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SOCIOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Governance collaboration in schools: the perceptions of principals, parents and educators in rural South Africa

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Abstract: The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 clearly articulates the roles of School Governing Bodies (SGBs). The SGBs consist of the principal as an ex-officio member, teachers, parents and learners, in cases of secondary schools. This study revealed that collaboration among members of SGBs, regardless of their position in the school, is a critical provision of quality education to learners. The study explored the collaboration between the principals, parent and teacher governors in rural South Africa. The qualitative study used a focus group discussion with ten (10) school governors from two (2) schools in one rural province of South Africa. The participant sample included two (2) principals, four (4) parent governors and four (4) teacher governors. Findings revealed that principals, parent and teacher governors are faced with challenges concerning their working relationship or failure to collaborate. These include overlapping governance roles played by principals, low meeting attendance by parent governors, failure of principals to support parent governors, failure of principals to guide parent governors by implementing the South African Schools Act, and finally, the challenge of governors' isolation. The

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The South African education system dictates that public schools ought to have School Governing Bodies (SGBs), and there should be a demarcation of duties and powers relating to the school principal and the School Governing Body (South African Schools Act 84 of 1996). The SGBs consist of the principal as an ex-officio member, teachers, parents and learners, in cases of secondary schools. This paper reveals that collaboration among members of SGBs, regardless of their position in the school, is a critical provision of quality education to learners. In seeking to establish collaboration between principals, teachers and parent governors in some rural South African schools, this study magnifies these issues: Collaboration of principals, parent and teacher governors; the role of the principal as a governor; and strategies to ensure healthy working relationships, which will lead to effective collaboration among three key members of SGBs (Principal, Parents and Teachers).

findings, however, have implications for school leadership and school governance practice. Given structural isolation, parents and teacher governors ought to work together. Notably, they face limited effectiveness due to overlapping roles and limited resources.

Subjects: Educational Research; Education Studies; School Leadership, Management & Administration; Secondary Education; Teachers & Teacher Education

Keywords: Parent governors; transformational leadership; school effectiveness; principals; rural schools

1. Introduction

This article is part of a PhD thesis of the co-author of this article. The study was aimed at investigating perceptions of principals and school board members regarding their working relationship in the Zambezi Region of Namibia. Writing this article, the researchers complied with the university requirement, that a PhD student should at least produce one or two articles from his/her doctoral thesis. Both researchers specialise in educational leadership and management. Their interest is in Schools' Governance and Education Policy Studies. The supervisor is a Senior Lecturer at the University of South Africa, while the student researcher is a lecturer at the University of Namibia, Katima Mulilo Campus.

With their similar interests, this placed them in an ideal position to investigate governance collaboration in schools: The perceptions of principals, parents and educators in rural South Africa. The researchers chose to investigate governance collaboration in schools: The perceptions of principals, parents and educators in rural South Africa, which has the potential to provide valuable information to the Department of Education (DoE), teachers, principals, educational practitioners and researchers, in their attempts to create a platform for smooth dialogue and the harmonisation of their operations for the good of the school and the surrounding communities. As researchers, we envisage that this article will develop principals and teachers' capacity and provide them with insights that may increase the effectiveness of their collaboration.

Most rural schools in South Africa are faced with numerous challenges. This study aimed at discovering how principals, parent and teacher governors collaborate in their governance function which could contribute towards more effective schools. Sound governance, leadership and school effectiveness are inseparable in attaining improved learner performance. This study thus sought to identify factors that affect the working collaboration of principals, parent and teacher governors and recommends strategies that principals, parent and teacher governors can utilise to increase collaboration.

Walkley (2011) defines a relationship as the interaction between key groups and individuals who contribute to the governance of a school. Wise et al. (2013) affirm that the development of trusting relationships is a critical leadership factor in the development of a school culture that can contribute to school effectiveness and facilitate improvement in the school. Modisaotsile (2012) points out that the SGBs must ensure that the school is governed in the best interests of all the stakeholders and should put the interests of the school before any personal interests. Parent and teacher governors, together with the principals need to work together to enhance their relationship as partners to ensure high-quality education (Heystek, 2010).

The South African Schools' Act (1994) makes provision for the establishment of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) for all public schools. The SGBs in South Africa are composed of the principal, teachers and parents (The South African Schools' Act, 1997). The roles and responsibilities of SGBs vary from one country to the next. In South Africa, the intention of establishing SGBs was

not that parent governors be involved in professional matters for which they are not trained, but that they have an opportunity to act in cases of gross negligence (Heystek, 2010).

