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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**Stakeholders' perceptions of parents' involvement in the
governance of a Namibian rural school**

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Abstract

The issue of decentralisation has been one of the top priorities of the Namibian education system since independence in 1990. One of the decentralisation aims was to enhance parental involvement in education by establishing School Boards. However, School Boards and the role of parents in school management have been considered ineffective for several years which led to the promulgation of Education Act 16 of 2001 in which the roles of School Boards are strengthened and clarified. This study sought to investigate School Board members' perceptions, understanding and experiences of parents' involvement in school governance more specifically after the implementation of the Education Act of 2001 in 2003.

This study is an interpretive case study of one combined rural school in the Ohangwena educational region of Namibia. This research employed three data collection techniques, namely semi-structured interviews, observation and document analysis.

The main findings of this study reveal that there is a lack of joint understanding and shared vision between educators and parents in the School Board. This problem underpins other more symptomatic problems, such as lack of accountability in the matter of school finances, differences in understanding the roles of School Board members and lack of parents' motivation from the school management. The study further reveals the ineffectiveness and insufficiency of the training provided in the past. It highlights some of the challenges that hinder the effective involvement of parents in rural school governance, such as poor educational background among parents, poor knowledge of the English language and poor understanding of educational issues.

However the findings also acknowledge parents' participation and their full involvement in decision-making. The findings show that the new School Board elected in terms of the Education Act of 2001 has been more effective than previous School Boards and has reached a number of achievements such as being instrumental

in solving disciplinary problems, purchasing school assets and renovating classrooms. Recommendations for practice and for further research are made.

Dedication

This study is dedicated to my lovely mother, **Mrs Martha Niitembu**, who inspired me to walk this extra mile in my life.

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This study has been completed with direct and indirect support from a number of individuals. I therefore have to be grateful to all people who contributed to this study.

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Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CSD	Centre for Social Development
ELCIN	Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia
HOD	Head of Department
MBESC	Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture
MGSLG	Matthew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance
NASGB	National Association of School Governing Bodies
NGEO	Non Governmental Educational Organisation
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
SADC	Southern Africa Development Countries
SGB	School Governing Body
SMC	School Management Council
SMT	School Management Team
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation
PTSA	Parent Teacher and Student Association

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Chapter 1

Introducing my research study

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces my research to the readers. It seeks to clarify why and how I developed an interest in the phenomenon of parents' involvement. It elaborates on the research context and the research approach I adopted. Furthermore, it explains some of the concepts I used and finally provides an outline of how the thesis is structured.

1.2 My interest

My interest in the phenomenon of parents' involvement emerged from my five years experience in teaching, and more specifically in the last three years I served as a member of the School Management Team (SMT). At that time I had been in many joint meetings of SMT and School Board/School Governing Body (SGB) where I encountered numerous challenges and problems regarding the role of parent members of School Board. These difficulties posed significant challenges that I thought worthy of investigation.

Furthermore, my study was also drawn and guided by recent South African research conducted on parents' involvement in SGBs which in most cases found that parents have limited participation, face many challenges and play little or no role in decision-making especially on critical issues (HRSC, 2005; van Wyk, 2004; Msila, 2004). Taking into account the Namibian context, I realised it was worth conducting research into this phenomenon and exploring how School Board members view, experience and understand their roles, more particularly the roles of parents after the implementation of the Namibian Education Act of 2001 which stated that "Every state school established a School Board to administer the affairs and promote the development of the school and learners of the school".

My interest was also motivated by the broader significance of parental involvement. Parents have been recognised as partners in education since it is their children who are the core beneficiaries of schools' existence and achievements. Parents' roles and responsibilities are more than just being members of School Board; they are expected to manage, govern and take ownership of schools since they were denied those rights in the past. Therefore, the government strives to motivate parents' participation in education by giving them power and rights to serve on the School Board.

1.3 Research context

In the past, School management and governance in Namibia and South Africa were fully on the shoulders of the school principals and teachers. Parents were less involved in school governance and uncertain of their roles and activities in school management (Mendelsohn, 1997). This situation emerged as a result of lack of policies that could reinforce their participation in the management of schools during the apartheid regime.

Following Namibia's independence in March 1990, the new government realised that one effective way of ensuring local/community support for schools was through the establishment of School Boards. "Although these boards had operated in many schools for many years, yet there was no structure or any evidence of what they had done to improve schools" (Mendelsohn, 1997:258).

Therefore, the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture decided to implement the new structure, powers, and functions of the School Boards that had been clarified in the Education Act 2001. The Act clarified the reason for establishing a School Board that was "To administer the affairs and promote the development of the school and learners". The new system expects the parents to be the majority on School Boards and encourages them to play important roles in school governance and decision-making about the education of their children (South African Schools Act of 1996,

section 23 & Namibia, Education Act No. 16, 2001 section 18). School Boards were officially established in Namibia in 2003.

In general, “Educational institutions operate within a legislative framework set down by national, provincial or state parliaments” (Bush, 2003b:11). One of the key aspects of such a framework is “the degree of decentralisation and devolution of decision-making powers to subordinate levels in the educational system” (*ibid.*). Furthermore, “decentralisation involves a process of reducing the role of central government in planning and providing education; one of the main forms of decentralisation is participative democracy, involving strong participation by stakeholders at the institutional level” (Bush, 2003b:11). According to the Ministry of Education & Culture (1993:168), “decentralising both responsibility and authority is the key to upgrade the quality of schools and to maximise the local contributions to the whole education system”.

The move towards decentralisation and the establishment of Governing Bodies in South Africa and other Southern Africa Development Communities (SADC) countries reflects current management theory. Bush’s (2003b:64) collegial models, for example, emphasise that “power and decision-making should be shared among some or all members of the organisation”. In brief, collegiality has its roots in the human relation management approach where as Kurt Lewin emphasised “the establishment of democratic groups in education, in which members actively participate in decision-making, which are more productive in terms of both human satisfaction and the achievement of goals” (Lunenburg & Ornstern, 1991:9). According to Bush (2003b:65), “the empowerment of school level Governing Bodies is largely a matter of faith, since there is only limited evidence that this new change is being matched by professional collegiality in schools”.

Recently, a great deal of research has been conducted on parental involvement in School Governing Bodies (SGB) in South Africa, particularly in rural schools (Christie, 2001; Msila, 2004). Findings show that parents in SGBs have limited participation and play little or no role in decision-making especially on critical issues such as employment policy, managing school funds and teacher conduct (Ndlazi, 1999; Christie, 2001; Msila, 2004; HSRC, 2005). These studies further reveal that

problems such as low attendance of parents at SGB meetings and parents' lack of financial skills still exist in rural school SGBs. They recommend that parents from impoverished backgrounds need to be empowered if they are to make a meaningful contribution to the education of their children.

Since the implementation of the new policy and the establishment of School Boards in Namibia in 2003 no study has been conducted to investigate parents' role in School Boards. This research will therefore examine a relatively new phenomenon in Namibia, with a view to finding out whether and to what extent School Boards can play a role in improving the school management and governance as was claimed by the Minister of Education at the International conference on education in Geneva, 2004.

This research is potentially important to parents, school managers and policy makers, as it may provide them with a clearer picture of how parents perceive their role in school governance. The research will also help to establish the field of governance as an area worthy of academic investigation.

1.4 Research goal

- To investigate stakeholders' (SGB members) experience and understanding of parents' roles in school governance.

1.5 Methodology

The research is oriented in the interpretive paradigm. It seeks to interpret the meaning, experiences and understanding of parental involvement in school governance. The interpretive orientation fits my personal reason for conducting this study as I believe in the assumption that, "Knowledge is socially constructed by people active ... and the researcher should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experiences from the point of view of those who live it" (Schwandt, cited in Mertens, 2005:12).

The research study utilizes a case study approach in my attempt to understand in - depth the issues and challenges of parental involvement in the management of a school. According to Yin (2003:13), a case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context”. That being the case, I seek in this study to explore what is really going on, how the parents are exercising their legal rights of playing a major role in the school governance as it was stated in the Education Act, 2001.

The sample for my research study consists of members of the School Board drawn from one rural combined school in Ohangwena Region in Namibia. The sampling procedure employs a purposive sampling technique in which the researcher “handpicks the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality” and experience of the central phenomenon being studied (Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000:103).

Different data collection methods are used. The main data collection methods in this research were semi-structured interviews and observation. Document analysis was the secondary data collection method. The methods I used were able to talk to each other, to reveal what the other method cannot do and to provide rich and sufficient data for this research.

The interview data was coded. Maxwell (2005:96) refers to coding as “To fracture the data and rearrange them into categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts”. Taking field notes, descriptions and my comments as an observer provide the analysis of observation data. The full details of research method are presented in chapter 3.

1.6 Concepts

Since this is a Namibian study some terms used will be more familiar in Namibia while some terms used in the literature are only popular in South Africa since I used a lot of South African literature because I lived in South Africa at the time I wrote this thesis. The following concepts have been used throughout the study, which to my understanding needs an early clarification to prevent misunderstandings.

- School Governing Body - a governing body is a statutory body of people who are elected to govern a school. In accordance with section 16 of the South African Schools Act of 1996. The SGB consists of teachers, principal, parents of learners who are not employed at the school and learners in the case of secondary schools.
- School Board - this term means a body of people who are elected to administer the affairs and promote the development of the school. Established in terms of section 16 of the Namibian Education Act of 2001. Membership is the same as that of the SGB above.
- Democratic - this term is used to describe the notion of ‘participative’ education in the Namibian education system. It appears in official documents, for example, “the Education Act strives to develop democracy in our education system by allowing adequate parent and community participation in education” (MBESC, 2004:1).

1.7 Thesis structure

This thesis has been arranged and carried out as follows:

Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the phenomenon of parents’ involvement, starting with my personal interests that attracted me first, followed by the research context and the methodological approach in which the research is oriented. This chapter highlights the research goal and some of the concepts used in the study.

Chapter 2 gives the overview of literature specifically relevant to my study. I refer to the historical background of parents’ involvement, review the policy underpinning the phenomenon and discuss most influential research and their findings. Finally, I trace the development of the participative management approach, which underpinned the decentralisation of power.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology adopted in this study. Here I give a description of the research paradigm I am working in, the method and the techniques employed in data collection. I also highlight the data analysis method like coding and the ethical considerations of the research participants and the site.

Chapter 4 discusses the presentation of the data collected. Here the data are presented as drawn from all techniques.

Chapter 5 discusses the research findings through the lens of the literature.

Chapter 6 contains the summary of the findings, recommendations, suggestions for further research and the limitations of my study.

Chapter 2

Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The aim of my study was to investigate stakeholders' experience and understanding of parents' role in the governance of a rural school. To fully understand the complexity of this phenomenon this chapter presents a conceptual framework ranging from parents' involvement through to participative management theories.

The first section deals with parental involvement starting with its definition and then moves to the concept of school governance. This is followed by some historical background of how parents' involvement started and evolved in South Africa and Namibia and looks more specifically at rural schools. I discuss some of the reasons for involving parents in the management of schools and examine parents' involvement from a legal perspective by discussing the Acts, which present the expectations, and rights that are granted to parents in the governance of public schools including the functions of School Boards.

The last part of section one deals with the problematic issues in School Governing Bodies (or School Boards as they are known in Namibia). Because the democratic school governance system was introduced soon after the end of the apartheid era, these Boards have been operating in schools for at least a decade now and some problems have already been identified. Therefore, I close this section by referring to some of the problematic issues regarding rural school governance such as financial responsibilities and accountability, power relations, and the principal and SGB relationship.

Finally, in section two I show how the whole process of democratic school governance is supported by theories of participative management.

2.2 Parents' involvement in school governance

2.2.1 Parents' involvement: a definition

Reference is usually made to “the parents” as a collective term (Dekker & Lemmer, 1993:153). However, not everyone has the same understanding of the concept (*ibid.*). Hence, I find it important to define this concept at this early stage of this chapter. Dekker & Lemmer (1993:153) refer to “parents as neither an amorphous nor a homogeneous mass, but they all have one trait in common, namely that they have children”. In brief, in this thesis the word ‘parents’ refers to the entire parent community of a specific school in a specific environment.

To elucidate the notion of parental involvement it is useful to start with a description provided by *Emerging Voices*, a significant HSRC sponsored study of rural education in South Africa. *Emerging Voices* (HSRC, 2005:119) defines parental involvement as “a way of involving parents in the education of their children in order to make parents supportive of and informed about their children’s progress in school”. Furthermore,

Parents’ involvement is a catch-all term that is used to describe a wide variety of activities that range from occasional attendance at school functions, efforts to become better teachers of their own children, to intensive efforts of serving in a school governance and make decisions in the interest of their children’s education (Dekker & Lemmer, 1993:154).

Squelch & Lemmer (1994:93) define parent involvement as follows:

It is the active and willing participation of parents in a wide range of school-based and home-based activities, which may be educational or non-educational. It extends from supporting and upholding the school ethos to supervising children’s homework at home. Parent involvement implies mutual co-operation, sharing and support.

This definition points to the dual nature of parental involvement. On the one hand parents’ roles include taking part in school governance as governors and policy-makers. On the other hand, parents are involved with the curriculum and teaching and learning, for instance in supporting their children with homework and other schoolwork. This research focuses on the first of these roles, namely the role parents play in the organisational life of the school.

2.2.2 What is school governance?

Potgieter, Visser, van der Bank, Mothata & Squelch (1997:11) define school governance as follows:

School governance, as regarding the governing body's functions, means determining the policy and rules by which your school is to be organised and controlled. It includes ensuring that such rules and policies are carried out effectively in terms of the law and the budget of the school.

Governance refers to the act of governing a school to ensure that the school fulfils its functions of providing a relevant, quality service to the learners and the community in which it is situated. In South Africa and Namibia, school governance embraces the principles of democracy and equity. Potgieter *et al.* (1997:2) state that "The democratisation of education includes the idea that stakeholders such as parents, teachers, learners and other members of the community must participate in the activities of the school". The School Governing Body 'SGB' (or School Board as it is known in Namibia) is comprised of parents, educators, non-educator members of staff and learners in the eighth grade or higher. Together these people are responsible for governing the school.

According to Maile cited in Xaba (2004:314), "School governance is regarded as an act of determining policy and rules by which a school is to be organised and controlled, which includes ensuring that such rules and policies are carried out effectively". To achieve this, the School Board members are allocated functions.

Next, I provide some historical background on the phenomenon of parental involvement in schools.

2.2.3 Historical background

Parental involvement has always been problematic especially in rural schools (Ndlazi, 1999; Christie, 2001; HSRC, 2005). The history of parental involvement in rural

schools where the majority of people are black is strongly related to apartheid and colonialism of the last century and there is no way I can ignore the political influence. Ndlazi argued that:

The denial of blacks' participation in political and educational issues brought about by the discriminatory legislation of the apartheid government in South Africa was the chief factor in discouraging black parents from being involved in education of their children. Although black people's rights were very limited in the 1970s and 80s, some black parents started demanding their right to involve in the education of their children (1999:27).

Likewise Sayed and Carrim (1997:91) stressed that demands of decision-making in schools and school governance structures that include all stakeholders concretely manifested themselves in the 1980s in the growth and development of Parent Teacher and Student Associations (PTSAs). However, due to apartheid structures, these bodies resulted in individuals nominated by the minority white state and consequently were considered to be illegitimate by the oppressed community (Sayed & Carrim, 1997:91).

As a result, the Education and Training Act of 1979 gave School Management Councils (SMCs) the power to govern traditional black schools at the micro level. Hence, the power of parents was widened giving them a say in matters such as appointments, promotions and dismissals of staff (Ndlazi, 1999:31). Though the government had passed the Act, some parents seemed reluctant to be members of School Management Councils (SMCs) because SMCs were not fully representative of the stakeholders in education. They were seen as puppets of the state since teachers and learners were not involved in the election, which means that the whole process was undemocratic and not transparent (*ibid.*: 32).

My understanding of this issue of parental involvement during the apartheid years is that the system only appeared to involve parents but in reality the whole system was under the direct control of the apartheid government. The parents who took part in the School Boards were all in favour of the government, their rights were limited, and they could not challenge or criticize its services. The situation was similar in Namibia. Visser (1981:59) argued, "The active involvement of parents and

communities in the system of education is provided for by means of School Committees, boards of control or some other means.” However, although the School Boards he refers to existed, they had no powers or rights to challenge the government or the school principal. Statements, which argue that parental involvement existed – such as the quotation from Visser above – are therefore misleading.

Amukugo (1993:77) explains how, in a Namibian context, real power resided with the government and not the parents:

in terms of Act 30 (section 4) of 1980, the active involvement of parents and communities shall be given a place in the educational system, but at the same time the Administrator General advocated for parents’ and communities’ participation in the area of school, he [the Administrator General] was responsible for establishing the school committee or advisory board for every state school. Even worse, he could, whenever he deemed it necessary, dissolve any school committee or advisory board, withdraw powers and duties, as well as replace members of such committees and boards (section 8). With Educational Act No. 30 of 1980, the Administrator General had an overwhelming power to control and direct education of Africans in accordance with the interest of the state [my emphasis].

Hence many parents withdrew and believed that the principal and teachers were the only people responsible for their children’s education.

Despite the fact that apartheid and colonialism played a major role in discouraging parental involvement in the governance of Namibian and South African public rural schools, the need for change in this area has emerged as a focal point for policy and research. This is because parental involvement is seen as part of the decentralisation of education in the new democratic system. However, the progress of parental involvement in post-apartheid South Africa and Namibia has not been without its problems. According to Mendelsohn, “The new Namibian government decided to promote parents’ participation through democratic School Boards but yet there is no structure or evidence of what they had done to improve schools” (1997:258). In South Africa, the Schools Act (South Africa 1996) says that all schools must establish governing bodies on which parents have the largest numerical representation (Christie, 2001). To many, this would have appeared to be a quick solution, but in

reality the notion of governing bodies was a long process which was full of obstacles and challenges, as will be discussed under the heading 'problematic issues in SGBs'.

The aim of looking back and analysing what happened in the past century on parental involvement was to provide a clear picture of the historical background on this subject. This brief historical account is meant to frame the issue of parental involvement since I believe that to some extent this history has an impact on the present situation of parents' involvement.

Considering the challenges of parental involvement experienced in the past, one might ask why parents must be involved in education, specifically in school governance.

2.2.4 Why parental involvement?

Parents' involvement in education has many advantages similar to the participation of other stakeholders such as teachers and learners. According to Griffith (2000:162) "Involvement of parents in their children's education has long been advocated as integral to positive childhood development and school success." Griffith (*ibid.*) adds that the beneficial effects of parent involvement are mostly visible in children's academic learning and performance. In addition Squelch and Lemmer (1994:93) claim "Parental involvement is vital with benefits such as improving school performance, reducing drop-out rates, decreasing delinquency and developing a more positive attitude towards the school."

Similarly, Dekker & Lemmer emphasise that "If the school (and thus education) is to be improved, we need parents who are critical and can make sensible judgements and who do not view changes in the education system as a threat" (1993:165). Again, according to *Emerging Voices* (HSRC 2005:119) "It is important for parents to be involved and supportive of their children's education because children feel encouraged when their parents are informed about their progress at school." Thus it is clear that it is not desirable to exclude parents from involvement in school governance when it is their children who are the main clients and potential beneficiaries of educational organisations.

