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The Influence of Age and Educational Background on Teachers' Participation in Decision-Making at Islamic Junior High Schools in Makassar

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of teachers' age and educational background on their participation in decision-making at State Islamic Junior High Schools (Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri) in Makassar City. Specifically, it investigates how these two demographic factors (independent variables) affect the level of teacher involvement in institutional decision-making processes (dependent variable). A correlational survey design was employed to explore these relationships. The population comprised 135 teachers from two MTsN schools in Makassar, and a sample of 67 teachers was selected using Arikunto's (1991) sampling guidelines. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire measuring six indicators of participation—problem identification, problem formulation, development and selection of alternatives, implementation, and evaluation. Descriptive statistics were used to profile respondents by age and educational attainment, while inferential analyses, including partial correlation and multiple regression, were conducted using SPSS. Results show that 28% of respondents were aged 24–30, 36.7% aged 31–37, and the remainder distributed across older age groups; 80% held a bachelor's degree, with smaller proportions holding diplomas or master's degrees. Both age and educational level were found to have a positive and statistically significant influence on teacher participation in decision-making. Older and more highly educated teachers demonstrated greater involvement, reflecting higher cognitive maturity and analytical ability. These findings highlight the importance for school leaders and policymakers of considering demographic factors when promoting participatory decision-making. Tailored professional development and inclusive governance structures may enhance teachers' engagement and improve institutional decision-making quality.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Teacher participation in decision-making is widely recognized as a key element of effective and democratic school governance (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). In contemporary educational settings, shared decision-making not only fosters a sense of ownership and accountability but also enhances institutional innovation and responsiveness (Leithwood et al., 2020). Particularly in the context of public religious schools, such as State Islamic Junior High Schools (Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri or MTsN) in Indonesia, involving teachers in institutional decisions is essential to ensure alignment with both educational goals and community expectations.

Modern leadership frameworks, especially transformational leadership and distributed leadership, emphasize the importance of participatory governance in schools. Transformational leaders inspire and engage teachers by fostering trust, encouraging professional growth, and aligning individual goals with institutional vision (Bush & Glover, 2014). In parallel, distributed leadership shifts the locus of decision-making from the principal alone to a broader base of staff, recognizing the collective expertise within the school (Spillane, 2006). Both paradigms underscore the importance of teachers' active involvement in decision-making processes, which has been associated with improved school performance and teacher satisfaction (Nguyen et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the concept of teacher agency has gained prominence in recent literature as a lens for understanding teachers' roles in shaping educational policies and practices. Agency refers to the capacity of teachers to act purposefully and constructively to direct their professional growth and influence institutional change (Biesta et al., 2015, Ingersoll et al., 2012). Teachers who are empowered to contribute to school decisions are more likely to demonstrate high levels of motivation, responsibility, and engagement (Priestley et al., 2015). However, teacher agency does not operate in isolation. It is shaped by structural and cultural conditions, including leadership support, institutional openness, and demographic characteristics such as age, experience, and educational background.

Among these background factors, age and educational level are often assumed to correlate with maturity, decision-making competence, and confidence in professional settings. Older teachers may have accumulated more experience and developed broader perspectives, enabling them to contribute more effectively to strategic discussions (Torres & Weiner, 2021). Similarly, higher educational attainment may equip teachers with stronger analytical skills, pedagogical knowledge, and familiarity with policy frameworks—attributes that are essential for informed decision-making (OECD, 2020). Nevertheless, empirical evidence on the actual influence of these demographic variables on decision-making participation remains limited and often context-specific.

In Indonesia, school leadership is undergoing a shift towards more participatory and collaborative models, especially in Islamic schools that operate under dual governance by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and local authorities. While national policies encourage school-based management (SBM), including teacher involvement in planning and evaluation (MoEC, 2020), implementation varies widely based on local leadership, institutional culture, and teacher readiness. Studies on Indonesian educational leadership have found that hierarchical structures and traditional norms can sometimes inhibit genuine teacher participation (Suryani & Watt, 2022). Hence, understanding the micro-level factors—such as age and educational background—that influence participation is crucial for supporting more inclusive school governance models.

At MTsN schools in Makassar City, variation in teacher demographics is considerable. Teachers range in age from young professionals to those nearing retirement, and their academic qualifications span from diplomas to master's degrees. This diversity may affect their level of engagement in school decision-making, but no prior research has systematically examined these relationships in the MTsN context. While earlier studies have focused on teacher motivation, leadership styles, or professional development (Rahman et al., 2019), the specific impact of age and educational level on decision-making participation remains underexplored.

