

INFORMAL LEARNING AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESS AMONG
ACADEMIC BOARD MEMBERS OF NIGERIAN POLYTECHNICS

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Azman Hashim International Business School
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

FEBRUARY 2020

DEDICATION

To God alone be all the Glory. This thesis is dedicated to the Almighty God who, can do what no man can do. He is the most **beneficent**, the most merciful for His love and faithfulness towards me and my entire household.

Also, to:

My beloved wife, Mrs. Norah Abaniwo and my God given children

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First, I give thanks to God Almighty for giving me the wisdom, strength and sound health throughout the PhD programme. My profound gratitude goes to my first and second supervisors; Dr Muhd Fauzi Othman and Dr. Mohd Azhar Abd Hamid whom their instructive and constructive guidance, inspiration, encouragement and support enabled me to complete this study successfully. To you both, I am indeed grateful to have you as supervisors throughout the research work. I wish to also appreciate my viva External Examiner, Prof. Dr Abd Halim bin Busari and my Internal Examiner, Prof. Dr. Nik Hasnaa bte Mahmood for accepting to be my examiners during the viva session.

I would like to acknowledge the management of Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND) for sponsoring this study. I wish to specially thank the Rector, the Deputy Rector, the Registrar, the Polytechnic Librarian, Deans of Schools and Heads of Departments. You all did well throughout the period of the interviews I conducted in the institution. I sincerely appreciate this rare opportunity for your kind cooperation as friends and colleagues.

My heartfelt and sincere appreciation goes to my beloved wife, Mrs Norah Abaniwo for her prayers and support throughout my PhD journey outside Nigeria. For standing in the gap and to have properly managed our home, I say thank you and God bless you. I will not forget to thank my children who indeed missed me many times throughout the period. God will make you all become greater than us as your parents.

ABSTRACT

Polytechnics in Nigeria are important tertiary institutions that could introduce change in the entire nation through its breakthrough in science and technology and job creation. Nevertheless, Nigerian polytechnics are faced with various issues particularly on poor decision-making process among its Academic Board members who are known as the highest decision making committee in the polytechnic education system. The issues of poor decision-making process are especially with regard to students and staff dissatisfaction resulting in frequent student's unrest and staff going on strike. As such, this study was done to explore the effect of informal learning towards decision-making process. The philosophical approach adopted was interpretivism in which, interview and focus group discussions (FGDs) were employed to source for data. The overall design of the study was qualitative and it applied the non-homogenous purposive sampling method. In-depth interviews were carried on two groups of samples. Eleven management staff were interviewed individually followed by twenty-one Heads of Departments who were purposively selected in three separate focus group discussions comprising of seven respondents per group. Data were analysed using Nvivo 12.0 computer software while the thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Findings from the data revealed that effective communication and internet facilities play a crucial role in the development of decision-making process. This study discovered that access to information and communication technology (ICT) assists stakeholders to understand themselves essentially when it comes to teaching and learning activities and particularly for effective decision making. Additionally, performance appraisal, motivation and reward play a significant role as part of the institution's strategy to boost the performance of staff which were seen as imperative to help management encourage informal learning. Similarly, it was revealed that skills, knowledge and past experience through informal learning are necessary in assisting and resolving issues capable of causing disharmony among stakeholders in the system. This study has contributed to the understanding of informal learning and decision-making process among the Academic Board members through the development of a model of informal learning for effective decision-making process in Nigerian Polytechnics particularly at the Federal Polytechnic Bida where the case study was conducted.