According to Mendelsohn, parental support for education in Namibia should be fostered for a number of reasons:

- Local communities, especially parents, need to be interested in education if the current high demand for education is to be sustained.
- The more interested parents are in schools, the more seriously their children are likely to take their schooling.
- The government is unable to manage all aspects of school administration and needs to use local structures to support the management of schools (1997:257).

There is thus a moral imperative for parents to be involved in the education of their children.

2.2.5 Parents' involvement: the legal obligations

In fact, the need and importance of parents' involvement received huge support from the Namibian Constitution which led to the establishment of the Education Act 16 of 2001. This Act legally provides parents with rights to be involved in school governance. Likewise, since 1996, the Republic of South Africa has had a democratic constitution. "The constitution is the highest law in the country and all other laws and conduct must be in accordance with the constitution" (Potgieter *et al.*, 1997:5). "In fact the constitution of 1996 sets out certain important values on which the democratic state is based, in other words, they are values and principles that must be taken into account – also in the governance of your school" (*ibid.*).

In effect, the 1996 constitution also requires that school education be transformed and democratised in accordance with the main values of the constitution (*ibid.*). The democratisation of education includes the idea that stakeholders such as parents, teachers, learners and other people (such as members of the community) must participate in the activities of the school.

As part of the process of rebuilding the school system, the South African government passed the South African Schools Act (1996) "in an attempt to give parents the

responsibility of managing the schools their children attend and of legitimating parental participation in the life of the school” (HSRC, 2005:120). Therefore, “The South African Schools Act provides formal power in education to parents as well as communities” (Msila, 2004:301). Furthermore, according to Msila, “The SASA creates the expectation for parents to be meaningful partners in school governance” (2004:301). However, “Questions of school governance, and the forms of school community relationships it expresses, have been a key concern of education policy in South Africa” (Christie, 2001:56).

At the same time, the Act required that schools establish School Governing Bodies (SGBs) to be composed of parents, teachers, students (in secondary schools) and members of school support staff (van Wyk, 2004; HSRC, 2005). The SASA section 23(9) states “The number of parent members must comprise one more than the combined total of other members of a governing body who have voting rights.”

Likewise, in Namibia the Education Act of 2001 section 18 (2) states that school parents must constitute the majority of members of a School Board. Only a parent who is not employed at the school may be the chairperson of the governing body (South Africa, 1996, section 29[2]; Namibia, 2001, section 19 [4]). This shows that the Acts want to empower and encourage parents outside the school premises to be fully involved in the education of their children. Van Wyk (2004:49) highlighted, “Parents have been placed in a powerful position with authority to influence fundamental issues, such as school budget, language policy, discipline, and appointment and promotion of teaching and administration staff.”

Furthermore, the SASA stipulates other responsibilities of parents as follows:

- Parents must see to it that a learner attends a school from the first school day of the year in which a learner reaches the age of seven (7).
- A parent of a learner must pay the school fees that have been duly approved, except in the case where a parent has been exempted.
- Parent’s failure to send the child to school without permission may result in a fine or imprisonment.

Therefore, South African and parents and guardians have an accepted role in the education of their children. Since 1994 they have the main legal responsibility for educating their children. This applies to Namibian parents also.

Parents' involvement in school governance becomes only visible through the roles, responsibilities and powers they have in SGBs. Therefore, next I state some of the functions of parents and other members of School Boards/SGBs.

2.2.6 The functions of the School Board/SGB

Subject to the Namibian Education Act of 2001, section 17, the powers and functions of a School Board are as follows:

- To develop the mission, goals, and objectives of the school
- To advise the school's management on the extra-mural curriculum of the school
- To advise the Regional Director of Education on educational needs and the curriculum of the school
- Subject to the Public Service Act, to recommend to the Permanent Secretary the appointment of teachers and other staff members at the school
- Subject to the restrictions imposed by the permanent secretary and upon conditions as the School Board may determine, to allow the reasonable use of the school facilities for community purposes
- To consider any case of misconduct by a learner or staff member of the school with the aim of:
 - (a) Ensuring that such misconduct is properly investigated; and
 - (b) Recommending to the Permanent Secretary the appropriate disciplinary measures to be taken regarding serious misconduct of a learner
- To exercise other powers and perform other duties and functions as may be authorised or imposed by or under this Act.

Likewise in South Africa, the South African Schools Act (1996), section (20) lay down the functions of all governing bodies of state schools. Most of the functions

subject to this Act are similar to those of the Namibian Education Act (2001) that I have just stated.

Even though the functions of School Boards are clearly set out and visible to all stakeholders, problems concerning the execution of these functions abound. Hence, School Boards have not been working in an ideal situation. Many issues have been identified and boundaries of responsibilities and capacities have clashed. This is especially the case in rural schools where issues related to governance have been problematic. Next I discuss some of the problems that local researchers (for example van Wyk, 2004; Msila, 2004; Mestry, 2006) have identified as main issues of concern in rural school governance.

2.2.7 Problematic issues in rural school governance

Most of the challenges inherent in the notion of parental involvement stem from two sources. The first is the crippling effects of the apartheid education system as discussed by Ndlazi (1999) in his unpublished thesis 'Parents' non-involvement in school governance'. The findings of Ndlazi (1999) show the significant role played by the historical background of political, economical, social and educational factors in parental non-involvement in the governance of a rural school. "Parents describe the reasons for their less involvement as caused by lack of finance, work commitment, illiteracy, broken family structure and diminishing value of education" (Ndlazi, 1999:94).

The second is the fact that the parent body, especially in rural areas, is largely illiterate and therefore do not see nor understand their role in school governance. These challenges play themselves out in numerous ways.

Next, I analyse problematic issues in rural school governance (as manifested in the literature) namely financial responsibility, power relations, the poor relationship between school principals and SGB members (parents), lack of clarity in terms of roles and responsibility, and parents' perceived limitations in what they can offer and the role they play.

2.2.7.1 Financial responsibility and accountability

“The functions of the principal and the SGB in school finances is still a problematic issue with the question of who is responsible and accountable with school funds” (Mestry, 2006:31)

The issue of who is responsible for managing the school finances and accountability has been one of the main problems and challenges of the SGB, particularly in rural schools. According to Mestry (2004:130):

The Act challenges the rural school parents when it provides unprecedented responsibility to school governing bodies by regarding all schools equal and making parents primarily responsible for the education of the children. Hence, it is the intent of the state to move towards making every school independent and self-managing. The full control of funds in the school therefore becomes the responsibility of the SGB.

According to some researchers the low educational level of rural parents causes the problem of financial accountability. The study of Adams & Waghid (2005:30) stressed that the “Lack of necessary education levels (including illiteracy) and poor economic conditions among parents in rural areas contributes to their lack of financial skills.” The issue of parents’ low education level appears to be the main reason for problems regarding parents and SGBs financially operating and controlling a school. It is highly improbable that a person who can neither read nor write will successfully be responsible for calculating the expenditures and income of a school. In a similar vein, Heystek argued that:

In a school where parents have limited skills, knowledge or experiences and even lower levels of literacy, they may find it difficult or impossible to assume responsibility for drafting and managing the budget and it is now the responsibility of the principal (2004:310).

In short, Mendelsohn (1997:269) found that:

Decisions are not made in School Board meetings and on school fees; parents know rather little about what these funds were used for. They [parents] have no idea on whom set the amount to be paid, how many learners had paid, and what additional funds have been raised. Discussions on school funds also appear to be limited in School Board meetings and often dominated by the principal and teachers [my emphasis].

In a recent study of the functions of school governing bodies in managing school finances, Mestry (2006:31) revealed that there is a common misconception amongst various stakeholders regarding the functions of the school governing bodies in managing school funds:

In accordance with the stipulation of the schools Act that the overall governance of the school rests in the governing body, the SGB is accountable to the parents for the efficient and effective management of school funds, and may delegate certain financial functions to the principal, who is then accountable to the SGB.

The whole issue of financial responsibility and accountability involves knowledge and power. Therefore, Mestry (2006:33) found that there is a lack of collaboration among stakeholders: “In many instances, the principals were not prepared to share the responsibility of school governance lest they lose their power, and regard the withholding of information with regard to school finances as an intentional act on the part of principals.” Furthermore, Mestry (2004:34) states:

Some members of SGB use to be excluded from financial decisions, treasurers lack financial skills and merely sign cheques, which they are not sure of. As a result lack of effective financial control measures was identified and both parents and educators expressed their wish for knowledge and training with regard to the handling of funds.

2.2.7.2 Power relations

“Power play and domination is normally part of any teamwork and interpersonal interaction, therefore an SGB is not different” Heystek (2004:309).

Financial matters are not the only issues where principals and SGB members fail to draw the line over disputes. Other misunderstandings lie in power relations between the two groups. Power problems and disagreements often erupt in SGBs when there is a “Principal trying to dominate the rest of the SGB or the chairperson of the SGB [is] trying to dominate the principal on behalf of the parents” (Heystek, 2004:309). Furthermore, van Wyk (2004:51) emphasised that “Parent governors bring to their governance tasks power and status from other contexts, while educators and principals rely heavily on the power and status offered by their position in schools.”

However, the situation is even worse in rural schools where “parents are illiterate and lack participation” (Adams & Waghid 2005:30) and leave the door open for principals to abuse their power and authority and financially manipulate SGBs. Some educators stated that “SGB members (parents) are unable to make an impact on school policies and practice because they do not fully understand the SASA and the power and responsibilities afforded school governors” (van Wyk, 2004:52).

Most researchers found that low competency and literacy levels of parent members of the SGB in rural schools place restrictions on the functioning of the body, including the power that they are able to exert in general (van Wyk, 2004; Heystek, 2004; Mestry, 2006).

Furthermore, principals and educators maintained that the management of schools is their sole domain and that parents have no understanding of how schools operate, and regard parents’ involvement as interference (Mestry, 2004:33). Like other researchers, I support the fair and equal distribution of power between the principals and SGBs. This popular quote helps make my point and emphasizes that there need to be ‘checks and balances’ in the relationship between principals and SGBs: ‘power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely’. School principals when allocated too much power are prone to abusing such powers. They are tempted to manipulate relationships in such a way that the SGBs lose their effectiveness in performing their functions as stipulated by SASA or the Namibian Education Act. When this happens, the very reason for which SGBs were established – to serve the school and community – means that they have lost their very reason for existence. On the other hand, when SGBs are allocated and assume too much power there is the possibility they will abuse it and interfere with the principal’s administration and management of the teaching and learning duties of the school. My view, as expressed here, is consistent with that of van Wyk:

SGBs have, by virtue of the SASA, been assigned considerable power and responsibility and, among other things, can capture the school’s character and identity in the wording of the school’s policy, as well as determine the way in which the school should achieve its purpose ‘systematically and consistently’ (2004:52).

2.2.7.3 The relationship between Principals and SGBs

“The principal had just recovered from a heart attack and he was of the opinion that the stressful relationship between himself and parental governors was one of the main reasons for his illness” Heystek (2004:310).

The fight over power and financial control results in a poor relationship between the principals and school governing bodies in many public schools. According to Heystek (2004:309):

The poor relationship between principals and SGB varies from minor problems at schools to major cases reported in the media, such as accusing each other of misconduct, principals being chased out of school premises by angry parents and principals so angry with parents in SGB that they want to make all decisions concerning school governance alone.

The poor relationship between parents and educators can even result in physical illness as reported by Heystek above. This lack of co-operation may be attributed to the old centralised views when principals believed that schools were theirs and as such they could manage them as they saw fit without seeking or wanting parent input. On the other hand, parents too misunderstood their involvement and forget that the principal is responsible for the professional management of the school. As I said earlier the two parties need to cooperate in order to solve misunderstandings and enhance their relationship as partners.

2.2.7.4 Lack of clarity in terms of roles and responsibility

Recent research throws light on this issue. Christie’s (2001) study revealed that governance issues are by no means straightforward. In all historically black schools, involving parents in school governance has presented difficulties. For instance, “Some principals commented that parent interests were neither constant nor sustained” (Christie, 2001:56). Other principals emphasised that “Parents often saw the school as having responsibility for their children and for running itself, and attempts to involve parents were viewed as the school not fulfilling its responsibility” (*ibid.*).

The difficulties are more pronounced in rural schools. According to *Emerging Voices* (HSRC, 2005:121) “Decisions on critical issues such as employment policy, managing school funds and teacher conduct seem to be the domain of educators in the SGB, especially of the principal.” There are many problems in running SGBs in impoverished rural areas:

Even in a well-run school where relations between staff and parents seems good, issues such as low attendance at SGB meetings, lack of financial skills (in treasurers) and the difficulty of persuading impoverished families to pay school fees are constant problems. Some SGBs are dysfunctional, with the structure often in the principal’s pocket (*ibid.*).

2.2.7.5 Parents perceived as limited in what they can offer

“I would rather do the work myself, than to wait and expect that the School Governing Body must do it and I know that nothing will happen” (a principal quoted in Heystek, 2004:309).

Some schools appear to be underestimating parent involvement in school governance. In some schools the parents are seen as uneducated people who cannot make any meaningful contribution to the healthy growth of the schools, especially through decision-making. In accordance with this, Christie (2001:56) revealed that many schools mentioned the importance of having parents as a backstop in discipline. Again in most of the schools, parents were not involved in day-to-day issues and played little or no role in decision-making.

Parents are generally only involved in minor issues. The HSRC (2005: 121) makes the case for parental involvement being mostly ceremonial:

The participation of parents in the running of schools can be described as ceremonial ... most parents do not feel able to fully engage with teachers over the education of their children, nor do they have the resources to participate in the SGB or to hold it accountable. Hence the involvement of parents seems to be largely limited to control over school furniture and repairs and assisting with feeding schemes.

A study of School Boards in the Oshana region of Namibia by Mendelsohn (1997) revealed a number of similar results. This study indicated that School Boards in rural

schools are mostly composed of elders and less educated people with little understanding and knowledge of education. Since elections are based largely on candidates' qualities and role in the community, the only requirement for the person to be a School Board member is that s/he must be a parent. These kinds of School Boards are not independent or able to provide constructive criticism and contribution to the benefits of the school (Mendelsohn, 1997:269).

In light of these challenges, training in SGB functions is a viable option and possible solution to the difficulties described previously. Recently training has been conducted in South Africa to make SGBs more aware of their functions and to improve the situation. According to *The Novalis Institute* (2000:2):

Non Government Educational Organisations (NGEOs) have been called upon by government to assist in the training of SGBs so that they can become effective managers and inspirers of their schools. The Novalis Institute has positively responded to this call and has trained facilitators to undertake this enormous task of empowering civil society through creative management and leadership programmes.

The Novalis Institute further states that it has trained hundreds of SGBs in the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal provinces in recent years (*ibid.*).

Another South African institution that has been providing training for SGBs since 2004 is the Matthew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance (MGSLG). According to the MGSLG, their training for SGBs focuses on “the constitution, policy, relationship building, decision-making, and communication, core functions of SGB, school development plans and school finances.”

Likewise, the Centre for Social Development (CSD) at Rhodes University has been training SGBs in some Eastern Cape locations such as Grahamstown, Port Alfred, Alexandria and others since 1999. According to Daki (2006), an SGB trainer, the CSD train people (parents, teachers, principal and learners when applicable) before they start working as SGB members. The CSD training focuses on:

Building the confidence in SGBs, clarifying the members' role to avoid abuse of power, enhancing positive attitudes between parents and educators, basic financial skills and maintaining a good network with other government stakeholders such as political bodies (Daki, 2006).

Daki further explained that she is now busy working with people in the community and helping to facilitate and expand the number of SGB trainers. She believes that it is a daunting task due to the fact that she is responsible for an extensive area and is currently working alone. However, Daki (2006) goes on to further state that though the CSD had been providing this training for an extended period, the improvement in SGBs is very slow due to lack of interest in education among parents and their low level of education.

In contrast, Mathonsi (2005), an NASGB coordinator, claims in a local newspaper article that “The provided training was inadequate and irrelevant for SGBs in needy communities, which has a negative effect on the performance of these SGBs and undermines the democratisation of the education system.” Although training seems to be a possible solution and an answer to some SGB problems, there are researchers such as Heystek (2004:311) who are of the opinion that “This money and effort should rather be spent on building a sound relationship between the principal and the parents so that they will trust one another and understand each other’s responsibilities, strengths and weaknesses.”

It is important and admirable that some NGOs are offering training to SGBs, but much still needs to be done for these bodies to serve and function as they were designed. I believe and support the notion that parents in rural school governance require more training in order for them to function effectively and help their schools achieve success as an academic institution. I believe parents can and will improve as SGB members once they better understand their role, function, and power in the whole process and system. This can, in part, be accomplished through training and co-operation with principals who need to accommodate SGBs as working partners and not view parents and SGBs as antagonists, foes or hindrances.

The idea of parental involvement in school governance did not emerge from a vacuum, but is rooted in decentralisation of power for people at the grassroots level, and in democratic participation. According to van Wyk (2004:49), “The concept of decentralisation originates from the belief that the state alone cannot control schools, but should share its power with other stakeholders, particular those close to the school.”

Likewise the Namibian Ministry of Education and Culture (1993:168) emphasises that “Decentralisation is concerned with the relocation of authority and responsibility from the centre to regional and local levels.” Decentralisation is generally supported by participative management theory. Therefore, in the next section I discuss how decentralisation, collegial theory, and some characteristics of participative management theory emphasise the importance and applicability of democratic participation in the education system.

2.3 Participative management theory

2.3.1 The overview of participative management theory

Namibian apartheid educational background is similar to that of South Africa in the sense that Namibia was colonised by South Africa and all instructions concerning education came from the same central government in Pretoria.

A democratic education system is organised around broad participation in decision-making and the clear accountability of the people in leadership positions and those involved in decision-making. Decentralisation was one of the top priorities of the new Namibian and South African government in the early 1990s. According to the Ministry of Education (n.d.):

In Namibia democratic participation in education has been improving since independence. The ministry of education has been making efforts as early as 1991 to sensitise learners, teachers, parents and communities regarding their democratic role and responsibilities in education.

The Ministry of Education (n.d.) emphasises that “It is working on the decentralisation process of some of its programmes and activities to consolidate and enhance the already decentralised activities of the education regions.” The purpose of this exercise by the Ministry of Education was to provide regional and local authorities and people at the grassroots levels decision-making powers in matters that concern them. It is important that this process is extended to school community levels.

In addition, the Namibian Ministry of Education and Culture believes that “Decentralising both responsibility and authority is the key to upgrade the quality of schools and to maximise the local contribution to the whole education system” (1993: 168). The move towards decentralisation and the establishment of Governing Bodies in Namibia, South Africa and other Southern Africa Development Countries (SADC) reflects current management theory.

Management models, which emphasise collegiality, participation, and democracy, are currently influential in shaping practice. Bush (2003b:64) emphasises that “power and decision-making should be shared among some or all members of the organisation.” “Advocates of collegiality believe that participative approaches represent the most appropriate means of conducting affairs in educational institutions” (*ibid.*:81).

