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SOCIOLOGY | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Views of parent governors' roles and responsibilities of rural schools in South Africa

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Abstract: This article is based on the findings of a qualitative case study, which formed part of a nationwide research project. The project named 500 Schools Community Engagement Project was conducted by the academics of the University of South Africa in five provinces of South Africa. It used a mixed methods approach. However, for this article, only qualitative data were utilised. As part of gathering data, a case study was also used to enhance the findings of the larger project on the role of parent governors. Six parent governors from two schools belonging to two rural provinces, namely, Eastern Cape and Kwazulu-Natal were purposefully sampled for the case study; three from each province. The case study aimed to investigate the views of parent governors' roles and responsibilities. In-depth individual interviews were utilised to gather data from participants. Data analysis was conducted thematically. Findings suggested that problems still exist around issues of the understanding and implementation of the South African Schools Act in the sampled schools. It was evident from the findings that parent governors unintentionally or intentionally shifted their governance roles and responsibilities to principals. A suggested, a strategy to improve cooperation among School Governing Bodies and School Management Teams is to involve universities in the training of newly elected School Governing Bodies.

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The pursuit of quality in education is one of the fundamental drivers in the educational transformation process. School Governing Bodies (SGBs) are in the front line to create an environment for quality education. South Africa, as a democratic country, introduced policies and legal frameworks to empower schools and School Governing Bodies to perform their tasks optimally. However, the level of education of parent governors in certain rural schools is still a concern. Their lack of knowledge of interpreting and implementing the South African Schools Act (SASA) forces them to shift their responsibilities to the principals. This article reflects the parent governors' views on the shifting of their responsibility to the principal. It also analyses their understanding of their non-performance as prescribed by the SASA. The paper suggests ways of equipping parent governors with skills and knowledge that will contribute towards functional school governance and not disempower them.

Subjects: School Leadership, Management & Administration; Leadership Strategy; School Leaders & Managers

Keywords: School governing bodies; literacy levels; community engagement; and training

1. Introduction and background

School governance in South African rural primary schools continues to be a challenge. This phenomenon increased the opportunities for universities to consider research projects necessary to determine how parent governors carry out their roles and responsibilities. The argument is that community engagement projects offer opportunities for enabling knowledge. Involvement of parents in governance enhances the success of principals' leadership in schools. Without effective leadership, the schools will struggle to achieve their teaching goals, and the performance of learners will be adversely impacted. The 500 Schools Research Project was conducted by academics of the University of South Africa (Unisa) in response to a public outcry that South African primary schools are not performing well. This study analysed the 500 Schools Project data to find out what parent governors articulate regarding their roles and responsibilities. This was to discover whether they perform their roles in accordance to SASA. The 500 Schools Project aimed at finding out the causes of under-performance in Grades 3 and 6 with particular attention to Mathematics and Languages. As one of the findings of the project, the study revealed that the dysfunctionality of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) in South African primary schools affected learners' performance (Magano, Mohapi, & Robison, 2017). Bagarette (2012) questions the cooperation between the SGB and School Management Team (SMT) as there are numerous reports on power struggles attributed to the principals' privileged position of knowing policies and regulations compared to the parent governors. It is important to note that principals in public schools are responsible for professional management (Xaba & Nhlapo, 2014). This means that the principal represents and must protect the interests of the employer. In addition, the principal should assist the SGB to perform its functions and responsibilities regarding policy and legislation. However, Mncube and Mafora (2014) point out that there is some uncertainty about the roles, as the legislated functions do not provide a clear distinction between the SMT and SGBs. This means that there are some responsibility overlaps whereby some school governing members tend to insist on being involved in the professional management of the school. In addition, such unclear boundaries and resultant encroaching in the roles of others engender the cooperation of the two structures, thus on their roles and responsibilities. Onderi and Makori (2012) state that when SGBs assume too much power, there is a possibility that they will interfere with the professional matters related to education or school governance support. The other side of the coin is that the principal, as the head of SMTs, plays a dominant role in governance roles and responsibilities.

