

Decision Making in Higher Education Administration: Exploring Demographic Influences

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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of organizational management relies heavily on the managerial competencies of academic administrators. These administrators often face situations requiring prompt decision-making to achieve organizational objectives. Decision-making serves as a pivotal tool for them in attaining these goals. The research sample comprises 145 academic administrators from the Kashmir Valley. To evaluate the decision-making approach of these administrators, the General Decision-Making Style scale, which was standardized by Scott and Bruce in 1995, was employed. The findings indicate no notable disparities in Decision-Making-Styles based on gender. However, significant distinctions were observed in Decision-Making Styles concerning the duration of employment and academic qualifications of academic administrators.

Keywords: Decision-making, educational administrators, demographic influence, higher education, Kashmir valley

Introduction

The efficient management of higher educational institutions is crucial amidst the evolving challenges confronting the higher education sector (Smith, 2020, Nadaf, 2019). These challenges encompass a range of issues, including technological advancements, changing student demographics, and increasing global competition (Jones & Brown, 2018; Siddiqui & Nadaf 2017). Therefore, effective administration is essential to navigate these complexities and ensure the success and sustainability of higher education institutions (Taylor, 2019).

The academic administrator serves as both the academic and administrative leader of higher education institutions, playing a central role in overseeing the institution's functions (Smith, 2018; Siddiqui & Nadaf 2017). The administrators of higher educational institutes play a crucial role in empowering teachers to recognize their capabilities, fostering their best efforts, and inspiring them to achieve greater productivity (Jones, 2020). They manage the institution in a way that encourages cooperation among both faculty and non-faculty personnel, cultivating a unified working atmosphere. (Smith & Johnson, 2019). Additionally, academic administrators provide staff with the autonomy needed to enhance their skills and pursue professional growth opportunities (Brown, 2018). Equipped with a diverse set of knowledge, abilities, and strategies, higher educational institute heads effectively fulfil their leadership responsibilities (Wilson, 2021). Leadership in this context entails achieving organizational objectives through collaborative efforts (Anderson, 2017). Variations in organizational outcomes under different academic administrators may stem from differences in policies, competencies, and decision-making approaches (Garcia & Lee, 2018).

Decision-making is a fundamental aspect of human existence, permeating every aspect of daily life (Smith, 2015). Individuals constantly navigate a myriad of choices, each with potential consequences that can significantly impact their lives (Jones & Brown, 2018). Decisions made early in life can shape the trajectory of

one's journey, guiding them towards fulfilment or dissatisfaction (Anderson & Johnson, 2019). The process of decision-making involves careful deliberation, assessment of alternatives, and rational reasoning (Nadaf, 2019; Garcia & Lee, 2020). It requires the ability to tolerate uncertainty, navigate complex situations with multiple variables, and embrace ambiguity (Taylor & Wilson, 2017). Even the act of abstaining from making a decision constitutes a choice, as emphasized by the adage, "Not to decide is to decide" (Carlsson, Fedrizzi, & Fuller, 2004). Neil Peart succinctly captured this concept, stating, "If you choose not to decide, you still have made a choice" (Smith & Davis, 2016).

On a daily basis, academic administrators are confronted with a myriad of issues, complexities, and dilemmas that demand effective decision-making (Smith, 2018). Their decision-making process is often driven by the exigencies of the situation, influenced by various factors such as social, administrative, and academic considerations (Jones & Brown, 2019). The ability to enhance the quality of education within a country lies in the hands of educational administrators who are tasked with making crucial decisions (Anderson & Johnson, 2020). It is imperative that the decisions made by these administrators are not only sound but also sensible, considering the circumstances at hand (Garcia & Lee, 2021). To arrive at a well-founded and logical decisions both high-ranking and mid-level kingpins within an administrative organization adheres to a systematic approach, which includes steps such as problem identification, problem analysis, exploration of possible alternatives, evaluation of the potential outcomes, selection of the best option, and implementation of the chosen decision (Taylor & Wilson, 2017). See figure 1

