shift reflects broader changes in organizational environments, where participatory management, emphasizing respect, equality, and the active expression of ideas, has emerged as a solution. Participatory management aims to enhance decision-making, foster better relationships between employees and employers, and improve organizational effectiveness (Ryatura, Serunjogyi, and Asimwe, 2023).

However, the genuine implementation of participatory management remains a global challenge. Critics, such as Akhimien & Oriomah (2023), argue that true participatory decision-making is either non-existent or poorly executed in certain regions, including Nigeria, due to a lack of essential conditions for effective employee involvement. Furthermore, a significant issue persists in schools, where school heads often fail to involve teachers in critical activities, leading to issues such as absenteeism, lack of commitment, and unprofessional behavior (John and Asimwe, 2024).

In the Philippines, particularly in Zamboanga City, secondary school teachers express dissatisfaction with their principals' management styles, urging for greater involvement in

decision-making processes to enhance their morale and effectiveness (Canaya, 2008). However, there is a clear research gap in examining the direct impact of participatory management on teachers' behavior and morale. While past studies (Ssali, 2011; Asimwe and Niyikiza, 2013, 2014; Asimwe and Zuweni, 2023) have addressed the relationship between teachers' involvement in school activities and their job performance, they have not sufficiently explored the effects on deeper variables such as behavior and morale. This study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by investigating the influence of participatory management on these aspects of teachers' professional lives, offering a more comprehensive understanding of its impact on teachers' overall well-being and effectiveness in the educational setting.

### Statement of the Problem

- What are the themes describing school heads' participatory management practices as perceived by teachers?

### Phase 1: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Teachers in Participatory Management

In this phase of the study, qualitative data were gathered to present the findings from interviews with teachers, aimed at gathering insights into the participatory management practices of their school heads. The participants shared their personal

experiences through in-depth interviews, which were recorded via phone with their consent.

Table 3 shows that the experiences shared by the teacher-participants which includes three (3) global themes revealed from the responses: Teacher Empowerment, Shared Decision-Making, and Encouraging Stakeholder Collaboration.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a phenomenological research design and was conducted in the 3rd congressional district of Cotabato Province, Philippines. Fifteen (15) key informants were interviewed to gather insights into their lived experiences regarding the school heads' participatory management practices. Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to, ensuring the confidentiality of the informants and respecting their privacy throughout the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows that the experiences shared by the teacher-participants which includes three (3) global themes revealed from the responses: Teacher Empowerment, Shared Decision-Making, and Encouraging Stakeholder Collaboration.

### School Heads' Participatory Management Practices

**Teacher Empowerment** The first theme that emerged aligns with school heads providing teachers with the authority and opportunities to make decisions about their work and the educational environment. This empowerment is not just about providing a title or a role but about allowing teachers to actively showcase their skills in managing the school and its day-to-day operations. When school heads give teachers the authority to take on responsibilities, such as overseeing certain tasks or leading initiatives, it provides them with real-world experience in school management.

Majority of the informants shared that they felt empowered by their school heads when assigned the role of officer-in-charge. This role allowed them to experience the responsibilities of a school head, even if just for a day. The teachers were able to make decisions, manage tasks, and oversee operations, which gave them a deeper understanding of leadership and school management. It allowed them to expand their professional skills and build confidence in their abilities to lead and make impactful decisions.

### In support to this, participants shared that:

*"Nung ina-assign ako bilang officer-in-charge, ramdam ko talaga ang participative management. Hindi lang basta title ang binigay sa amin—ibig sabihin, bibigyan kami ng tunay na pagkakataon na magdesisyon at mag-manage ng school operations. Nagkaroon ako ng chance na mag-organize ng meetings, mag-solve ng mga problema, at mamuno kahit na isang araw lang, na parang naranasan ko na talaga kung ano ang responsibilidad ng isang school head. This hands-on experience boosted my confidence and allowed me to showcase my skills in managing and leading."* (When I was assigned as officer-in-charge, I truly experienced the essence of participative management. It wasn't just a title given to us—we were provided a genuine opportunity to make decisions and manage school operations. I had the chance to organize meetings, solve problems, and lead, even if only for a day, which allowed me to really feel what it's like to carry the responsibilities of a school

head. This hands-on experience boosted my confidence and allowed me to showcase my skills in managing and leading.) Informant 2