Although there is research conducted on management and governance in South African schools, not much research is conducted on the collaboration of principals, parent and teacher governors in rural South Africa (SA). (Govindasamy, 2009; Heystek, 2006; Mestry, 2004). This article, therefore, is based on a study conducted in South Africa. The study aimed to explore the collaboration between the principals, parent and teacher governors in rural South Africa. The study used qualitative data collected through focus group discussions with ten school governors. It emerged from the governors' perceptions that somehow school governors collaborate, but they still have some challenges regarding their working relationship; attendance of school governors' meetings, lack of support from principals, governors not having time for governors' matters and not performing their roles in accordance with the South African Schools Act. In the end, the study adds to research conducted on working collaboratively among parent governors, teacher governors and principals by suggesting strategies that can be utilised to improve their working relationship.

2. Literature review

The literature review covers the following issues: Working together of principals, parent and teacher governors; the role of the principal as an ex-officio member of the School Governing Body (SGB); and strategies to ensure healthy working relationships.

2.1. Working together of principals, parent and teacher governors

The literature reviewed in this paper opens with a discussion on the importance of working together, three key elements needed to build working relationships between principals, parent and teacher governors, collaboration among governors, and the role of the principal as an ex-officio member of the SGB. The literature review concludes with an overview of the strategies that rural principals, parent and teacher governors can utilise to ensure that they work together effectively.

2.1.1. The importance of working together

Fullan (2012, p. 1) upholds that building relationships is one of the components of leadership. Other components that Fullan (2012, p. 1) identifies include focusing on a small number of ambitious goals or priorities, persistence, developing capacity, and spreading quality implementation. Sallee (2014, p. 25) states that relationships are vital factors in schools. This means that the principal ought to make relationship-building a priority for meaningful results in the school. In consideration of this, principals must understand the importance of placing a high value on people and working together.

Spicer (2016, p. 29) states that healthy relationships in the school are afforded when the principal accepts, respects and exalts employees. This study validates Sallee's (2014, p. 25) statement that positive relationships are the heart of what makes a school extraordinary. Equally important is that relationships must be professionally supportive, sincere and consciously developed. Spicer (2016, p. 10) acknowledges that principals who can build working relationships with stakeholders hold the central elements for creating a positive school climate. To create a positive school climate, principals must be consummate relationship builders within groups, especially with people different from themselves. According to Spicer (2016, p. 10), when principals lead by example and work to build trust, shared values and a shared vision, working relationships improve, and stakeholders are happier with their jobs.

2.1.2. Key elements needed for working relations

In this section, the two elements essential to working relations, i.e., trust and the existence of constructive conflicts, are discussed as highlighted by Ament (2013) and Van Der Westhuizen (2015).

The first key element to working together is building trust. Thus, Ament (2013, p. 64) explains that taking time to build trust is imperative for SGB members to adapt the mission, vision and core beliefs of the school for learners to meet high standards. Whitehead et al. (2013) reiterate that when teachers and principals are cooperative, and trust efforts are strong, learners experience more significant academic achievements and a greater sense of well-being. Moreover, according to Bennis and Nanus (2007, p. 41), when transformational leaders gain the trust of organisation members, it provides them with a sense of self-respect similar to a healthy identity and achieving great organisational goals. Ament (2013, p. 52) affirms that effective communication is a critical component in the development of trust. This is supported by Ehren et al. (2016, p. 212), who acknowledge that school governors should establish a strong communication structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving school goals. Governors ought to receive information from various sources, including principals, teachers, and external sources. They should share the information received among all members and communicate actions and goals to staff members. Bauer and Brazier (2012, p. 46) agree that communication is critical by involving others, both from the school and apart from it. These authors further show that communication does not need to be sophisticated or lengthy, but only regular (ibid). This is acknowledged by Steyn and van Niekerk (2012, p. 143), who emphasise that effective communication needs to be simple.

Encouraging constructive conflict around ideas is another element needed to build a working relationship. Van Der Westhuizen (2015, p. 308) states that conflict, in the sense of an honest difference of opinion where a choice must be made between two alternative methods, is unavoidable and can be a valuable exercise. This means that constructive conflict ensures that all the possibilities are carefully considered, and that future planning is done based on the advantages and disadvantages that the alternatives offer (Van Der Westhuizen, 2015, p. 308). The importance of constructive conflict is reiterated by Boucher (2013, p. 67) who affirms that principals consider constructive conflict around ideas as an essential skill that contributes to a positive school climate.