“The notion of collegiality became enshrined in the folklore of management as the most appropriate way to run schools and colleges in the 1980s and 1990s” (Bush, 2003b:64). Collegial models emerged at the time when participative management overpowered bureaucracy and centralised systems in education in many countries worldwide. In short, collegiality has its roots in the participative management approach of Kurt Lewin. Lewin believed that:

We are likely to modify our own behaviour when we participate in problem analysis and solution and likely to carry out decisions we have helped make (Weisbord, 1987:89).

Participative management had an improbable origin. “It evolved during World War II from collaboration between Lewin and anthropologist Margaret Mead in an attempt to reduce civilian consumption of rationed foods” (Weisbord, 1987:88). Weisbord described Lewin’s influential contribution to the notion of participative management as follows: “Kurt Lewin wed scientific thinking to democratic values and gave birth to participative management” (1987:72). In 1920 Lewin realised that scientific management was incomplete. Lewin believed that “The old manager formula of planning, measuring, controlling, leading which Frederick Taylor devised was sound, but to Lewin it was very hard to apply it today unless you included everybody in the process” (Weisbord, 1987:95).

In addition, Lewin emphasised “the establishment of democratic groups in education in which members actively participate in decisions are more productive in terms of both human satisfaction and the achievement of goals than authoritarian groups” (Lunenburg & Ornstern, 1991:9). Weisbord 1987:71) argues that “While Taylor sought to rid workplaces of authoritarianism and conflict through scientific management, Lewin strove to free the world from prejudice, ignorance, and self-hate through social science”. In other words, “Lewin’s major contribution to management was his way of thinking; to him every change requires a new participative experiment” (Weisbord, 1987:89).

Though Lewin opened the participative management doors in the early 1900s, the emergence of bureaucracy theory by Karl Marx overtook it. “Marx’s concept of bureaucracy can best be understood within the general framework of his theory of class conflict, the crisis of capitalism and the eventual advent of communism” (Rogers & McIntire, 1983:6).

Although Marx’s bureaucracy was more related to the state and not directly to the management of organisations, it gave birth to the bureaucratic forms of organisation of Max Weber. According to Abrahamsson, “Weber perceived the capitalist order of production as one important driving force for the emerging of bureaucratic patterns of organisation” (1993:34). Weber’s notion of a tight hierarchy gradually penetrated all social institutions including schools. Because bureaucracy emphasises power and authority it received huge support in South Africa and Namibia during the time of the apartheid regime, where it was given room to grow and become accepted by all as the best way of managing educational organisations. Lauglo (cited in Bush, 2003b:11) states: “Bureaucratic centralism is pervasive in many developing countries and links this to both former colonial rule and the emphasis in central planning on many post-colonial governments.” However, this does not mean that bureaucracy and centralised systems were confined to one time colonized countries. According to Bush, (2003b:11) France, the United Kingdom and Greece have all experienced highly centralised and bureaucratic education systems over the past 30 years.

However, bureaucracy as a form of management came under increasingly sharp criticism towards the end of the 20th century. Some writers associated bureaucracy

with “the abuse of power. This abuse of power could be internal to the organisation (over centralisation and lack of democratic decision-making) or external in its relation to society” (Rogers & McIntire, 1983:11). Some writers describe theories of bureaucracy as a “Negative social element, that it is a repressive force and a parasite, undemocratic and an outgrowth of illegitimate power” (Abrahamsson, 1993:20). Bureaucracy is also blamed for its inability to bring about transformation. Mclagan & Nel emphasised:

So conditions as we enter the twenty-first century are ripe both for the decline of authoritarianism and for the rise of participation. This is a crossover time from one form of governance to another (1995:23).

In order to accomplish transformation, bureaucracy and traditional management today are often replaced by shared governance, collaboration and collegiality in many organisations. According to the theories I have presented (participative and bureaucracy), these two forms of management/governance have been grinding into and against each other for many decades. Mclagan & Nel also argued “It is important to understand the deeper dynamics that are responsible for the changes and to see the depth and breadth of the shift” (1995:23). Thus, according to Masschelein & Quaghebeur (2005:51):

since the end of the 1980s, there has been a growing body of opinion - amongst politicians, academics and the wider public – that has been concerned to promote participation in educational practices, for children, students, parents and teachers. Participation on the strength of this is perceived and presented mostly as an increased and active involvement of these target groups in the activities and decisions that concern their lives.

In my view, participation seems to be a desirable option in the sense that its foundation makes sense both in theory and practice as well as morally and socially. Participation aims to make everyone part of the system. Similarly, Mclagan & Nel claimed that “The focus of participation is of short and long term value in satisfying multiple stakeholders, people everywhere in the system are equally responsible for creating it” (1995:26).

As a result, participation in education has grown rapidly towards the end of the 20th century and become an interesting subject to many educational stakeholders, including myself. However, as I have argued in this chapter, participation has never

been a straightforward journey and there is doubt that it has reached its destination, especially in rural schools. Participative management has some significant features that distinguish it from other management approaches, for instance, participative decision-making, empowerment, teamwork and co-operation. Next, I present some of these characteristics in detail.

2.3.2 The characteristics of participative management

Participative management includes the idea of inviting people into the decision-making process. Karstanje (1999:29) emphasises that “Decentralisation involves the assignment of decision-making tasks to lower levels”. Participative decision-making is one of the main features of participative management, whereby all/some members of the organisation become part of the decision-making process and own the decision taken. Participative decision-making has many advantages both to the organisation and to the employees. According to Du Preez (2003:70) “Joint or participative decision-making will facilitate a pleasant work climate and job satisfaction.”

Participative decision-making requires mutual understanding and co-operation among participants and becomes more effective when all people involved make decisions that contribute to the achievement of organisation aims and objectives. Yukl (2002:95) states, “Co-operation is more likely when the decision is important to followers and they perceive that they will actually have some influence over the final decision.”

Hence, participation leads to empowerment. When people are encouraged to participate in the organisation’s activities they always feel motivated and empowered. According to Davidoff & Lazarus (2002:174) “Empowerment has two processes namely subjective and objective empowerment.” Objective empowerment requires people’s participation and involvement in all sections of the organisation. Davidoff & Lazarus (2002:174) further state that “Objective empowerment involves the taking of power, building structures where people can participate and involve themselves in decision-making processes.”

Davidoff & Lazarus (2002:175) also emphasise that “Empowerment is fundamentally related to participation, and it is important simply because it is a basic human need to feel a sense of control over your life.” Empowerment leads to human satisfaction, and enhances a sense of confidence and belonging among individuals in the work place and this is the aim of participative management.

Davidoff & Lazarus (2002:176) put the necessity of participation this way:

When people in any context participate in shaping the life and direction of that situation, their capacity is enhanced. The more people participate, the more meaningfully they will be able to participate. Therefore appropriate structures and processes need to be in place to facilitate such participation, and control, and responsibility need to be shared.

Furthermore, participative management needs understanding, co-operation and effective facilitation to satisfy all involving parties. Openness, trust, transparency and accountability are some of the features of participative management. Teamwork is one of the core principles of participative management. According to Everard, Morris & Wilson (2004:168) “Teamwork depends on effective meetings, effective decision-taking, effective communication, the identification of team roles and effective delegation.” Stofile (2005:15) emphasised that:

Teamwork in an organisation creates synergy because the sum of the effort of team members is far greater than the sum of people working alone. In a team situation each member contributes to the success of others and this collaboration of different members to bring about an integrated achievement is the secret that lies behind the success and effectiveness of high performing organisations.

Teamwork enhances participation and collegiality among organisational members. It helps people to realise their personal and team goals, improve communication, develop a sense of vision, achieve the organisational goals and strive for success.

Peter Senge introduced a strong characteristic of participative management which he termed the ‘learning organisation’. Senge believed in five components of the learning organization namely personal mastery, mental models, team learning, shared vision and systems thinking. According to him, each component “Provides a vital dimension

in building organisations that can truly ‘learn’, that can continually enhance their capacity to realise their highest aspirations” (Senge, 2006:6).

Moloi supports the idea of making schools learning organisations. Moloi (2002:15) emphasised that “For our schools to become learning organisations we need to facilitate learning at the four levels of the individual, the team, the organisation and society.” The lesson to be gained from learning at four levels is that if we combine our will, motivation and action, and collaborate with parents and the wider community in our efforts to transform schools, we will not fail (*ibid.*). Organisational learning can help the individual, groups and the whole organisation to continuously transform the organisation in the direction that can include and satisfy all stakeholders. Learning organisations can create an ideal situation that can be achieved through the highest participation of all involved individuals and groups.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I presented an overview of parents’ involvement in school governance starting with the historical background of apartheid and moving to the present situation. I showed how democracy, the constitution, and Acts underpinned and supported this notion of parental involvement. I presented a picture of School Governing Bodies in rural schools and discussed them in relation to much current local research. Finally, I looked at the theories that underpin the whole idea of parents’ participation, democracy and decentralisation in the education system. In the next chapter I present the methodological approach this research employed.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The goal of my study was to investigate the stakeholders' (School Board members) experience and understanding of parents' roles in school governance. Since my goal sought to explore meaning and participants' perception of parents' participation in education governance, this research was oriented in the interpretive paradigm.

In this chapter I explore the rationale behind the qualitative approach. I begin with a brief overview of research paradigms by discussing how they developed and changed over the past century in terms of ontology and epistemology. I present an argument of why I decided to base my study in the interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm has its limitations and I present these to conclude this section.

Next, I present my reasons for selecting the case study method and clarify the research sample and data collection techniques. I also give a brief overview of how I analysed the data. Finally, I conclude the chapter by highlighting issues of ethical concern.

3.2 The overview of research paradigms

Research of different kinds has been associated with different paradigms. Many experts in the field of research have defined the term paradigm. Bassey (1995:12) defined a paradigm as a:

Network of coherent ideas about the nature of the world and of the functions of researchers, which are adhered to by a group of researchers, condition the patterns of their thinking and underpin their research actions.

According to Mertens (2005:7) "A paradigm is a way of looking at the world. It is composed of certain philosophical assumptions that guide and direct thinking and action."

3.2.1 Positivist and post-positivist paradigm

“The dominant paradigms that guided early educational and psychological research were positivist and its successor post-positivist” (Mertens, 2005:8). Positivist researchers believe in the assumption that ‘reality is out there’ and that reality is stable, observable and measurable. “The ontology the positivists hold is that one reality exists and it is the researcher’s job to discover that reality” (Mertens, 2005:11). However it is hard today to find any researcher referring his/her research as positivist due to the fact that it is outdated, “...excludes notions of choice, freedom, individuality and moral responsibility” (Cohen *et al.*, 2000:17). This criticism led to the emerging of the next paradigm called constructivist.

3.2.2 Constructivist/interpretive paradigm

The constructivist paradigm emerged with a different underlying assumption and methodology. In contrast to the fact that the positivists and post-positivists believes that the reality is out there, the constructivist basic beliefs or ontology is that reality is socially constructed.

The constructivist and interpretive paradigms are similar since both of them tend to be anti-positivist. According to Cohen *et al.* (2000:22) “the central endeavour in the context of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience to retain the integrity of the phenomenon being investigated”. Mungunda (2003:31) emphasised that “in the interpretive paradigm reality is seen as subjective and multiple, seen through the eyes of the participants within the context of their frame of reference”. The features of the interpretive paradigm such as subjectivity of reality and the social construct of knowledge are some of the main reasons that attracted the interests of most researchers to base their studies in these paradigms. However, the interpretive paradigm has been criticised by some scholars, for instance Mertens (2005:16) claimed:

The constructivist paradigm has been criticised not only by positivists and post-positivists, but also by another group of researchers who represent a third paradigm of research: the transformative paradigm.

3.2.3 Transformative/critical paradigm

The transformative paradigm comes from the point of critical theorists and participatory researchers who realised the imperfections of the constructivist paradigm.

This paradigm is also known as the critical paradigm. According to Mertens:

The transformative paradigm arose partially because of dissatisfaction with the dominant research paradigm and practices and because of a realisation that much of sociological and psychological theory has been developed from the white, able-bodied, male perspective and was based on the study of male subjects (2005:17).

Likewise, Kincheloe & McLaren (2000:279) highlighted that:

A critical paradigm is concerned in particular with the issues of power and justice and the way that the economy, matters of race, class and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion and other social institutions and cultural dynamics interact to construct social systems.

The purpose of the critical/transformative paradigm is "...to bring about a more just, egalitarian society in which individual and collective freedoms are practiced, and to eradicate the exercise and effects of illegitimate power" (Cohen *et al.*, 2000:28). Though this paradigm is not relevant to my study, it is significant to many current researchers especially those who seek to investigate the issues of gender, politics, culture, poverty, disabilities and HIV/AIDS, with the idea of taking actions, changing and transforming the existing situation.

The table below explains the "basic beliefs associated with the major paradigms" (Mertens, 2005:9) for instance, ontology, epistemology and methodology of each paradigm. In other words, the table summarises the core principles of the paradigms, which may provide a better understanding of their differences.

Table 3.1 This table is adapted from Mertens (2005).

Basic beliefs	Positivism/post positivism	Constructivist/ interpretive	Transformativ e/critical
<i>Ontology:</i> (nature of reality)	One reality; knowable within probability	Multiple, socially constructed realities	Multiple realities shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, gender, and disability values
<i>Epistemology:</i> (nature of knowledge; relation between knower and would-be known)	Objectivity is important; the researcher manipulates and observes in a dispassionate, objective manner	Interactive link between researcher and participants; values are made explicit; created findings	Interactive link between researcher and participants; knowledge is socially and historically situated

3.3 Why the interpretive paradigm?

My research is oriented in the interpretive paradigm. It seeks to interpret the meaning, experiences and understanding of parental involvement in school governance. The interpretive orientation fits my personal reason for conducting this study as I believe in the assumption that “knowledge is socially constructed by people active ... and the researcher should attempt to understand the complex world of lived experiences from the point of view of those who live it” (Schwandt, cited in Mertens, 2005:12; Bassey, 1999).

As an interpretive researcher, I want to share the feelings and interpretations of the people in my research and see things through their eyes. In addition, this is qualitative research. Merriam (2001:6) noted, “Qualitative researchers *are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed*, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experience they have in the world” (emphasis in the original). This fits my purpose to explore and understand parents’ involvement through perceptions of people involved in the study.

3.4 The limitations of the interpretive paradigm

Like other paradigms, the interpretive paradigm has been criticised by many authors for a number of reasons. “The interpretive approach becomes hermetically sealed from the world outside the participants’ theatre of activity” (Cohen *et al.*, 2000:27). Bernstein cited in Cohen *et al.* stated “Subjective reports are sometimes incomplete and they are sometimes misleading” (*ibid.*). The validity of interpretive research is questionable since human bias can never be underestimated in research. However, since there are certain ways of reducing validity threats (for example triangulation and member-checking), the interpretive paradigm still remains one of the major paradigms applicable for current research.

3.5 The case study method

“The more the object of study is a specific, unique, bounded system, the greater the rationale for calling it a case study” (Stake cited in Mertens, 2005:237).

The research utilized a case study in my attempt to understand in-depth the issues and challenges of parental involvement in the management of school from the stakeholders’ perceptions. I decided to use a case study method for the reason that I seek in this study to explore the phenomenon of parental involvement “within its real-life context”, (Yin, 2003:13), that is, how parents are exercising their legal rights of playing a major role in the education of their children through participating in school governance as it was stated in the Education Act 16 of 2001. That has been the case; “case studies investigate and report the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance” (Cohen *et al.*, 2000:181).

Furthermore, I used the case study method with the intention to “...catch the complexity of a single case” (Stake, 1995:xi). The case study method allows the researcher to dig inside the participants and reveal the real-life situation of a particular context. It unfolds experiences and participants perception in a single phenomenon under investigation that could be lost if large-scale data like surveys are used. Consequently, “case studies enhance the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon, bringing the discovery of new meaning, extending the reader’s experience, or

confirming what he already knows” (Winegardner, n.d.). I hope readers may be able to learn one or two things from my case study.

3.6 The sample

“One cannot study everyone everywhere doing everything, even within a single case” (Maxwell, 2005:87).

Sampling refers to the selection of site and population of the study. Vockel cited in Stofile (2005:36) defined the population as that larger community from which the sample is to be drawn. The sample for my study consists of all members of the School Board drawn from one rural combined school in Ohangwena Region in Namibia. This school represents rural schools in Namibia where the impact of parental involvement in school governance matters has been little felt. I chose this particular combined school because it is close to where I stay, it is the same school where I attended my primary grades, it is purely a rural school and above all, it is a cluster centre and a mother to all surrounding schools. I elaborate on the concept of clustering in Chapter 4.

The sampling procedure therefore employed a purposive and convenience sampling technique in which the researcher “handpicks the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality” (Cohen *et al.*, 2000:103) and on their experience of the central phenomenon being studied. Purposive sampling fits well with the interpretive paradigm that I use in my study. Mertens (2005:317) emphasised that “Researchers working within the interpretive paradigm typically select their samples with a goal of identifying information-rich cases that will allow them to study a case in-depth”. Furthermore, Merriam (2001:61) stated that “Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research”.

3.7 Triangulation

“You need not be a prisoner of a particular method or technique when carrying out an inquiry, there is much to be said for multi-method enquiry” (Robson, 1993:291).

Cohen *et al.* (2000:112) defined triangulation as “The use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspects of human behaviour”. In other words,

triangulation is collecting information using a variety of techniques. Likewise, Patton (2002:247) defines methodological triangulation as “the use of multiple methods to study a single problem”.

Triangulation in this study is used to serve two purposes: first, methodological (using multiple data techniques) and second, as a validity measure. Robson (1993:290) asserted, “One important benefit of multiple methods is in the reduction of inappropriate certainty”. In addition, Fielding and Fielding cited in Maxwell (2005:112) emphasised the need to “recognise the fallibility of any particular method or data and to triangulate in terms of validity threats”.

It is against that background that I decided to combine the three data collection techniques, namely interview, observation and document analysis. I did this to strengthen the data from one technique to another, rule out their weaknesses and above all to provide rich and valid data. Furthermore, I used triangulation to examine this single phenomenon from more than one vantage point to validate my data. This strategy reduced the risks of validity threats such as bias from my research.

Patton put the advantages of triangulation in this way:

Studies that use one method are more vulnerable to arrows linked to that particular method (e.g., loaded interview questions, biased, or untrue responses) than studies that use multiple methods in which different types of data provide cross-data validity checks (2002:248).

However, triangulation has been criticised for some weaknesses. Flick (2004:179) views triangulation “less as a validation strategy and more as a strategy for justifying and underpinning knowledge by gaining additional knowledge”. Fielding and Fielding cited in Cohen *et al.* (2000:115) added “Methodological triangulation does not necessarily increase validity, reduce bias or bring objectivity to research”. Whereas those criticisms might be true, the use of triangulation allowed me to crosscheck my data from different data collection techniques. More details of my research validity and the use of triangulation are spelled out in Chapter 6.

3.8 Data gathering techniques

Since my goal was to obtain School Board members perceptions, understanding and experiences of parents' involvement, I realised that the use of different data collection techniques would be the best option for me to get the full data. The main data collection methods in this research were semi-structured interviews and observation. Document analysis was the secondary data collection method.

