The Role of School Governance in the Democratisation of Public Schools: A Reference to KwaCeza Circuit in Kwazulu Natal Province

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ABSTRACT The research focused on the role of the capacity, skills and knowledge of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) in the democratisation of public schools situated in KwaCeza Circuit- one of the circuits in KwaZulu-Natal province. The research methodology used could be described as qualitative, exploratory and descriptive in nature. Stratified purposive sampling was used to select participants who were selected according to preselected criteria (that is, being SGB members) relevant to the research questions. Data were collected by means of two focus groups interviews, one involving the principals of the schools and the other the SGB members of the same schools. An analysis of the data revealed a number of challenges which SGBs in KwaCeza Circuit experienced. Amongst others, one challenge was that parents had limited knowledge of their roles and responsibilities, with the result that school governance of the school became adversely affected. That implied that some of the SGBs would have to be trained to be functional.

INTRODUCTION

Schooling in South Africa during the pre-1994 period was characterised by socio-economic and socio-political problems (South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) 2000).This was due to the policy of separate development instituted by the apartheid government. This resulted in the lack of participation of majority of people in affairs that concerned them (DoE 2002). The post-1994 democratic dispensation meant that democratic values and practices be instilled. The democratisation process was also introduced in schools (Department of Education1996). School governance for example was placed in community based governing bodies (SGBs) while curriculum delivery was placed in the hands of school based management teams (SMTs) (DoE 2000).

Education was a discriminatory one being individual- centred and more of change resistance. In 1994 South Africa became a true democratic country after many years of oppression, racial separation and inequality caused by the system of Apartheid. The legacy of Apartheid and the many years of international isolation meant that, as part of the transformation process, the educational reform had to be fundamental and wide ranging if South Africa was to become a modern, democratic state participat-ing in global political economy of the 21st century (Harber 2001). Nzimande (1998) indicated that, given the history of the lack of participation by communities in the affairs of education, it is important that structures that would facilitate the participation of communities at grassroots level were created. He further noted that a unitary system of education was to be created to ensure the balance between national co-ordination and policy development and participation at the same time. Christie (2004) concurred with Nzimande that the South African education could have been administered by a single department of education. The recommendation made by De Lange (1981) was that there was to be one department of education for all in the country.

Statement of the Problem

Parents form the largest number in the school governing body. In most public schools, especially in KwaCeza circuit they are illiterates, which compound difficulties in the school governing affairas they are easily manipulated by the principals of the schools. The biggest problem is that what literate capacity is required to help the members of the schools governing bodies to know and understand their roles in education. In other words: "What could be done to

help the SGBs to know, understand their roles and functions in the governance of the school in ordernot to be influenced by the principals during decision making?"

The Research Aim

This study aims at exploring the roles and functions of SGBs in KwaCeza circuit in process of democratising public schools.

Objectives of the Study

To explore the legislative requirements regard the democratisation of public schools.
Identify the role played by governing bodies in the democratisation process of their schools try to understand the attitude of SGB members as being school governors.

Literature Review

The KwaCeza Circuit is one of the school circuits in the Vryheid District in KwaZulu-Natal. Schools in this circuit are located in communities that are poor, mostly illiterate and sceptical about schooling. Before 1994 democratic processes were not followed culminating in resistance to adopt democratic practices that were taking place in their lives. Establishment of school governing bodies was a challenge for the principals. In most schools principals had to make decision on their own without involving School Governing Bodies and School Management Team as well as any stakeholders. The autocratic leadership is a norm in most schools in the area of north of the uThukela river (Mncube and Naidoo 2014).

It is quite common to proclaim the necessity and desirability of parental involvement in our public schools. Sarason (1995) opines that: "Such proclamation has the ring of virtue, inclusion, and a democratic ethos." The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 led to a new approach to school governance in South African schools. Most significant was the democratic governance of schools through the involvement of stakeholders (Xaba 2004). This was a move welcomed by the government to have communities not only getting involved in the education of their children but to have a marked influence in the organisation and governance of schools (Maluleka 2008).