2.1.3. Collaboration among governors

Section 21 of the South African Schools' Act of 1994 outlines the roles and responsibilities of the SGBs. Among these roles and responsibilities are the School Development Plan (SDP) and setting the vision and policies of the school. This implies that a School Development Plan (SDP) is a strategy on how the governors could collaborate to maintain standards and improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Trust and constructive conflict, as discussed in the preceding section, are needed for collaboration to take place effectively. It is, therefore, crucial to investigate the existence of collaboration between principals and teacher governors. Hence, Bagarette (2012, p. 97) questions whether collaboration among governors is successful or not if the legislated functions do not provide a clear distinction between the principals, parent and teacher governors. There are numerous reports on power struggles attributed to principals' privileged knowledge of policies and regulations compared to parent and teacher governors (Deem et al., 1995; Heystek, 2004). Principals, by virtue of their position, should assist the parent and teacher governors to perform their functions in accordance with the South African Schools Act (1994), ensuring governors' collaboration (Xaba & Nhlapo, 2014, p. 425). However, Mncube and Mafora (2013, p. 21) point out that there is some uncertainty about the roles, due to overlaps between roles, unclear boundaries, and encroachment in the roles of others. These can engender conflict and tension that influence the working relationship between principals, parent and teacher governors. This is supported by Onderi and Makori (2012, p. 022) who state that tensions and conflicts are likely to occur when roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined. As well as if roles overlap, or when a particular group goes beyond its mandate. This implies that if there are uncertainties in the role definitions in a school or unclear boundaries of responsibilities, then the stage is set for interpersonal frictions between the principal, teacher and parent governors. In agreement, Doty (2012, p. 3) mentions that studies indicate that principals and parent governors have not been collaborating in an ideal situation, leading to intensified tension and strained relationships.

It is worth noting that parent members are voted in the SGBs to represent parents and the community at large (The South African Schools' Act, 1994). Therefore, governors should communicate with parents and the community, and they should regularly arrange meetings with parents to inform them of the school developmental activities (Ehren et al., 2016, p. 212; Lorentzen, 2013, p. 53). The roles and responsibilities of governors are an indicator of the working relationships that exist between principals, parent and teacher governors (The South African Schools' Act, 1994). This means that if the principals encroach on the roles of parent governors and vice versa, this may determine the perceptions of the two parties towards each other. The roles and responsibilities determine whether their relationship works for better or for worse.

2.2. The role of the principal as an ex-officio member in relation to the School Governing Bodies

In terms of the South African Educators' Employment Act and Personnel Administrative Measures (South Africa Government Gazette No 12 February 2016, No 197678 February 1999), every principal must show leadership and be able to manage and contribute towards effective governance. According to Xaba and Nhlapo (2014, p. 425), the principal is responsible for the professional management of the school. This implies that school leadership requires the principal's direction so that the function and purpose of the school are fulfilled. It is, however, essential to note that working together of the principal, parent and teacher governors is influenced by the school's values, mission as well as by the SGB's constitution. The principal is morally and legally obliged to cooperate and collaborate with the school governors in the best interest of the school.

Furthermore, the principal is an essential person in the school community and accountable to the Department of Education- Minister and Head of the Department, teachers, parents, learners and school community at large. He/she is a representative of the Ministry of Education and, therefore, must lead by example and set high standards for him/herself. This entails that in matters of school governance, the principal is answerable to his/her employer by assisting school governors on the performance of their functions and responsibilities in terms of SASA (1994).

2.3. Strategies to ensure healthy working relationships

Several strategies need to be considered to ensure working relationships among the principals, parent and teacher governors (Walkley, 2011, p. 3). These may include creating time for collaboration. This is supported by Crozier (2003), who asserts that partnership between parents and teachers encourages not only benefitting from the education of their children but also becoming active partners in the production of educated children. Thus, the partnership could be achieved if governors meet to discuss matters of common interest. The school principal should ensure governors understand their roles to avoid tensions that often arise when there are misguided or misunderstood expectations of each other (ibid). If the principal perceives or anticipates that a particular agenda item may be controversial or problematic, he/she should spend time before the meeting discussing the matter with key members of the executive committee. This implies that such a move can be a wise investment of time, ensuring that the agenda item is addressed.