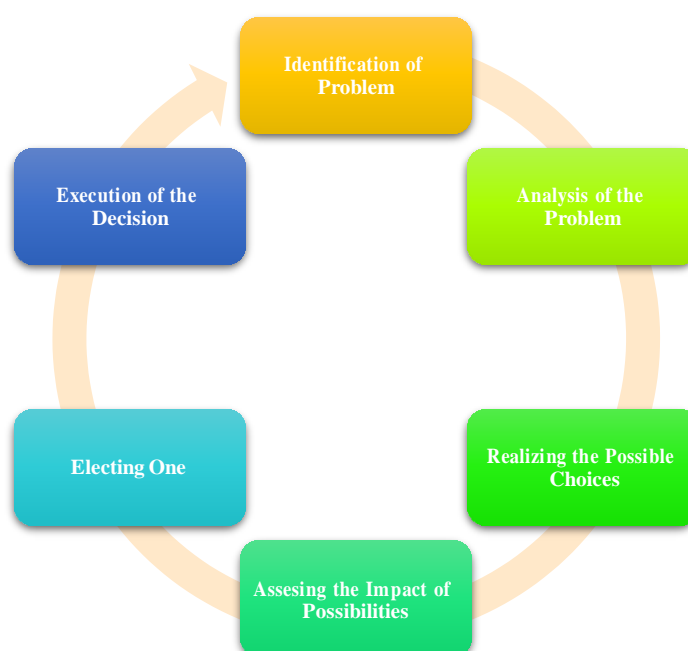


Figure 1 Decision-Making Cycle

Academic administrators face the dual imperative of making timely and effective decisions, drawing upon their individual perspectives, insights, and personal inclinations (Johnson, 2016). Decision-Making-Styles represent the varied approaches individuals employ in navigating decision-making scenarios. It can be considered as "a learned pattern of responding to decision situations, developed through prior experiences" (Smith & Jones, 2002, p. 45). In essence, DMS encapsulates the habitual responses exhibited by individuals when confronted with decision-making tasks (Scott & Bruce, 1995). Rao and Sridhar (1997) underscore the importance of conducting research on management styles within the higher education sector, emphasizing the urgent need for comprehensive studies in this area.

Objectives of the Study

Objective 1: To Investigate variations in Decision-Making-Styles among academic administrators concerning gender.

Objective 2: To examine disparities in Decision-Making-Styles among academic administrators based on length of service.

Objective 3: To assess variances in Decision-Making-Styles among academic administrators with respect to academic qualifications.

Null Hypotheses (H₀):

H₀₁: Academic administrators' decision-making styles will not significantly differ based on gender.

H₀₂: Academic administrators' decision-making styles will not significantly differ based on length of service.

H03: Academic administrators' decision-making styles will not significantly differ based on academic qualifications.

Operational Definitions of the Variables

Decision-Making Style (DMS)

DMS refers to the structured method used in making judgments and reaching decisions. In the present study, DMS is defined as the combined score derived from academic administrators' responses of the General Decision Making Style Scale introduced by Scott and Bruce (1995).

Gender

Gender pertains to an individual's biological sex. Within this investigation, gender is classified into two categories: male and female.

Length of Service

Length of Service pertains to the number of years served by academic administrators in higher educational institutes. For this study, length of service is divided into two groups: 1-5 years and 6-10 years.

Academic Qualification

It stand for the educational degrees achieved either before or during one's service. It was divided into two categories: postgraduate (P.G.) and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.).

Population

The study population includes academic administrators from various types of higher education institutes in the Kashmir Valley, totalling 145 individuals (N=145). To ensure a representative sample, all higher education institutes were included due to the limited population size. (Refer to Figure 2).

Considering the small population size of one academic administrator per institution, the researcher chose a thorough data collection method, encompassing multiple locations across the Kashmir Valley. This approach required extensive efforts and travel to gather data from all academic administrators.