Van Wyk and Lemmer (2002) assert that the main thrust of the South African Schools Act of 1996 was that the state had inadequate financial and organisational capacity to do everything for schools,all stakeholders, parents, educators, learners and local community members had to be actively involved in the organisation, governance and funding of schools. The idea stemmed from the strong belief that schools were run well when governed by local people, since these people are well placed when it came to identifying the problems and needs of their schools – provided that they were well prepared to accept the responsibilities of their governance (Maluleka 2008).

SASA (1996) offered parents and guardians more power and role to play in the governance of schools and indeed in the education of their children. Summing up the rights and responsibilities of parents and guardians, SASA (1996) emphasizes that "parents or guardians have the right to be consulted by the state authorities with respect to the form that education should take and to take part in its governance"(Quan-Baffour 2006; Mncube and Naidoo 2014).

The preparation of these stakeholders to assume their governance responsibilities remains the challenge to both the Department of Education as the controlling body and the schools as the site for governance practices (Maluleka 2008).Van Wyk and Lemmer (2002) warn that in order to perform their duties and carry out their responsibilities in an effective and efficient way, school governing body should have the capacity to do so.

School governance is a legal responsibility, which needs particular skills, knowledge and expertise to ensure that member will be able to fulfil the concomitant legal duties and accountability. Besides, the functionality of the schools depends on the level of knowledge, skills and expertise of the school governing body. In this regard Xaba (2004) asserts for the delivery of effective teaching and learning in schools. The various component members therefore need to perform their functions and their roles in a way that promotes the best of the child in the school.

Principals as stakeholders in school governance are required to be both managers and leaders of effective teaching and learning (Southworth 2002). Their roles as managers include marketing the school, liaising with all the stakeholders in education and managing resources.

The principal should develop and deploy a marketing strategy for the school which interacted with external environment in order to produce quality education. In so doing, the principal would be promoting the school which could result in a great deal of success in developing and improving the relationship between the school and its clients (Davis and Ellison 1991).

As part of the governance structure of the school, the governing body falls under the authority of the national and provincial structures, namely the Minister of Education, Member of the Executive Council (HoD) and the Head of Department (Potgieter et al. 1997).The governing body is responsible for the making of policy or the laying down of broad guidelines for planning and decision making in the school. All stakeholders are represented as elected members.

In South Africa, education is organized at national, provincial and local levels. These spheres of government are distinctive, but also interdependent and interrelated. These bodies make laws, regulations and rules on education, and continue to work together according to principles set out in the constitution. The school governing body has; through the process of decentralization, become part of this system of governance with vested powers (Potgieter et al. 1997).

Co-operative governance is the bedrock of education governance and should provide the ways and means of achieving democratic, participative, transparent and accountable school governance (Davies 2001). Thus the school governing body should know and understand its position, functions and powers in order to make critical contribution within the education system. Xaba (2011) is of the opinion that the essence and effectiveness of the training of the school governors received was questionable.

Potgieter et al. (1997) argued that the following constitutional principles for co-operative government were applicable to school governance and members of the school governing body:
  * The activities of the school governing body should preserve the peace, harmony and stability of the school.
  * They should secure the well-being of all stakeholders in education
  * They should provide effective, transparent and accountable governance for the school.

It is therefore, fundamental that members of the school governing body were to understand their collective and individual roles within their sphere of co-operative governance. Under the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, the governing body in each public school assumed joint responsibility with the provincial education authorities for the provision and control of education (Nkosana 2003). According to Looyen (2000) co-operative governance could only be fruitful when there was a closer understanding of the roles, responsibilities and functions of governors. These concepts were to be clearly defined and understood. It is for this reason, according to him, that the training of governors formed a cornerstone in affirming and empowering governors to execute their functions with the view to increase school effectiveness and efficiency based on the principle of democracy. This is in concert with the observations made by Quan-Baffour and Arko-Achemfuor (2014) who indicated that they were aware of their roles in the school system.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study data was collected using an ethnographic method. Ethnography is a description and interpretation of cultural or social group or system. Although there is some disagreement about the precise meaning of the term culture, the focus is on learned patterns of action, language beliefs, rituals and ways of life (Schumacher 2010; Straus and Corbin 1990). Ethnographic research studies communities and culture where in the researcher immerses himself/herself in the research scene (Leedy 2009). The researcher will spend time in the research site studying the phenomenon in its natural setting. This research methodology enabled the researcher to observe the patterns of interactions of SGB members during their meetings. The qualitative research approach regards participants in investigation as rich and prime source of information. McMillan and Schumacher (1997) for instance points out that the qualitative approach focuses on the understanding of social phenomenon from the perspective of participants.