ABSTRAK

Politeknik di Nigeria adalah institusi pengajian tinggi yang boleh memperkenalkan perubahan di seluruh negara menerusi penemuan dalam sains dan teknologi serta pewujudan peluang pekerjaan. Walau bagaimanapun, politeknik Nigeria menghadapi pelbagai isu terutamanya tentang proses membuat keputusan yang memberi kesan terhadap ketidakpuasan hati dalam kalangan ahli Lembaga Akademiknya yang dikenali sebagai jawatankuasa membuat keputusan tertinggi dalam sistem pendidikan politeknik. Isu yang timbul dalam proses membuat keputusan yang lemah terutama berkaitan dengan ketidakpuasan pelajar dan kakitangan mengakibatkan berlakunya mogok dan kekacauan dalam kalangan pelajar dan kakitangan. Oleh itu, kajian ini dilakukan untuk meninjau kesan pembelajaran tidak formal ke arah proses membuat keputusan. Pendekatan falsafah interpretivisme diterima pakai di mana temubual dan perbincangan kumpulan berfokus (FGDs) digunakan untuk mendapatkan sumber data. Reka bentuk keseluruhan kajian adalah kualitatif dan ia menggunakan kaedah pensampelan bertujuan bukan homogen. Temubual mendalam dilakukan kepada dua kumpulan sampel. Sebelas kakitangan pengurusan ditemu bual secara individu diikuti oleh dua puluh satu Ketua Jabatan yang dipilih secara sengaja dalam tiga perbincangan kumpulan fokus berasingan yang terdiri daripada tujuh responden bagi setiap kumpulan. Data dianalisis dengan menggunakan perisian komputer Nvivo 12.0 manakala analisis tematik digunakan untuk menganalisis data. Kajian ini mendapati bahawa komunikasi dan kemudahan internet yang berkesan memainkan peranan penting dalam proses membuat keputusan. Kajian ini mendapati bahawa akses kepada teknologi maklumat dan komunikasi (ICT) membantu pihak berkepentingan untuk memahami diri mereka pada dasarnya apabila ia melibatkan aktiviti pengajaran dan pembelajaran khususnya untuk membuat keputusan yang berkesan. Selain itu, penilaian prestasi, motivasi dan ganjaran memainkan peranan penting sebagai sebahagian daripada strategi institusi untuk meningkatkan prestasi kakitangan yang dilihat sebagai penting untuk membantu pengurusan menggalakkan pembelajaran tidak formal. Begitu juga, kemahiran, pengetahuan dan pengalaman masa lampau melalui pembelajaran tidak formal adalah diperlukan dalam membantu dan menyelesaikan isu-isu yang boleh mendatangkan ketidakharmonian antara pihak berkepentingan dalam sistem. Kajian ini telah menyumbang kepada pemahaman tentang pembelajaran tidak formal dan proses membuat keputusan dalam kalangan ahli Lembaga Akademik melalui pembangunan model pembelajaran tidak formal untuk proses membuat keputusan yang berkesan di Politeknik Nigeria khususnya di Politeknik Federal Bida di mana kajian kes dilaksanakan.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADAPTI	-	Advanced Digital Appreciation Programme for Tertiary Institutions
ASUP	-	Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics
ASUP-B	-	Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics, Bida Branch
FCT	-	Federal Capital Territory
FGDs	-	Focus Group Discussions
FME	-	Federal Ministry of Education
HOD	-	Head of Department
HRD	-	Human Resource Development
ICT	-	Information and Communication Technology
NASU	-	Non-Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics
NASSUP	-	Non-Academic Senior Staff Union of Polytechnics
NBTE	-	National Board for Technical Education
NPE	-	National Policy on Education
NSTA	-	National Science Teachers' Association
SDL	-	Self-Directed Learning
SSANIP	-	Senior Staff Association of Nigeria Polytechnics
SERVICOM	-	Service Compact with all Nigerians aiming at motivating workers to discharge their duties timely and effectively
SIWES	-	Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme
SUG	-	Students Union Government
TETFUND	-	Tertiary Education Trust Fund
GA	-	Group A
GB	-	Group B
GC	-	Group C

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter gives an overview of the study, the background of the study; discussing both informal learning and decision-making process. The chapter also states the problem statement, research questions, and objectives, scope of the study and the operational definition of key terms.

1.2 Overview of the Study

Polytechnic is one of the tertiary institutions in Nigeria charged with the responsibility of providing human capital for the technological development of the nation. It is expected to produce higher and middle-level manpower (Ukpai, 2015). Nigerian polytechnics are faced with various issues in decisions-making process, resulting in students' and staff dissatisfaction. Although, the Polytechnics have been taking series of decisions yet they are still faced with various challenges such as poor decision-making process resulting in students unrest, staff strike, union disputes, lack of motivation for workers and others (David, 2005; Jayeola-Omoyeni, 2013). The implication for the poor decision making is very costly to the institutions, it may ruin the reputation and also create serious problems for the institutions (Altarawneh & Ibrahim, 2016). In order to avoid any problems as mentioned above, a careful and effective decision-making process has to be in place.

Decision-making has been described as a medium through which the Polytechnic management have to choose from a number of alternatives or opportunities having considered the desired outcome of the chosen alternatives, the problems are identified and the best solutions are provided by the available alternatives

(Negulescu & Doval, 2014). Decision-making can further be described as a careful evaluation of the situation at hand with the intention of providing the required solution which will be in the interest of the polytechnic stakeholders. According to Negulescu & Doval (2014), some of the benefits of decision making include: (i) it provides the opportunity to have access to hidden facts. (ii) multiple approaches are discovered for the problem at hand. (iii) different options for the problem at hand are presented and considered. (iv) the problem is better comprehended through the analysis and (v) the acceptance of the decisions taken is increased.