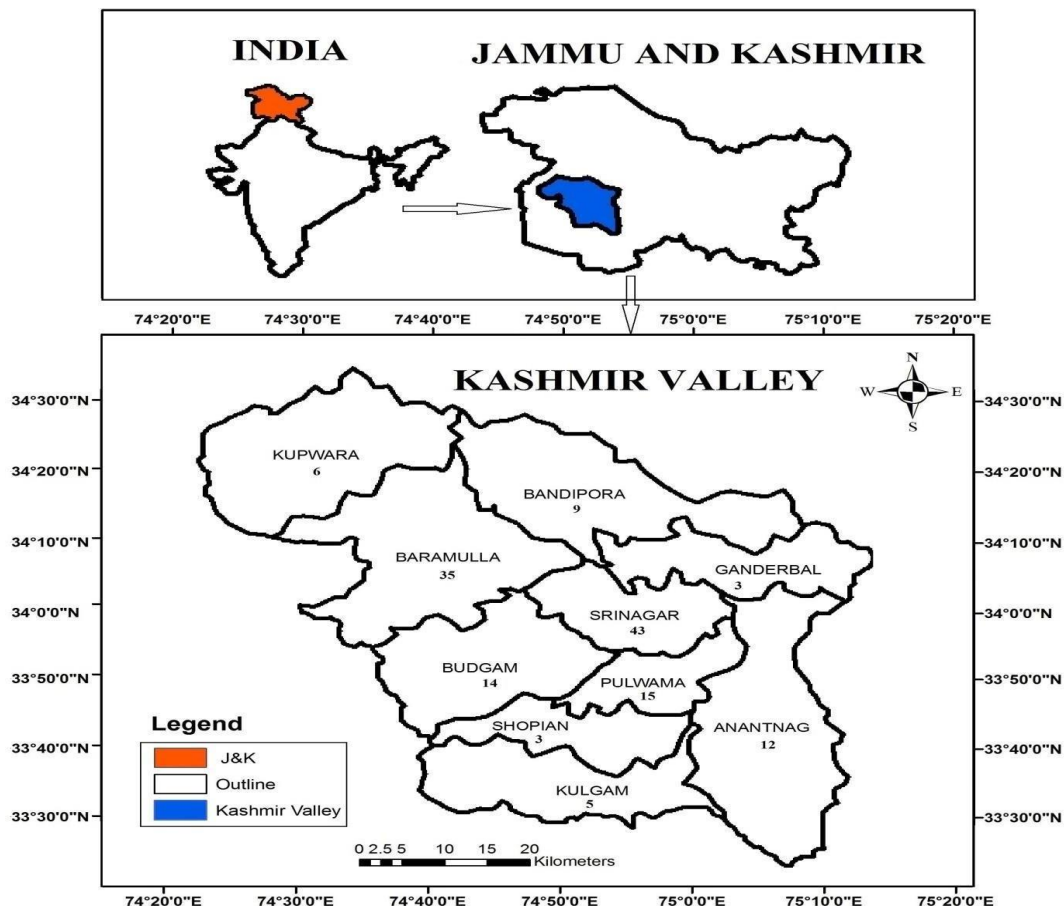


Figure 2 Higher educational institutes in Kashmir Valley

Portrayal of the Population

The study has a diverse group of participants, including individuals of both genders, varying lengths of service, and different academic backgrounds. The researchers categorized gender as male or female, and length of

service as either senior administrators with six to ten years of experience or junior administrators with one to five years of experience. The researchers also took into account academic credentials, and classified the participants as either a doctorate (Ph.D.) or a postgraduate degree (P.G. - Master's Degree). See Figure 3

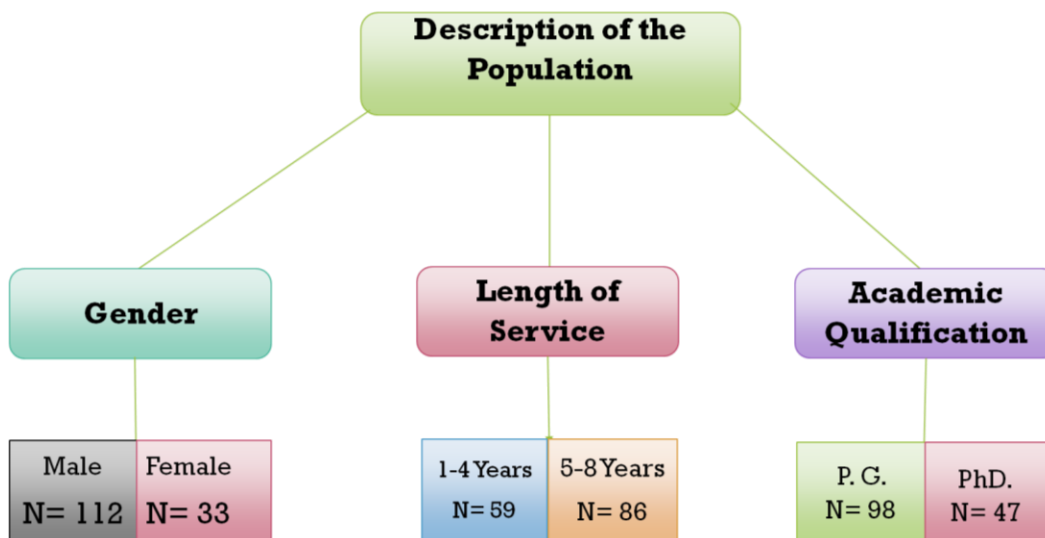


Figure 3 Description of the Population

Data Collection

Data collection refers to the process of obtaining empirical data to test the hypotheses of a study. In this study conducted via survey, academic administrators from all types of higher education institutes in the Kashmir Valley comprised both the population and the sample. The information consent was received from the academic administrators and all their queries were addressed before the commencement of the survey. Questionnaires were distributed individually to participants, and instructions were provided by the researcher.