Furthermore, Doty (2012) indicates that both the SMT, represented by the principals in the SMTs and SGBs have not been working in an ideal situation, leading to the tension between them that has intensified the pressure of the two leadership roles and has resulted in their strained relationship. Moreover, Bayat, Louw, and Rena (2014) and Maile (2002) argue "some SGBs are not working properly because they do not have the necessary skills and they are not sure about their roles and responsibilities," and this mostly happens in rural communities.

Research conducted by Sibanda (2017) revealed that many parents feel marginalised by principals in the governance of the school. He further shows that some parents believed that they were not fairly treated at these schools as wealthy and educated parents were treated better than poor and uneducated parents. Such claims compromise the state of affairs of teaching and learning in schools and might result in poor learner performance.

The involvement of parents in their children's education is associated with higher academic achievement, greater school enjoyment, better school attendance and few behavioural problems at school (Sylvia, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford & Taggard, 2010). Parental involvement has

the most significant effect in the early years of childhood. Its importance to children's educational outcomes continues into the teenage and adult years (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). According to Brown (2010), working with parents is a mutually beneficial activity. On the one hand, parents receive information about school activities and functions, and they can assist with their children's curriculum activities. On the other hand, teachers get to know what help parents could provide and are capable of giving. Brown (ibid) also states that the fundamental aims of involving parents in the education of their children include informing teachers about the child, outside the school. This also fosters mutual respect, understanding, and openness between parents and educators.

Parental involvement in children's school activities facilitates socialisation, positive attitudes, and socially acceptable behaviour. Regardless of their educational backgrounds, parents play a pivotal role in the education of their children as parental involvement is a strong predictor of learner achievement. The more involved the parents are, the better off their children are because they become more receptive to learning and view schooling in a more positive light (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). Thus, this article sought to investigate how the parents who are part of the SGBs view and understand their role in school governance. It was essential then to investigate if the parents understand their role in school governance.

Further, it is crucial to suggest strategies that may assist in improving the parents' governance skills. This endeavour, as mentioned in the first paragraph, was conducted by analysing the accounts of the parents of the 500 Schools Community Engagement Research Project. The following section presents the conceptualisation of school governance in schools.

2. Literature review

The literature review highlights the South African and international perspectives of school governance.

2.1. South African perspective

The discussion of the South African perspective is discussed under the following sub-headings: South African Schools Act (SASA) and governance responsibility, as well as the theories that underpin governance.

2.1.1. South African schools act and governance responsibility

In 1996, the new democratic state published a White Paper on the organisation governance and funding of schools (Republic of South Africa, 1996), from which emanated the *South African Schools Act no 84 of 1996* (SASA). SASA became operative at the beginning of 1997 and mandated that all public state schools in South Africa must have democratically elected SGBs composed of teachers, non-teaching staff, parents, and learners (the latter being in secondary schools). Parents are supposed to be the majority in the SGBs, and the chair of the governing body should come from the parent component (Mncube, Harber, & Du Plessis, 2011). SASA provides for secondary school learners, who are members of the Representative Council for Learners (RCL), to be part of the school governance through participation in the SGB. Furthermore, this Act is regarded as a tool aimed at, among other things, redressing past exclusions and facilitating the necessary transformation to support the ideals of representation and participation in the schools and the country. With the introduction of SASA, the state was purporting to foster democratic school governance, thereby introducing a school governance structure that involves all educational stakeholder groups in active and responsible roles to promote issues of democracy, tolerance, rational discussion, and collective decision-making DfE (Department for Education), 2010, p.16).

However, despite the existence of these democratic principles and practices, Naidoo (2005) still established that conflicts and dilemmas among the membership of SGBs are central to the experience of school governance. Studies on the functioning of the new SGBs (Mncube, 2005; Bush & Heystek 2003; Brown & Duku, 2008; Ministerial Review Committee, 2004) established that members of governing bodies tend to be male. In addition, principals still played a dominant role in

meetings and decision-making processes, and that teachers tend to participate in meetings more than other stakeholders do. Parents, the numerically dominant group under the legislation, were hampered in many areas by a skills capacity deficit, communication, and transportation challenges.