Therefore, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of teachers' individual backgrounds (age and educational level) in relation to decision-making participation at State Islamic Junior High Schools in Makassar City?
2. Do individual background factors (age and educational level) significantly influence teachers' participation in school decision-making?

This study is important for several reasons. First, it contributes to the empirical literature on school governance in religious public schools—an area that remains underrepresented in international educational research. Second, it provides practical insights for school leaders and policymakers aiming to build inclusive leadership cultures. Third, by identifying demographic participation gaps, the study offers a foundation for designing targeted interventions, such as leadership training or mentoring programs tailored to specific teacher groups.

Theoretically, this research is grounded in the assumption that teacher participation is not only a function of leadership style or school structure but is also shaped by individual characteristics. By incorporating variables such as age and education into the analysis, this study builds on the distributed leadership and teacher agency frameworks, offering a nuanced understanding of participation dynamics in the MTsN context.

In sum, this study aims to examine how age and educational background influence teacher participation in decision-making at MTsN schools in Makassar City. It is expected to provide both theoretical contributions to leadership and participation literature and practical guidance for improving participatory governance in Islamic junior high schools.

2. METHODS

This study employed a quantitative, correlational survey design to examine the relationship between individual background characteristics—specifically age and educational level—and teacher participation in decision-making at State Islamic Junior High Schools (Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri or MTsN) in Makassar City. The primary objective was to determine whether these independent variables significantly influence the dependent variable within the school context.

2.1 Research Variables

The study involved the following variables:

1. Independent Variables:
   a. Age (measured in years and grouped into age brackets)
   b. Educational Level (categorized as Diploma, Bachelor's degree, or Master's degree)
2. Dependent Variable:
   a. Teacher Participation in Decision-Making, measured through a Likert-scale questionnaire covering six core dimensions of decision-making involvement.

2.2 Population and Sample

The target population consisted of all teachers employed at two MTsN schools in Makassar City: MTsN Model Makassar and MTsN Biringkanaya Makassar. The total population was 135 teachers.

Sampling followed Arikunto's (1991) practical guideline, which recommends that if a population is fewer than 100, all members should be surveyed, and if it exceeds 100, at least 10%–25% should be selected. This study used approximately 50% of the total population to ensure adequate representation, resulting in a sample of 67 teachers. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, focusing on full-time teachers with a minimum of one year of teaching experience to ensure familiarity with school decision-making processes.

2.3 Research Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed specifically for this study. The instrument consisted of 18 items, grouped into six indicators of participation in decision-making, adapted

from decision-making frameworks in educational leadership literature. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale:

(1) Never, (2) Rarely, (3) Sometimes, (4) Often, and (5) Always.

The six indicators and an example item for each are as follows:

1. Problem Identification – e.g., "Teachers actively identify issues that require school-wide discussion."
2. Problem Formulation – e.g., "Teachers are involved in defining the scope of school problems."
3. Development of Alternatives – e.g., "Teachers propose different approaches to address school issues."
4. Selection of Alternatives – e.g., "Teachers participate in choosing the best solution among proposed options."
5. Implementation – e.g., "Teachers are involved in executing decisions agreed upon at school meetings."
6. Monitoring and Evaluation – e.g., "Teachers contribute to evaluating the outcomes of school decisions."

2.4 Instrument Validation and Reliability

Content validity was established through expert judgment involving three education management scholars who reviewed the questionnaire for relevance, clarity, and alignment with decision-making constructs. Based on their feedback, revisions were made to improve item wording and indicator alignment.

Reliability testing was conducted through a pilot study involving 20 teachers from a different MTsN school not included in the final sample. Using SPSS version 25, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the overall instrument was 0.876, indicating a high level of internal consistency (George & Mallery, 2019).

2.5 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted over a two-week period in October 2024. Respondents completed the questionnaires anonymously and voluntarily during designated school hours. Participation was coordinated with school administrators to minimize disruption to teaching activities.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to standard ethical research protocols. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were informed about the study's purpose, their right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses. Data were anonymized, and no personally identifiable information was collected. Ethical approval was obtained from the Faculty of Education at Universitas Muslim Indonesia.