Informal learning has been described as a means through which the polytechnics can have better knowledge of their environment and take appropriate decisions based on the acquired knowledge and experience. Based on this, this research intends to holistically study the relationship between informal learning and decision-making process among the Academic Board members of the Nigerian Polytechnics. Informal learning is a form of learning that occurs naturally. Informal learning according to Boyer *et al.* (2014) is a form of unstructured, unplanned, unscheduled and impromptu kind of learning that is acquired outside the classroom. It is an independent learning process with a rich source of experience for the learning needs, in order to change the social life of the learner (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Some of the benefits of informal learning are that: (i) it is cheaper compared to formal learning and (ii) It is personal, no intimidations, (Radakovic & Antonijevic, 2013).

The decision-making process of these institutions rests on the shoulders of the Academic Board members. The Academic Board consists of the senior management staff of the institutions. They have the task of managing all academic matters and other related administrative issues in the institutions. The members of the Academic Board include the institutions' Principal Management staff, Deans of schools, Directors of Academic Planning Units and the Heads of Departments with the exception of the Bursar who though, is one of the Principal Management staff, but not a member of the Academic Board.

1.3 Background of the Study

Past researchers from different fields of specialization contend that, there is a link between informal learning and decision making in organisations including institutions of higher learning. Despite the benefits that informal learning and decision-making process embrace, it is less being used compared to the restricted formal learning and decision-making process (García-Peñalvo, & Conde, 2014). For the right and effective decision to be made, appropriate information is essential during the process. From a theoretical point of view, the more useful the information available is, the easier and better, the decision making becomes (Conde *et al.* 2013).

The practice of decision making in organisational setup is as old as the organisation itself. It is seen as an integral part of organisational process that influences the operation of the organisation at all levels for effective problem-solving in the organisational structure (Akdere, 2011). Decision making finds its application in both formal and informal organisations. Decision making influences sales strategy, for example, in marketing organisations (Alharthey, 2015). It is vital in strategic planning of organisations (Papulova & Gazova, 2016). The more the degree of complexity and uncertainty an organisation becomes, the higher the sophistication of decision making (Gorzeń-Mitka & Okreglicka, 2014). Further, the more the quest to engage in more profitable and streamline business coupled with technological advancement increases, the more efficiency is required in decision making.

Every organisation works on her decision making strategies from time to time in line with the technological advancement and human needs to ensure optimum operations of the organisation, since the success of any organisation lies on the efficacy of decision making in practice (Negulescu & Doval, 2014). Sometimes, organisations apply the decision making improvement strategic suggestion proposed by Blenco *et al.* (2013) in the running of the organisation. They score the organisation to identify the pros and cons, determine various organs of the organisations that needs improvement, take decisions, scale the decisions, focus on key decisions, enforce the decisions and implant the decision capabilities. The focus of the decisions is to achieve

and maintain effective teaching and learning in the academic institutions. Such decisions cut across all nations including Nigeria.

The Nigeria, educational system consists of the primary, secondary and tertiary educational subsystems (Imam, 2012). Each subsystem has a defined age group of learners attached to teachers that were recruited by the subsystem based on their educational qualifications and choice. The recruitment of the teaching staff and students' admission are all decision making exercises. In addition, the teachers and management staff of the educational institutions do engage in decisions to keep the schools running. The decision making strategy in the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education are never the same, probably as a result of age differences, level of exposure and personal attributes. Decision making process, which is a useful tool in governance of institutions, is more complex at the tertiary education level than other levels of education, because of high level of philosophy and logic displayed at higher levels of education (Arowolo & Ogunboyede, 2013). In Nigeria, the University, Polytechnic and Advance Teachers' College fall under the category of tertiary institutions.

In Nigerian polytechnics, decision making can be complex such that any form of decision taken may, in one way or the other, affect the entire institution. The case of Federal polytechnic Bida is not an exception. This is why decision makers in any setting, should be careful in the decision making process. Sufficient information should be available and necessary decision making steps should be followed while taking decisions. There are factors that influence the decision making process. One of such important factors is the systematic process behind decision making including the decision maker(s) involved in a particular issue demanding for a decision (Suttle, 2014).

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is today common in everyday activities and it can be used to generate a lot of information in order to facilitate decision making particularly in the Nigerian polytechnics as the unit of analysis of this study. In decision making, errors are made for lack of adequate information and or due to biases which can affect both the employee(s) involved and

the organisation itself. In the light of this, scholars from diverse specialization had argued directly or indirectly the relationship between organizational management role and informal learning and decision-making process in the organization. Before examining the conclusions or arguments of these scholars, informal learning and decision-making is described as the art by which subordinates are given the opportunity to participate in decision-making process, or at least given some autonomy to make decision when the needs arises (Ejimabo, 2015).