This section reviewed literature related to the exploration of collaboration among principals, parent and teacher governors in rural South Africa, suggesting that principals play a significant role in creating effective working relationships. It also appears that positive working relationships between principals, parent and teacher governors are the heart of what makes a school effective. In addition, this working relationship can be fruitful if there is a closer understanding of the roles and responsibilities of school governors.

2.4. Transformational leadership theory

The collaboration that is infused with transformational leadership may go a long way in ensuring healthy working relationships, as discussed in the succeeding paragraph. Allen et al. (2015, p. 2) aptly add that transformational leadership is one style that has advocated for success in the school improvement process.

The transformational leadership theory defines the concept of leadership as it applies to principals and school governors. Wahab et al. (2014, p. 40) define transformational leadership as a process inspiring change and empowering followers to achieve greater heights, to improve themselves as well as to improve organisational processes. This implies that it is an enabling process causing followers to accept responsibilities and the processes to which they are assigned. Therefore, a leader, as expressed by Ali (2012, p. 74), must display the ability to influence, motivate and enable others to contribute towards the effectiveness and success of the school. This is even more important because research indicates that transformational leaders are proficient in altering people's thoughts and culture in branding new model reforms within an organisation (Pepper, 2010). Further, research in leadership and management presents that transformational leadership is associated with successful contemporary organisations (Eagly, 2013).

Bass and Riggio (2010) postulate that transformational leaders stimulate and inspire their followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their followers' leadership capacity. These authors further show that these transformational leaders help followers to grow and develop by responding to followers' individual needs by empowering them and aligning the objectives and goals of the individual followers, the leader, the group, and the broader organisation (ibid). There is doubt then that if the principals follow transformational leadership, they will be more likely to gain the cooperation of both teachers and parent governors. Thus, leadership typically involves an element of vision. This implies that a vision provides direction to influence the process. Therefore, governors (principals, parents and teachers) as leaders may have one or more visions to help guide a group. Leadership involves inspiring and supporting others towards the achievement of that vision, and in this context, suggests that the principal, parent and teacher governors should provide direction to the school so that the function and purpose of the school are fulfilled.

It is, therefore, crucial at this point to understand what transformational leadership is. Researchers (Afshari, Bakar, Luan & Siraj, 2012, p. 165; Hauserman & Stick, 2013, p. 186; Avci, 2015, 3, 2759–2760) mention the four dimensions of transformational leadership in terms of attitudes and behaviour of a transformational leader that relates to collaboration. These are idealised influence or charisma; inspirational motivation; intellectual stimulation; and individualised consideration. These four dimensions are outlined below.

2.4.1. Idealised influence or charisma dimension

Idealised influence emphasises trust, values and ethics (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This dimension of transformational leadership describes leaders who act as strong role models for followers. This implies that followers identify with these leaders and want very much to emulate them. In addition, these leaders usually have very high standards of moral and ethical conduct and can be counted on to do the right thing. They are deeply respected by followers, who usually place a great deal of trust in them. Furthermore, they provide followers with a vision and a sense of mission (Al-Husseini & Elbeltagi, 2016; Supermane, 2019). It is essential to acknowledge that principals, parent and teacher governors can adopt transformational leadership because it is a crucial element in students' excellence and schools' success. This is in line with what Wahab et al. (2014, p. 45) reiterate that a transformational leader is a change agent who will drive change in the organisation or school.

2.4.2. Inspirational motivation dimension

Inspirational leadership sees transformational leaders who communicate high expectations to followers (Al-Husseini & Elbeltagi, 2016; Supermane, 2019). The same authors (Al-Husseini & Elbeltagi, 2016; Supermane, 2019) further indicate that the leader inspires followers through motivation to become committed to and be part of the shared vision in the organisation. It will be difficult for principals, parent and teacher governors to share a vision if they do not collaborate. Transformational leadership enhances team spirit, is based on the assumptions that principals, parent and teacher governors need to respect and trust each other to gain loyalty and

acknowledge that everyone has a special contribution to make and work together to communicate high expectations to the school community (Supermane, 2019).

2.4.3. Intellectual stimulation dimension

Transformational leadership includes leadership that stimulates followers to be creative and innovative and to challenge their own beliefs and values as well as those of the leader and organisation (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Elrehail et al., 2018). This type of leadership supports followers as they try new approaches and develop innovative ways of dealing with organisational issues (Geijsel et al., 2003). It encourages followers to think things out on their own and engage in careful problem solving (Obeidat & Tarhini, 2016). This theory encourages the full participation of governors in meetings.