Numerous challenges in rural school governance relate to parent governors' ability or inability to execute their roles as prescribed by SASA (Xaba, 2011). The SASA, 84 of 1996, gives power to the SGBs to govern. Parent governors are in the majority in the SGB; therefore, they may influence decisions during SGB meetings. By devolving power and concomitant responsibilities, parent governors increase their responsibilities of encouraging all parents to involve themselves in school activities. The researchers in this study argue that, unless parent governors stop shifting their governance roles and responsibilities to principals, misunderstanding and non-compliance of SASA will remain in some South African schools. To ensure effective governance, parent governors should have sufficient power to hold the principals, who cannot or do not want to implement their performance improvement plans, accountable for quality education (Heystek, 2010). If parent governors fail to implement what Heystek (2014) alleges, either by lack of knowledge or misunderstanding and misinterpreting SASA, dysfunctional school governance will continue characterising certain schools in South Africa. Maile (2002) sees school governance as an act of determining policy and rules by which schools are to be organised.

According to the *South African Schools Act no 84 of 1996* (SASA), the roles of SGBs include the following: starting and administering a school fund; opening and maintaining one bank account for the school; preparing an annual budget and submitting it to parents for approval; drawing up and submitting audited or examined financial statements to their provincial departments of education. Furthermore, it includes buying textbooks, educational material, or equipment for the school; paying for services; supplementing the funds supplied by the education department (in the case of section 21 schools), collecting and administering school fees as well as other fund-raising efforts; and deciding on applications for exemptions from school fees. Their responsibilities also include administering, maintaining, and controlling the school's property, buildings, and grounds; adopting a constitution; and deciding whether the surrounding community can use the school for social purposes. The Schools Act also makes provision for SGBs to apply for additional responsibilities such as determining the subjects taught and an extra-mural curriculum. Principals are also ultimately responsible for the school timetable, the admission and placement of learners, and all activities at a school that support teaching and learning.

2.1.2. Governance responsibility

The challenge is the custodian of governance responsibility. Parent governors find it very challenging to implement these policies. Functions of SGB as stipulated by SASA are complicated. It has been observed with concern that some functions of SGBs are contingent on social conditions of schools as well as a capacity differential of SGBs (Van Wyk, 2004). Regardless of what Van Wyk (2004) states, school governance cannot be a one-person show; that is, the principal leading the professional team and the SMT, as well as the SGB.

Mncube, Davies, and Naidoo (2014) stress that members of the SGBs, including parents, must be well informed about issues of school governance and legal requirements that are stipulated in the SASA, no 84 of 1996, as a way of enhancing school effectiveness. This argument ties well with the argument and objective of the study on which this article is based. Parent governors seem to be ill-informed about the power they must use to govern schools. School effectiveness will not be achieved if parent governors are not working in accordance with SASA. From an international perspective, it is noted that the roles and responsibilities for the SGB in South Africa are similar to the roles and responsibilities of school board members in Namibia. The two countries share the same historical background, culture, and education system as they were all colonised by minority White South Africans. The roles and responsibilities of school board members are an indicator of the relationship that exists between principals and school board members. This means that if the

principals encroach into the roles of the school board members and vice versa, this may determine the perceptions of the two parties towards each other. In addition, the roles and responsibilities determine whether their relationship works for better or for worse.

Despite numerous studies conducted on SGBs in South Africa, especially on parent governors and their involvement, the capacity to govern remains a challenge (Chaka, 2005; Heystek, 2011; Mncube & Mafora, 2014; Xaba, 2011). The researchers above emphasised continuing SGB challenges in South African schools. The researchers have not found a study that has used the 500 Schools Project findings to analyse parent governors' accounts to investigate if parent governors perform their roles and responsibilities in accordance with SASA. This paper sheds light on how projects such as the 500 Schools Project may inform policymakers to rethink ways of encouraging parent governors to take their roles and responsibilities seriously. Following the discussion above, the study attempts to answer the following questions: First, why do parent governors shift their governance powers to principals? Second, what strategies can be used to empower parent governors to hold onto their governance power? To answer the abovementioned questions, the following objectives were achieved: The study determined why parent governors shifted their governance powers to principals; we suggested strategies to empower parent governors to hold onto their governance power.

2.2. International perspectives

This section presents international perspectives on school governance. It focuses on school governance in the US, UK, and Australia to highlight how school governance is practised in those countries as compared to South Africa.