3.8.1 Semi-structured interviews

Most of the data were collected by conducting interviews because I was interested in capturing people's knowledge, experience and understanding of a certain phenomenon. According to Patton cited in Merriam (2001:72) "We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe ... and the purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other people's perspective".

The semi-structured interview has been selected as it provides me with the main questions of focus and guides me not to lose the aim of the interview. In addition, the semi-structured interview offered me the opportunity to ask probing questions that emerged from the interviewee's responses and allowed the generation of new ideas that will lead to richer data. The interviews were focused on the roles, experience, understanding, issues and challenges of parent involvement in school governance.

Cohen *et al.* (2000:278) emphasised the advantages of semi-structured interviews as follows:

The framing of questions for a semi-structured interview considers prompts and probes. Prompts enable the interviewer to clarify topics or questions, whilst probes enable the interviewer to ask respondents to extend, elaborate, add to, provide detail for, clarify or qualify their response, thereby addressing richness, depth of response, comprehensiveness and honesty that are some of the hallmarks of successful interviewing.

The choice was given to all participants to choose the language that they felt comfortable and able to express themselves very well. As a result all four parents and one teacher chose their interviews to be conducted in the local language. The school

principal and two teachers were interviewed in English. All interviews were tape-recorded and I translated those in the local language to English. I am fluent in both languages, since the participants' local language is my first language and English is my second language and the same language I am using in this course.

3.8.2 Observation

Maxwell (2005:94) claimed:

Observation can enable you to draw inferences about the perspectives that you couldn't obtain by relying exclusively on interview data. This is particularly important for getting at tacit understandings and theory-in-use, as well as aspects of the participants' perspective that they are reluctant to directly state in interview.

Observations were the other main data collection method for this research, I observed how parents get involved in school governance by attending one School Board meeting and the parents' day-to-day school visits and their relationship with the whole school management team within the three weeks that I spent at the school. I planned to observe one parents' meeting but unfortunately I found the meeting had taken place already in May while I was still doing my coursework in South Africa.

My observations focused on:

- School Board meetings; since I was interesting in observing parents participation, the power relations in the meeting, the relationship between the principal, teachers in School Board and parents and the flow of decision-making. I also looked at the meeting process, how it was planned, who chaired and his/her role and the parents' attendance.
- School Board parent members and other parents day-to-day school visits; I observed how often parents visited the school, what brought them to the school, and the relationship between the parents and the school.

The points above described the areas of focus of my observation, which is designed to find answers to my research question. Kidder cited in Merriam (2001:94) highlighted:

Observation is a research tool when it serves a formulated research purpose, is planned deliberately, is recorded systematically, and is subjected to checks and controls on validity and reliability.

3.8.3 Document analysis

To provide rich and quality data, I probed how parents have been involved in school governance by reading some school documents such as previous School Board minutes of meetings. Merriam (2001:126) emphasised that “Documentary data are particularly good sources for *qualitative* case studies because they can ground an investigation in the context of the problem being investigated” (emphasis in the original).

Document analysis was my secondary source of data, and was used mainly to support the interview and observation data.

3.9 Data analysis and report

Merriam (2002:209) stated, “In case study research, data analysis consists of making a detailed description of the case and its context”. I first started with the transcription of interview data since the interviews provided me with a large amount of data. I listened to tape-recorded data several times. Where the interviews were in the local language (Oshiwambo) I translated them into English. All data were coded. Maxwell (2005:96) refers to the goal of coding as “...to fracture the data and rearrange them into categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts”. After coding the data I broke down the data into units of broad themes that emerged from the questions asked and the participants’ response and under each broad theme I presented a number of sub-themes.

Taking field notes, descriptions and my comments as an observer formed the basis of the analysis of observation data. The data from observation are presented and included wherever they are relevant to the themes identified. I presented document data by interpreting and analysing it in a descriptive form. The data from the document analysis are also presented under relevant themes.

3.10 Ethical considerations

Ethical issues are of significant importance in every research; therefore it was my role as a researcher to take into account the effects of research on participants.

Bassey (2002:110) claimed that “the closer one comes to the people being studied the more important it is to ensure that they are willing to be studied and that what they say or do is reported in such a way that it is not prejudicial to their best interest”.

Before the commencement of the interview, I gave a brief description of all ethical concerns to the participants, clarifying the purpose of the research and explaining the research protocol which states clearly the participants’ rights to voluntary involvement in and withdrawal from the research at any time. I did this in the language the participant understands. The example of the consent form is included as an appendix to my thesis (Appendix A).

I was personally well known by all research participants, due to the fact that I grew up in the area, I attended all my primary grades at the same school and my mother is the former principal of that school. The current principal is my former teacher, all teachers in the School Board know me as well and all the parents in School Board are local people who have known me since birth.

This degree of familiarity between the participants and myself was a challenge and very dangerous as it could jeopardise my research. It was dangerous in the sense that one can only tell what they think I know, and since they are all my elders they could have decided not to disclose important and sensitive information to a young local ordinary girl like me. To avoid all those problems I always made a clear introduction of myself, explained the purpose of my study, and clarified the state of confidentiality and participants’ rights before the commencement of the interviews.

Participants’ confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed. I changed all participant names into pseudonyms during data presentation for safety and confidentiality reasons. Data were stored securely and shown to participants for member checking.

In the next chapter I present the data of my research.

Chapter 4

Data presentation

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 briefly explained the data collection techniques used in this research and touched on how the data was analysed. This chapter presents the data gathered from all three techniques used, namely semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. This chapter is strongly shaped by the interview data; observation data, in the form of journal entries and document analysis, are then used to support the data generated from the interviews.

Against the background of my research goal – *to explore School Board members' experience and perceptions of parents' involvement in the governance of a rural school* – the interview questions (Appendix C) focused on and probed three issues facing SGB members: one, gaining a better understanding of the role of parents and functions of the School Board; two, what are the challenges facing School Board parent members; three, what are parents' experiences of being part of this body. The data is reported under three broad headings:

- The roles/functions of the School Board
- Problems and challenges of parents' involvement
- School Board members' experience of parents membership

I have developed several sub-themes under each broad heading in order to make the data more comprehensible.

4.2 School context

Since my research method is a case study, I researched only one school. The school is situated in the Ohangwena region – on the Namibian and Angolan border – in the northern part of the republic of Namibia.

The school is about 50 km east of the region's capital Eenhana. The region is predominantly rural and is characterised by poverty and high unemployment. The Ohangwena region has only two small towns with populations of fewer than 40 000 each.

The school itself is a 'classic' rural school constructed 200 metres from the gravel road and surrounded by a clinic, a few small shops, a church, an agricultural office and the regional councillor's office. The school consists of 495 learners in grades one to ten. The school has 16 teachers, one Head of Department, no deputy Principal and one Principal. The school has electricity but unfortunately it has no running water. The whole village including the school survives on water from the few dams and wells that are available in the area. There is no library, no hall, and no laboratory.

The school is also a cluster centre. The clustering system was introduced in Namibia in 2003 as a part of the decentralisation process. About ten surrounding schools form a cluster and the best resourced school becomes a cluster centre which is normally situated in the centre of the group. The cluster system provides a channel through which information and other services pass between the schools and the circuit office. This cluster consists of eight schools.

Before presenting the data I provide brief sketches of the research respondents.

4.3 Participants' profiles

School Board Chairperson

The Chairperson is a married woman of about 47 years old. She has been the Chairperson of this School Board for six years. She has a Grade 10 (standard 8) education and currently works as a caretaker at the local clinic. Apart from being the Chairperson of the School Board she also serves as the Chairperson of the ruling political party (SWAPO) District Women's Council and is the leader of ELCIN Sunday school.

Parent 1

Parent 1 has been a member of the School Board for the past seven years and serves as the treasurer. She is also the secretary and treasurer of the ELCIN local congregation and a member of an HIV/AIDS project called Penduka. She is a 56 year-old married woman. She has a Grade 8 (Standard 6) education.

Parent 2

Parent 2 is a 45 year old single woman. She is one of the new members of the School Board who was elected in May 2006. Parent 2 is a former (unqualified) teacher currently working as a private secretary to the regional councillor. She is also a member of the Constituency Development Committee. She has a Grade 10 education.

Parent 3

Parent 3 is a 35 year-old man. He is a new parent member of the School Board elected in 2006. Parent 3 has served on another School Board at a nearby school where he was also an unqualified teacher for five years. He has a Grade 12 education and is currently working as a literacy promoter and a SWAPO district coordinator.

The Principal

The Principal is a man of 45 years. He succeeded the first principal and founder of the school seven years ago. The Principal's educational background is Standard 10 and a National Higher Education Certificate. The Principal does not occupy any other position of responsibility in the community.

Teacher 1

Teacher 1 is a 29 year-old single female teacher. She has been involved in the School Board of this school for eight years representing the teacher component and serves as the secretary to the Board. She joined the School in 1999 soon after completing a three-year Teachers' Diploma. She has been the secretary of the School Board for eight years. Despite her relative youth, she serves the community in different capacities: she is an AIDS contact teacher, an active member of the church

congregation, on the financial committee, and a member of the Constituency Development Committee.

Teacher 2

Teacher 2 is a head of department for Mathematics and Science at the school, and he is the only HOD currently employed at this school. He has been a member of the School Board since he became an HOD four years ago. Teacher 2 mentioned that he is also a secretary for the village. He is 36 years old.

Teacher 3

Teacher 3 is a former member of the School Board representing the teachers' component and has served on the board for twelve years. She is a 42 year-old married woman and teaches in the lower primary phase. She does not occupy any other position of responsibility in the community.

What is noteworthy is that six of the eight School Board members I interviewed are also fairly heavily involved in other community activities, often in leadership positions. While this was not a criterion for my sampling, I do think that it suggests a high level of community awareness and sense of service on the part of these members. This in turn adds to the credibility and trustworthiness of their responses to my questions. I now present the data under the three broad headings outlined above.

4.4 Data presentation

4.4.1 The roles/functions of the School Board

4.4.1.1 Recruitment and appointment of staff

Almost all respondents stated that the School Board recommends the new appointment of teaching and non-teaching staff at their school. The Chairperson claimed that she recruits teachers whenever needed and supervises the school in its recruitment and appointment procedures. The school Principal seemed to concur:

The main role of the School Board is to recommend suitable candidates when we have teaching and non-teaching vacancies at school.

Teacher 2, however, expressed difficulties from parents whenever they recommend new teachers. He put it this way:

We experienced difficulties. Especially when it comes to recommending teaching staff ... parents do not know which candidate is suitable for the post, therefore we teachers have to play a role and explain things to parents or direct them, otherwise they cannot make a meaningful contribution and choose the right person for the job.

Another problem that Teacher 2 identified was that English was the language used in conducting interviews for teaching vacancies at the school. According to him:

The interviews are done in English, which is the official language, and since most of the parents on the School Board do not understand English only teachers ask questions during interviews while parents observe. Parents can comment only on the 'behaviours' of the interviewees but cannot understand or comment on how the interviewees answered the questions. Because of the language problem they cannot influence the outcome of the interview.

Teacher 3 voiced similar concerns. She explained that before Namibia obtained independence in 1990 the role of parents was only to make sure all learners came to school, but after independence parents were given additional powers such as recruiting teaching and non-teaching staff. She argued that "This is difficult for them since they do not know much about teachers' qualifications."

Hence, it seems that although parents are seen to have a significant role to play in the appointment of new staff, there is doubt whether they really have the competence to play an effective role. This indicates a possible area of tension among members of the School Board.

4.4.1.2 Discipline

Disciplinary issues emerged as a strong theme across all the data. The importance of the School Board in disciplinary issues was identified and stressed by all respondents. Teacher 1, for example, said, "The School Board is really working in terms of developing the school, disciplining learners and teachers as well." Parent 1 saw their role as problem-solvers as a positive one, explaining that the School Board is really

needed because without it no development will take place: “The School Board needs to be there to solve teachers’ and learners’ problems.”

According to the Chairperson her roles on the School Board are to supervise the school, for instance, by monitoring whether teachers were providing quality education to learners and handling disciplinary problems among learners. In addition, the Chairperson explained that they mostly discuss learners’ and teachers’ problems in School Board meetings. The Chairperson was satisfied with the current roles and functions of the School Board.

The disciplinary role was also stressed by Parent 1:

I am a treasurer and like other members my other roles are to advise teachers and learners and to solve disciplinary problems at school.

And by Teacher 1:

The role of parents on the School Board is to listen to anything such as indiscipline among learners, teachers who apply corporal punishment and other things that need their attention.

Parent 3 was elected to the School Board in May 2006 and has had limited experience on this Board. However, he had been a member of another School Board and said that his roles had not changed much. He mentioned that for instance he would keep the school in good order and bring about peace and co-operation between teachers and learners. Parent 3 also emphasised: “I remember that normally in the School Board people discuss factors such as learners’ and teachers’ behaviour.”

Teacher 2 made the interesting point that disciplinary matters – regarding either teachers (when teachers violate rules) or learners – had to be dealt with by the School Board: “the Principal has no power especially when teachers violate certain offences.” In contrast, the Chairperson believes that the School Board has a ‘policing’ role to play in the school both in terms of learners and teachers. She claimed that:

The School Board is very much needed in the sense that if there is no School Board then teachers will work and behave the way they want and there will be no one to control the Principal’s work. Now teachers know that whatever they are doing the School Board is watching them and is ready to step in when things start going wrong.

Many interview responses stressed the role of the School Board concerning learners' discipline. The Chairperson said that undisciplined behaviour was one of the problems the SGB had to deal with the most. "Learners have a tendency of denying the truth." Similarly, Parent 1 explained that the main problem they met with on the School Board is learner misbehaviour: "They used to insult each other and teachers sometimes." Parent 1 acknowledged the fact that they succeeded in some cases. For example learners previously went to shops at break time or on their way to school and drank alcohol. She said: "We (School Board) addressed this problem seriously and today you would not see any learner walking around shops during school hours."

Unfortunately disciplinary issues can also lead to conflict which can harm relationships between parents and teachers. According to Teacher 3:

In some cases when learners misbehave and the School Board call their parents in order to deal with the issue it resulted in damaging the relationship between some School Board members and learners' parents just because such Board members were asking more questions or giving punishment. Consequently, the affected School Board member will no longer feel free to participate in such meetings or make decisions in disciplinary matters.

The Principal also viewed disciplinary issues in a positive light, since it was one of the problems that enabled them to invite parents to school. He revealed that generally, parents in the community only visit the school whenever they are individually invited to do so especially in connection with learners' behaviour. The Principal stated:

Teachers used to send learners to report themselves at school with their parents when learners misbehave or in accordance with other matters but in most cases parents did not come. Teachers have to send three to four letters or prevent learners from attending classes until parents report themselves is when parents will come.

Document analysis bore out these views. The School Board minutes that I reviewed confirmed that learners' behaviour was one of the matters most often discussed in School Board meetings since 2003 as confirmed by all interview respondents.

Likewise, during the three weeks I spent at this school my observation of parental involvement and the school in general substantiates this situation as this entry in my journal shows:

Since I started observing, no parents had shown up to see how education is taking place and their children's performance. Only two parents came to school since teachers requested it. One parent came in connection with old school uniform of her son, which according to teachers was no longer in good condition. Another parent was called to report herself at school as teachers sent her daughter home after fighting with other learners. Otherwise, most parents that I met at this school only came to sell their goods such as breads, meat and nuts (Journal Entry July 21, 2006).

The important issue in this section is that there is a sense of misunderstanding concerning the roles of parents on the School Board. For instance, the Chairperson believes that they have a policing role (watching teachers). The other interesting issue is the view that the principal has little power in disciplinary affairs and the relationship with the SGB is harmed because of disagreement over disciplinary matters, which shows limited understanding of participative management.

4.4.1.3 School Finance

All participants claimed that the School Board is responsible and accountable for school finances. The respondents emphasised that it is the School Board's responsibility to approve purchases when the school needs to buy something.

For example, Teacher 3 stated that:

It is the responsibility of the School Board to approve money to buy school needs such as photocopy machine, books, stationeries etc.

Likewise, The Chairperson of School Board had this to say:

School monies are our responsibility as well, teachers just collect them from learners and the elected treasurer (a parent member of School Board) calculates the money to see if the amount collected from learners is the same amount available.

Parent 1, the treasurer, confirmed this:

My role is to check the financial books and see if what is written is exactly what is used and received by teachers. In other words I check the income and expenditures of the school.

The Principal explained why the school development fund is collected by teachers: “The treasurer is a parent but since she lived far from the school teachers used to collect the money from learners.” Although parents felt responsible for school finances, their lack of financial skills made it possible for teachers to gain access to school money. Teacher 3 was of the opinion that though parents read some information in booklets they still needed teachers’ assistance, especially in financial matters: “though the treasurer of the School Board is a parent she cannot calculate the incomes and expenditures without teachers’ assistance”.

However, the principal freed himself from many of his financial responsibilities; for instance, safe-keeping the school financial records was no longer a priority. The Principal positively claimed that he did not deal with or control the school finances except for signing the withdrawal forms. In his own words:

School money is not part of my responsibility. My role as a Principal is only to find out what the school needs are and bring them to School Board meetings so that the Board can agree with such a need or not and approve the amount required.

Although, Parent 1 stated that she does not carry or keep school money in cash, she insisted all school monies were saved at the school bank account. However, the safety and security of school money remains questionable as she further revealed an interesting point:

When the school needs some cash to use they always consult me but I am not one of the members who signs or has power to withdraw money from the school account. When I became a treasurer I found some teachers with that authority therefore we did not change it or take it away from them.

In a similar vein, Teacher 1 revealed that only the principal and one teacher (not a member of the School Board) had the authority to withdraw money from the school bank account. According to her, this teacher was not authorised to do so by the School Board but he is just doing it because he had been granted that power before the

implementation of the Education Act 2001. Teacher 1 further expressed concern that “this teacher takes care of all school money either that in the bank account or the cash at school, therefore I do not fully understand the role and use of the treasurer we elected in School Board.”

Thus, an ignorance of policy and misuse of formal procedure is common. Parent 1 (the treasurer) also revealed that:

Because the school development fund is usually received by class teachers, some teachers used to use this money for personal purposes and pay it back later.

Though there is a sense of inappropriateness concerning school funds Parent 3, a new member, felt that he would work according to the School Board roles and powers that were articulated in the School Board members’ booklet and he stressed that “we will take good care of school finances to avoid its misuse by the Principal and teachers.”

Despite the poor control of school money, some parents claimed that they had used school finances to buy school assets in the past year. According to one, they still needed more financial aid to assist them in developing and purchasing school equipment and supplies. The Chairperson put it as follows:

At our school, we achieved some things like buying the photocopy machine, now we are trying to get a school patron and donors to help our school finances and to provide assets like computers, overhead projectors, video machines and other things.

In brief, what is interesting here is that parents feel that they are responsible and accountable for school finance but according to teachers, parents lack competence since they cannot control the finances alone without teachers help. In reality, what the School Board is doing here is only approving the amount of money needed. Other issues are that a non-School Board member has signing authority, and the misuse of school development funds by teachers (using it the money for personal purposes), which shows an ignorance of policy and a degree of carelessness in the School Board members and the principal. The principal feels totally justified and not responsible for financial matters, which is not always the case.