2.4.4. Individualised consideration dimension

This dimension of transformational leadership is representative of leaders who provide a supportive climate in which they listen carefully to the individual needs of followers (Al-Husseini & Elbeltagi, 2016; Supermane, 2019). In this dimension, Bi et al. (2012) argue that leaders act as coaches and advisers while trying to assist followers in becoming fully actualised. Thus, these leaders may use delegation to help followers grow through personal challenges. If principals, parent and teacher governors lead in line with the transformational leadership theory, they will encourage interaction and attach importance to the individual interests.

This study uses perceptions of principals, parent and teacher governors to explore the impact of collaboration on their working relationship. The transformational leadership theory was selected in this study because the introduction of SGBs in South African schools specifically aimed to transform the old system of running schools, where parents were left out of decision-making processes. Transformational leadership theory is thus used to understand educational leadership as a collaborative process, where governors and managers work together to create and achieve their school vision.

In closing this section of the study, it is worth noting that the transformational leadership theory in the educational context refers to many stakeholders such as heads of departments, teachers, learners, institutional workers and governors who work closely with the principal to ensure that effective teaching and learning take place. This implies that, through the transformational leadership theory, for any change to take place in a school, the principal and governors should be involved. Ament (2013, p. 26) echoes that working together is especially important for those who serve public schools.

3. Methodology

A qualitative research methodology was utilised to conduct the study, and an interpretive paradigm underpinned the study. Okeke and van Wyk (2015, p. 40) affirm that the interpretive paradigm assumes that people construct and merge their own subjective and intersubjective meanings as they interact with the world around them. This study explored the collaboration between the principals, parent and teacher governors in rural South Africa.

3.1. Selection of participants

The study used purposive sampling and a typical case sampling technique. The participant sample included two (2) principals, four (4) parent governors and four (4) teacher governors from two schools in one rural province of South Africa.

This purposive sample consists of the principal, two-parent governors and two teacher governors from each school who were selected to participate, resulting in five participants per school.

The two principals are also ex-officio members of the School Governing Body (SGB), and head of the School Management Team (SMT). The teacher governors represent the teaching staff, while the parent governors represent parents and the community at large.

The profile of the two principals depicted that they are females, with ages ranging from 44 and 45 years respectively. The two principals had previously served as ex-officio members of the SGBs and have relevant education qualifications; one had a Bachelor of Education (Honours) degree. Two female and two male parent governors ranged from thirty-six (36) to sixty-three (63) years. Two of the parent governors are chairpersons of their respective SGBs, while one is a treasurer and one an ordinary parent governor. Two of the parent governors had two (2) years of experience as members of the SGB; one had three (3) years and one six (6) years. One parent governor had a BEd qualification, one had Grade 10, and two parent governors had Grade 7.

	Position/ Designation	Gender	Qualification	Experience (years)	Age
School 1	Principal	Female	BEd (Hons)	11 years	44 years
	Parent Chairperson	Male	B Ed	2 years	45 years
	Parent Treasurer	Female	Grade 10	4 years	53 years
	Teacher Secretary	Male	Diploma in Teaching	2 years	54 years
	Teacher	Female	B Ed	1 year	38 years
School 2					
	Principal	Female	Diploma in Teaching	4 years	45 years
	Parent Chairperson	Female	Grade 12	5 years	36 years
	Parent	Female	Grade 7	5 years	63 years
	Teacher	Male	Diploma in Teaching	2 years	37 years
	Teacher Secretary	Female	Diploma in Teaching	2 years	45 years

Teacher governors' ages ranged from twenty-seven (27) to fifty-seven (57). Among the four (4), two served as secretaries of their respective SGBs. Their years of experience as teachers varied from one (1) to two (2) years, respectively. One of the criteria to select the SGBs of these schools was that they had been working together for the previous two years.

3.2. Participants' (Governors') profile

3.3. Data collection techniques

Focus group discussions and interviews were used to elicit information on principals, parent and educator governors' perceptions on governance collaboration. There were three focus group discussions separately to elicit information on whether it is important for governors to collaborate when performing governance functions and what the challenges that the principals, parents and educators face are, regarding failure to collaborate as governors.

3.3.1. Purpose of focus group with the principals

The researchers wanted to find out the challenges principals were facing when not collaborating with educators and parents, and how these affect their governance responsibilities.