2.7 Data Analysis

Data were processed and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25. The analysis included:

1. Descriptive statistics to summarize demographic data and participation scores
2. Normality tests using skewness and kurtosis values
3. Correlation analysis (Pearson's r) to explore relationships between variables
4. Multiple regression analysis to determine the influence of age and educational level on participation in decision-making
5. Partial correlation analysis to assess the unique contribution of each independent variable

Assumptions of normality, linearity, and multicollinearity were tested and met prior to conducting inferential analysis. The significance threshold was set at $p < 0.05$ for all hypothesis testing.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Descriptive Findings

3.1.1 Respondent Characteristics

The sample consisted of 67 teachers from two State Islamic Junior High Schools (MTsN) in Makassar City. The demographic distribution is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	33	49.3
	Female	34	50.7
School	MTsN Model Makassar	37	55.2
	MTsN Biringkanaya	30	44.8
Rank	III-b	13	19.4
	III-c	5	7.5
	III-d	10	14.9
	IV-a	17	25.4
	IV-b	3	4.5
Age Group (years)	24–30	20	29.9
	31–37	22	32.8
	38–44	8	11.9
	45–52	8	11.9
	53–59	9	13.4
Education	Diploma (D3)	5	7.5
	Bachelor's Degree (S1)	48	71.6
	Master's Degree (S2)	14	20.9

In terms of academic qualifications, most respondents held a bachelor's degree (71.6%), with a smaller proportion holding a master's degree (20.9%) or diploma (7.5%). The average number of years spent completing formal education was 18.13 years (SD = 1.16), with a slight negative skewness (-0.133), indicating a distribution slightly skewed to longer durations.

3.1.2 Teacher Participation in Decision-Making

Teachers' participation in decision-making was assessed through a composite score based on 18 items, with a minimum possible score of 18 and maximum of 90. The observed range was 41 to 84, with a mean score of 65.82 (SD = 10.31).

To interpret participation levels, the scores were classified into five categories based on percentage of maximum score, following a common rubric in educational research:

1. Very High: 81–90 (90–100%)
2. High: 72–80 (80–89%)
3. Moderate: 54–71 (60–79%)
4. Low: 36–53 (40–59%)
5. Very Low: 18–35 (≤39%)

Based on this rubric, the distribution of participation levels is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Participation Levels

Level of Participation	Score Range	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Very High / High	72–90	36	53.7
Moderate	54–71	17	25.4
Low / Very Low	18–53	14	20.9

The negative skewness value (-0.306) confirms that most teachers scored above average, indicating relatively high levels of participation in school decision-making. Participation was measured across six key indicators. An example breakdown is shown for the "Problem Identification" indicator:

1. Always: 24 respondents (35.8%)
2. Often: 22 respondents (32.8%)
3. Sometimes: 15 respondents (22.4%)
4. Rarely: 6 respondents (9.0%)
5. Never: 0 respondents (0.0%)

Similar distributions were observed across the other five indicators: problem formulation, alternative development, selection, implementation, and monitoring & evaluation.

3.2 Inferential Findings

Prior to inferential testing, normality and autocorrelation assumptions were tested. Skewness values for the main variables were within acceptable limits (±1), and no serious autocorrelation was detected based on Pearson correlation coefficients.

3.2.1 Multiple Regression Analysis

A multiple linear regression was performed to determine the effect of age and educational level on teacher participation in decision-making. The model summary is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Regression Coefficients and Model Summary

Predictor	Coefficient (B)	t-value	Sig. (p)	Partial r	Interpretation
Constant (b_0)	85.91	4.99	0.000	—	Significant intercept
Age (X_1)	0.84	3.59	0.0001	0.318	Significant positive influence
Educational Level (X_2)	0.97	3.86	0.000	0.340	Significant positive influence
R^2	0.445				44.5% variance explained

The results indicate:

1. Age has a positive and statistically significant effect on teacher participation ($t = 3.59$, $p < 0.01$), contributing 31.8% to participation variance (partial r).
2. Educational level also shows a significant positive effect ($t = 3.86$, $p < 0.01$), with an effective contribution of 34.0%.
3. The model explains 44.5% of the variance in participation levels ($R^2 = 0.445$).

These results support the study's hypothesis that both age and educational background are significant predictors of participation in decision-making among MTsN teachers in Makassar.

To provide a clearer picture of the respondents' engagement in decision-making processes, teachers' participation levels were categorized into five distinct groups based on their total questionnaire scores. These categories—Very Low, Low, Moderate, High, and Very High—reflect the frequency and depth of their involvement across six key decision-making indicators. The bar chart below illustrates the proportion of respondents falling into each participation level, highlighting that the majority of teachers demonstrated high engagement in school-based decision-making.