Participants and Setting

KwaCeza Circuit is comprised of 34 schools, 10 being secondary and 20 primaries schools.

Purposeful sampling was used when selecting the participating schools. Four schools were selected. According to Kumar (1999), purposeful sampling can be said to be judgmental sampling because the researcher has to consider who can be selected for the study to get the best information. This information can help the researcher to achieve the objective of the study. After selecting the schools, all the other participants were selected using purposeful sampling.

The sample consisted of four (4) principals of selected schools, males and females and fall between the age group of 31 and 55 with an average of 8 - 15 years teaching and principal ship experience respectively), four (4) with an average age of 26-40 educators who represent their colleagues in the SGB and six (6) members of the SGB representing the parent component. Amongst four selected schools only two had learners serving in the SGB since they have grade 8. The other two were primaries which only have grade 7 as their exit. The learners from two schools were males and females since in each school only two learners were serving in the governing body. The learners group was interviewed after school. The participants were nominated in order to achieve the aim of the study, which was to identify the gaps that existed between policy and implementation thereof in terms of schools being democratized.

These particular groups were chosen purposefully for the interview because their number was not large.As elected members of the School Governing Bodies, they would give relevant information about their roles. Best and Khan (1993) point out that; the primary purpose of research is to discover principles that have universal application, but to study a whole population in order to arrive at generalization would be impracticable if not impossible. Indeed some populations are so large that their characteristics could be measured; before the measurements could be done, the populations would have changed. In view of the above the researchers observed the characteristics of a sample and made inferences about the characteristics of the population from which it was drawn (Quan-Baffour 2006).

Data Collection

The researchers held four separate focus group interviews starting with the educator com-

ponents of the targeted four schools, followed by the interviews with the principals of the four schools, learners' representatives and lastly the parents serving in the school governing bodies.

Data Analysis

The training manual of school governance for the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education was analysed to discern its relevance and suitability for capacity-building of SGBs in this province. This gave insight into the role of SGBs. In doing this the research question was borne in mind and the voices of the participants were depicted as truly as possible.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Many of the SGB members especially the parents do not have sufficient reading skills to enable them to read understand and interpret education policies.

The government policy documents are written in English and the fact that some parents on the SGB are illiterate or did not complete even secondary school could be a reason for their inability to read, understand their roles and interpret education policies. This is in agreement with what Mncube (2009) noticed with the reluctance of parents in becoming governors.

It is against this background that the educator components of the governing bodies volunteer to read and interpret roles and functions of the SGB to the parent members and also to the learners.

The issue regarding language of instruction is still not solved. It seems everyone has his/her own views on the type of language be used in the teaching and learning of learners at the schools, especially in the foundation phase.

The illiterate status of SGB parent component contributes a lot in the decline of effective and productive governance of the school. On the contrary, Quan-Baffour and Arko-Achemfuor (2014) indicated that: 'during brainstorming and drafting of policy on indiscipline, the school governors realized the limit of their power and the importance of policy guidelines in taking appropriate actions against learners who get involved in misconducts.'

Learners are reluctant about their parents being part of the SGB because of their ignorance regarding the legislative imperatives.

Educators feel intimidated and insecure in carrying out their obligations because learners know a lot about their legal rights. The dissatisfaction of the insecurity of the educators caused a tense relationship between the SGB and the staff members (Bayat et al. 2014).