3.3.2. Purpose of focus group with the parents

The researchers wanted to find out challenges faced by parents when not collaborating with educators and principals and how these affect their governance responsibilities.

3.3.3. Purpose of focus group with the educators

The researchers wanted to find out challenges faced by educators when collaborating with parents and principals and how these affect their governance responsibilities.

3.4. Data analysis

Data were analysed according to Tesch's method of open coding to identify themes and categories (Creswell, 2014, p. 269). The themes and categories were identified during the data analysis process. In analysing data to gain insight into the perceptions of principals, parent and teacher governors, four themes and related categories were identified.

3.5. Ethical considerations

The research was designed in such a way that it protected participants' privacy, dignity and integrity. Moreover, the project proposal was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee of the University of South Africa for ethical clearance. Further, to ensure confidentiality and anonymity and to protect the participants, the real names of the schools were not revealed. Instead, pseudonyms were used.

4. Findings and discussion

The discussion on findings focused on four themes, which are governors' working relationships, the importance of having a working relationship, challenges to working together and strategies to building good working relationships.

4.1. Governors' working relationship

It was discovered that the governors of the two rural schools collaborate in their governance function and their relationships are collegial. This was confirmed by the principal of school 2 when she said:

The SGB members, once they are called to attend meetings, whatever issue we discuss we normally reach consensus.

The principal of school 1 also said:

During School Governing Body meetings that is where I advise the School Governing Body members on certain issues with regard to the smooth running of the school.

From the two quotes, it seems the principals perceived collaboration on matters pertaining functionality of their schools.

The principal of school 1 also clarified her role in supporting governors:

As an ex-officio member of the SGB, since I am the one on the ground, I know what is required and what is happening around the school. I normally advise parent and teacher governors as to what we need, what is going on around the school and advise them of what their input could be so that the school is driven forward.

It was revealed that principals see the need for parents and teacher governors; hence as leaders, they try to empower these governors to understand what is happening in the school and encourage their participation. This could be perceived, from their perspective, as having a healthy working relationship.

Principal 2 further illustrated:

Teacher governors always attend SGB meetings. They air their views if they have a problem that concerns the school. Sometimes I meet teacher governors and discuss with them issues before we present them to other governors.

Mostly, principals consult teacher governors on matters pertaining to curriculum delivery, learners' learning and achievements. By virtue of principals consulting teacher governors, confirmed that they collaborate with teachers on matters of common interest, which is students' success. Similar observations were made by Ehren et al. (2016, p. 211) who assert that clear and shared vision and goals for student achievement and quality instruction trickle down to the classroom. This means that the school governor should ensure that goals on student achievement include specific targets and standards and are the highest priority in all schools without the distraction of other goals and initiatives. Principals revealed that they perceive parent and teacher governors playing a critical role in learners' performance.

The principal of school 1 also said:

First of all, I am an overall implementer of the day-to-day activities of the school. I see to it that teaching and learning is taking place. Apart from that the implementation of the curriculum, which is mainly teaching and learning.

The principal of school 1 confirmed that she supports teacher governors:

"Discussion with teacher governors prior SGBs meetings is to understand their needs, and present them in SGB meetings"

As acknowledged on the roles and responsibilities of principals, parent and teacher governors, this perception is similar to what Botha (2012, p. 264) and Mncube and Mafora (2013, p. 4) declare. They emphasise that the SGB suspends learners from attending the school as a disciplinary measure for a period not exceeding one week. The parent governor from school 2 also confirmed this perception:

If there is a shortage of classrooms at our school, we sit together with management and write letters to the relevant ministries to ask for extra blocks of classrooms.

This parent governor further said:

On the development of the school, our school was without a wall fence. As governors, we sat and decided on what we are going to do to make sure that our school should have a wall fence.

This is in line with the roles and responsibilities of SGBs as stated by the South African Schools Act (1994), demonstrating that principals, parents and teachers collaborated to ensure the safety of learners by ensuring the erection of a wall fence.

4.2. Importance of having a working relationship

It was revealed by two rural principals, parents and teacher governors that when there is a good working relationship between principals, parent and teacher governors at the school, it becomes easier to maintain discipline among learners. Principal participants, parents and teacher governors seem to be working together in maintaining discipline at the school. Teacher 3 from school 1 had this to say: *In our schools we ensure that learners adhere to their code of conduct and classroom rules.* This concurs with Sallee (2014, p. 25), who argues that relationships are vital factors in schools. The principal must make relationship-building a priority to maintain and control school discipline.