In the US, SGBs are called school boards. The role of school boards is to provide strategic guidance for the school and to oversee and review the school's management effectively. Thus, as pointed out in the US government policy, the principal as the public face of the school must ensure that the standards and personality of the school are excellent (Martens, 2013). Like the expectation in South Africa, the relationship between a board and the head of the school is often identified as the factor most critical in determining the success of a school in meeting its goals and serving its students. Some schools have parents in their school boards. Gurr, Drysdale, and Walkley (2012) see the involvement of parents in some schools as a form of community service. Moreover, D'Cruz (2016) shows that most no-government schools are constitutionally required to have parents as voting members of the boards and women must form 50% of the boards. However, no matter how essential school boards in the US are, they are sometimes dysfunctional due to a lack in organisation, leadership, and an understanding of their role. This diminishes the board's capacity for sound decision-making and strong educational leadership (Mannes, 2015), which is the case elsewhere.

The same is the case in the UK. Every governing body includes parent governors. In the UK, school governors are volunteers who help to run the school. Most schools work with a group of school governors, and together they are called the "governing body." Moreover, their role is to make decisions about all aspects of managing the school, for example, running buildings and budgets, supporting staff, and setting the standards of school discipline (Claridge, 2018). Young (2017) asserts that the Governors' Guide to the Law (DfE [Department for Education], 2012) of England adopted a "stakeholder" model and was premised on the idea that different stakeholders bring different knowledge to the governing body. As such, the basic composition of the SGBs of schools in England in 2012 was: the head teacher; staff governors elected by staff; parent governors elected by parents; LA governors nominated by the LA; and community governors nominated by the governing body. This is described as a "stakeholder" (DfE [Department for Education], 2012) model and is premised on the idea that different stakeholders bring different knowledge to the governing body.

D'Cruz (2016) also shows that parents are an integral part of Australian school boards and as such, the Federal Department of Education and Training has developed a "Guide for Parents on

School Boards and School Councils.” The roles of their school boards are the same as those of countries discussed in this section.

As per the literature highlighted in this section, the governing bodies internationally are composed of the multiple stakeholders and their roles are the same. Their main aim is to help the schools achieve their teaching and educating roles. South Africa can tap from best practices worldwide. The multiplicity of members of the governing bodies necessitates cooperation from all members. Moreover, each member needs to cooperate and execute his or her roles effectively and efficiently.

2.3. Cooperation as a theory underpinning governance roles and responsibilities

Cooperation theory in this article is used to understand the dynamics between SGBs, especially the parent component and SMT represented by the principal in this paper. To make cooperation theory useful in this paper, knowledge is needed to identify conditions that affect the governance and management functions of SGB and SMT, respectively. SMT and SGB are two crucial school structures; they depend on each other. Further, they ought to join forces to complete both professional and governance functions.

According to Tjosvold and Andrews (1983), social and educational psychologists developed the cooperation theory. They (Tjosvold & Andrews, 1983) further assert that during that period the organisations had nothing to do with cooperation theory. Drawing upon the classical ideas of Deutsch and Krauss (1962) of the Cooperation theory, in an environment where there is cooperation, team members in governance perceive their goal attainment as positively related. In this sense, social relationships are differentiated through their perceived goal interdependence. Thus, these authors (Deutsch & Krauss, 1962) aptly state that “one’s movement toward one’s goals facilitates the other’s goals.”

Cooperative governance is grounded on assumptions, namely, democracy, devolution of powers, shared decision-making, participation, freedom to accomplish quality education, empowering stakeholders, restructuring, accountability, developing constructive partnerships, and equity of resources (Looyen, 2000).