There have been reported scenario for example, the problem of wrong decision-making process that have led to various disputes in Nigerian tertiary institutions with particular reference to the Nigerian polytechnics. Typical among such issues is wrong decision-making process which results into mismanagement, indiscipline in the system, staff strike actions, students unrests, unfair judgments and poor implementation of policies (Jayeola-Omoyeni (2013). Bloch (2006) also mentioned some of such issues in the Polytechnic to include: inadequate teaching/learning facilities, mismanagement, poor leadership and lack of professional skills.

The extent to which the decision made is either right or wrong determines the success or failure of the institutions. Decision making enables the identification and evaluation of various alternatives (Papulova & Gazova, 2016). Some of the benefits of correct decision making include gaining a higher level of knowledge, good communication and the ability to listen, access to more number of approaches, a better understanding of the phenomenon and high rate of acceptance of the decisions made. Similarly, it provides varied alternatives capable of providing the desired outcomes. Other benefits as identified by Band & Frith (2017) are provision of better beliefs, more wisdom is expressed by members of the decision making committee, a decision is reached by majority, there are better solution, combined efforts and overcoming the issues of bias in the decision making process.

Decision making has been studied using either qualitative or quantitative methods, the current study use the qualitative method. However, some example of quantitative method is given: Ogbogu (2013) conducted quantitative research to see the extent to which committee system affect decision making. It was found out that,

committees are institutional arrangement that facilitate and improve decision making. Further, a quantitative study was carried out by Adesoji & Adetoro (2015) on the effectiveness of students' involvement in decision making and University leadership. It was revealed that, a significant relationship exists between the two.

The term "informal learning" has been progressively used in adult education for many reasons. Informal learning provides a simple difference to formal learning that suggests better flexibility or freedom for learners (Eraut, 2010). Further, it draws attention to the learning that occurs in a much wider variety of setting than formal education or training (Eraut, 2010). Informal workplace learning refers to the learning that takes place in the workplace without following any structured training outlines. It is learning that, employees at any level who are prepared to learn are free to learn at the workplace either through their colleagues' past experiences, skills, and knowledge. Any informal workplace learner is also capable of learning from his own past experiences.

Czerkawski (2016) referred to informal learning as lifelong learning that takes place on-the-job, structured in different ways with the aid of technology and more often, through informal or incidental learning that is integrated with work. Informal learning is further described as learning by experience. The author further states that informal learning involves all investigative forms of learning through socialisation, sharing of ideas and opinions. In the context of this study, informal learning can be described as learning that does not follow the official protocol of transferring knowledge from the more knowledgeable (the teacher/instructor) to the less knowledgeable (the learner). It is workplace-based and not classroom-based. Informal learning is mostly acquired at the workplace since, individuals learn as they perform their daily tasks while at the same time, they socialise with others to share experiences, ideas and opinions through which they acquire knowledge in this process (Czerkawski, 2016).

Ogundele *et al.* (2016) states that the past experiences acquired through informal learning increases the decision-making strength of the decision makers. He further states that informal learning is different from formal learning knowledge

acquired from the classroom. It has been established in the literature that skills, knowledge, and experience acquired through informal learning are very important during the decision-making process. According to the author, some of the collected data through formal learning might tend not to be very useful but informal learning can provide reliable data during the decision making process. Consequently, upon this, informal learning enhances the professional development of the stakeholders, improved self-efficacy, and improved personal relationship, provides a platform where individual socializes and acquire new skills, knowledge, and experience. The decision makers have the opportunity to gather information through informal learning fora (García-Peñalvo & Conde, 2014). The use of informal learning has been described to be cheap and easy to acquire as well as, providing an efficient method of information gathering. Knowledge through informal learning is acquired either consciously or subconsciously because the knowledge presents itself naturally in a most conducive setting (García-Peñalvo & Conde, 2014).

However, information gathered through either formal or informal learning is for decision-making process. Also keeping workers' skills up to date through informal learning is very important when skill require changes frequently (de Grip, 2015). Informal learning can take the form of organised knowledge in which, it is used by the learner. It could also be in the form of skills used for practice or used during job performance. Understanding people and places occur during the informal learning process. According to Marsick (2009), informal learning methods at the workplace includes examining one's own practice, getting and using ideas and opinions from others, learning by doing, learning from past mistakes, mentoring, experimenting, coaching, giving and receiving feedback and conversations/discussions with others. Most of the knowledge acquired from any of these methods are useful ideas got from ideas, impressions, opinions, and questions arising from either superiors, friends, or colleagues. Moreover, there are situations that can result in informal learning including self-directed learning, incidental learning, performance learning, networking, organization culture, and learning from mistakes (Marsick & Watkins, 2015). The benchmark of the researcher in this study is that, the above views about informal learning are correct and the researcher also views informal learning as that which is acquired through social interaction with friends, colleagues, predecessors, mentors and other socialising agents in order to gain knowledge, acquire the right skills and past

experiences of others that will help to improve the decision making process of the organisation.