Instruments

To evaluate the DMS of academic administrators, the General DMS scale, standardized by Scott and Bruce (1995), was employed.

Analysis of Data

Data analysis entails the systematic application of statistical and logical methods to interpret data and derive significant conclusions. In data analysis “diverse analytical techniques aid in making inductive inferences from data and distinguishing the phenomenon of interest from statistical variations, inherent in the data” (Siddiqui & Nadaf, 2017).

Objective 1: To Investigate variations in Decision-Making-Styles among academic administrators concerning gender.

Table 1					
Variations in Gender & Decision-Making Style					
	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Decision Making Style	Male	112	92.75	7.19	.88^{NS}
	Female	33	94.24	8.94	

^{NS} insignificant

Table 1 presents data extracted from the responses utilized for estimating disparities in Decision Making Style based on gender. An assessment of the difference in DMS among academic administrators based on gender was conducted using a t-test.

The table illustrates a minimal distinction between male and female academic administrators regarding the decision-making scale. Specifically, the average score for male academic administrators is 92.75, while for female academic administrators, it is 94.24, indicating a relatively small difference. This mean score for female administrators is closely aligned with that of male administrators. The calculated t- value (.88; p>0.05) is insignificant at any level. Therefore, the null hypothesis H₀₁ is accepted and objective no1 is realized.

Objective 2: To examine disparities in Decision-Making-Styles among academic administrators based on length of service.

Table 2
Variations in Length of Service & Decision-Making Style

	Length of Service	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Decision Making Style	1-5 years	59	86.83	5.42	3.19**
	6-10 years	86	90.39	5.68	

****significant at .01 level**

Table 2 illustrates the analysis of responses employed to evaluate the DMS of academic administrators concerning their length of service. An examination of the variance in DMS based on length of service was conducted using a t-test.

It demonstrates a notable contrast between academic administrators with 6-10 years of service and those with 1-5 years of service regarding their Decision-Making-Style. Specifically, the mean score for administrators with 5-8 years of service. The computed t-value (3.19; $P < 0.01$) is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Consequently, the null hypothesis H_{02} is rejected and the objective no2 is realized.

Objective 3: To Assess variances in Decision-Making-Styles among academic administrators with respect to academic qualifications.

	Academic Qualification	N	Mean	SD	t-value
Decision Making Style	P.G.	98	90.75	7.44	6.64**
	Doctorate.	47	97.95	5.34	

****significant at .01 level**

Table 3 presents data derived from responses utilized for evaluating the DMS of academic administrators concerning their academic qualifications. Discrepancies in DMS and academic qualification were analysed using a t-test.

The table indicates a notable distinction between academic administrators holding doctorate and a post-graduate (P.G.) degree, regarding their Decision-Making Styles. Specifically, the mean score for administrators with a doctorate is 97.95, while for those with a P.G. qualification, it is 90.75. The computed t-value (6.64; $p < 0.01$) is statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis H_{03} is rejected and the objective no3 is realized.

Findings of the Study

Upon analysing the data, the researcher has uncovered the following conclusions:

- i. The study suggests that gender is not correlated with Decision-Making-Style.
- ii. However, there is a significant disparity in Decision-Making-Styles among academic administrators based on their length of service.
- iii. Additionally, the research unveils a noteworthy association between academic administrators' Decision-Making-Styles and their academic qualifications.

Discussion

This study involves an examination of the DMS among academic administrators, taking into account their gender, length of service, and academic qualifications. Employing suitable methodologies and analyses, the researcher aims to derive significant conclusions consistent with the stated objectives. The study's results are structured and discussed within the subsequent sections.

Decision-Making Style (DMS) and Gender

Objective 1 indicated that The study suggests that gender is not correlated with Decision-Making-Style. This finding is consistent with research by Trinidad and Normore (2005), who observed that female academic administrators often employ similar strategies to their male counterparts, drawing from successful approaches. In line with the findings of this study, Franze'n (2006) likewise discovered no gender difference in decision-making styles. According to Kanter (1977), "administrative jobs tend to eclipse gender differences", with those holding them prioritising efficient administration above adhering to socially accepted gender norms. The results are in line with Wilson 2021, Nadaf, 2019; Siddiqui & Nadaf 2017.