In his work, Deutsch (1949) mentions the outcomes of cooperation as (1) expected and actual assistance, (2) communication and influence, (3) task orientation, and (4) friendliness and support. Thus, in the cooperative theory, members of SGBs are expected to incorporate those factors in their governance activities. Recently, Scholl and Sherwood (2014) developed a four pillars model of cooperative governance. This model, in many ways, agrees with the outcomes mentioned by Deutsch’s model (Deutsch, 1949). Scholl and Sherwood (2014, 19) emphasise Teaming, successfully working together to achieve a shared purpose; Accountable Empowerment, successfully empowering people while at the same time holding them accountable for the power granted; Strategic Leadership, successfully articulating the cooperative’s direction or purpose and setting up the organisation for movement in this direction. Lastly, Democracy, successfully practising, protecting, promoting, and perpetuating our healthy democracies. Some of these aspects and outcomes of cooperation theory are used as a tool to analyse the perspectives of the parent governors who participated in this study.

According to Tjosvold (1984), cooperation theory can shed light on organisational issues. It is utilised to understand relationships among people working together. The theory is extended to understanding issues such as participation in decision-making. Tjosvold (ibid) further argues that the cooperation theory aids in understanding social interaction and productivity in an organisation. For the school to be functional and effective, the interaction of SGB and SMT should prevail. In a school where relations are unequal, cooperation among groups is compromised. Drawing from these ideas from Tjosvold, the important thing is not that cooperation has ideological overtones and several meanings for some people but rather that cooperation should be regarded as a solution for others. For functional school or school effectiveness with regard to governance and

the role played by the parent component of SGB, cooperation should be used to refer to the absence of conflict and competition.

3. Methodology

3.1. Mapping the 500 schools community engagement project

It is important for this article to mention that the data used for this article were only part of the more substantial dataset gathered for the whole national project, namely the 500 Schools Community Engagement Project. Therefore, it is crucial to map out the national project in order to contextualise the investigation. The project targeted 100 schools offering Grade R to six in each of the five provinces. Of these schools, 80% were declared as underperforming, and 20% were performing well. In total, the project targeted 500 primary schools in the following five provinces: Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga, Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Free State. Teachers who teach English First Additional Language, English Home Language, Natural Science, and Mathematics in these 500 schools formed part of the project. The study targeted Grade 3 and six teachers. Each province was requested to select the schools using the Annual National Assessment (ANA) as a guide.

The Centre for Continuing Education and Training (CCET) at Unisa was an ideal location for the research project, which looked at the issues of performance in schools, including governance issues. Collaboration with different departments and colleges at Unisa allowed the project to access researchers from various colleges and centres at the university.

A total of 50 Unisa lecturers from the College of Education, and in particular from the following departments, played a significant role in the project: Mathematics, Science and Technology, Language, Psychology of Education, Education Management and Leadership, Early Childhood Education, ABET and Inclusive Education. Contract staff from participating provinces were used to collect data from the schools. The 500 Schools Research Project served as the nucleus of all community engagement projects in the College of Education. The 500 Schools Project was vital in charting activities in the College of Education's community engagement projects (McKay, 2014).

3.2. Sampling

This article used only two rural primary schools in two provinces, namely, Eastern Cape and

KwaZulu-Natal. As part of the bigger project, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with six parent governors selected purposefully from two schools; two from KwaZulu-Natal Province schools and three from the Eastern Cape Province schools (one participant per school).

3.3. Data collection

Interview schedules were developed, and each parent governor was interviewed individually. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) argue that in a qualitative study, a researcher collects data in a face-to-face situation by interacting with selected persons in their settings. Data were presented as narration with words that assisted in the understanding of the phenomena from the participants' perspective. The interview is the predominant mode of information collection in qualitative research (De Vos & Strydom, 2011). The following section presents the findings and the discussion of these findings. Given the illiteracy levels, parent governors' interviews were held in the language they understood better. However for this study, their interviews were translated into English.

3.4. Data analysis

A thematic approach was adopted to analyse data, which involved developing themes and patterns (Creswell, 2014). The thematic analysis provided cogent answers to why parent governors shift their governance roles and responsibilities to the principal. The rationale for this section was, therefore, to intellectually interrogate the information provided by each participant and to make

an earnest attempt to identify the defining moments that led to their practices on their governance roles and responsibilities.

3.5. Ethical considerations

Ethical consideration issues were adhered to. Six parent governors who participated in the project declared their interest to participate in the narrative interviews. Permission was granted to use a tape recorder. Further, researchers ensured anonymity and confidentiality. In this case, the participants were given pseudonyms, and the names of the schools were not revealed.