There can be good communication between principals, parent and teacher governors. This is supported by Ehren et al. (2016, p. 212) who acknowledge that school governors should establish a strong communication structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving school goals. When principals, parent and teacher governors communicate, they tend to trust each other, and collaboration is more effortless. Ament (2013, p. 64) explains that taking time to build trust is imperative for SGBs to adapt the mission, vision and core beliefs of the school for learners to learn with high standards and clear expectations. It is important to note that trust is something that the principal must maintain with the SGB.

There are consultations between principals and SGB members on matters regarding school development. Teacher governor 1 from school 1 said: *"We make sure that the programmes of the school are implemented, and the development of the school is in place."*

Principals, parent and teacher governors are important partners when it comes to the smooth running of the school. Onderi and Makori (2012, p. 027) made a similar observation that the role of SGBs is to facilitate the smooth operation of teaching and learning in schools through the provision of teaching and learning materials.

4.3. Challenges of collaborating

The principal participants raised challenges when it comes to parent governors. From the response of one principal, the challenge he experienced was the interest of parents being involved as governors. He said that: *"Parent are losing interest for the reason that I do not know. I do not know whether we are not treating them well"*. He stressed that the interest of the parent governors is deteriorating when it comes to their participation in school-related activities. He affirmed that a way should be found which would boost their morale to participate in school-related matters actively. The principal of school two concurred with the challenge pointed out by the principal of school 1.

They stated that some parent governors, when invited to school board meetings, give many excuses such as: *"I did not see the letter inviting me to the school board meeting"*. In addition, teacher 1 from school 1 reiterated that this was especially during the ploughing season when parent governors attend to their fields. He said that most of the SGB meetings are postponed during this time because the meetings cannot quorate:

When we want to meet as SGBs, it is not easy to have all present. Parents will tell you that I am at the cattle post, or I am busy elsewhere.

The other challenge was the level of education of parents. Some principals asserted that most of the parents are illiterate. This is similar to the findings of Mohapi and Netshitangani (2018, p. 8) that stresses that the low level of education and literacy may affect functional SGBs and parent governors' roles and responsibilities. This is revealed in their literacy profiles.

Some principals stated that the illiteracy level of parent governors is ruining their working relationships. This was evident from the response by the principal at school 1 who acknowledged that:

This is a big challenge because every time they are policy issues to be discussed in the school governors meeting, they do not have the necessary knowledge on such issues. I will end up advising them again to clarify the matter. Being the majority in the School Governing Bodies, they have to take decisions; they should not necessarily rely on my understanding of policy issues because I might manipulate them to my advantage.

Teacher 2 of school 1 reiterated this; stating that being a teacher in an urban school is different from being a teacher in a rural school. He stated that parent governors in urban schools are well vested in their roles and responsibilities. He said:

In schools that are in rural area there are certain thing that you just cannot do, not that governors cannot do them, but they do not know that they are supposed to do them.

Parent governor 2 at school 2, during the focus group interview, stated that the principal does not work collaboratively with the parent governors. She said: *"Since he was appointed to be a principal, he is working alone, and he is ignoring the school governors"*.

This section presented the findings from principals on the challenges with parent and teacher governors. Parent governors lose interest in participating in school activities. They seem not to be attending school governors' meetings when invited. They present many excuses when invited to attend school board meetings. It was also revealed that the illiteracy level of parents is ruining the working relationship with principals. A majority of parent governors are illiterate and old. This is in agreement with Mncube and Mafora (2013, p. 19) who present that the involvement of parents in the SGB is flawed and ineffective due to the illiteracy of parents.

Teacher governors responded that there was a lack of regular school governors' meetings taking place at their schools. This was evident from the responses of teacher governor 2 from school 1:

We do not have regular meetings. The school was supposed to have constant school governors' meetings to highlight what is happening. The meetings must be there every term. At our school meetings just come haphazardly. Sometimes we do not know the agenda of the school board meetings; you only get the agenda of the meeting when you are already in the meeting.

Teacher 1 of school 1 agreed:

Like my colleague said, they are things where we were supposed to be involved, like budgeting. Since I came here, there was no meeting that was called for the school governors to budget. I don't know what the money here is used for. You just here budgeting from other school and that they have received money from the government.