4.4.2 Challenges of parents' involvement

Respondents identified a number of challenges that hinder the effective involvement of parents on the School Board.

4.4.2.1 Absenteeism and poor attendance

All respondents complained about absenteeism in general and poor attendance in all corners of the school: parents' absenteeism from School Board meetings, teachers' absenteeism from parents' meetings and teaching duties, parents' low turnout at parents' meetings and learners' poor school attendance.

Teacher absenteeism as claimed by parents who participated in this study was reduced after the School Board made an effort to talk to them in order to improve the situation. Parent 1 stated that learner and teacher absenteeism was one of the main issues they discussed in School Board meetings over the past term and that this situation was now improving. Parent 1 stressed that:

In the past term we experienced high absenteeism among teachers at work. As the School Board we talked to those teachers face to face and reduced their absenteeism.

Furthermore, parents expressed their concern with teachers' low turnout at parents' meetings. The Chairperson put it this way:

Some teachers did not like to attend parents' meetings. I do not know if they have some problems with parents or they just do not wish to attend and in many cases we (the School Board members) talked to those teachers and now it is getting better.

Parent 1 believed that:

Teachers from other areas are not responsible and they do not even like to attend parents' meetings.

According to Parent 1 only teachers who were born or grew up in the area took their responsibility of caring for learners seriously.

However, the Principal and teachers had also experienced a high degree of absenteeism from the parents' side. The Principal stressed the point that:

Some parents do not attend School Board meetings or give their apologies. So the Board was forced to postpone the meeting because they did not meet the quorum. High absenteeism does happen, even in general parents' meetings that we usually have at school.

High absenteeism among parents leads to an assumption that they do not understand and respect their duties on the School Board. Teacher 2 explained that parents do not understand their roles on the School Board: "They even failed to attend School Board meetings by providing any number of excuses". He added that another challenge was that most parents had other responsibilities either at home or in the community and they paid more attention to those than their responsibilities to the School Board.

On the matter of punctuality and absenteeism at School Board meetings I observed the following:

80% of the School Board members were punctual and joined the meeting from the beginning at 14h30 as indicated in the invitations. Only two members were not present; one parent member was absent with an apology and the other parent was a new member who came one hour late (Journal Entry July 25, 2006).

Likewise, the document (School Board minutes) I studied confirmed that the chief offenders in terms of absenteeism among School Board members were parents, ranging from one member to four members absent per meeting. Few parents gave apologies, while only one teacher was absent once, during 2003-2006 term. In addition the documents further show that School Board meetings were postponed by two days once when four parents were absent in January 2005.

My observations and document analysis confirmed the information provided by teachers on the issue of parent absenteeism. Parents were absent more than other members, without apologies in most cases, and seemed to lack an understanding of the significant role they needed to play on the School Board. Despite the poor attendance of former School Board members, the new members felt confident and promised to do their best during their term. For example, Parent 3 said that:

Even if I am a literacy promoter and SWAPO district coordinator as well as a married man I do not foresee any problem in attending School Board meetings since most of my responsibilities are not on a

daily basis and the School Board meetings will only be attended once a term except in emergencies. I will do my job to my level best.

The Chairperson also showed her confidence and willingness to attend School Board meetings as she has been doing in the past. She expressed the feeling that despite the fact that she was a janitor and a married woman who had to take care of her family, being a member and Chairperson of the School Board was not demanding at all. She further explained that because of co-operation at her work she always asked permission from her supervisor when she needed to attend School Board meetings and in most cases the meetings were always held in the afternoons. This allowed her to complete most of her work in the morning and freed her up for the School Board meetings later on in the day.

Likewise, Parent 1 felt that:

Being a School Board member is not demanding at all. We always have meetings when we are available. I can deal with all the responsibility very well; therefore, to me nothing is demanding.

In fact, the issue of absenteeism did not only arise with regard to parents attending School Board meetings but also with other parents in the community (parents in general – who have children at that school) as the Principal explained: “Only some parents usually attend parents’ meetings.” Unfortunately the school never takes any action against those parents who do not attend the meetings.

What is interesting from this section is that although nearly everyone is guilty of some degree of absenteeism, parent’s absenteeism is very high since at every School Board meeting there was one parent absent. This leads to an assumption that parents lack the understanding of their role on School Board. The matter of many responsibilities was also raised, as this could be one of the possible causes of high absenteeism. The fact that the school makes no attempt to encourage parental involvement may also indicate a lack of understanding of the problem. Parent absenteeism could be construed as lack of interest but a later section shows that the parents are committed and really want to play a role in the school.

4.4.2.2 Poor educational background and lack of understanding

Almost all teachers who participated in this study claimed that parents' poor educational background was the main cause of the problem with regard to the difficulties on the School Board. Teachers further revealed that due to the poor educational background and lack of understanding parents did not really understand and fulfil their roles as School Board members. The Principal stated, "As far as my experience and knowledge is concerned parents do not fully understand their involvement in School Board."

Teacher 1 emphasised that during the seven years she had served on the School Board only some parents fulfilled and understood their roles and duties on the board. The teacher went on to explain that those parents that did have some degree of understanding concerning what was expected of them were at least educated to the Grade 10 level.

Some parents understand that there are colleagues on the board they just do not know what their duties are, the roles they need to play, or that they must fulfil and act in a certain manner (Teacher 1).

Similarly, Teacher 2 stated that the School Board is responsible for encouraging learners to know why they come to school and what their roles at school are. "Some parents never visit the school and encourage learners to study hard." Most of the parents do not understand their roles and only a few parents understand and fulfil them. Parent 1 admitted that among the parents on the School Board there are some members who do not understand what their involvement is in the education of their children. Parent 1 explained that as a parent and a member of the School Board she visits the school regularly even when there are no School Board meetings and reports things that she identifies as going wrong.

Even a few days ago I visited the school to report some learners that I found playing on their way to school and the Principal used this opportunity to show me the new photocopy machine that the school bought (Parent 1).

Teacher 3 emphasised that the new parent members elected in 2003 were better than the previous ones, but even “they are not 100% perfect; they still need teachers’ assistance.”

They do understand the importance of education but there are still difficulties especially in reading documents written in English and understanding their content. Someone has to read it for them so that they can make a contribution (Teacher 3).

All teachers on the School Board responded that the poor educational background and lack of understanding among parents was the main cause of the problems they are facing nowadays in school governance.

Teacher 1 pointed out:

The main problem is the language in use. I mean English the official language. All circulars are always written in English and most parents have difficulties expressing their views in English.

Teacher 3 emphasised a similar point:

In many cases parents need a translation from the official language to the local one but most well educated people have difficulties in translating information from one language to another and the information someone reads and translates to you is not exactly the same as reading the original document yourself. (Teacher 3)

The other problem is the literacy level of parents:

On the new board there is one old man who was elected (2006) but has had problems even signing the declaration form; therefore, I do not know how he will work as a School Board member. (Teacher 1)

Teacher 1 had this to say on parents’ understanding:

Parents do not understand educational terms. For example, when the Principal informed parents on the School Board that they need to develop the school mission statement, the motto and emblem, most parents had difficulties in understanding the use and importance of those things and what they should look like since it was their first time to hear about them.

According to Teacher 3:

Parents know little about the teachers' code of conduct and in many cases the Principal speaks by referring to Education Act that many parents know very little about. The parents do not know what kind of punishment teachers should be given when they violate certain rules and if the Principal and his teachers hide it from them then nothing will happen to that teacher.

The poor education standard among parents was identified as being the result of the environment and the apartheid era. Teacher 3 explained that:

This was a very rural area. There were no schools here, even some of us who got educated we went to look for it far from here. Some parents did not send their children to school in other areas if they had no relatives in those areas where schools were available.

According to Teacher 3 the main cause of educational difficulties among parents was war:

It was tough and very dangerous to walk to school in those days. Landmines and soldiers were everywhere; therefore, many parents did not want to be separated from their children during the dangers of wartime.

There were some weaknesses that I observed in the School Board meetings that are a possible challenge to parents. For instance:

The agenda was in the official language and no translation was made. According to what I observed, parents including the Chairperson had difficulties in understanding the topics on the agenda. The Chairperson had difficulties in reading and pronouncing the words used such as 'remarks, duties, responsibilities, and oaths' (Journal Entry July 25, 2006).

Because of the lack of understanding among parents, some participants felt that the School Board term should be expanded and lengthened. Most parents became better accustomed to and more familiar with School Board operations towards the end of the third year of their term. Teacher 3 suggested that "School Board terms need to be extended from three years to five years." She said:

The term is too short, and when parents start to know their roles better the term is almost about to finish. The new members elected then have to re-start again from the beginning.

All teachers expressed the view that more development and less problems would result if parents had greater educational 'experience'.

Teacher 1 emphasised:

If all parents were well educated, the school could develop well and smoothly because now when the Principal or teachers rise any suggestions, for instance, to build a library, buy an overhead projector or other things parents do not even understand what an overhead projector is. And remember they, parents, are the majority, so it will take time for them to approve or support the idea. But if they were better educated they could make suggestions or support different ideas when raised by other members in the board.

Teacher 3 stated that:

If parents on the School Board were better educated, they could easily notice teachers' mistakes especially when they are not providing effective teaching and identify the Principal's weaknesses. Furthermore, educated parents can look for donations and other financial sources that can help the school to develop further.

In addition, the study participants revealed that poor educational background, lack of understanding and interest in education exists not only with School Board members but also with other parents in the community. Parent 1 stated that lack of understanding among parents, which also resulted in unmotivated learners, was very common among other parents:

When parents do not know the importance of education they also do not motivate and encourage their children to go to school. There are still some parents who do understand that they have to control their children the way they want either by giving them domestic work to do during school hours or not to permit them to do extra-mural activities like sport. Most of those parents are illiterate (Parent 1).

The principal pointed out that parents have not really been interested in education over the past six years. According to Parent 1 a low level of education, the apartheid legacy, and the rural environment the general population lives in are some of the factors that contribute to a poor understanding and involvement of parents in education.

One thing, we are now free to move wherever we want even to other schools and see what other schools are doing especially town schools. Our parents do not even go and attend parents' meetings at town schools or high schools in other areas (Parent 1).

She added:

Most of the parents in this area do not want to read newspapers especially those who know how to read and write in order to update themselves.

Parent 1 went on to emphasise that she used to read and listen to the radio and this helped her to learn and pick up some English words that she can use and speak today.

At the same time, the Principal expressed that parents do not take education seriously:

I started talking to them as a Principal about the importance of education, their roles and responsibilities as parents of learners attending school here and from that time they started changing and became better. Normally I speak to them in the parents meetings.

However, Parent 1 explained that only parents who understand the importance of education used to attend the meetings. Most parents feel free to ask and give their own suggestions and opinions in the parents' meeting. According to Parent 1 the parents and the teachers need to discuss significant and important facts concerning learners that learners are not aware of:

Poor parental involvement and lack of formal education is considerable therefore there was one time when we (School Board members) wrote a list requesting a meeting with some parents that we wanted to talk to because most of the parents did not understand what it means to be a parent nowadays.

What is important from this section is that the lack of formal education among the parents is the number one problem that hinders effective parent involvement on the School Board or regarding parent involvement in the community. Teachers felt that parents do not fulfil their roles on the School Board because of their poor educational background; on the other hand, some parents on the School Board felt that their educational understanding is better than that of other parents in the community. Some parents in the study agreed that some parent members of the SGB lack a basic understanding and seem not to be fulfilling their roles on the board effectively.

4.4.2.3 School Board training

Respondents emphasised that lack of effective training is one of the main challenges that hinder the effective participation of all parents on the School Board. All participants agreed that the training was only provided to certain members. They further expressed their concern about the fact that the training provided in the past was not effective and suggested that more training is needed for all members on a regular basis. The School Board Chairperson commented:

We did not get enough training but we got trained once at the cluster level during the whole three-year term.

The Chairperson confidently pointed out that they were trained on how to work as School Board members. The training took two days and not all members were included, only certain selected members. “The training helped us a lot though not everything was made clear to us.”

Parent 1 stated that she did not get any training on her work as a School Board member. “I just learned my roles as time went on.” Parent 2 stated: “I am inexperienced in School Board affairs and since I did not get any training, I do not know what my roles are.” Parent 3 also expressed the point that he did not have any training yet but since he is an experienced School Board member he will just work the way he did previously at the other school. “I hope the little knowledge that I have will help me to do my job in the School Board.”

The Principal confirmed that the Ministry of Education provides training for School Board members but not to all members, only to the Chairperson and Principal, and this was only done once during a three-year term. A number of problems have been identified with the training provided to School Board members. The Principal stated that:

School Board members were trained about their work and roles as members of the board and from there their participation and as a result of the training attendance during School Board meetings improved. However, the trainers used mostly English words and parents do not know English.

Similarly, Teacher 2 emphasised:

The problem I identified with such training is that mostly the trainers used English words therefore sometimes parents cannot understand all information very well. Fortunately there are booklets that are written in all languages.

Teacher 1 strongly criticised the training provided in the past by highlighting the following points:

In past years the training was provided to all, meaning the Principal, one teacher, and one from the parents' side. But now (since 2003) only one Chairperson of the School Board cluster gets trained. The training did not go into detail or provide facts. For example, they did not train people on how to open a school account, to look for other sources of funds to supplement that provided by the government.

Due to the reason that not all members were trained and the problems associated with such lack of training most research participants suggested that training must be provided to all members soon after the next election.

Teacher 1 suggested that:

More training must be provided. There is a certain committee in the region that provides training to School Board members and I suggest that this committee must continue training members of the School Board.

Teacher 1 further suggested:

That training must be provided annually, and the booklets that explain the work of the School Board must be given to all members permanently so that they can read them on their own time.

According to her the booklet is written in multiple languages but only given to members during training and then taken back. The booklets that are even provided are insufficient. The school was only given four booklets for nine School Board members.

Similarly, Teacher 2 suggested that parents need more training, at least once a school term:

They need to know their job description and their power because most of them are not even aware of the power and control that they do have.

Teacher 3 explained that:

Sometimes it takes a year before parents got trained and all those days parents are just working without knowing their roles and rely heavily on assistance from teachers.

According to the School Board meeting minutes, parent members of School Boards in the whole cluster gathered to elect one parent to go for training in 2004 (to represent the whole cluster). However, what I observed in the School Board meeting was that:

The Principal invited all members to attend the School Board training which was held at their school (cluster centre) for three days in the afternoons on 25-28 September this year (Journal Entry July 25, 2006).

The main fact here is the perception that training provided in the past was not effective and it did not include all members. The training did not cover important aspects such as finance and a number of weaknesses such as the use of English language were noted. Hence, the training provided seems ineffective and inefficient. It is also very interesting that in this term the training will be provided early (four months after the election) and will include all members as stated in my Journal Entry.

4.4.3 The School Board members' experiences of their membership

The following sub-themes were identified as the core views of what participants experienced from parents on School Boards especially after the implementation of the Namibian Education Act 16 of 2001 in 2003.

4.4.3.1 Participation and decision-making

In this study participation and decision-making on School Boards is often viewed from contradictory perspectives depending on the participant. Some respondents mentioned that parents do participate and make decisions during the School Board meetings while other respondents feel that some parents do not participate and make no decisions on a satisfactory level. Teacher 1 put it as follows:

Parents are in different categories. Some are more willing to express their views and participate during meetings while others are not. For example in the previous term that was elected in 2003, there was one parent who was always present at meetings but she never said anything or contributed except when she was delegated to make a prayer.

Teacher 1 identified some constraints that obstruct parents from participating. She stressed the point that some parents felt shy to participate which may be caused by such things as embarrassment regarding their low educational background and poor standard of living.

She further stated:

Those parents might be feeling that whatever is said by teachers and the Principal is always correct since they are well-educated and knowledgeable people. Parents may feel that the things we discuss are only for educated people and therefore they (parents) cannot make any worthwhile decisions. Some maybe think that they are from a poor family and should not speak in the presence of better people (Teacher 1).

Teacher 2 supports the view of lack of participation among parents with more emphasis on lack of skills. He stressed:

When it comes to decision-making parents do not know the procedures that they have to follow and in many cases they want to make decisions the way they do at home.

Teacher 2 also revealed an important point that parents' participation is limited and SGB meetings are dominated by teachers and the Principal on major issues like school finance:

Though parents make contributions and make decisions as well, teachers in many cases they just accept what teachers have said, and the Principal, especially regarding financial matters.

In contrast, parents confidently view their participation in a positive way. They feel that they do participate and make decisions like other members on the School Board.

The Chairperson said:

We all make decisions both parents and teachers on the board. When there is something to decide on we all do it. When we are not happy with the decision taken we always express our concerns and since parents are the main members of the School Board our concerns normally get considered.

Parents seem aware of the fact that participation and decision-making is one of their legal rights granted by the law. Parent 1 stated that all members have the right to

make decisions. “Sometimes we use to send the Principal or a teacher out when we needed to discuss something that related or affected such person.” Despite the earlier claim of parents’ poor participation, the Principal supported the point that parents do participate and make decisions like other members. The Principal asserted that they employed a democratic decision-making style of majority rule and the principal or chairperson status does not interfere in the decision-making process. The Principal claimed:

Decisions on the School Board are taken by the majority and not merely by the Principal or the Chairperson. In addition, the Principal stressed that parents must make decisions that benefit the school in School Board meetings.

Some respondents identified the importance of all stakeholders on the decision-making body. Teacher 3 was of the opinion that:

We need to be part of the education, all of us, I mean teachers, education officials as well as parents, and make decisions that benefit learners. Parents send their children to school therefore it’s impossible to remove them completely from the education of their children (Teacher 3).

My observation confirmed these perceptions. During a School Board meeting I noticed that all members (teachers and parents) participated extensively in matters discussed. Parents were free to add other items to the agenda as requested by the Principal. The Principal presented more items than other members. In his presentation he highlighted some duties and responsibilities of School Board members as articulated in the booklet to make parents aware of their duties and powers. What I also noted in the meeting was that:

Parents asked questions and requested more clarification when things were not clear to them. The Chairperson made comments and presented some topics to add to the agenda. Parents participated and gave good suggestions through at the meeting, which I witnessed rated parent teacher participation as 50/50 with both groups participating about equally. Parents had shown a good level of general education and a good understanding of school programmes (Journal Entry July 25, 2006).

Furthermore, both parents and teachers including the Principal made decisions freely in the meeting. The Chairperson and parent members were very interested and

confident in making decisions on such things as school improvement, looking for a school patron, and the renaming of school buildings. The Chairperson invited two learners who were also members of the School Board to participate, to be responsible for confidential information, to be disciplined, and act as good examples to other learners at the school. However, there was no time limit allocated to items on the agenda or a timekeeper to keep things 'moving' which left the meeting open for people to spend a long time in one item and made the meeting much longer necessary.