4. Findings and discussions

This section represented an account of a sample of six parent governors' personal opinions of their governance roles and responsibilities. The schools and participants' description is provided to contextualise the investigation. The following themes emerged from the data generated from interviews conducted with parent governors: understanding and implementation of SASA by parents; parent governor's involvement in the governance roles and responsibilities. As well as education and literacy levels of parent governors; parent governors' willingness to perform their governance roles and responsibilities; and strategies to empower parent governors to perform their governance roles and responsibilities. As mentioned in the methodology section, we used pseudonyms for participants in order to protect their identities.

4.1. Contextualising the investigation

This section is introduced to contextualise the investigation. The schools are located in the rural areas that are poverty-stricken. Very few parents are educated and literate.

The names of the participants are Tiger, Owl, Lion (KwaZulu-Natal Province), Eagle, Thabo, and Mpho (Eastern Cape Province). Not all six participants went beyond secondary school education. The findings show that none of the participants has a matric qualification. The highest qualification of the participants was Grade 11, and the lowest was Grade 5.

The first participant was Tiger. Tiger joined the SGB in 2013 and did not go far with schooling. His highest qualification was Grade 3 and was unable to follow discussions and read English. The second participant was Owl. She passed Grade 9 and became a member of the SGB in 2013. This participant was not happy about the manner in which SGB meetings are arranged that makes it difficult to attend all meetings. Lion was the third participant. Lion passed Grade 4 and became a member of the SGB in 2011. His grandchildren attended the same school in which he was an SGB member. The fourth participant who participated in the narrative interviews was Eagle. She passed Grade 11, and she could read English. She became a member of the SGB from 2014. She was also working and most of the time was late for meetings when invited by the principal. Thabo passed Grade 5 and became a member of the SGB in 2012. The sixth participant was Mpho. She passed Grade 10 and became a member of the SGB in 2014.

4.2. Education and literacy levels of parent governors

The utterances of the participants suggested a low level of education and literacy of some of the parent governors. Low level of education and literacy may affect functional SGBs and parent governors' roles and responsibilities. Moreover, the majority of the parent component in the SGB structure in the two provinces consisted of women. From the participants' accounts, it became apparent that they had difficulties following the discussions because of the English language barrier. Moreover, some could not even read, and those who could read could not read English. This state of affairs seemed to pose a challenge regarding the parents' level of participation. In the context section, the education level of the parents was mentioned. The following utterances show the literacy levels of the parent governors:

Even if I had (SASA document), I would be unable to understand what is written because of the language barrier. (Tiger)

... I cannot read English. (Lion)
I find it difficult to read and understand SGB minutes. (Thabo)
... sometimes I am unable to follow the discussion. (Tiger)

Notwithstanding the challenge of the low level of education of the parent component, parent governors should be given space to perform their roles and responsibilities. The findings in the study show that parents were not supported to perform their roles, and, as mentioned in the previous section, not all participants received a copy of SASA, the Act that empowers them to perform their functions. The principals in this study were too quick to take over parent governors' roles and responsibilities. It is worth noting that principals, as accounting officers, should use their expert power to lead their schools. This includes governance roles and responsibilities; however, their actions should not take power to govern from the parent component. However, given the education and literacy levels, it may be unfair to expect them to execute this role efficiently. It is in a situation like this one where empowerment is necessary, if stakeholders were to cooperate (Looyen, 2000). Principals have the responsibility of ensuring the empowerment of parent governors as per SASA.

4.3. Understanding and implementation of SASA by parents

The findings in this study suggest that most parent governors do not understand nor implement SASA. The emergence of this lack of understanding in this study is not surprising as most of them are illiterate. Moreover, the literate principals do not even bother to read SASA in the meetings. Some do not participate in discussions because they cannot read the minutes and the principal and his/her staff do not read the minutes for them. What makes the situation worse is that the principal does not always provide them with minutes of the previous meetings. This is what the participants said:

I do not have the copy of SASA...I do not remember any of the SGB members reading the SASA" (Tiger)
I can read English, but I have not seen SASA. (Eagle)

The above utterances show that there could indeed be a lack of training for the parent governors. It is for this reason that this paper is underpinned by the cooperation theory of governance, which advocates for social relationships that are differentiated through their perceived goal interdependence (Deutsch & Krauss, 1962). In this situation, teacher governors in their democratic endeavours will successfully empower parent governors while at the same time holding them accountable for the power granted (Scholl & Sherwood, 2014). Moreover, according to Scholl and Sherwood (ibid) teamwork aids the achievement of a common purpose.