With the introduction of SGBs parents have been given the opportunity not only to be involved but also to actively participate in matters relating to the improvement of learning. It is only when parents are visible on the school governance structures that they can influence policies and transformation and improvement agent of community schools. Schools improvement strategies can have positive results on learner performance. Sergiovanni (1994) states that, "If we are to rewrite the script to enable good schools to flourish, we need to rebuild community. Community building must become the heart of any school improvement effort."For example, the participants pointed out that with the abolition of corporal punishment in schools (SASA 1996) there is a general break down in discipline. Learners do as they please with no respect for educators or school authorities. Principals and educators said they do not know how to handle discipline problems so that they should not be accused for 'abusing' learners. Expressing her frustration one lady educator said:

"We (educators) are now like chickens set before eagles. We are supposed to educate, admonish and guide learners who now see themselves as superior to us and are more powerful than us because of too many rights with no responsibilities. We all fear to admonish wrong behaviors' because some educators, especially women are often targeted by learners."

The introduction of SGBs is acknowledgement of the need for democratic school governance by the government. The SGB concept makes it obligatory for all role players in education –community (parents) and the school (educators) to take active part in education. It has given parents as governors an insight into the responsibilities associated with the running of schools. One parent representative from one of the participating schools summed it up in the following words:

"I now understand the problems of the school truancy, lack of resources for teaching and learning better."

The SGB is an elected body compromising representatives of parents and educators with the school principal as anex-officio member. Both parent and educator components of the SGB who participated in the focus group interviews concurred that as elected governors they have the responsibility to assist the school principal and staff to ensure improvement in school results.

This acknowledgement is in line with SASA (1996) stipulation which makes it mandatory for the SGB to support the school principal and staff in performance of their duties. The support could be in a variety of ways, for example, ensuring quality teaching and learning at all times. The SGB chairperson of school B was more than apt when he said:

"I visit classrooms to see how teaching and learning take place. If an educator or a learner is absent I jot down in my file and follow up the matter."

This resentment of monitoring class attendance was confirmed by SGB chairperson who said:

"Go and ask that man there about SGB matters. He is not our principal but always enters our classes to check on us."

Learners are of the opinion that parents and educators do not work with them and view this as being unfair. One learner said:

"parents and educators take decision which games we must play or participate inonly to find we have no interest in that kind of sport. This is a democratic country everyone has the right to choose the sport he/she wants to play."

Learners argued that althoughtheir parents are part of the SGB,for schools to be viewed as beingdemocratic,they were to be involved in matters that pertain tothem.

On the other hand, most parents want to engage themselves in activities that would at least earn them some remuneration because they were from the impoverished rural area. This sentiment was echoed by one of the principals.

Principal of school C argued that:

".….the fact that they are not being paid sort of demoralizes them. I don't know if they can be given certain remuneration…may be (then) the attitude and level of motivation would change…and the level of motivation would also be high…"

Principal of school A concurred that:

".….some of these people (SGB members) really believes that they cannot perform SGB functions for free…they expect to be remunerated in a way.…"

Most parents want to engage themselves in activities that will at least earn them some livelyhood because of the poor condition they live in.

Principal of school C argued that:

".....the fact that they are not being paid sort of demoralizes them. I don't know if they can be given certain remuneration...may be (then) the attitude and level of motivation would change...and the level of motivation would also be high..."

Principal of school A concurred that:

"....some of these people (SGB members) really believes that they cannot perform as SGB."

The idea that the SGB members should be remunerated seems to create a serious challenge for the principals to secure a full complement of parent members in the SGB. The South African schools Act 84 of 1996 states that "no member of the governing body may be remunerated in any way for performing his/her duties."

CONCLUSION

Finding of the study revealed that principals as well as SGB members themselves are concerned about the effect of SGB members' lack of capacity on the governance and management of the schools in KwaCeza circuit. The data also revealed that there is a need to provide purposeful guidelines on the recruitment and election of literate and skillful SGB members. This should be supplemented by a vigorous training to harmonize the various skills, expertise and knowledge of the individual SGB members for effective governance of the school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

School Governing Bodies need to have necessary skills in order to perform their duties and carry out their responsibilities in an effective and efficient way for the schools to be democratized. Increased training efforts to build the capacity of the SGB members on governance aspects including financial management, school safety, and awareness of the different laws that pertain to school governance including labour laws is to be undertaken.Schools are to be clustered and their SGBs in order to have quarterly collective standing meetings facilitated by the governance and management sub-directorate. It is also important to emphasize to the princi-

pals, the parents and SGB members the need and importance of having sound knowledge and understanding of the relevant education policies and legislation to improve the performance of SGB functions.

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