However, the degree of participation and parent's involvement was not at this level before 2003. Parents revealed that before the Education Act of 2001 was implemented the Principal and teachers were the only people involved in school activities. Parent 1 revealed:

Previously teachers and the Principal presented most of the items in parents' meeting agendas. But now the School Board members present some topics as well and the Chairperson of the School Board who is a parent been the Chairperson of the parents' meeting since the new board of 2003.

Generally, parents' participation and involvement in school activities is very low. However, the school management never tried different or alternative approaches to solving this problem as the Principal revealed that no fundraising or other activities took place at school as a way of bringing parents closer to the school or enhancing their participation and involvement. Yet, the Principal felt that he done enough and there was nothing else he could do. Therefore, he stressed the point that:

Parents need someone from the Ministry to address them during parent meetings, a person who can clarify their roles in education and motivate them to participate and involve themselves in school activities. 'Maybe they are tired of my voice and my face'.

Though there are different views on parents' degree of participation and decision-making on the School Board, it is evident that one could say there is some degree of participation. The participants' ideas on the importance of all stakeholders' involvement and use of democratic decision-making is also interesting. However, it seems that the principal and the SMT have done little and need to look for ways of enhancing parent involvement. This shows little real understanding of decentralisation of power.

4.4.3.2 Achievements

We approved the renovation of classrooms. The board applied for a water tank and water itself from the rural water supply though we did not succeed in this matter (Parent 1).

Despite the parents' poor educational background and other challenges facing members of the school governance team, all participants acknowledged the fact that the new School Board elected in 2003 in accordance with the Education Act 16 of 2001 had achieved much compared to previous Boards.

Teacher 1 stated that “parents elected in 2003 were much better than the School Board of 1999 when I become a member for the first time”, but she further expresses her uncertainty concerning the parents elected in 2006. She emphasised the following:

Although we did not meet yet the way I look at some of the parents elected now and this leaves me in some doubt about whether or not things will be going back to the 1999s board when we had many illiterate parents and things were very hard for us, during that time we did not develop the school very much because of the kind of parents we had in the board (Teacher 1).

However, Teacher 2 viewed the importance of having parents on the School Board in a more positive way:

Some parents are very initiating. They make good suggestions, advise the Principal, teachers, and learners on what to do. Therefore, the School Board is very much needed.

Even though the participants acknowledged that they achieved some things, in her welcoming remarks of the first term meeting the Chairperson articulated her wishes for the new term as follows:

In this term I think we should motivate our teachers to work hard, encourage learners to come and study harder, develop the school and look for donors and a school patron just to mention a few (Journal Entry July 25, 2006),

All parents seem to have plans in place for their new term. Parent 1 highlighted some of their plans:

In this term, the School Board plans to send some teachers and learners to well-performing schools (academically) in the region just to observe

what other teachers are doing, that they do not do at their school and on the learners' side is to see what other learners are doing as well and contribute to their good pass rates at the end of the year.

Parent 1 stressed that their aim and objectives for doing this is only to change the school academic performance, which is currently very low. Parent 3 pointed out that his first priority and issue of concern relating to the School Board was to increase the number of computers at the school, to apply for a water tank, to motivate cleaners to improve the state of the school, and if there is not enough money in the school account then they will increase the school development fund in relation to parents' income.

Parents' involvement in school governance is a voluntary duty that makes it a challenge and problematic for motivation. Parents in this study responded that their level of education and understanding motivated them to serve on the School Board. All parents emphasised that they are learning new things on the School Board and expressed their willingness to serve in the school governance.

Parent 1 put it this way:

What motivated me to be a member is only my understanding of education and by working hard I want to be exemplary to other parents who do not know the importance of education.

Furthermore Parent 1 feels happy to represent other parents on the board and the whole community: "I am not forced to be a member." Parent 1 said:

Myself I feel lucky to be a member of the School Board because I am learning a lot of things from this board. As a Chairperson I learned how to work and be with different people. For example, to deal with learners and their problems. I learned how to be a leader because as a Chairperson I am the leader of the School Board, I chair School Board meetings as well as parent meetings.

Parent 2 hopes that by being a member of the School Board she will learn a lot but failed to specify what exactly she meant.

In similar vein, Parent 3 stressed:

Since I was already a member I am not forced to become a School Board member, I will learn a lot since this is a big school having grade 1 up to 10. I will learn people's behaviours, interpersonal relationships, management skills, and much more.

All respondents stressed the importance of the School Board for different reasons. Teacher 3 explained that the School Board is very much needed because parents on the School Board represent other parents in the community and make their voices heard. She believes that parent members of the School Board mostly explain education-related matters and procedures to other parents better than teachers do. According to the Principal the School Board is needed since parent members represent other parents. Parents on the School Board help other parents to understand the importance of education and motivate them as well.

Parent 3 was of the feeling that:

The School Board is very much needed. It is on top of every one at school. Its members are responsible for all decisions taken at the school therefore if there is no School Board then there will be no school at all.

In brief, this section raises the point that though the notion of school governance and parental involvement has many challenges it is evident that they achieved certain things in some areas of their duty. Willingness of parents to serve on the School Board is also important as it shows how motivated and inspired they are. The significance of the School Board is that it shows a better understanding of participative management.

4.4.3.3 Relationship, powers and teamwork

The governors' relationship with each other and with educators is one fact that can strength or weaken their performance in schools. In this research all participants stressed and acknowledged that they have a good relationship with each other.

Parent 3 is a new member but he also claimed that:

Currently I have a good relationship with the Principal and teachers and therefore I do not think that by becoming a member of the School Board will change our good relationship.

And Teacher 1 said: "The spirit on the board is very good."

However, some respondents felt that relationships are a personal thing that varies from person to person and from term to term. Teacher 2 stressed:

The relationship with parents on the School Board depends on an individual. But according to the parents I had been working with they are good which means we have a very good relationship.

As an experienced former member, Teacher 3 expressed that relationships vary from term to term. “In some terms the relationship is very good while in some other terms it was just average.” For example, the thing that she noticed as causing poor relationships was when parents teachers related matters discussed on the School Board and the members started blaming each other for several things but according to Teacher 3 this does not happen always, and overall, their relationship was good. “We helped each other in many cases, but being together will never be good 100% of the time.”

According to my observation:

Members of the School Board respected each other very much and considered every member’s ideas in the meeting (Journal Entry July 25, 2006).

All participants concurred that good relationships positively lead to good co-operation and this enhances their teamwork. Participants claimed that they work as a team and no power-related cases were experienced in their School Board. The Chairperson said:

In our school, we work together as a team. On the School Board we know that these are teachers and those are parents but whenever we are discussing something we are all the same and equal.

According to Teacher 1: “We work as a team and solve problems peacefully.”

The Chairperson made an important point when she stated that they all know their roles and powers, both the parents and the Principal. “No one group closed the borders of their roles and threatened the other party.” But the Chairperson admitted that when one group did something wrong they would address the matter directly. “Even when the Principal identified problems regarding parent members he is free to come and talk to me as a Chairperson and a parent on the board.” The Chairperson further asserted:

I do not have any extra powers as a Chairperson of the School Board. I just have the same powers as other members.

Similarly, the Principal denied any power relation fights or problems at his school and claimed that “the School Board members know their powers and no one group, either parents or teachers, dominated the meetings.” Furthermore, the members, especially the chairperson and the Principal seemed to work together well and know where their power starts and ends. The principal described his roles and power on the School Board as follows:

I do not think that I as the Principal have separate powers and functions from that of all members on the School Board. My role is to explain and make parents understand educational matters and school needs on the board. Again I guide parents on what should be done on the School Board and provide the picture of the school to parents in order to see where and what the school is currently doing. As a Principal I am responsible for bringing the school needs to School Board members’ attention.

This section sums up the positive characteristics of participative management that were experienced by respondents such as good group and personal relationships, co-operation, teamwork and an understanding of power on the board. According to respondents, working together as a team has been effective for their school.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented data precisely as provided by respondents during interviews and from what I observed as well as document review. I have attempted to explore and provide the views, feelings, and experiences of participants on parents’ involvement in school governance. As claimed in Chapter 3, triangulation of information articulated from interviews, observations, and documents had spoken to each other in this chapter. I believe that my personal beliefs and feelings did not influence any of the data; rather it strengthened and validated my data. Since I am working in the interpretive paradigm and interested in showing how others understand and shape their reality, I quoted freely from the raw data in order to ensure that the respondents’ voices are heard.

The general picture that emerges from the data suggests that parental involvement in the governance of this school is average to positive. Some the weaknesses that appeared from the data are that parents lack competence in some areas of their roles such as in the appointment of new staff and school finance. The issue of discipline is also misunderstood on a certain level, for instance, when the chairperson thinks that their role is to police teachers and the view that Principal has no power in disciplinary matters. Parents' absenteeism from School Board meetings is substantial, which may indicate disrespect and lack of commitment to School Board duties.

Lack of a good educational background was identified as the main cause of most problems surrounding the notion of parents' involvement, as the participants' profiles show that only one parent has a Grade 12 certificate. Thus, many respondents recommend the parents be given an effective training course in order to perform their functions to a satisfactory level.

However, the data strongly show that parents believe they have a good level of participation and make decisions equal to other members on the School Board. It is also evident that some achievements have been reached since the implementation of the Education Act of 2001 and the establishment of this board in 2003. Parents feel motivated and willing to serve in school governance, which is providing a good understanding of participative management. Finally, respondents emphasised the good relationship that exists between parents and teachers, including the Principal on the School Board, as well as other important facts like co-operation, teamwork, and the understanding of power. It seems that working together has worked effectively for this school.

In the next chapter I discuss the findings and make sense of my data by referring to my research goals and to the literature.

Chapter 5

Discussion of findings

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I presented the data as collected from interviews, observation and documents during data collection time. I decided not to interfere or make any personal comment in Chapter 4 but to leave the data to speak for themselves. In this chapter I make sense of my data in terms of my research goal, the literature I have consulted and my personal comments.

In trying to make sense of the data I use the following lines from the handbook *The work of the School Board - Guidelines for Namibian School Board members* published by the Namibian Ministry of Basic Education, Sport & Culture as a lens through which to view the issues that have emerged. These lines capture the essence of what Namibia is trying to achieve, socially and educationally, in adopting a ‘democratic’ or participative approach to management and governance:

Since independence in March 1990, Namibia has undergone tremendous political and social transformations. One of such important change, which shall have long-term and fundamental significance, is the enactment of the Education Act, 2001 [Act 16 of 2001]. While mapping out a path for the future, the Education Act, in accordance with the Namibian Constitution, seeks to address the past imbalances and practices in the education system. Among other things, the Education Act strives to develop democracy in our education system by allowing adequate parent and community participation in education (MBESC, 2004:1).

The above quote serves as a main theme of this chapter and highlights how the Namibian Constitution, Education Act, 2001 and the Ministry of Education strive for democracy and decentralisation – which would include enhancing parents’ involvement – in the Namibian education system.

The main issues that captured my attention from my data are discussed under the following broad headings.

First, is the issue of *participation*. Here I discuss parents' participation in the governance of the school, the role of school management in enhancing participation, team learning, motivation and teamwork, systems thinking, sense of achievement, and the essence of school governance. These issues are all directly or indirectly related to the phenomenon of participation.

Second, I look at the *challenges* inherent in the notion and practice of parents' participation in governance. Here I focus on literacy, understanding of educational matters, training, and the controversial matter of school finance. These themes are discussed through the lens of participative management with the research goal in mind and measured with the main findings of the study. In order to keep the reader informed of what the research is all about and the argument it makes, I first provide a brief review of my study.

5.2 Review

As I outlined Chapter 4, the goal of my research was to explore School Board members as stakeholders' perception, understanding and experience of parents' roles' in the school governance. In this study my motive has been to understand the individual experiences and perceptions with regard to participative management and decentralisation of power in the Namibian education system. In that context, the data collection techniques namely, interview and observations, were designed in such a way as to answer the following questions:

- How do stakeholders view and experience parents' involvement in school governance specifically after the implementation of Namibian Education Act 16 of 2001?
- What perceptions and understandings do School Board members (including parents) have about their roles and how have they been fulfilling them?
- What factors pose a threat to the effective involvement of parents in participative management and what suggestions could the stakeholders make to improve the situation?

Several themes emerged during the data analysis that deal with each particular idea about participative management, participation and involvement of stakeholders in the Namibian democratic education system. Next, I provide an in-depth understanding of participants' views presented through the lenses of participative management theory which underpinned the idea of parents (stakeholders) involvement in education.

5.3 Participation

5.3.1 Parents' participation in school governance

The respondents view parents' participation in School Board meetings differently: teachers feel that parents do not participate effectively while parents themselves feel that they participate just like all other members. Owens (2001:284) defined participation as "The mental and emotional involvement of a person in a group situation that encourages the individual to contribute to group goals and to share responsibilities for them". The above quote defines the kind of participation we mean, whereby members have a sense of "mental and emotional involvement" (*ibid.*), exercise the ownership of decisions and are not merely present going through the motions. It may be that teachers' and parents' perceptions differ so dramatically because of their different perception of 'participation'. I identified from participants' responses that they lack a shared understanding and common knowledge of this concept. I think teachers understand participation as the 'mental and emotional involvement' of a person while parents understand it as 'being there' and showing their interest in that way. This may be because the school is making little effort to include and 'educate' parents into their roles as stakeholders, a point to which I return later in this chapter. Parents' participation is a key mechanism for capacity building. Davidoff & Lazarus put the necessity of participation this way:

When people in any context participate in shaping the life and direction of that situation, their capacity is enhanced. The more people participate, the more meaningfully they will be able to participate. Therefore appropriate structures and processes needs to be in place to facilitate such participation, and control, and responsibility need to be shared (2002:176).

The main idea that emerged from parents' participation is that it depends on 'individuals', as Teacher 1 emphasised that: "parents are in different categories, some are free to express their views while others are not". My view in this regard is that parents are individuals and therefore their participation varies from person to person. However the use of different data collection techniques suggests that parents' participation in the School Board is good. I agree with some participants that not all parents participate in the meetings, as this also happens in the meeting I observed, but I still claim that most parents participated as my following entry emphasised:

Parents ask questions and more clarification when things were not clear to them. The chairperson made comments and presented some topics in the agenda. Parents participated, made good suggestions and had been part of the decisions taken through out the meeting. Parents had shown good level of general education understanding and school programmes (Journal Entry July 25, 2006).

At the same time, the above quote explains how I view participation of parents in the School Board of the school under study. My belief is that all members have the right to participate and be part of the process. Owens (2001:288) argued: "in participative decision-making, all organisational members have the right to be heard, to have their views considered, to express feelings, to offer knowledge and information". Group participation (such as a School Board) is one of the important aspects of participative management which aims to serve several purposes. De Bruyn (2002:291) asserted that "Participation in groups or teams is particularly useful to encourage quiet team members to come up with creative solutions to difficult problems". The phenomenon of participation is a feature of what Bush (2003b:64) refers to as 'collegial' models of management.

Collegial models have been defined as "The models that include all those theories which emphasise that power and decision-making should be shared among some or all members of the organisation" (Bush, 2003b:64). Collegiality between the school management and parents can improve parents' participation in decision-making, as Bush (2003b:74) claimed that "Collegial models characterize decision-making as a participative process with all members of the institution having an equal opportunity to influence policy and action". Collegiality was reflected in the words of the

chairperson who stated that: “we all take decisions both parents and teachers on the board” (Chapter 4, page 64).

At the meeting I observed one of the parent members came late and she hardly participated in the matters discussed. But since this was only one member and all the other five parents participated well throughout the meeting I feel that parents’ participation and decision-making in this School Board is good and reflects what Bush (2003a:53) suggested, that “decision-making in schools and school governance should include all sectors, role players or stakeholders”. The participative or group decision-making leads to a number of advantages. Lunenburg and Ornstein highlighted:

It is believed that group decision-making results in a number of benefits over individual decision-making, including increased decision quality, creativity, acceptance, understanding, judgement, and accuracy (1991:171).

5.3.2 The role of the school management team in enhancing participation

The school management team has a role to play in increasing the relationship between decision-making and management. According to Davidoff & Lazarus:

Decision-making *structures and procedures* [my emphasis] relate very closely to issues of control and management of the school and are therefore central when considering the development of a democratic organisation. If we understand democracy, in its simple definitional form, to mean the appropriate involvement or participation of all relevant role-players in decisions relating to their organisation either through direct participation or representation, the school’s structures and procedures need to reflect this (2002:28).

The school under study lacks structures and procedures where parents can play a role. For instance, there are seven committees in this school – including a Counselling Committee, School Development Committee, Admission Committee – but only teachers are members of these committees, none of them include parents. I am aware of other schools where parents are included in such committees to let them (parents) have a place in the school structure and motivate their involvement. Parents are

educational stakeholders just like all other stakeholders and therefore they need to be motivated and encouraged by school management to do their best in school governance. Everard *et al.* (2004:145) similarly see this as management's responsibility: "the management's task is to look after the interests of all stakeholders and keep some sort of balance between them". Some respondents identified the importance of having parents as partners in education. For example Teacher 3 expressed that:

We need to be part of the education, all of us, I mean teachers, education officials as well as parents, and make decisions that benefit learners. Parents sent their children to school therefore it's impossible to remove them completely from the education of their children (Chapter 4, page 65).

Similarly, the involvement and participation of various stakeholders and democratisation of the education system is emphasised by the MBEC (1993), which states:

In order to teach about democracy, our teachers, and our education system as a whole must practise democracy. A democratic education system is organised around broad participation in decision-making and the clear accountability of those who are our leaders.

The school management should help parents to learn and practise their roles effectively in school governance which is in agreement with Lewin's words cited in Weisbord (1987:97): "leading people to set goals, choose methods and make decisions is learned. Nobody is born knowing participative management". In other words participative management is something that people must learn and be helped to learn; hence school management has a role to play if parents are expected to perform effectively. Erasmus & van der Westhuizen (2002:247) stressed that "The core of participative management is the fact that teachers are allowed and encouraged to participate in the management of the school and in the decision-making process". They (*ibid.*) added, "It is important to note that participative management is not implemented only in order to come to decisions or solve problems, but is an *integral part of the relationship* between the school principal and teachers" [my emphasis]. Although their comments focus on teacher involvement, I would argue that within the broad framework of democratic management as captured in the quotation from the Manual (cited above), they apply equally to parental involvement. Effective leadership and management encourage participation of all stakeholders in the management process.

It appeared from data that parents do take decisions and participate but still need help in order to make effective decisions as Teacher 2 stressed: “parents do not know the procedures to follow when taking decisions”. I think school management needs to empower parents so that they can make effective decisions, as the Principal was of the opinion that parents on the School Board must make decisions that benefit the school. This is in line with what Sergiovanni (2001:151) called the three dimensions to enablement:

- (1) Empowering principals, teachers, parents and others by giving them the discretion they need to function autonomously on behalf of school goals and purposes;
- (2) providing them with the support and training they need to function autonomously; and
- (3) removing the bureaucratic obstacles that keep them from being autonomous.