It is of importance for these parent governors to know about the existence of SASA, irrespective of their low education and literacy levels. The training responsibility lies in the hands of the Department of Education and the principals (Xaba & Nhlapo, 2014).

4.4. Parent governor's involvement in the governance roles and responsibilities

From the data of this case study, two parents alleged that principals chair the meetings without being delegated. The principal knows and understands the chairperson's roles and responsibilities, but he or she decided to chair the meetings and finalise SGB meeting agendas without consulting the chairperson. The principal also finalises the school budget without involving the treasurer, who is the parent component. Principals' actions justify taking away the governance roles and responsibilities from parent governors, which may affect the cooperation between the principals and the parent governors. It is also crucial for principals to be organised and to have all the necessary documents ready for meetings. For example, Thabo expressed that "... sometimes minutes are not available."

This is how some of the participants expressed how they were excluded from governance activities:

I am a member of the finance committee but was not consulted when the budget was drafted. I only saw the budget during the SGB meeting when it was presented for approval. (Thabo)

I am the chairperson of SGB at my school; I am not involved in the drafting of agendas of meetings. The principal lead [sic.] most of the discussion during the meetings because usually we receive the agenda during the meeting and it becomes difficult to follow the discussions. (Mpho)

I always find the principal chairing the meetings. (Eagle)

What Eagle expressed clearly shows that she is not happy with the principal being the only one chairing the meetings. It is essential for the principal to educate the chairperson of the SGB to delegate other members of the SGB to chair meetings. Moreover, chairpersons of SGBs are parent components. This finding was confirmed by literature, which states that numerous reports refer to the power struggle attributed to the principals' privileged position of knowing policies and regulations compared to the parent governors (Bagarette, 2012). If principals educate the parents about their responsibilities, they will not get away with side-lining the parents.

Moreover, all participants had experience of being members of the SGB. The range of participants' experience was from three to seven years, which is an indication that regardless of their level of education, they have the potential to learn and understand their roles and responsibilities, regardless of the principals dominating in the governance structure. On the one hand, it may be true that principals' action is an indication of SGBs not functioning according to the SASA, but, on the other hand, seniority may not mean that these parents know what their roles and responsibilities are as they have not been trained.

4.5. Parent governors' willingness to perform their governance roles and responsibilities

Cooperation requires the willingness of all parties to perform their roles and responsibilities (Ramphela, 2000). Further, cooperation is characterised by the governing body members' perceived goal interdependence (Deutsch & Krauss, 1962). Thus, the principals need to be vigilant in sharing the mission and vision of the school as well as providing the necessary school governance information. In this particular case, principals need to provide strategic leadership, plan and discuss with all school governors about the goals to be achieved (Scholl & Sherwood, 2014). It is crucial to note that, as much as principals need to take the initiative to educate and develop the parent governors with regard to their roles and responsibilities, parents need to be willing and committed team members (Scholl & Sherwood, 2014). In this study, participants expressed their lack of interest in being part of the SGB. Different reasons for the disinterest were cited including fear of being a governor; fear of intimidation by the principals; and work commitment. One participant agreed to be a governor because no other parent was willing to be a member. This unwillingness may necessitate the rethinking of the requirements, and the process of school governors' elections as unwilling members might find it difficult to cooperate with other willing members. The unwillingness to participate in SGB activities was expressed in the following accounts by the participants:

I have agreed to be a member of the SGB at our school because few parents did not show interest. (Thabo)

I attend SGB meetings but not always because I am working. (Tiger)

Parents are afraid to be elected as SGB members. (Tiger)

I attend SGB meetings because the principal shouts if we do not attend his meetings. I do not sign attend register. (Lion)

I was asked to be part of the SGB (Lion)

Sherwood (2014) emphasises accountable empowerment, and it is the responsibility of the SMT to ensure that parent governors are empowered. Moreover, accountability is one of the outcomes of the cooperative theory (Deutsch, 1949; Scholl & Sherwood, 2014). In this case, it seems that the SMT did not empower the parent governors. The SMT's inability to empower parent governors, whose level of education and literacy levels are low, seem to contradict the principles of cooperative governance.