Merits of informal learning in a workplace include enhancement of employability and positive benefits for managers of organizations and the development of task-oriented skills and knowledge (Conde *et al.* 2013). Informal learning encourages effective communication and inculcation of social norms and favorable patterns of behavior among staff. It also enables staff to learn and abide by the rules guiding a workplace such as academic institutions or business organizations. Under the informal learning process, achievement is the main instrument to success in all human endeavors (Jayeola-Omoyeni, 2013). The author further states that, participation in any informal education, is to prepare and equip learners for diverse and multiplicity of jobs roles due to its emphasis on the discipline of self-directed learning and independent reasoning.

Past researches have been conducted on informal learning and decision making process in different contexts using either quantitative or qualitative methods. This current study uses qualitative methods, giving examples of related past studies that used quantitative method. Jayeola-Omoyeni (2013) used quantitative method to see to the effectiveness of using informal learning in decision making process. The study affirmed that adults learn less under formal learning but more active learners in informal learning with higher percentage than in formal learning. Another quantitative study Garcia-Penalvo & Conde (2013) conducted a quantitative study about employees learning at the workplace. It was found out that, decision making from informal instance is possible and make decision making easier and faster due to availability of required information through informal learning than the formal learning.

In this study, based on the foregoing, the onus to take decisions rests squarely on the Academic Board members of the Nigerian polytechnics. Academic Board members consist of members majorly, the senior academic staff of the polytechnics. It is expected that they will have the ability to monitor, have good expertise, social connection and must have the required reputation and have similar characteristics in discharging their responsibilities as decision makers of the institution. These qualities

are expected to enable them to take the decision relating to the general management of the institutions including crisis management that may arise from time to time.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

Decision-making involves searching for the right information, analyze them in order to make appropriate and effective decisions (Papulova & Gazova, 2016). The prevailing problem of practice as part of the reasons which this study is set out to examine is that not much is known about how various Academic Board members of Nigerian polytechnics learn through past experience in order to make the right decisions. Also, useful factors and strategies that could be used to assist the Board members in quality decision making is grossly inadequate.

The main problem facing the Nigerian polytechnics particularly, the Federal polytechnic, Bida is the deficiency found in decision-making process due mainly to the sole application of formal learning knowledge in taking decisions (Ogundele *et al.* 2016). Corroborating this, (Ferrell & Fraedrich, 2015; García-Peñalvo, & Conde, 2014) opined that informal learning is effective for decision making but highly overlooked with more attention on the use of formal learning process. This formal knowledge is characterized by academic knowledge which, does not translate to solving the real problem efficiently. Despite the conclusions by scholars that, today's world needs a spontaneous action and reaction to make average decision, it was observed that some higher educational institutions rely solely on formal decision-making approaches (Kogan, 2018; Lesley, 2018). Wrong decision-making process has led to different type of crisis to the dissatisfaction of both students, staff and the management of Nigerian polytechnics. These crisis are not effectively managed but rather, have created more problems particularly, at the Federal polytechnic, Bida (Ajibade, 2013).

In academic institutions, there are socio-cultural factors, human differences, and other related factors that necessitate the study of decision making based on institution type, environment, people involved and available learning materials.

Consequently, several studies have been conducted on the influence of decision-making process on the management of institutions (Negulescu & Doval, 2014)). However, the studies are still far from sufficient. Decision makers in organisations including tertiary institutions at various levels, need to be competent and to follow the normal decision-making process to ensure that, the right decisions are made. Past studies have shown that competencies can be developed in adulthood (Emerling & Boyatzis 2016), but did not address the question of how these competencies are usually acquired at the workplace. What the Academic Board members of the Nigerian polytechnics learn, and how they engage in learning as part of the decision-making process has remained unknown hence the need for this study. Although, Dung-Gwom (2014) disclosed that, informal learning supports employee-centered approaches towards adequate employer/employee relationship but, the work did not address how informal learning influences decision making process in the workplace. Hence, the need for this current study.

Interestingly, several studies have been conducted on the influence of informal learning on decision making, but much is yet to be unveiled on how Academic Board members of tertiary institutions particularly, the Federal Polytechnic, Bida learn in order to make effective decisions, as well as during decision-making process (Negulescu, 2014). Strategies that could assist the Board members to understand better decision-making procedures are yet to be investigated in the Federal Polytechnic, Bida. In addition, the extent of awareness of the influence of informal learning on decision-making is unknown to the majority of the Board members. Also, how informal learning could enhance personal/professional development among the Academic Board members of this particular institution is yet to be studied.