*"Nung time na na-assign ako bilang OIC, parang nabigyan ako ng training being a school head and that is for me is participative management. Hindi lang ito basta role-play; this was a real chance to make choices, lead initiatives, and manage important tasks in the school. I felt empowered dahil binigyan ako ng authority na gumawa ng mga desisyon, na nagpatunay na ang pagbibigay ng ganitong oportunidad sa mga teachers ay mahalaga. It helped me build my confidence in school management and showed that when teachers are trusted, they can significantly contribute to a better educational environment."* ("When I was assigned as OIC, it felt like I was given training in being a school head, and for me, that is participative management. This wasn't just a role-play; it was a real chance to make choices, lead initiatives, and manage important tasks in the school. I felt empowered because I was given the authority to make decisions, which proved that providing such opportunities to teachers is important. It helped me build my confidence in school management and showed that when teachers are trusted, they can significantly contribute to a better educational environment.") Informant 9

*"Ang experience ko as officer-in-charge ang para sa akin ay patunay na may participative management sa school. Ito ay nagbukas sa akin ng bagong perspektibo. Sa pagkakataong iyon, hindi lang ako nagturo—naging bahagi ako ng decision-making team ng school. I got to experience firsthand kung paano nagwo-work ang school management, mula sa pagplano ng mga activities hanggang sa pagresolba ng daily issues. This real-world experience helped me understand that empowering teachers means giving them the trust and opportunity to contribute to the school's growth and to develop their leadership skills."* (My experience as officer-in-charge is, for me, proof that there is participative management in the school. It opened a new perspective for me. At that moment, I wasn't just teaching—I became part of the school's decision-making team. I got to experience firsthand how school management works, from planning activities to resolving daily issues. This real-world experience helped me understand that empowering teachers means giving them the trust and opportunity to contribute to the school's growth and to develop their leadership skills.) Informant 13

Additionally, many of the participants narrated that the practices of school heads when it comes to participative management revolved around the delegation of the right person according to the kinds of activities. This role is crucial because they felt that they have something to offer through participating to school activities based on their strength.

Also, most of the participants shared that school heads' approach to participative management involved delegating tasks to the right individuals based on the nature of the activities. This practice was important to them because it allows them to contribute to school activities that aligned with their strengths. School heads who assigned roles that matched teachers' skills made them feel valued and more engaged in the school's success.

**Say for instance, one participant shared that he was being assigned to organize a pageant:**

*"I was assigned by our school head na mag-organize ng pageant sa school. As a pageant fan, I was really excited and empowered. It was an amazing opportunity to participate in the implementation of school activities, kung saan naipakita ko yung mga strengths ko." (I was assigned by our school head to organize a pageant at school. As a pageant fan, I was really excited and empowered. It was an amazing opportunity to participate in the implementation of school activities, where I was able to showcase my strengths.) Informant 5*

Another informant shared that:

*"Ang participatory management sa school ay evident through letting us implement activities na aligned sa among coordinators, na nagpapakita ng tiwala sa amin na mag-lead at mag-organize ng mga events." (Participatory management in the school is evident through letting us implement activities aligned with our coordinators, which shows trust in us to lead and organize events.) Informant 15*

The narratives imply that participatory management is rooted in the profound trust placed in teachers' capabilities to lead, contribute, and make impactful decisions. Empowering educators with responsibilities aligned to their strengths, such as leading initiatives or taking on roles like officer-in-charge transforms their participation into authentic leadership opportunities. This approach not only cultivates their confidence and professional growth but also affirms their integral role in shaping a thriving and collaborative school environment, where their talents and insights drive meaningful progress.