4.6. Strategies to empower parent governors to perform their governance roles and responsibilities

Participants were asked to suggest strategies to improve school governance dysfunctionality. Findings from this study suggest that educating elected members of SGBs on their roles and responsibilities as a necessity. Indeed, some of the assumptions and outcomes of the theory of cooperation are the empowerment of stakeholders, devolution of powers, expected and actual assistance, communication and influence, task orientation, and friendliness and support (Looyen, 2000; Deutsch, 1949). Parents ought to be supported and encouraged to accept nomination when asked to be part of the SGBs. Most importantly, SMT and SGB members should treat each other with respect. Participants suggested some strategies that would empower parent governors to perform their governance roles and responsibilities. The following utterances show that the majority of the parents may not have received training:

If we could be informed when they elect us what will be our roles and responsibilities, we will be able to function efficiently with the school. (Mpho)

I request that we be consulted on matters pertaining to SGBs' role and responsibilities. (Thabo)

The school should support parents who volunteer to be members of the SGBs. (Eagle)

I suggest that those elected need to be supported. (Tiger)

The young parent [*sic.*] must be elected to be members of SGBs. (Lion)

Parent governors need an informal education on their roles and responsibilities because certain parents do not talk in our meetings. (Owl)

From what is presented above, it is clear that the parent governors need support from the principals. Even though they did not mention SASA, they express the need to be educated on their roles and responsibilities as stipulated in SASA. The issue here is that all members should have a copy of SASA regardless of their level of education. Illiterate parents can be taught their responsibilities in a language, and at a level, they will understand. Tjosvold (1984) further argues that the cooperation theory aids in understanding social interaction and productivity in an organisation. If these principals and teachers want school governance to be effective, they need to ensure good relations by holding the hands of the parent governors. What is crucial and critical is the effective and efficient execution of the roles of school governors for schools to attain their goals.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The case study considered how parent governors are haunted by giving principals their power to govern and neglect their roles and responsibilities as mandated by the SASA. In this section, we draw a few conclusions about the underpinning assumptions of parent governors' views on their role and responsibilities. The findings of the study cannot be generalised to all SGBs in South Africa. This is because this study was limited to six rural primary schools that participated in a case study conducted as part of the nationwide 500 Schools Project.

Findings suggested that complications still exist around issues of understanding and implementation of SASA in the sampled schools. Parent governors found it challenging to use their governance powers.

Findings reveal that the SGB in the two sampled schools were powerless as governance structures. Some participants in their responses confirmed that they had shifted their power to the

principal, notably when they chaired SGB meetings without being delegated. The challenge of low illiteracy education also emerged. Among the six sample participants, only one participant had Grade 11. The overlapping role played by principals affects the cooperation among the SMT and SGBs, especially parent governors. It was evident from the findings that parent governors unintentionally or intentionally shifted their governance roles and responsibilities to principals who are members of both the SMT and SGB structure. This kind of practice may be acknowledged as a process of shifting of governance roles and responsibilities.

What also became evident was that the principal discusses the school's finances with the teachers without consulting the SGB treasurer and the chairperson of the governing body. It, therefore, seems that problems such as the illiteracy of some parents lead to principals chairing SGB meetings and not consulting SGBs on governance issues.

It is legislated that the principal, as an ex-officio member in the SGB, may use his or her expert knowledge to guide parent governors, but not to take advantage of their low level of education, and hijack their governance roles and responsibilities.

It is recommended that universities should consider introducing informal courses for newly elected SGBs, which will empower them to use their authority to govern. Issues of age and qualification should be looked into before electing members of SGBs. This empowerment could be done by introducing formal courses of school governance in universities. Further, the SMTs can organise training workshops for the parent governors. The more all SGB members are made to understand their roles and responsibilities, the more the dysfunctionality is reduced.

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