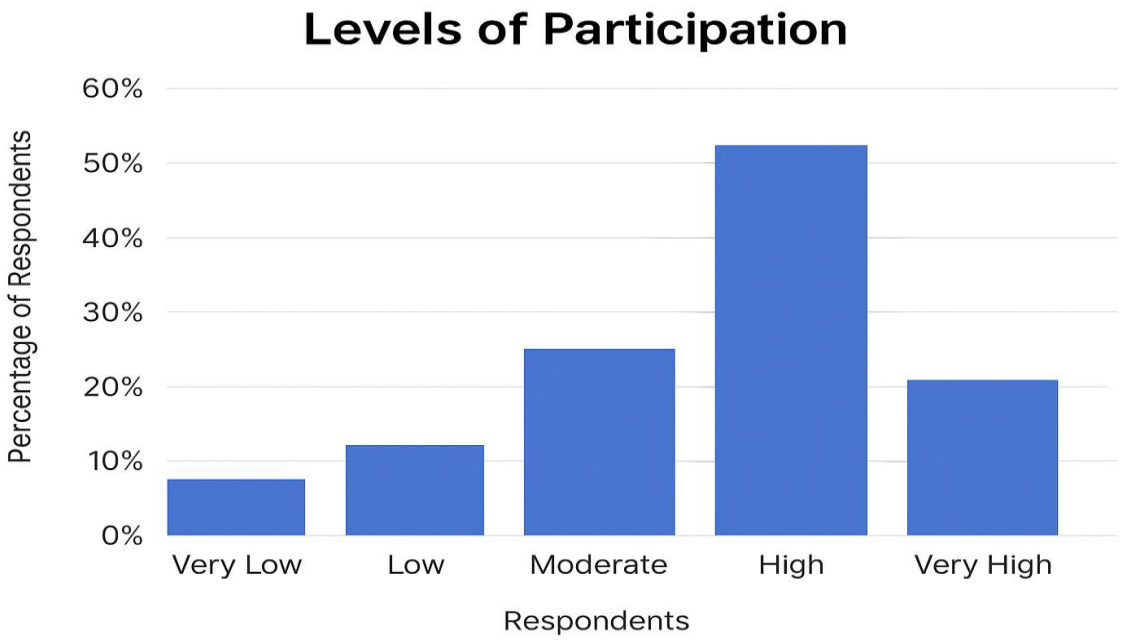

Figure 1. Distribution of Teachers' Participation Levels in Decision-Making

Discussion

This study set out to examine the influence of teachers' age and educational level on their participation in decision-making at State Islamic Junior High Schools (MTsN) in Makassar City. The results revealed that both variables exert **a** positive and significant effect on participation, with age contributing approximately 31.8% and educational level contributing 34.0% to the variance in participation. The model as a whole explained 44.5% of the variance in teacher participation, indicating that while age and educational level are important predictors, other factors also play a role. These findings are broadly consistent with theoretical perspectives on leadership and teacher agency, as well as empirical studies conducted in comparable contexts.

Interpreting the Influence of Age

The positive association between age and participation in decision-making aligns with literature on cognitive and professional development**.** Older teachers tend to have more experience, institutional knowledge, and established social capital within their schools, all of which enhance their confidence and perceived legitimacy in contributing to decisions (Torres & Weiner, 2021; Bezzina, 2002). Maturity, as characterized by emotional regulation, foresight, and risk assessment, is especially valuable in collective decision-making settings (Leithwood et al., 2020). From a developmental perspective, adults in mid-career stages (approximately ages 25–45) often demonstrate a heightened sense of responsibility for future

generations and community welfare, which translates into greater engagement with institutional policies and practices (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). This is consistent with Pidarta's (1997) observation that individuals in this age bracket tend to think beyond personal interests and prioritize educational and societal development.

However, the relationship between age and participation should not be assumed to be purely linear. In some contexts, older teachers may also face constraints such as burnout, health issues, or hierarchical norms that limit their willingness to participate (Priestley et al., 2015). The present study did not find a drop-off in participation among the oldest cohort, but future research could explore whether the effect of age plateaus or reverses at later stages of a teacher's career.