Literature has disclosed that crisis management has become a subject of concern within the education sector in Nigeria (Ajibade, 2013). Furthermore, there have been reports of poor management of crisis in Nigerian higher institutions as a result of wrong decision-making process. Crisis management due to poor decision-making could be reduced by the use of past experiences through informal learning during decision-making process (Mezey, 2004). Therefore, strategic ways to address the difficulties and or inadequacies in decision-making among the Academic Board

members of Nigerian polytechnics need research attention. Therefore, the need for this study.

According to Altarawneh & Ibrahim (2016), wrong decision-making has negatively affected the image of the polytechnic system in Nigeria. Hence, the need for this current study. Furthermore, Ajibade, (2013) states that some of the implications of the crisis in the polytechnics especially when there is no quick response include, loss of legitimacy, poor governance, maladministration, misplacement of priority and breakdown of law and order. This has led to chaotic situations that had a far-reaching negative effect on the institutions. The aforementioned crisis was attributed to wrong decision-making process.

In spite of the benefits of decision-making as highlighted above, the decision-making process in the polytechnic sector still fails to achieve the intended purpose. According to Ogundele *et al.* (2016), the reason for its failure has been attributed to the strict adherence to the formal learning method of obtaining information during the decision making process. Sometimes, it may be due to ignorance or lack of vigilance by the management (Dubrovski, 2009). Moreover, a bad decision or error in the decision-making implications are very costly. It results to further crises and worst still, affect the image of the Polytechnics in a negative way (Altarawneh & Ibrahim, (2016). In order to avoid management errors in the process of decision making, the management has to learn from past experience and to build capacity for crisis management. This, however, can be achieved through informal learning approach (Farazmand, 2007).

It is against this backdrop that, this research is aimed at investigating qualitatively “how informal learning can be used to support decision-making process in order to make the right decisions and to enhance the personal/professional development of Academic Board members of the Nigerian Polytechnics”. Hence, the study seeks to ask the following research questions:

From the problem statement above, the specific research questions that were addressed in this study are:

1. How can the key informal learning factors influence the decision-making process in Nigerian Polytechnics?
2. What are the informal learning strategies used by Academic Board members of Nigerian Polytechnics to help in the decision-making process?
3. How does informal learning enhance the personal/professional development of Academic Board members of the Nigerian Polytechnics towards decision making?

1.5 Research Aims and Objectives

The aim of this study is to examine “how informal learning can be used to support decision making and to enhance the personal/professional development of Academic Board members of the Nigerian Polytechnics”. In view of this, the following specific objectives are designed:

1. To identify how key informal learning factors will influence the decision-making process in Nigerian Polytechnics
2. To know the informal learning strategies used by Academic Board members of the Nigerian Polytechnics in improving the decision-making process.
3. To investigate how informal learning enhances the personal/professional development of Academic Board members of Nigerian Polytechnics towards decision-making process.

1.5.1 Methodological Gap

A qualitative case study by Choonara *et al.* (2017) established that the role of informal learning is being appreciated by management of organisation due to its positive effect on the success of the organisations. Similarly, another qualitative study on informal learning in the context of managerial decision-making for example, in a pharmaceutical company indicated that managers who were involved informally in self-directed learning activities performed better in decision making than those that relied solely on formal learning knowledge, (Coyne, & Walker 2018). Further, a study was conducted by Ferrell & Fraedrich (2015) and Garcia-Penalvo & Condo (2015). The study confirmed that, informal learning is more effective in decision making within organisation but highly overlooked. The study added that more attention is given to formal learning during decision making process. However, despite the benefits of informal learning in decision making of managers, little study has been carried out in understanding how informal learning process can be applied in organisations especially among the Academic Board of Nigerian polytechnics to improve decision making process.

1.5.2 Justification for focusing on informal learning factors and strategies

The two common forms of learning are formal and informal. Informal learning is one of the most prevalent forms of learning in the workplace. This study differentiates the two thus: formal learning is classroom-based while informal learning is non-classroom based (Berg & Chyung, 2008). In this study, both the factors and strategies are very important and there is the need for their proper understanding and application if informal learning is to be successfully acquired at the workplace.

According to Berg & Chyung (2008), knowledge is more frequently acquired through the informal learning than the formal. A qualitative study was conducted by Ejimabo (2015) to identify factors influencing success in decision making among Nigerian leaders and policy makers. Also, a qualitative case study was carried out by Choonara *et al.* (2017). The aim of the study is to let management of organisations

know and appreciate the role of informal learning for the success of their organisations. Therefore, the justification for focusing on factors and strategies is based on literature. Hoekstra *et al.* (2009) conducted a study to explore how teachers' perception of workplace condition for learning as related to their informal learning activities. From literature reviewed, this present study discovered that there are both influencing and inhibiting factors to informal workplace learning which must be properly understood and handled for the success of informal learning in the workplace. Literature reviewed also stated that there are both organisational and personal factors such as age, educational qualification and so on that, are factors to informal learning in the workplace.

