

Exploring the Involvement of School Governing Bodies (Sgbs) In Enhancing a Culture of Teaching and Learning in Disadvantaged High Schools in South Africa: A Case Study

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Abstract: *School Governing Bodies (SGBs) as part of the community, play an important role in the enhancement of a culture of teaching and learning in schools. This idea is important in the enhancement of a culture of teaching and learning in schools, but rarely applicable in most of disadvantaged high schools. Disadvantaged schools in this context refer to rural poor schools with no proper resources and teaching. This means that learners in such communities could not be able to do schoolwork, due to the lack of parental involvement. In this study, qualitative interpretive approach was used. The researcher preferred to use this method in order to obtain a more detailed understanding of the involvement of SGBs in the enhancement of a culture of teaching and learning in schools. Data was collected through unstructured interviews that are formal or informal whereby the participants answer freely the questions asked, allowing the expression of feelings during the interviews. In this study SGBs were thus asked questions focussing on their involvement in the enhancement of a culture of teaching and learning in disadvantaged schools. The researcher found through the participants' responses that SGBs are partially involved in the enhancement of a culture of teaching and learning in schools thus a lack of their commitment in school activities and children's schoolwork.*

Keywords: *culture, disadvantaged, involvement, learners, teachers, school and School Governing Bod*

I. Introduction And Background To The Study

Schools are part of a community as they do not exist in isolation from communities. On the other hand community include people and families. So it is very important that teachers, learners, parents and principals as members of communities relate well within the schools and communities in order to enhance the culture of teaching and learning. This would develop stronger ties or links and in turn bring into picture community participation in the school settings. This study was conducted in the far rural area of North-West Province in South Africa. Its rurality was shown by the absence or inadequate supply of water, electricity, Learner Teacher Support Materials (LTSM), tarred roads, classrooms, modern laboratories and sporting equipment in schools. Hence disadvantaged schools. On this note, School Governing Bodies (SGBs) as part of community, play an important role in the enhancement of a culture of teaching and learning in schools, not excluding the advantaged schools of course. Munn (1993) sees SGBs as a special channel between the school and parents. The Department of Education and Training (1997) states that the South African Schools Act gives certain powers and responsibilities to SGBs. The South African Schools' Act, Section 20 (1996) further lists the following as functions of SGBs, namely to start and administer school funds, open and maintain a bank account for the school, prepare an annual budget, submit the budget to parents, ensure that school fees to be paid are collected according to decisions made by stakeholders, keep the financial records of the school, buy textbooks, educational materials or equipment for the school, add to the funds supplied by the State, and improve the quality of education in the school. Regarding the preceding section on functions of the SGBs, the researcher is of the opinion that the South African Schools' Act of (1996) gives the SGBs certain responsibilities which, when supported by the entire staff members, community together with the School Management Team (SMT) of the school, a culture of teaching and learning will be enhanced in schools. But it should not be ignored that in certain disadvantaged high schools, community involvement, (in this context, including SGBs as they belong to the community) is still a problem in the sense that there is still that vast gap between the school and the community due to the fact that there is a high rate of illiteracy, scarce resources and poor physical structures.

Problem statement

Based on the preceding section, members of the community should be willingly involved in becoming part of SGBs, Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), Parent Association (PA) and Parent-Teacher-Student Association (PTSA) at all levels, as that will attempt to enhance the culture of teaching and learning, especially in disadvantaged high schools. Through these bodies, the researcher is convinced that community involvement in school activities and children's schoolwork will improve thus an enhancement of a culture of teaching and learning. In support of the above statement, Pitout, Smith and Windell (1992) add that a school and community

should aim at achieving three goals, which are, to educate the child to become a useful and efficient citizen who will be able to take his/her place in society, assist the child to develop into a person with an educated mind and good moral character, and lastly prepare the child for an independent and successful life in the work s/he will eventually do. The above opinions are important for the enhancement of a culture of teaching and learning in schools, but they are ideal in most of disadvantaged high schools. For example, some parents as members of the community are not educated enough to be elected as SGBs and also check and help with home-works, school budgets and administration. This means that learners in such communities could not be able to do schoolwork and study effectively with the lack of supervision and involvement from their parents thus a lack of a better culture of teaching and learning.