The Role of Educational Level

Educational attainment was also found to be a significant predictor of teacher participation in decision-making. Teachers with higher academic qualifications—particularly those holding master's degrees—reported greater involvement in decision-making processes. This finding is consistent with the idea that advanced education equips teachers with stronger analytical skills, broader pedagogical knowledge, and greater familiarity with educational policy frameworks**,** enabling them to engage more confidently and substantively in collective deliberations (OECD, 2020). Higher qualifications may also increase teachers' credibility in the eyes of school leaders and peers, thereby facilitating their inclusion in decision-making forums (Nguyen et al., 2021; Alabdulhadi, 2020).

These results resonate with distributed leadership theory, which emphasizes the collective expertise of staff as a basis for shared decision-making (Spillane, 2006). In schools where teachers hold advanced degrees, principals may be more inclined to delegate authority, trusting in the teachers' professional competence. Conversely, in schools with a larger proportion of less-qualified teachers, principals may adopt more centralized decision-making structures, inadvertently limiting teacher agency. Thus, educational attainment not only reflects individual capacity but may also shape institutional norms around participation.

Confirming and Extending Existing Research

Taken together, the findings confirm prior studies on the benefits of participatory decision-making in schools. For instance, Leithwood et al. (2020) and Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) highlight that teacher involvement leads to improved school outcomes, stronger professional communities, and higher job satisfaction. This study extends those insights to the MTsN context, demonstrating that demographic factors—particularly age and education—significantly influence participation levels in Indonesian Islamic schools. While Bintarto (1987) emphasized organizational mechanisms and voluntary participation, the present study shows that individual background characteristics are also critical in shaping who participates and to what extent.

Practical Implications

The findings carry several implications for school leaders and policymakers. First, principals should actively consider teacher demographics when designing participatory governance structures**.** Younger or less-qualified teachers may need targeted capacity-building initiatives—such as mentoring, leadership training, or structured opportunities to voice their perspectives—to overcome barriers to participation. Second, policymakers could incorporate demographic data into professional development planning**,** ensuring that leadership and decision-making competencies are equitably distributed across age groups and qualification levels. Third, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and local education authorities could develop guidelines for inclusive decision-making processes in MTsN schools, thereby institutionalizing participatory practices regardless of the demographic composition of the staff.

Such interventions are especially important in the Indonesian context, where school-based management policies aim to decentralize decision-making but often fall short of full implementation due to hierarchical norms and uneven teacher readiness (Suryani & Watt, 2022). By acknowledging the

interplay between individual characteristics and institutional structures, leaders can better harness the diverse expertise within their schools.

Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the sample size (n = 67), though adequate for the chosen statistical analyses, limits the generalizability of the findings to other MTsN schools or non-Islamic public schools. Future studies should employ larger and more diverse samples to validate these results. Second, the data were collected through self-report questionnaires, which are susceptible to social desirability bias and may overestimate actual participation. Triangulating self-reports with observations or administrative data would strengthen the reliability of future findings. Third, the study's cross-sectional design captures associations at a single point in time but cannot establish causality or account for changes over the course of teachers' careers. Longitudinal research would provide a more dynamic understanding of how age and education interact with participation over time.

Additionally, other potentially relevant variables—such as gender, work experience, organizational culture, or leadership style—were not included in the present analysis but may also influence participation. Incorporating these factors in future models would yield a more comprehensive understanding of the determinants of teacher involvement in decision-making.

Future Research Directions

Building on these limitations, future research could take several directions. Qualitative studies—such as interviews, focus groups, or ethnographic observations—could explore the mechanisms through which age and education shape participation, providing richer insights into teachers' lived experiences. Mixed-methods designs could combine the breadth of survey data with the depth of qualitative inquiry. Additionally, comparative studies across different regions or types of schools (public vs. private, Islamic vs. non-Islamic) could reveal whether the observed patterns hold in other contexts. Finally, researchers could examine how leadership practices interact with teacher demographics to either enable or inhibit participation, thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of distributed leadership in practice.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that both age and educational level have a positive and significant influence on participation in decision-making processes. The study, which involved 67 respondents—primarily aged between 24 and 59 years and mostly holding a bachelor's degree (S1)—revealed that older individuals tend to have greater cognitive maturity, which enhances their ability to contribute effectively to decision-making. Similarly, higher levels of education correlate with increased participation, suggesting that education equips individuals with the skills and confidence necessary for informed decision-making. However, a limitation of this research is its relatively small and demographically limited sample, which may not fully represent broader populations. Future research is recommended to include a more diverse sample and to explore additional factors—such as professional experience or organizational culture—that may also impact participation in decision-making.

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