From literature reviewed for this study, it was discovered that if workplace informal learning is to succeed, there is the need for some important strategies to be put in place. According to Cheetham and Chivers (2001), strategies such as social learning, networking, mentoring, performance planning systems used for developmental purposes, mistakes and trial and error are identified as predominant learning strategies that enhance informal learning in the workplace. Therefore, from the above backdrop, the present study focuses on both factors and strategies to ensure the successful use of informal learning in the workplace in order to improve decision-making process among the Academic Board members of Nigerian polytechnics.

1.6 The scope of the Study

In research, the scope is considered significant since it provides a narrower and more manageable focus for the study. Therefore, this study was conducted at the Federal Polytechnic, Bida in Niger State of Nigeria as a single-case study. The study adopted a non-homogenous purposive sampling method as recommended by Creswell (2005). Interview participants were limited to four Principal Management staff, seven Deans of schools and twenty-one Heads of Departments purposively selected. This is because they are all members of the Academic Board (decision makers) of the institution who have all the characteristics to provide useful information regarding the phenomenon under study.

This study attempts to expand knowledge on the key factors and strategies of informal learning that contribute to the proper understanding and success in the decision-making process of the Nigerian polytechnics with particular reference to the Federal Polytechnic, Bida as the case study.

1.7 Operational Definition of Key Terms

For the purpose of proper understanding of this study, this section explains some of the key terms and how they are used in the context of this study. They include informal learning, decision-making process and personal/professional development of Academic Board members of Nigerian polytechnics.

1.7.1 Informal Learning

Informal Learning (adult learning) according to Boyer *et al.* (2014), is any form of an unstructured, unplanned, unscheduled and impromptu type of learning that takes place outside the classroom. It is independent learning with a rich source of experience for learning needs, to change the social life of the learner (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). Informal learning is an enduring model of learning by an individual as a social animal, acquiring knowledge in different settings from people and their past experiences (Garcia-Penalvo & Condo, 2014). Participation in any informal learning is capable of preparing and providing the learner for diversity and multiplicity of employment and roles due to its emphasis on self-directed learning and independent thinking (Jayeola-Omoyeni, 2013). In this study, the researchers views informal learning as that, which an individual decides on his own without consulting anybody to acquire because of the benefits he/she will derive from it in the work place through social interactions with others

1.7.2 Decision Making

Decision making is the process of selecting a logical and suitable choice from amongst the various available options. This choice represents best option for a particular situation faced by an individual. For the present study, decision making is that of members of the Academic Board of the Nigerian polytechnic particularly, at the Federal polytechnic, Bida, the case study. According to Bundy *et al.* (2017), decision-making process accounts for the recognition of a particular issue, assessing available options and choosing the best option. In such a process, individuals make the best available choice from many other alternatives considering the present condition. This means that, to make a good decision, the decision maker has to have an idea of the problem in order to make the right decision. In the context of this study, for a decision to be meaningful, the decision maker must have requisite skills and experience to make a decision after identifying suitable alternatives from which the most appropriate choice is taken (Abood & Thabet, 2017). As such, the variables to be measured for effective decision making is to have adequate experience as well as alternatives.

1.7.3 Professional Development

A profession has been defined as an occupation based upon particular intellectual study and training, the aim of which is to apply expert service or advice to others for a certain fee or salary (Cheetham & Chivers, 2005). A profession can further be defined as skill acquisition based on extensive practical and theoretical knowledge acquired by an individual in a specialized field of study and to be able to practice in that particular field. Every profession usually has professional bodies organized by their members who also have full control over their entrance requirements. According to Bell & Kozlowski (2008), informal learning is critical to success in any profession that demands personal initiative to acquire a set of new skills, which may not be included in the formal training offered by the employer. Hence, professional development in this study is hinged on the premise that informal learning acquired at the workplace will greatly enhance the personal/professional development of the

Academic Board members of Nigerian polytechnics. Below is the research activities undertaken in this study.