The aforementioned implication supports the conclusion that empowering teachers through shared program implementation and leadership opportunities enhances their professional growth, motivation, and job satisfaction. This approach cultivates authentic leadership experiences, allowing teachers to contribute meaningfully to school improvement (Harianto, 2024).

**Shared Decision-Making**

The second theme revolves around shared decision-making, which refers to a collaborative process of teachers and school heads, work together to make important decisions that impact the school environment. This is evident in the responses of most teacher-informants, who shared that their school heads involve them in prioritizing programs to be implemented through the School Improvement Plan (SIP). Many of the teachers highlighted that their school heads ensure their needs are diagnosed, and their suggestions are taken into account. School heads recognize that teachers are the ones most familiar with classroom issues and believe that it is essential for teachers to have a say in deciding which programs and projects should be implemented to address these challenges.

**In fact, one informant said that:**

*"Hmmm participatory management for me is involvement namin as teachers. Example? Hmmm sa aming School Improvement Plan, lagi kaming kinokonsulta ng school head. Halimbawa, nung meron kaming issue sa reading comprehension ng students, kami mismo ang nag-recommend ng reading program. Ang saya lang kasi ramdam namin na pinapakinggan yung inputs namin at*

*nakikita namin yung impact ng mga suggestions namin." (Hmmm, for me, participatory management is about our involvement as teachers. For example, in our School Improvement Plan, the school head always consults us. For instance, when we had an issue with our students' reading comprehension, we ourselves recommended a reading program. It's really satisfying because we feel that our inputs are being heard, and we can see the impact of our suggestions.) Informant 7*

**Likewise, two informants confessed that:**

*"Ang approach ng school head namin ay parang teamwork talaga. Pag may bagong programang iimplement, iniisip muna namin kung ano talaga ang kailangan ng classroom. For example, nung pinag-usapan ang bagong initiative sa technology, binigay niya sa amin yung pagkakataon na mag-decide kung ano ang best tools para sa mga bata." (The approach of our school head is really like teamwork. When there's a new program to be implemented, we first think about what the classroom really needs. For example, when the new initiative on technology was discussed, she gave us the opportunity to decide which tools would be best for the students.) Informant 11*

*"Ang participatory management sa amin ay talagang observable. Naramdaman ko ito nung sinabi ng school head na kami ang mag-identify ng top priorities para sa mga classroom needs. Kaya yung mga projects na na-implement, alam mong galing sa pangangailangan ng students dahil kami mismo ang nag-recommend." (Participatory management is really observable in our school. I felt this when the school head told us that we would identify the top priorities for the classroom needs. So, the projects that were implemented were clearly based on the students' needs because we were the ones who recommended them.) Informant 6*

Additionally, the dominant of the participants shared that their school heads ensure parents and stakeholders are actively involved in the decision-making process. The school heads are open and receptive to suggestions, especially when these are aimed at the school's improvement. However, they emphasize that decisions must be reached through consensus, reflecting the collective agreement and shared responsibility of all stakeholders. One participant shared that:

*"Bilang teacher, napansin ko paano na-aapply ng aming school head ang pag-involve ng parents at stakeholders sa decision-making. Tuwing may mga meetings or assemblies, palagi siyang receptive sa mga suggestions, lalo na kung ang layunin ay makakatulong sa ikabubuti ng school. Pero kahit open siya sa ideas ng iba, lagi niyang pinapaalala na ang mga decisions dapat ay napagkakasunduan ng lahat, para maramdaman ng bawat isa na parte sila ng proseso at may shared responsibility." (As a teacher, I have noticed how our school head applies the involvement of parents and stakeholders in decision-making. During meetings or assemblies, she is always receptive to suggestions, especially when the goal is to benefit the school. However, even though she is open to others' ideas, she always reminds us that decisions should be made through consensus so that everyone feels included in the process and has a shared responsibility.) Informant 8*