Similarly, teacher 2 of school 2 reiterated that:

Like what my colleagues said about the budgeting of the finances received by the school. Since I came at this school as a member of management, I am just hearing about budgeting. I am not involved in the budgeting process of the school. I am a member of the school board and also a member of the school management, but I am not there when the budgeting of the school is done.

Teacher 2 from school 2 stressed that when the finances are received by the school as a teacher governor and as a member of the management of the school, he was supposed to be informed and involved in the budgeting process.

From these findings, meeting attendance is a challenge for teacher governors, parent governors and principals. Parent governors and the principal do not have time for each other. Meetings are not appropriately conducted nor attended as scheduled. Governors always present many excuses when invited to attend the meetings. Parent governors lose interest in participating in school activities. From what one principal indicated during the focus group discussion, which is confirmed by teacher governors, the schools do not have scheduled SGB meetings. The SASA prescribes four fixed annual SGB meetings, excluding committee and special or urgent meetings.

It seems principals want to meet with parent governors whenever it suits them. Additionally, when parent governors visit the principals, principals seem to be too busy to give them attention. It seems some members think, regarding SGB meetings and working together in the drafting of

agendas, that things are not running smooth. It emerged from the findings that parent and teacher governors do not consider the South African Schools Act (1994) on how they should conduct their meetings, and what their code of conduct is regarding meetings' attendance.

4.4. Strategies to build good working relationships and collaborate

All participants were asked about the strategies that can be utilised to build good working relationships with all governors. Several categories and findings emerged. Good communication as a strategy was cited, which can be used to build good working relationships with all governors. This was evident from the responses of two principals:

Having very good communication with parent and teacher governors will motivate them to tell you the problem that they have. Once they tell you their problems it is better to solve them (Principal of school 1).

The other strategy is communication, as a principal you need to be a good communicator. One of the roles of the principal is to influence. You can only influence if you have good communication skills. Therefore, whenever you have a platform to communicate to the parents, make use of it to your advantage to make sure that the best of the school results emerges from (Principal of school 2).

Teachers pointed out that governors should feel at home when they visit the school. This was evident from teacher 1 of school 1:

Maybe parents should be inviting to visit principal's office regularly to discuss with them school-related issues. This will bring them closer to the principals and teachers, they will feel free to come to school without being scared.

Another strategy is being transparent in all activities that they carry out at school. This means that the principal should be able to inform parent and teacher governors about whatever activities are conducted at the school. It is important to note that trust is something that the rural principals in this study ought to maintain with parent and teacher governors.

The findings of this study suggest two different views. There is a lack of cooperation between the governors, it also emerged that in themes 2 and 3, principals seem to think that parents and educators collaborate in their governance responsibilities. This somehow suggests that parents and educators have a perception that things are running smooth, and while principals have a different perception. This different perception is not good for the effective governance of the schools.

From the discussion of this study, there was a lack of collaboration among principals and parent governors due to overlapping roles and responsibilities. Principals perceived parents too illiterate to understand policies and that they are not conversant with governance issues.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The findings of this study have important implications for principals, parent and teacher governors in rural South Africa. The lack of cooperation appears to have far-reaching consequences, not only to principals, parent and teacher governors but largely to the teaching and learning processes. It emerged in this study that the responsibilities of a principal are immense. The principal ensures that the entire school is running in the right direction; the right direction means that the school has its own set goals and objectives where the principal is the driver of a team in achieving these goals and objectives

As perceived by the principal that parent governors have little knowledge of the provisions of SASA (South African Schools Act) and are not fully informed, principals with expert power need to hold continuous capacity sessions for both parent and educator governors.

According to the Report of the Ministerial Review Committee on School Governance (Republic of South Africa, 2004, p. 175), SGBs in South African schools are under-capacitated and ineffective in engaging with the business of education. A common sentiment sometimes constrains the ability of parents to govern effectively, in that they are perceived as people without training and experience and therefore, should not be allowed to interfere in professional activities (Sallis, 2001).

This study recommends that parents, principals and educators as governors should collaborate to understand the South Africa Schools' Act that could help to emphasise their roles and responsibilities. In relation to the principal being an ex-officio member of the School Governing Body, while working together with parents and educators is a requirement for sound school governance, more work needs to be done. There is a need to find ways of making parents, educators and principals to collaborate in their governance responsibilities, to achieve this, parents, principals and educators as governors ought to adopt transformation leadership if they wish to collaborate and improve their working relationships.

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