The Aim of the Study

From the preceding discussion, it is evident that this study aims at exploring and describing the involvement and the role of SGBs in the enhancement of a culture of teaching and learning in disadvantaged high schools. This means that conditions and disciplines of compulsory schooling, budget, administration, regular attendance, punctuality and acceptance of authority should be emphasised and carried out by both teachers and SGBs at schools even though many schools are faced with the problem of learners abusing the schools' act which emphasises human rights

II. Research Methodology

Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004) describe qualitative approach as the method which aims for depth rather than quantity of understanding. Ezzy (2002) on the other hand sees qualitative method as that which identifies a person's understanding of a situation as something to be discovered rather than assumed. Based on the above description, in this study the researcher thus preferred to use qualitative interpretive approach in order to obtain more detailed information and understanding of the SGBs involvement in the enhancement of a culture of teaching and learning in disadvantaged high schools.

Sampling procedures

Lategan, Vermeulen and Truscott (2003) define sampling as all the elements in the population from which the sample is drawn. Neuman (2000) describes sampling as a representative sample of a larger population. Imelda and Muyangwa (2000) further state that research sample is a small group of subjects that possesses the main characteristics of the accessible population. A sample is therefore part of a larger group, and should constitute a representative selection of the whole population. Since the emphasis of this study is on the involvement of SGBs in the enhancement of a culture of teaching and learning in disadvantaged high schools, I found it necessary to purposefully select only SGBs (in this context teachers at that school as SGBs) as they are directly dealing with school related matters and also that they were easily accessible as stated by Gall, Borg and Gall (1996) that the accessible population is in most cases influenced by the time and other extraneous variables such as the resources, distance, money and safety. In this study teachers as members of SGBs were therefore the participants since parents were inaccessible due to the fact that they work far away from home and also coming only on weekends and month end.

Collection and Analysis of Data

Polkinghorne (2005) defines data as primarily existing in the form of spoken or written language rather than numbers. Merriam (2009) further states that data comprises of ordinary pieces of information found in the environment. This means that data in this study is thus consisting of opinions and experiences obtained from participants through interviews. Macmillan and Schumacher (2001) define interviews as flexible, adaptable and involve direct interaction between individuals. Unstructured interviews were therefore used in this study where questions were asked for collecting data in order to enable the researcher to understand the involvement of SGBs in the enhancement of a culture of teaching and learning in disadvantaged high schools. Mertens (1998) mentions that unstructured interviews are formal or informal whereby the participants answer freely the questions asked allowing the expression of feelings during the interviews. I preferred this type of data collection because it provides uniform information which in most cases ensures comparability of data. The researcher therefore conducted this type of interviews with the SGBs focussing on their involvement in the enhancement of a culture of teaching and learning, after being given permission by the school and Education District office. Questions asked were e.g.:

- How do you listen to and understand learners, parents and staff?
- How do you report to parents and local community regularly on school related matters?
- What benefit do you draw from collaboration with other schools and other sectors, locally and nationally?

These questions were brief, objective and relevant to the topic, encouraging interviewees to be actively involved as this would assist in gathering data to confirm theory. These questions were also relevant to this study because Borich (1996), Lemmer (2000) maintain that involvement means working in close partnership for the benefit of the child. Flexibility was allowed during the conduction of the interviews, accommodating the emergence of questions with an aim of getting a clear understanding of the given information by the participants. During interview session the interviewer briefed the interviewees about the purpose of the interview and also asked permission to tape record their responses. The taped information (after been given permission by the participants) was transcribed, coded and themes were generated.