### In a similar vein, another informant confessed that:

*"When it comes to participatory management, ang school head namin ay magaling mag-organize ng mga activities na nagpapalakas ng partnership sa mga parents at stakeholders. Halimbawa, nagbuo siya ng task force kasama ang mga magulang para sa pagpapalano ng improvements sa school facilities. Sa tuwing may mga ganitong proyekto, lagi niyang sinisiguro na lahat ng miyembro ay naririnig ang boses at nafa-finalize ang mga desisyon sa pamamagitan ng consensus."* (When it comes to participatory management, our school head is excellent at organizing activities that strengthen partnerships with parents and stakeholders. For example, she formed a task force with parents to plan improvements for the school facilities. Whenever there are such projects, she always ensures that every member's voice is heard and that decisions are finalized through consensus.) Informant 4

The finding implies that school heads practice participatory management by recognizing the importance of acknowledging the participation and contributions of teachers, parents, and stakeholders, fostering a collaborative environment where the school operates as an interconnected ecosystem. This inclusive approach to decision-making ensures that every individual involved feels valued and empowered, leading to shared accountability and trust among all members of the school community. Moreover, by addressing specific needs and promoting collective responsibility, this strategy results in impactful and sustainable school improvement initiatives, strengthening the foundation for long-term success and unity.

The aforementioned implication accords to the finding of Rezende et al. (2023) that participatory management in schools fosters collaborative cultures, enhances trust among stakeholders, and improves overall school performance. Effective participatory management is significantly related to stakeholders' trust levels, particularly in areas such as committee structures, governing body composition, and decision-making processes. Further, successful implementation of participatory management strategies involves engaging the school community, valuing diverse contributions, and utilizing technology to facilitate communication.

### Encouraging Stakeholder Collaboration

The last theme that emerged emphasizes the promotion of stakeholder collaboration, a key practice of participatory management among school heads. They ensure that all stakeholders, including local government units, Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) officers, and the School Governance Council, are actively involved and well-represented in every activity. This inclusivity fosters a sense of shared responsibility, where each stakeholder's voice contributes to the planning, decision-making, and problem-solving processes within the school. School heads encourage collaboration by creating an environment where stakeholders feel valued and empowered to participate meaningfully.

Majority of the participants narrated that stakeholders play a crucial role in addressing school challenges, offering their insights, resources, and support to overcome various issues. For example, during activities such as community engagement projects, stakeholders often extend their assistance, whether through financial aid, volunteer work, or by providing access to valuable networks and expertise. These participative strategies do not only

strengthen partnerships between the school and its community but also enhance the overall effectiveness of school operations and educational outcomes. Leveraging the collective efforts of stakeholders can build a more resilient, inclusive, and impactful educational environment for both teachers and learners.

### This conformed the responses of the participants that:

*"Our school head's practice of fostering stakeholder collaboration is truly commendable. She makes sure that every activity includes representation from key stakeholders such as the local government unit, PTA officers, and the School Governance Council. This inclusiveness allows for diverse perspectives during planning and decision-making, ensuring we address challenges from multiple angles. For instance, in community engagement projects, stakeholders actively contribute by offering financial assistance, volunteering their time, or connecting us with useful resources."* Informant 14

*"One remarkable quality of our school head is their ability to bring stakeholders together for the betterment of our school. He always ensures that the local government unit, PTA officers, and the School Governance Council have active roles in planning and executing activities. His participative style invites open discussions and brainstorming, which have been instrumental in solving school-related issues."* Informant 1

*"The stakeholders are actively contributing to solving issues faced by the school. Through their collaboration with the school administration, they provide valuable resources, insights, and support that address challenges effectively. Their participation in various programs, such as community engagement and planning activities, ensures that the school benefits from their diverse perspectives and expertise. All of these are because of the participative management of our school head."* Informant 10

In addition, a large number of the participants shared that their school heads organize quarterly meetings involving all stakeholders, including representatives from local government units, Parent-Teacher Associations, and the School Governance Council. These meetings provide an open platform for stakeholders to express their concerns, suggestions, and insights about the school's operations and overall development. Creating this opportunity for dialogue demonstrate their commitment to transparency and inclusivity in their management practices.