In my opinion, empowerment raises people’s confidence and assertiveness; Loock cited in Niitembu (2005:9) also stressed: “the aim of empowerment is excellence”. He (*ibid.*) added “An empowered individual is neither the unwilling victim of externally driven changes, nor the innovator who reacts unthinkingly to every whim. He or she responds to the challenge by recreating his or her own vision and by releasing the energy and confidence to put his or her ideas into practice”. Empowerment is one of the strategies that the school management can adopt to enhance parents’ participation either in school governance or other school activities. In this regard, Moloj (2002:70), writing in a South African context, strongly emphasised that “To survive in a highly competitive environment, knowledgeable and empowered school teams are crucial to success”.

Davidoff & Lazarus (2002:175) also emphasised that “Empowerment is fundamentally related to participation, and it is important simply because it is a basic human need to feel a sense of control over your life”. Empowerment leads to human satisfaction, enhances a sense of confidence and belonging among individuals in the work place and this is the aim of participative management. The study of Msila (2004:305) highlighted the need for parents’ empowerment: “parents from impoverished backgrounds also need to be empowered if they are to make a meaningful contribution to the education of the learners”. Bush (2003b:65) also stressed the fact that “empowerment of school level governing bodies is one of the manifestations of many education systems”. All the above quotes emphasise the

essence of empowerment, which I believe is one of the recipes for enhancing involvement.

The view expressed by the Principal that “Parents need someone from the Ministry to address them, a person who can clarify their roles in education and motivate them to participate and involve themselves in school activities” (Chapter 4, page 66) makes me think that the Principal is ‘tired’ and thinks that he has done enough and therefore there is nothing else he can try to make parents come closer to the school. This is a traditional way of thinking when school managers wait for someone to come and do their work. I am of the opinion that principals of rural schools must have courage, a sense of purpose, and the “preparedness to act, move from passivity and victim-hood to active agency” (Christie, 2001:54).

My views find support in the statement by Owens (2001:298), who stressed that “Shifting from traditional methods to participative methods requires administrators to develop a new understanding of power, a new sense of administrative wisdom”. Similarly, the South African *Task Team Report* also emphasised that “Managers can no longer simply wait for instructions or decisions from government. The pace of change and the need to be adaptable and responsive to local circumstances requires that managers develop new skills and styles of working” (Department of Education, 1996:14). Furthermore, Davidoff & Lazarus (2002:173) emphasised the point that “knowing how to lead and manage appropriately does not depend only on learning specific skills but rather developing ourselves so that we are able to respond with greater depth, breadth and understanding in any given situation”. In my view the principal of the school under investigation need to learn and develop skills of how to deal with certain issues including parents’ involvement.

The findings show that apart from talking to parents in parent meetings nothing else was done to motivate and encourage parents to participate in school activities, as the Principal stated that “no fundraising or other activities took place at school as a way of bringing parents closer to the school or enhancing their participation and involvement” (Chapter 4, page 66). This shows that the Principal and the management team effort need to be increased, and they should look for other means of strengthening parents’ involvement in order to run an effective organisation. I believe

in the words of Greenfield & Ribbins (1993:141) who said that “Organisations are run by managers who must make decisions about goals, policies, and strategies of action that influence human values and behaviour, both within and outside the organisation”.

I feel that the principal needs to encourage and practise collegiality. As discussed earlier (page 76) Bush (2003a:57) asserted that “There are powerful advantages to participation, as long as it is at the discretion of the principal, the practice of collegiality is likely to fall well short of its potential”. The Principal needs to practice collegial leadership, which Bush (2003b:75) pointed out “influences and [is] influenced by the nature of the decision-making process”. He (*ibid.*) added that “because policy is determined within a participative framework, the head or principal is expected to adopt strategies, which acknowledge that issues may emerge from different parts of the organisation and be resolved in a complex interactive process”. Hence, decision-making and problem-solving are some of the main activities the school governance deals with. As far as participative management is concerned, the Principal cannot work as an individual since there are a lot of pressures in the work of a school leader but rather practise a leadership style that can succeed in “gaining commitment of followers, in bonding staff and stakeholders together and stresses the importance of collaboration and interpersonal relationship” (Bush, 2003b:79).

5.3.3 Team learning: ‘Individuals cannot do it alone’

The Principal and school management alone cannot make participative management completely successful; nor can parents learning as individuals make any difference. All stakeholders must learn together as “team learning balances the need to be responsive to others with the need for advocacy” (Moloi 2002:55). Moloi added “Team learning teaches team members to attend to the perceptions of others in order to arrive at shared meanings and mutual understanding”. The data suggest that there are divergent meanings and understanding on parental involvement so this indicates that this School Board lacks a shared vision which could lead to shared meanings and mutual understanding.

Learning together as partners can be a better solution to the effective implementation of participative management, the process of decentralisation of power and specifically

the work of School Board. One parent mentioned, “I just learned my roles as time went on”. This shows the need of team learning and partnership. Fullan (1993:96) highlighted that “Partnership among a variety of stakeholders in for the long haul, is another essential ingredient for learning individuals and learning organisations”.

There is no doubt that participative management is a new notion in the Namibian education system that was introduced after independence in 1990. It is against this background that it is a relatively new challenge to rural schools that requires new learning and adoption of changes. Learning as a team can help the entire school to become a learning organisation as Senge (2006:129) summed it up: “Organisations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organisational learning, but without it no organisational learning occurs”. The most effective way for team learning is through dialogue, which Senge described as follows:

During the dialogue process, people learn how to think together – not just in the sense of analysing a shared problem or creating new pieces of shared knowledge but in the sense of occupying a collective sensibility, in which the thoughts, emotions, and resulting actions belong not to one individual, but to all of them together (2000:75).

Dialogue does not only mean members exchange words but also “explore complex issues” (Moloi, 2002:55). In my view, if teams like School Boards could engage in dialogue they will learn how to think and work together. This point finds support in French & Bell (1995:96) who argued, “Involvement in team learning empowers us to work together skilfully and honour the diversity of individual members and individuals who function in other teams”. Team learning and dialogue can be a solution to lack of participation and shyness in some parents as some respondents claimed (Chapter 4, page 64). The discipline of dialogue can be exercised even in School Board meetings by applying what Senge called “open dialogue” (2000:76):

This means giving every participant an opportunity to simply speak for a minute about what he or she is thinking, is feeling, or noticed. Stress the value of speaking from personal experience. When people know that they will have some air-time, they tend to relax (*ibid.*).

Learning as a team will help parents and teachers to create visions, share knowledge, develop skills and share understandings, which are currently lacking in the School Board of the school under investigation. Moloi (2002:57) maintained “individuals cannot do it alone”. She (*ibid.*) added “We need to support each other and analyse the skill gap in our schools. We need to commit the resources needed to ensure that we can deal with the challenges of change”. These statements concur with the features of participative management such as co-operation, commitment, shared vision, ownership and collegiality that schools need to adopt. Personally, I think people in the school under investigation need to commit themselves to those features and learn together since I believe that managing or learning as individuals would not succeed as much the team does.

However, Senge pointed to some challenges of applying dialogue and warned about the techniques of dialogue:

No matter how wilfully you engage in the practice, you can't force dialogue to happen. You can't 'will' yourself into greater awareness and sensitivity as a team. You need the techniques of dialogue to help you build a container – an environment that promotes collective inquiry – and to learn to pay careful attention to what is happening within it and yourself. At the same time, technique in itself cannot get you to your goal (1994:374).

5.3.4 Motivation and teamwork

Most of the parents in my study feel motivated by several things to serve on the School Board, for instance their education standard that they feel is much better compared with other parents in the community (Chapter 4, page 68). One parent expressed that: “what motivated me to be a member is only my understanding of education and my hard working as I want to be exemplary to other parents who do not know the importance of education”. Motivation is an important aspect in participative management and people often feel motivated by different things, as Owens identified:

Individuals are neither motivated only by their own internal perceptions, needs, and characteristics nor by external demands,

expectations, and environmental conditions, but by an interaction of the two (2001:365).

According to the data parents in this study are motivated by their own internal perceptions and not by external demands, which shows the lack of the interaction emphasised by Owens. Clegg, Kornberger & Pitsis (2005:248) stressed the importance of motivation particularly on leaders and managers: “there is no single theory or approach to leadership that fails to recognise that a fundamental quality of leaders is an ability to inspire and motivate people. Motivation is necessary whether you are to lead yourself, lead others or be led by others”. Leaders or managers need to inspire and motivate their followers or subordinates and stakeholders to work meaningfully to achieve the organisational goals, then followers will feel motivated and continue motivate themselves and each other.

Rather than receive huge support and encouragement from the Ministry and the school, parents said that they are self-motivated and want to be members of the School Board to serve their community. This kind of motivation is often not easy to find especially in this kind of duty when a lot of voluntary work and sacrifice is required. However, parents need to *be* motivated and *be given* the sense of ownership of their school through collaborative decision-making and teamwork. This is the aspect of motivation that appears to be weak in the case under investigation, which, as Davidoff & Lazarus (2002:177) put it, “would make it difficult to build a healthy organisational life”.

The parents and teachers of this School Board stressed that they work as a team. One parent stated: “in our school, we work together as a team. In School Board we know that these are teachers and those are parents but whenever we are discussing something we are all the same and equal” (Chapter 4, page 70). And one of the teachers said: “We work as a team and solve problems peacefully” (Teacher 1 Chapter 4, page 70).

Teamwork is one of the important aspects of organisational success. The chief advantage of teamwork identified by Ngcongco (cited in Mungunda, 2003:50) is that “Group members give one another support and that joint energy of group members is

likely to bring about success more quickly than that of individual members”. I personally believe that when people work as a team they always reach a better result and this makes teamwork popular and a successful process for those striving for success. Clegg *et al.* (2005:173) emphasised that “Teamwork is now seen to have a much wider utility”, and added that “it is not just a means of producing collaboration between distinct organisational units; it is also a way to enhance the effectiveness of members of the same organisational unit”. Teamwork is a strong aspect which I think is behind the achievements of the School Board as identified by participants (Chapter 4, page 67). In a study of participative management in a South African school, Stofile (2005:15) found that:

Teamwork in an organisation creates synergy because the sum of the effort of team members is far greater than the sum of people working alone. In a team situation each member contributes to the success of others and this collaboration of different members to bring about an integrated achievement is the secret that lies behind the success and effectiveness of high performing organisation.

Everard *et al.* (2004:173) identified some aspects of teamwork that appear to exist in this School Board: “The degree of openness and trust in the team; the use of resources; the clarity of tasks and decisions; non-verbal communication; the extent to which values are explicit and shared; the degree of commitment; and whether action follows discussions”.

The point made by the chairperson – that they suspend their status (e.g. parent and teachers) and become one team – shows their co-operation and inter-dependence. Clegg *et al.* (2005:211) argued, “Working in teams means we are quite dependent upon others in achieving outcomes”. However, they added (2005:217) that teamwork should not be claimed in situations when it is not effectively used: “in general, don’t use teamwork for simple, routine, or meaningless tasks or in situations in which the whole team is dependent on the performance of one or two members”. My sense of the School Board under investigation is that all members contribute to the team as a whole, though, as already pointed out, members’ perceptions of their roles may differ.

Another factor that participants stressed is good relationships between the Principal, teachers and parents in the School Board. As one participant claimed, “According to

the parents I had been working with they are good people which means we have very good relationship” (Chapter 4, page 70). Buchel (1992:79) claimed: “The successful functioning of the school is dependent on good relations between the principal and the governing body of the school”. One factor that I think strengthens the good relationships claimed by participants is the point that this School Board comprises only local people, which means that all teachers and parents in this School Board were born, grew up or live permanently in the area where the school is situated. My experience of people in my area is that they mostly like to engage, trust and feel free to work with people they know well. This is in line with parent 2’s words: “teachers from other areas are not responsible and they do not even like to attend parent meetings, unlike those who were born or grew up here” (Chapter 4, page 53). Lewin & Regine in Raynor identified the following characteristics of successful relationships:

Relationships built on authenticity, mutual care and trust will have the quality to accept diversity and use it to good effect as they respect others’ mental models. They will build a community of care and attention, where people feel they can influence things and be part of a larger purpose (2004:126).

Good relationships reinforce participation of members, as they would find that warmth and a friendly atmosphere prevails and have a positive effect on boosting the parents’ morale in the School Board. Stofile (2005:88) claimed “Warm and friendly relations promote the spirit of togetherness, which leads to the provision of better solutions to problems and acceptance of decisions by members”.

Relationships go hand in hand with trust. When parents and teachers trust each other and do not doubt each other’s action, especially in connection with finances, it generally results in a good and strong relationship and this is what I think is happening in this school. Raynor (2004:130) stressed the point that “Trusting others can mean you see the same qualities in them and you have confidence in their trustworthiness.” He further argued that “we can trust the relationship that it is not too fragile, that we can rely on the co-operative intentions of those in the relationship, who will be concerned for each other’s welfare and growth”.

5.3.5 Adopting a systems thinking discipline

The understanding of the sense of interdependence between parents and educators is crucial with regard to effective parental involvement. However, a sense of being a team in which members are interdependent on each other may not be enough for effective integration in the functioning of a school as an organisation where interconnectedness is more than interdependence. This study and others of the same nature (Heystek, 2004; van Wyk, 2004) have shown that there is little sense of interconnectedness of people in school governance, which shows the need for adopting the systems thinking discipline. The discipline of systems thinking emphasises the linkage between people in the team, “the roles of their team in the organisation and the organisation’s relationship to the larger environment” (Moloi, 2002:62). In similar vein, Senge (2000:8) described the discipline of systems thinking as follow:

In this discipline, people learn to better understand interdependence and change and thereby are able to deal more effectively with the forces that shape the consequences of their actions.

We have to understand and adapt to changes of the system we are working in, for instance to adapt to the changes brought by the Namibian Education Act of 2001. Moloi (2002:67) stated that: “we need to understand that change is given and is here to stay. How we accept and deal with change, from both within and outside our schools, will set us apart as educators *or stakeholders* [my emphasis]”. Similarly, Davidoff & Lazarus (2002:5) also stressed the point that “The school is at the heart of educational change. It therefore needs to equip to manage such change effectively, which means that it needs to become a learning organisation”. The school is a place where most educational policy is implemented, therefore teams and individuals in schools need a better understanding of those changes in order to effectively implement those policies, and this is one of the aspects that are lacking in the school under investigation.

Senge (2006:3) clarified that “a learning organisation is a place where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and

where people are continually learning how to act together”. This idea of a learning organisation can help the school to create conditions that can make individuals (parents and teachers) and teams (School Board) learn through shared understanding, shared meanings and shared visions.

The discipline of system thinking not only promotes interdependence and the ability to change among individuals and teams in the organisation but also stresses the interconnectedness between the school and the environment. For instance, one of the respondents (parent 1) stressed the point that some teachers do not like to attend parents’ meetings (Chapter 4, page 53). The idea is simply that the interaction between parents and teachers is not effective. The Principal also emphasised that parents do not visit the school except when specifically requested by the school to do so. Against this background I agree with Moloi who stressed that:

When educators interact with the parent community they create a context that allows them to identify their assumptions about what happens in the school and provides clarity when it needed. Through this interaction, parents and educators learn from each other and make efforts to work together and solve problems together (2002:3).

The points raised by respondents highlights that all educational stakeholders need to see the need of their interdependency and apply the discipline of systems thinking. This discipline teaches us that our schools are organisations in which all groups and aspects of education structure – such as departments and committees – are in continuous interaction and interconnection. The point here is that we do not only need each other for the school to exist (teachers, learners and parents), but we also need to see the interconnectedness of all aspects of the organisation – departments, committees and teams – and their contribution and meaningfulness to the success of the entire organisation. Therefore stakeholders need to meet each other half-way and see their interconnectedness in order to achieve the organisational goals. Moloi (2002:65) summed up the advantages and benefits of applying systems thinking: “the discipline of system thinking teaches us that we will arrive at a better understanding of any social phenomenon if we look at the whole picture”. Moloi added, “In systems thinking, the school is perceived as a system that is interconnected with different parts of life that intersect and influence each other. The interrelated parts are bound together in such a way that they become coherent in relation to one another” (*ibid.*).

5.3.6 Sense of achievement

From the data it emerged strongly that there is a sense of achievement from the School Board elected in 2003 in accordance with Namibian Act 16 of 2001. Despite many challenges experienced by stakeholders with parents' involvement in school governance, it is clear that at least they are doing something important and are making some differences in aspects like discipline, purchasing school assets, decision-making and recommending the appointment of personnel: as many respondents pointed out (Chapter 4, page 67) "The School Board is really working in terms of developing the school, disciplining learners and teachers as well" (Teacher 1).

The Chairperson put it as follows:

At our school, we achieved some things like buying the photocopy machine, we developed the mission statement with teachers' assistance and the emblem that was drafted by learners and we just give our approval. Now we are trying to get a school patron and donors to help our school finances and to provide assets like computers, overhead projects, video machines and other things.

Both teachers and parents acknowledged the fact that parents' involvement results in some achievements. This confirms the views of English (2005:241), who claimed that: "despite the challenges involved in building bridges between schools and communities, many educators have come to embrace the value of parental involvement in schools".

I feel that it is very important and motivating when participative management results in achievement. We also must note that participative management, more specifically school governing bodies, only became important after independence and therefore they still have a long way to go before they become effective especially in rural areas. Though this School Board is not fulfilling all its responsibilities, there is a sense of improvement and a hope of much better outcome in years to come by comparing the findings of the study of School Boards of 1997 by Mendelsohn, who reported that:

The new Namibian government decided to promote parents' participation through democratic School Boards but yet there is no structure or evidence of what they had done to improve schools (1997:258).

However it is also evident from the data that parents play a role in minor responsibilities like discipline and school infrastructures, as Christie (2001:56) found out “Many schools mentioned the importance of having parents as a backstop in discipline”. Teacher 2 confirmed this when mentioned that: “The School Board needs to be there to solve teachers’ and learners’ problems”. Likewise, *Emerging Voices* (HSRC, 2005:121) emphasised that “decisions on critical issues (employment policy, school management, school funds and fees) seem to be domination of the educators in SGB and the principal”. One teacher in this research revealed that:

Though parents make contributions and take decisions as well, in many cases they just accept what teachers have said, and the Principal, especially regarding financial matters. (Chapter 4, page 64)

Levin cited in Ngidi (2004:260) strongly highlighted the fact that:

One rationale for the choice of decentralised school governance is the argument that it will improve decision-making about teaching and learning, result in more effective use of resources, and contribute to more effective practice and outcome. However although parents have more knowledge of local conditions, they often know little about larger issues that are just as important in determining an appropriate course of action.

The above quote stresses lack of educational knowledge among parents, which is the reason for their failure to take decisions in major issues such as the financial and teacher conduct matters. In line with the above point of parents’ inability, Teacher 2 stated “When it comes to decision-making parents do not know the procedures that they have to follow and in many cases they want to take decisions the way they do at home”.

5.3.7 The essence of school governance

Stakeholders, such as governors, parents and local education authority, represent very potent forces acting on the school. In evaluating where they are placed on the matrix, you need to consider how each is disposed towards innovation in the school, and how much they see management processes as being devolved and democratic, or remaining tightly line-managed (Raynor, 2004:88).

The above quote highlights the aim of having stakeholders, their place and roles in school management. The theory of participative management and the decentralisation process have underpinned the importance of stakeholders' participation in the School Board. One advantage of the School Board is highlighted by Teacher 2 when he states that: "Some parents are very initiating. They have good suggestions, advise the Principal, teachers and learners on what to do. Therefore the School Board is very much needed" (Chapter 4, page 67).