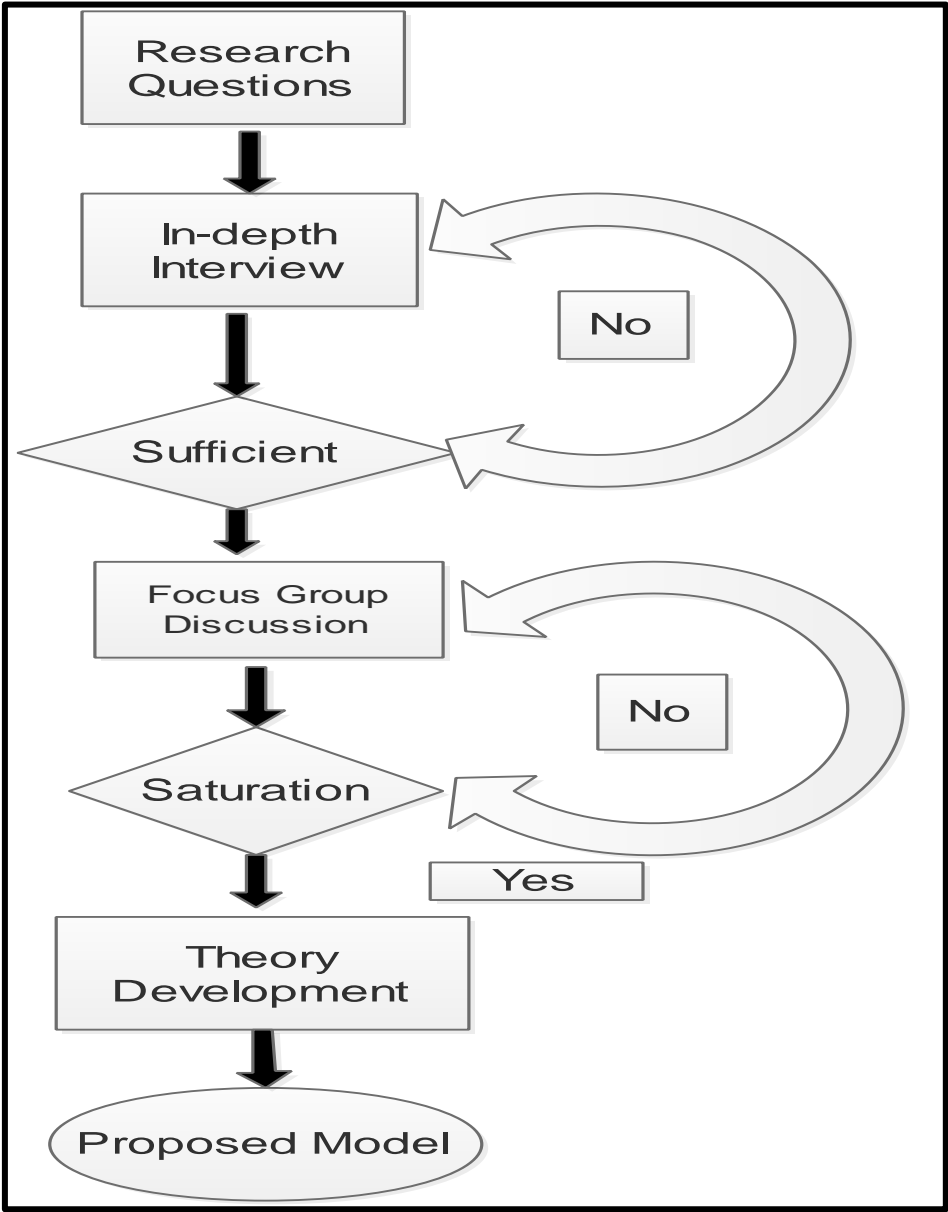


Figure 1.1 Research Activities

1.8 The Organization of the Study

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 gives an introduction and an explicit overview of the topic under study. Next is the statement of the problem,

research objectives, research questions, scope/limitation of the study and the operational definition of key terms. A complete organization of the thesis is also contained in the chapter.

Chapter 2 which is the literature review is divided into sections. The first section provides a synopsis of scholarly views and perspectives concerning informal learning and how its factors and strategies would ensure effective decision-making process and enhance the personal/professional development of Board members. The next section of this chapter explains the concept of Nigerian polytechnics, academic board members and their roles. The general concept of learning was vividly captured. The concept of informal learning and decision making were explicitly discussed. The section also discussed the three identified underpinning theories found suitable in this study and their integration formed the conceptual framework.

Chapter 3 explains the research paradigm employed for the study, the research approach employed the in-depth interview and focus group discussions (FGDs). The chapter also discussed the selection procedures of participants for both interviews and the focus group. The modus operandi of data collection techniques were explained with the use of Nvivo 12 and thematic analysis for effective data management.

Chapter 4 This chapter is made up of the former chapters 4, 5 and 6 as directed by the Viva Committee. It also affected the discussions under each of the chapters which have been merged and taken to chapter 5 of the study.

Chapter 5 Presents the discussion of findings arranged based on the themes that emerged from the research questions on factors that influence decision making process among Academic Board members of Nigerian polytechnics, Informal learning strategies used by Academic Board members on the decision making process and Informal learning enhancing the personal/professional development of the Academic Board members of Nigerian polytechnics. Discussion of findings,

contributions of the study, recommendations and conclusion are also presented in this chapter.

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