Furthermore, these sessions go beyond just addressing concerns—they also serve as venues for collaboration and shared decision-making. Stakeholders feel empowered knowing that their voices are valued and their contributions can directly influence policies and initiatives within the school. This participatory approach not only strengthens the relationship between the school and its community but also fosters a sense of shared ownership and responsibility for overcoming challenges and achieving goals. Such regular and structured engagement ensures that all parties are aligned and united in their efforts to improve the educational environment for both students and teachers.

*"Our school head ensures that every stakeholder is given the chance to be heard by organizing quarterly meetings with representatives from local government units, the PTA, and the School Governance Council. These gatherings allow us to openly discuss concerns, share*

insights, and collaborate on ways to improve the school. What’s impressive is how these sessions are not just about raising issues but also about finding solutions together. Stakeholders genuinely feel valued because their voices contribute directly to the policies and initiatives implemented by the school. This open and collaborative approach has strengthened the connection between the school and the community, making everyone feel they are part of a shared mission to enhance our educational environment.” Informant 12

“One practice I admire in our school head is their commitment to transparency and inclusivity through quarterly stakeholder meetings. Representatives from the local government unit, the PTA, and the School Governance Council come together during these sessions to discuss concerns and brainstorm solutions. The environment is always open and welcoming, where everyone is encouraged to voice their thoughts. These meetings do more than address problems—they foster collaboration and mutual accountability among all stakeholders. Knowing that their input influences school policies empowers stakeholders, creating a shared sense of responsibility. This participatory approach unites us all

in achieving a common goal: improving the school for the benefit of both teachers and learners.” Informant 3

Encouraging stakeholder collaboration underscores the importance of inclusivity and shared responsibility in fostering a thriving educational environment. When school heads actively involve stakeholders—such as parents, local leaders, teachers, and community members—in planning, decision-making, and problem-solving, they not only empower these individuals but also ensure that diverse perspectives shape the school’s initiatives and policies. This collaborative approach strengthens mutual accountability by giving stakeholders ownership of decisions, inspiring a collective commitment to the school’s goals. Moreover, leveraging the unique insights and resources of various contributors enhances the school’s operational efficiency and academic success, creating a balanced, culturally responsive, and unified environment where all members feel valued and engaged.

This connects to the conclusion school leaders who implement inclusive decision-making practices and engage stakeholders in problem-solving create environments conducive to professional growth and enhanced student achievement (Zahria, 2024).

Table 1 Themes on the School Heads’ Participatory Management Practices as Perceived by Teachers

Global Themes	Basic Themes	Core Ideas
School Heads’ Participatory Management Practices as Perceived by Teachers	Teacher Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hands-on leadership opportunities</li><li>• Real-world experience</li><li>• Trust and confidence building</li><li>• Assigning responsibilities based on strengths</li><li>• Development of leadership skills</li></ul>
	Shared Decision Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Collaborative process</li><li>• Teacher-driven decisions</li><li>• Team-based approach</li><li>• Inclusive decision-making</li><li>• Consensus-based decision</li><li>• Diversity-focused deliberations</li></ul>
	Stakeholder Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Agreement-centered resolution</li><li>• Inclusivity in planning</li><li>• Strengthening partnerships</li><li>• Quarterly stakeholder meetings</li><li>• Mutual accountability</li><li>• Collaborative problem-solving</li><li>• Engaging diverse voices in planning</li></ul>

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study highlighted the significant impact of school heads' participatory management practices on teacher empowerment, shared decision-making, and stakeholder collaboration. By offering teachers hands-on leadership opportunities and delegating responsibilities that align with their strengths, school heads empowered educators to contribute meaningfully to school operations and decision-making. Shared decision-making practices, including consultations and consensus-building, fostered a collaborative environment, where teachers felt their input was valued. Furthermore, the active involvement of stakeholders, such as parents and local government units, in planning and problem-solving sessions ensured inclusivity and strengthened community partnerships. These practices not only

enhanced teachers' professional growth and job satisfaction but also contributed to the overall improvement of the educational environment, reinforcing the importance of participatory management in achieving sustainable school success.

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