Academic administrators, regardless of gender, occupy similar leadership roles, leading to behaviour that is less stereotypical. Their actions are guided by the expectations associated with their managerial positions rather than by gender stereotypes. Visible differences in behaviour are not due to inherent gender disparities but rather result from differences in structural positions. Women are often placed in positions of lesser power, leading to behaviours aligned with these roles. Excitingly, recent research reveals that men and women in equivalent positions of authority often exhibit similar behaviours and decision-making styles, demonstrating little gender differentiation. Dobbins and Platz (1986) suggested that we can now put to rest previous concerns about gender disparities in managerial leadership.

Decision-Making Style (DMS) and Length of Service

The findings from objective 2 indicated a notable disparity in Decision-making based on the length of service. Decision-making is an inherent trait that individuals naturally possess and tends to refine over time, regardless of whether one is operating within an educational setting or in everyday scenarios. What matters most is the inclination and readiness to take on leadership roles. Through experiences, individuals are able to evolve their perspectives, thoughts, and emotions, gaining valuable insights that enhance decision-making capabilities. In the context of academic administration, prolonged periods of service contribute to the transformation of administrators, as their journey through various roles and responsibilities within the academic realm leads to profound shifts in perspective and expertise.

Decision-Making Style (DMS) and Academic Qualification

The findings from objective number 3 suggest a substantial disparity in Decision-Making-Styles among academic administrators based on their academic qualifications. Academic qualifications extend beyond mere knowledge acquisition, expanding the boundaries of human understanding and equipping individuals with a diverse array of skills. For instance, academic administrators holding a doctorate degree possess the ability to critically analyse the perspectives of others, thereby enhancing their decision-making capabilities.

Evidence supporting this can be found in the work of Drucker (1966), who emphasized the importance of intellectual rigor and critical thinking skills cultivated through advanced academic study. Additionally, research by Smith and Jones (2018) demonstrated that individuals with higher levels of education tend to exhibit more nuanced decision-making processes, drawing upon a deeper understanding of complex issues. Moreover, the results of the Johnson et al. 2015; Nadaf, 2019; Siddiqui & Nadaf 2017 studies aligns with the findings of our study which depicted that academic administrators with doctoral degrees often possess advanced analytical skills and a broader knowledge base, enabling them to approach decision-making tasks with greater depth and insight.

Recommendations

The following recommendations stem from the study's findings, aimed at guiding policymakers at both state and local levels to take actionable steps and create conditions conducive to enhancing educational administration and leadership.

The study's results indicate a diminishing gender gap, with women no longer lagging behind their counterparts. However, the representation of female academic administrators in the surveyed population remains modest at 22.60%, highlighting the need to address gender disparities. Hence, it is imperative for the Government of Jammu & Kashmir to implement targeted measures to eliminate these disparities, particularly within higher education. Furthermore, the study identifies significant statistical variances among educational administrators based on their length of service. Therefore, tailored programs should be developed for administrators with 1-4 years of experience in higher education. Similarly, significant variations in intellectual qualifications across educational administrators are noted. Therefore, it should be mandatory for educational administrators in higher education to hold a doctorate (PhD) degree.

Furthermore, it is imperative that the administrations of Jammu and Kashmir take immediate measures to create more technical colleges & universities, where there are far fewer higher education institutions than in other Kashmir Valley districts.

Conclusion

Quality education hinges on effective administration. Administration transcends mere management; it represents a fusion of knowledge, practices, and skills. Today, administrators grapple with a myriad of challenges within their organizations. In the past, administrators wielded control over less complex organizations in more stable environments. However, contemporary realities have ushered in multifaceted forces such as market demands, constant change, and the quest for authentic leadership. Consequently, administrators must engage in planning, initiation, management, delegation, coordination, decision-making, communication, and evaluation to navigate these challenges.

The role of educational administrators has evolved significantly; administrations led by incompetent individuals cannot thrive, while those guided by adept administrators can excel. The evolving landscape of higher education presents new challenges that demand appropriate skills and competencies from administrators to ensure institutional preparedness for the future. Administrations lacking the requisite skills, knowledge, and alignment with progress can impede development.

A responsive organizational structure that adapts to societal needs, global trends, and knowledge is pivotal for accelerating progress. Research underscores the centrality of decision-making for organizational survival. The well-being and sustainability of higher education institutions rest heavily on the decision-making process of administrators, transcending gender considerations. Thus, the paramount task within an organization is charting a course of action to address internal challenges and seize opportunities.

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