Almost all respondents pointed to a number of benefits (co-operation, teamwork, good relationships) that accrue from adopting a participative approach of which the dominant idea was that it resulted in willingness to share ideas, participative decision-making and representation of all stakeholders. This supports Lewin's core principle: "we are likely to modify our own behaviour when we participate in problem analysis and solution and likely to carry out decisions we have helped make" (Weisbord, 1987:89). The idea of including parents in the decision-making body has a number of benefits, such as feeling ownership of decisions and representing the community, as one respondent stated, "Parents in the School Board represent other parents in the community and make their voices heard" (Chapter 4, page 69).

School governance is an important part of the school management, which comes into operation through the school governing body and practises several vital roles as identified by Davidoff & Lazarus:

School governing bodies have a central role to play in developing a common vision for the school, incorporating the values and principles embodied in the school's mission statement in a school policy that can guide the practices in the school, and overseeing the financial and other central roles in providing leadership to the school (2002:38).

Potgieter *et al.* (1997:6) stressed the idea of transformation and democratisation of education in the South African context:

The democratisation of education includes the idea that stakeholders such as parents, teachers, learners, and other people (such as members of the community near school) must participate in the activities of the school. The governing body makes decisions on behalf of the school and sees to it that the school is administered properly. Through

representation on the governing body all stakeholders can share in the decisions of that body. The members of the governing body are also accountable to these stakeholders.

The governing body is regarded as a guardian of the school, which should exercise the capacity of guarding the school with wisdom, insight, skills, courage and understanding.

5.4 Challenges of parents' involvement

5.4.1 Literacy and understanding of educational matters

The respondents identified several challenges that hinder parents' involvement. The main challenge is poor educational background, which resulted in lack of understanding of educational terms and language in use (English) as pointed out by the respondents. Illiteracy and low educational level has played a role in inefficiency of School Boards particularly in rural schools, as Maile cited in Ngidi (2004:260) remarked: "Illiteracy among the members of SGBs which is specially the case in the rural areas may contribute to their inefficiency". He further argued, "This is possible because illiteracy precludes parents from accessing relevant management information from the principal" (*ibid.*).

During the colonial era the country was often at war which is why most parents' age of 40 upwards did not get a good education, as Teacher 3 explained (Chapter 4, page 58):

It was tough and very dangerous to walk to school in those days. Landmines and soldiers were everywhere; therefore, many parents did not want to be separated from their children during the dangers of wartime.

Most of the parents did not receive a good education: the participants' profile (Appendix B) shows that the highest qualification obtained by parents in the School Board of this school is only grade 12. The quality of black education during the apartheid era was poor and resulted in poor understanding and lack of knowledge among its graduates. About the apartheid legacy, the *Task Team Report* argued that

“The neglect of the quality of African education, combined with a rapid increase in numbers of students, led to the disintegration of learning environments and the death of a culture of learning in many black schools” (Department of Education, 1996:18).

The change in languages (medium of instruction) from Afrikaans to English in the 1980s prevented many people from being proficient in either of the two languages. Therefore parents in the study have used other means to improve their understanding and update themselves, either by learning from their full-time careers or by using the media, as Parent 1 stated: “I used to read newspapers and listen to the radio and this helped me to learn and pick up some English words that I speak today” (Chapter 4, page 60).

5.4.2 Training

Another challenge is lack of proper training. The respondents described how training, which was largely ineffective, was provided only to some members. Some of the weaknesses identified by respondents were the use of English by the trainers while most of the parents (trainees) did not know English. For instance, Teacher 2 stated: “trainers used English words therefore sometimes parents cannot understand all information provided to them”. Van Wyk (2004:54) pointed out, “SGB workshops should be done in the language they (the parents) understand, not in the language that suits the providers”.

There is an indication that more training is needed and must be provided regularly as required by participants. Teacher 1 asserted (Chapter 4, page 62):

More training must be provided. There is a certain committee in the region that provides training to School Board members and I suggest that this committee must continue training members of the School Board.

This is in agreement with Owens (2001:295), who noted “One of the persistently under-recognised problems of implementing participative decision-making methods is the need to provide participants with training in the group process skills that are needed to make collaboration work well”. He (*ibid.*) further added “The intention to

collaborate in making decisions is simply not sufficient in itself”. In my view training is very important as it can alert members of what is expected from them as members of School Board, assures them of their responsibilities and motivates their involvement. Squelch argues that:

All role players should master a number of skills if they are to fulfil their task successfully. These include: problem-solving skills, conflict resolution, time management, change management and financial planning (2000:143).

Challenges for parents’ involvement has been identified by many researchers and now the question that we need to ask ourselves is what more should be done to reduce or eradicate those challenges. The Namibian Ministry of Education has identified one alternative, the School Board members’ handbook. The MBESC emphasised the aim of this handbook as:

To empower and assist School Boards in facing the everyday challenges in education in Namibia. It is an important tool in the process of improving collaboration and partnerships between all stakeholders in education development (2004:1).

However the above-mentioned handbook did not solve the problem at all, as one respondent pointed out that: “The booklets that are even provided are insufficient; the school was only given four booklets for nine School Board members” (Chapter 4, page 62). The number of handbooks must be increased so that all members can have their own copies that they can read as required. It is also interesting that the handbook is written in all languages so that even those who cannot speak English can read it for themselves. I strongly believe that if the ministry can put more effort into increasing and distributing enough copies of its booklet some improvement will be experienced, particularly on the roles and responsibilities of parents in the School Board which teachers in this research and in other similar studies claimed was ineffective.

5.4.3 A controversial matter of school finance

The participants stressed that school finances are part and parcel of School Board members’ responsibilities. Though respondents were free and confident to explain that they are responsible and accountable with school finance (Chapter 4, heading 4.4.1.3), it appeared clearly from the data that lack of understanding and carelessness

with regard to school money exist in this school. The treasurer revealed that: “because the school development fund usually received by class teachers, some teachers used to use this money for personal purposes and pay it back later” (Chapter 4, page 52). The use of school money for personal purposes is against the law and the School Board members are instructed to take care of it. The Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture (2004:17) emphasised: “School Board members should ensure that individuals at the school do not misuse money and other resources contributed by parents, guardians and the community”. In the same regard the Namibian Education Act (2001) section 25 (3) stated that:

A school development fund must not be used (a) for any purpose which does not directly benefit the learners or the school; or (b) for providing loans or any kind of borrowing by any person.

Though the Ministry of Education and the Act (2001) tried to stop teachers and principals from using school money for personal purposes, what I have experienced in my five-year teaching career is that the above section 25 (3) of the Education Act receives little attention from both principals and teachers. Most of the educators want to live the old ways when they were the only people controlling and handling school money. People are resistant to change; for instance it was revealed from the data that only teachers are authorised to sign or withdraw money from the school account. Those teachers have been granted that power before the implementation of the Education Act 2001 as the treasurer revealed that when she became a treasurer she found some teachers authorised to sign or withdraw from the school fund account and they did not change it (Chapter 4, page 51).

According to the Education Act (2001) “the treasurer must never be authorised to sign cheques or other form of withdrawals from the school development fund”. The Act further stressed that “any withdrawal from the school fund account must be made by means of a cheque or other withdrawal form co-signed by the school principal and the School Board chairperson, or any other two members of the School Board *specifically authorised* by the School Board” [my emphasis].

As far as the research revealed the principal and one teacher made withdrawals from the school account, in fact that teacher is not even a member of the School Board and he has been granted that power by the former principal who retired eight years ago.

This is an indication that the Namibian Education Act (2001) is not fully implemented in this school: because people feel that things are good the way they are and there is no need for change.

The School Board of this school did not take the responsibility of school finance seriously and they did not comply with the following words of the MBESC:

A thoroughly committed and properly organised School Board is a fundamental requirement for the effective running of a school. It facilitates links between education administrators, teachers, learners and the wider community and takes responsibility for ensuring that school policies are developed and implemented to meet the challenges of the future. It protects the interests of all stakeholders by demanding *financial accountability* and *transparency* (2004:20 – my emphasis).

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed the findings of my research through the lens of the literature. The findings are presented in themes that deeply highlighted various aspects of participative management as emerged from participant responses and the general picture of the data. My motive for discussing those themes was to make sense of the statements made by participants in the light of the theories of participative management and other literature that was relevant to my findings.

Furthermore, I made use of the information from the literature review (Chapter 2) to support the views expressed by the participants and compare them with the findings of other recent research studies. In the next chapter I summarise the main findings of my research and give my personal recommendations regarding the theory and practice of participative management, decentralisation of power and the practice of parents' involvement. Finally, I highlight the potential value and the limitations of my study and suggest areas worthy of further investigation.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed the main findings of my research drawn from the respondents' view. I discussed those data through the lens of the literature to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of parents' involvement and make sense of the research participants' views.

In this chapter I provide an overview of the main findings drawn from the themes discussed in the previous chapter. I also present my recommendations on parents' involvement and the democratic education system in Namibia. Finally, I suggest areas that are worthy of further research and conclude the chapter with the limitation of my research.

6.2 Summary of main findings

It is evident from the data collected that parents' involvement and participation in the School Board is a controversial challenge to both educators and parents themselves. Parents expressed confidently that they fulfil their roles and responsibilities in the School Board as required by the Namibian Education Act 16 of 2001, while teachers disagree. The dominant theme of my findings seems to be that in most cases the views of parents and educators contradict each other especially on fulfilment of School Board roles, understanding of educational matters and attendance. However, all participants agreed on a number of facts such the need for sufficient training, the good and strong relationship they have, and co-operation between members of the board. Parent members of the School Board acknowledged their participation and full involvement in the decision-making.

All participants strongly acknowledged the understanding of their powers in the School Board and a participative mode of decision-making, which resulted in good

co-operation, a sense of teamwork and team spirit. Good relationships were emphasised by all participants as an important aspect of teamwork.

The respondents emphasised and acknowledged the fact that the new School Board elected in 2003 in terms of the Namibian Education Act of 2001 has made a number of achievements compared with previous School Boards. The new School Board have utilised the school finances to purchase assets such as a photocopier machine, and have renovated classrooms. They have also been instrumental in resolving many disciplinary problems and other areas of school development.

However, this study revealed a number of challenges that hinder the effective involvement of parents in school governance. These include lack of educational background among parents, poor knowledge of the English language and lack of general understanding of educational terms. According to the participants, training of School Board members has been ineffective, inadequate, and provided only to some members, so they are now appealing to the Ministry of Education to provide training to all members in the language that parents and other participants understand.

I found that there was a lack of understanding and carelessness with regard to school finances. According to participants, money is collected by teachers and used for personal purposes on some occasions, which is against the law. In other words, the School Board is not taking responsibility and accountability for school finance, which is supposed to be one of its core roles. The findings also brought to the fore the fact that the principal and school management have not done enough to enhance parents' participation.

The main finding of this study, which underpins all others, is lack of and differences in understanding between the school and the parents. In other words the whole organisation (principals, teachers, parents) has not developed a joint understanding and shared vision. According to the findings it seems these obstacles had been caused by factors such as the Ministry not doing enough training, the school not making any effort and the concept of participative management being relatively new.

It is also evident from the data that the notion of participative management and decentralisation of power still has a long way to go. Implementation of changes receives little attention from those in authority and the managers are unwilling to be innovative and creative and to act as agents of change.

6.3 Potential value of the study

I was unable to find any other similar study set in Namibia and hence assume that this is the first of its kind. This makes it potentially a study from which much may be learned.

- I believe this study could provide the Namibian Ministry of Education and policy-makers a picture of parents' involvement in rural school governance after the implementation of the Education Act 16 of 2001. The challenges surrounding parents' participation and the implementation of the Act outlined in this study may help the Ministry to design and look for other strategies of dealing with such challenges.
- This study may open up potential avenues for other research. My study has explicitly brought out the issues surrounding the notion of participative management and decentralisation of power in the Namibian education system that other researchers might note when studying the same phenomenon.
- This research also provides guidelines on how stakeholders' participation in schools maybe encouraged which may be of value to principals and their SMTs who want to practise participative management in their schools through the notion of a learning organisation.

6.4 Recommendations

On the outcome of my findings I make the following recommendations on parental involvement:

- The Ministry of Education need to provide School Board members – especially parents – with effective and sufficient training that will empower

them to carry out their legal responsibilities effectively. Training should preferably be in participants' home language, even though the policy on which the training must be based remains in English.

- Principals and teachers must encourage parents to participate and learn to view parents' involvement positively. They need to include parents in school structures and programmes, and motivate their involvement.

- Principals need to adopt and react to the notion of participative management in a strategic way by positively accepting changes and fully implementing the Acts as required by the education system.

- Principals, teachers and parents should realise that they are partners in education; therefore they need to see their interconnectedness and interdependence and respect the partnership. Working as a team and supporting each other will help them to attain the organisational goals and enhance their partnership.

- Parents need to work towards overcoming the challenges facing them in school governance, for instance, by upgrading their educational level and learning the official language (English) through informal education and the media. This will give them the confidence to demand financial accountability and transparency and to ensure that the school provides a safe and stimulating educational environment to all learners.

- School governance is an area worthy of inclusion in the Namibian leadership and management programmes presented by institutes of higher learning. The notion of participative management is relatively new to Namibia and needs further support to be successfully implemented. I believe in the words of Kurt Lewin cited in Weisbord (1987:88) that:

Today, more than ever before, democracy depends upon the development of efficient forms of democratic social management and upon the spreading of the skill in such management.

6.5 Suggestion for further research

I suggest that further research needs to be done on the following aspects of parents' involvement:

- Stakeholders' perceptions and experience of parents' involvement in school governance, which should include learners and inspectors of education as my research excluded them. I believe they might have had different experiences and perceptions of parents' involvement. Including learners and inspectors may provide new insight and help to clarify the challenges more sharply.
- Large-scale research is needed on parental involvement generally in education in rural schools as my research targeted only parents in school governance. This too might enrich our understanding of the problems and challenges. Furthermore, it would be useful to find out how parents view their involvement in the education of their children, since my study targeted only their roles in the management of the school, specifically on school governance.
- More research needs to be conducted to investigate whether the gap in understanding discovered in this study is a widespread phenomenon. This will provide more information to help us understand the problem more clearly and look for effective solutions.
- Further research needs to be done on investigating the financial responsibilities and accountability of School Board/SGB members, especially in rural schools. The aspect of school finance has many problems that School Boards may find difficult to control because of their limited understanding of finance.

- This study has found that this school is doing little to involve parents in governance. There is a need for research to explore what school management teams are doing to enhance parental involvement.

6.6 Limitations of the study

Since this is a small-scale-case study it has a number of limitations, such as the time and scope constraints and limited non-generalisable findings.

As this study is a half-thesis it focused on only one combined (Grade 1-10) rural school of Ohangwena Education region in Namibia. I researched a small group of eight people (all present or former School Board members), which include the principal, two teacher members of the School Board, one teacher (a former member of the School Board) and four parents all serving on the School Board. Unfortunately my study did not include two learner members of the School Board because they had just been elected when I was collecting data and I felt that they had no experience of being with parents in the School Board.

Because of this limitation in terms of site and participants, my study makes no attempt to generalise its findings beyond the informants studied. My aim in this study was to explore views, understanding and experiences of participants of the phenomenon of parents' involvement in school governance as I outlined throughout the thesis.

I used different data methods that allowed me to triangulate and provide rich data. I cross-checked the data collected from all techniques namely interview, observation and document analysis and provided the interview data to participants for member checking. Furthermore, I presented the data as provided by research participants and gathered through observation and document analysis. To claim the validity of my study as a researcher working in the interpretive paradigm, I suspended my knowledge of the notion of parents' involvement and leave the data to speak for

themselves. Again I did not make an attempt to influence the setting or participants in one way or another.

As I claimed earlier, my study is not statistically generalisable but like all other case studies it is possible for readers to find my findings similar or applicable to their own context. Stake refers to this as naturalistic generalisation:

Naturalistic generalisations develop within a person as a product of experience. They derive from the tacit knowledge of how things are, why they are, how people feel about them, and how these things are likely to be later or in places with which this person is familiar (2000:22).

I hope that readers will recognise and identify with some of the issues raised in the thesis. Although it is a small case study I hope that it adds to the growing body of knowledge on this important issue of parents' involvement in school governance. The recommendations made may also prove important in seeking for changes and improvements in the phenomenon of parents' involvement.

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Appendix A

The research protocol form

I-----hereby agree to participate in an interview with Martha Megumbo Niitembu. I understand that she will be enquiring about my roles, attitude towards, understanding, and experience of being a member of School Board at this school. Furthermore I understand that I have rights to withdraw or change any information I provide in this interview and my participation is voluntary.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B

School Board members' profile

Name:

.....
.....

Marital status:.....

Age:.....

Present post of responsibility in School Board:

.....
.....

Educational background:

.....
.....
.....
.....

Current career or occupation:

.....
.....

Year of appointment to School

Board:.....

School Board experience:

.....
.....
.....
.....

Did you occupy any other responsibilities in the community? If yes, specify:.....

.....
.....
.....
.....

Appendix C

Interview questions:

Teachers' members of the School Board:

1. What are the functions of this board?
2. How did parents become members of the School Board the (criteria)?
3. What is your experience of being with parents in the School Board?
4. What do you think are main roles of parents in the School Board?
5. According to your experience, do you think parents fulfil and understand their roles in School Board? Why or Why not?
6. What are the obstacles/challenges facing parents in the School Board?
7. How can parents' involvement in the School Board be improved?
8. What are the benefits/advantages of effective parents' involvement in the School Board?
9. As a member, how is your relationship with parents in the School Board?
10. Can you think of some contribution/achievement made by parents in the School Board to this school so far?
11. Do you think the School Boards are working/needed? Why or why not?

Principal:

1. What are your experiences of parents' involvement in the School Board of your school in the past 10-5 years?
2. What do you think are roles and powers of parents in the School Board?
3. To what extent do parents fulfil those roles and why?
4. How do you describe parents' understanding of their involvement in school governance?
5. What are the issues/problems you experienced in working with parents in School Board & in general?
6. What do you think should be done to improve the current situation?
7. What are your roles or the key functions of the principal in the School Board?
8. How is your relationship with parents in the School Board and all parents in general?
9. What have the parents/School Board done so far to improve the school?
10. What are the key issues of concern in the School Board of your school?

Parents:

1. How did you become a member of the School Board?
2. What are your roles in the School Board?
3. How did you get to know your roles? Did you undergo training? How effective this service was provided?
4. How often do you meet, in School Board? {What are the factors you mostly discuss}?

5. What are the other factors you think you should discuss that you are not discussing now and why?
6. How is the level of your involvement in school decision-making and finance?
7. What difficulties and problematic issues did you meet in fulfilling your role in school governance?
8. How do you describe your relationship with the principal/teachers?
9. Is being a member of School Board demanding?
10. What motivates you and what do you enjoy most in involving in School Board?
11. What are the contributions you (parents) made as governors to develop/update the school?
12. Is the School Board working/needed? Why or why not?