According to Bogdan and Biklen (1992) data analysis means the systematic finding and arranging of data collection instrument by the researcher in a way that he/she can clearly understand and be in a position to present it to others. Data was then analysed through qualitative approach in the form of interviews. SGBs' responses were recorded through their permission as stated in the preceding section, listened to many a time by the researcher in order to get more information on their involvement in the teaching and learning in disadvantaged schools. Data derived from the interviews was interpretively and descriptively analysed through statements which were then coded by meaning, themes patterns and ideas that brought meaning to the text. Taylor (2003) supports the above statement by mentioning that the analysis process involves getting to know the data and this requires reading and re-reading of the data.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Ethical standards according to Cooper, Richard, Jay and Kaufman (1998) refer to standards that guide moral choices about behaviour and relationships between the researcher and participants. The researcher thus complied by adhering to the following ethical measures below:

- The research proposal was submitted to the relevant committees at school, that is, the Principal and School Management Teams (SMTs).
- Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Principal and SMTs of the school.
- Consent forms, together with an information letter, were given to the SGBs.
- Information letters included detailed information on the purpose of the research and how data will be gathered.
- All reasonable efforts were applied in the research process to ensure confidentiality.
- The anonymity of the school and all participants were protected. Participants' details were not made known. Participants were informed that participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw from the research study at any time without any penalty.

III. Discussions Of Findings

Although the literature showed the importance of the availability of SGBs in schools in order to improve a culture of teaching and learning, in this study SGBs responded to some of the questions asked in the preceding section by stating that "even though they are skilled and qualified, in most cases they are unable to attend meetings and carry out certain school related matters because of their workloads and other extramural activities". Authors such as Kelly (1990), Pitout, Smith and Windell (1992), Mwamwenda (1990), Meintjies (1992), Borich (1996:83), South African Schools' Act, No 84 (1996), Amos (1999), Lemmer (2000), Chrisman (2005), and Olson (2005) on the other hand emphasised that commitment, dedication and obedience by all involved in the teaching and learning situation should also be taken into consideration. The former and present Presidents, Nelson Mandela (in *Sunday Times*, 30 March 1997) Thabo Mbeki (in *Sowetan*, 9 April 1998) and former Minister of Education, Prof Kader Asmal (in *Sunday Times*, 2002) respectively stress the above same opinion.

As researchers we therefore still maintain that it is necessary to explore further the phenomenon "a culture of teaching and learning in schools" as it is still of a concern to every teacher, learner, parent, researcher, politician and other concerned relevant stakeholders. This idea is supported by Mashile (1991) when saying that it is at home that the foundations are laid. If this is not done, a decline in a culture of teaching and learning might be the results. Rambolt (1998) also believes that parents/SGBs who do not provide a stable and stimulating home and school background lay the foundation for an unhealthy, chaotic learning environment for the learners. This shows that the lack of SGBs, teachers and parental involvement is also a contributory factor to a decline in a culture of teaching and learning in schools. Schools should therefore not be regarded as a separate and secluded environment, not reflecting or rather not supposed to be reflecting the social environment the learners are representing. As illustrated by the literature review, the creation and management of powerful learning environments as well as established cultures of learning at primary as well as secondary schools, also depends on the support learners and teachers receive and will be receiving from SGBs, parents and communities surrounding the schools and immediate surroundings. On this note, co-operation between home and

school/SGBs is essential to schools as this could be another way to attain and maintain emotional, physical, social and intellectual maturity of the learners.

IV. Recommendations

All relevant stakeholders, in this study SGBs should thus be responsible and dedicated for the education of the country of South Africa in order to improve the culture of teaching and learning in schools. There should also be need to continually and thoroughly in-service train SGBs by experienced qualified personnel on development programmes with regard to school related matters in order for them be well informed with e.g. school policy documents and South African school's Acts. This will therefore attempt to enhance the culture of teaching and learning in schools.

V. Conclusion

This research study was based on the involvement of SGBs in the enhancement of a culture of teaching and learning in disadvantaged high schools. The argument based on the preceding discussion and the researcher's observation indicates that there is still that lack of involvement of SGBs in schools especially in the disadvantaged school setting. This therefore leads to a decline and poor culture of teaching and learning in schools hence this topic needs to be researched further at a wider scope.

VI. Acknowledgements

This paper is part of a PhD studies conducted in three disadvantaged high schools in Makapanstad area in the North-West Province of South Africa. The researchers therefore, would like to thank the participants to enable the data collection process where this research study was conducted. Their contribution certainly made a difference in the country especially if the Department of Education in South Africa can take their contributions to this study into consideration and also revisit the South African Schools' Act of (1996) when amending school policies.

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