

## School Governance, Financial Management and Learners' Classroom Needs: Perspectives of Primary School Teachers

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**KEYWORDS** Teacher Participation. Decision-making. Stakeholder Participation. Participative Management

**ABSTRACT** The core responsibility of the school is to educate its learner population. For this to happen, school governance is critical, and policy imperatives require active participation of all key stakeholders, including teachers. Teachers as both members of the School Governing Body (SGB) and ordinary classroom teachers, have the responsibility to ensure that the school budget responds to classroom learner needs. Therefore, their participation in financial management is important. Given this background, a case study of two primary schools, purposively selected, was conducted. Semi-structured interviews and document analysis were used to generate data. Four teachers, two from each school were interviewed. The findings revealed that although teachers wanted to play a meaningful role in the decisions about financial issues in their schools, their participation was largely superficial and cosmetic.

### INTRODUCTION

A shift to self-governance has been observed in many countries including South Africa in the past two decades (Wadesango and Bayaga 2012). Such a move tended to entail stakeholder participation in decision-making processes at local level; this is usually based on the assumption that their participation is likely to benefit the school, learners and the community it serves (Wadesango 2011, 2012). This paper discusses the findings of a qualitative study that was conducted between June and August 2011 in two primary schools in the Pinetown district, South Africa. It sought to solicit teachers' views about their participation in school governance generally and financial management in particular. Their views were corroborated by those of the school principals and Chairpersons of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) of participating schools. It was based on the assumption that teacher participation in decision-making can enhance teacher commitment, expertise, and ultimately, learner achievement (Wadesango 2012).

The South African Constitution Act, No. 108 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa 1996a) makes provision for the principles of democracy, ac-

countability, co-operation, maximum participation, inclusion, consultation and partnership (Legotlo 2014) to underpin leadership, management and governance. These principles also permeate the South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa 1996b), hereafter referred to as SASA (Khuzwayo 2009). SASA, and the White Paper on Education and Training before it, make provision for all stakeholders in the school community to be involved in the school decision-making processes. Included in the school community concept are the teachers, the parents and the learners. The particular component of this school community under the gaze in the study was teachers. One of the fundamental assumptions underpinning SASA is that stakeholder participation in the decision-making processes at school level must be ensured (Khuzwayo 2009), and these include teachers. Their participation has received attention particularly because they are the ones that are at a critical level of performing core functions of the school (Legotlo 2014). However, teacher participation does not seem to have been embraced despite its benefits reflected in literature (Naidoo 2005; Mestry and Naidoo 2009; Wadesango 2012; Legotlo 2014). For instance, a study conducted by Mestry and Naidoo (2009) suggested that when the teachers do not participate, they felt a sense of deprivation in terms of participation in the decision-making processes that relate to the drawing up of school budgets. Findings by various authors (Magadla 2007; Kubeka 2009; Wadesango 2012; Wadesango and

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Bayaga 2012) show a similar pattern. The paper begins by outlining the background and the research question driving the study; discusses key concepts, conceptual framework, methodology, and concludes by presenting the findings.

### Research Question

There was one main question and three subsidiary questions:

1. How do teachers perceive their role in the financial decision-making processes at school level?

### Sub-Questions

- ♦ Do they think that the role they play assists in ensuring that learner needs are met?
- ♦ In what way do teachers participate in the school financial matters?
- ♦ What are the factors that promote teacher participation, and what factors hinder teacher participation?

The advent of democracy in South Africa ushered in new expectations and demands for school governance and management respectively (Bhengu 2005). Governance and management for instance, had to be shared and structures such as the School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and the School Management Teams (SMTs) were established (Swanepoel 2008). Finance Committees which were tasked with the responsibility of dealing with all financial matters, including construction of a budget, its control, monitoring, approval of all expenditure and to ensure that all expenditure were done correctly, were established (Mestry and Naidoo 2009). This called for active participation of various stakeholders, including teachers in school governance and decision-making processes such as finance related matters (Chaka 2008).

Bhengu (2005) argues that the notion of participation is currently in vogue, everybody is talking about it and it is something highly desirable. Participation entails sharing or taking part in the decision that is of one's interest (Naidoo 2005). It tends to be highly controversial because by its nature, participation is political as it relates to how groups and individuals are empowered to have control over their lives (Naidoo 2005). Ife and Tesoriero (2006) view participation as ranging from the *means* to being an *end*. Participation is a *means*, when is used to

achieve some predetermined goal, utilising existing resources to achieve the set of objectives of a programme (Ife and Tesoriero 2006). Participation as an *end* attempts to empower people to participate in their own development more meaningfully and to increase the role of people in development initiatives (Ife and Tesoriero 2006). Ideally, participation as *end* is preferred, due to its focus and emphasis on people empowerment.

Participative management can be regarded as a regular and significant employee involvement in the organisation's decision making processes (Ho 2010). It entails involving employees in setting goals, resolving problems and making decisions that affect the entire organisation (Ho 2010). Such a perspective supports genuine participation of teachers in order to ensure ownership of decisions and achieving targets.

School financial management can be regarded as a process of ensuring that the SGB and the SMT plan, organise, delegate and control the funds of the school to achieve its goals (Bisschoff 2007). Financial management in schools should not be divorced from a broader frame of management which is inclusive of all stakeholders as required by the DoE (Swanepoel 2008). Within this frame, power at school level is not centralised around one person, (the principal), but is shared with SMT and SGB, and as far as possible, should be inclusive of all relevant stakeholders (Swanepoel 2008; Mabovula 2009). Whether schools are no-fee or fee paying, they are expected to supplement funds received from the Department of Basic Education through fund raising. This entails getting additional funds from various financial sources such as donors and parents themselves, and decisions have to be made about how to solicit such funds (Khuzwayo 2009). Teachers are important in this regard; yet, research suggests that teachers are deprived of participation in school financial decision making processes (Mabovula 2009).

### Conceptual Framework

Democratic school governance was deemed relevant and was used as a lens to analyse the extent to which teachers, as one of the stakeholders in the school and in governance thereof, participated in it. Invitational leadership was also used in order to explore the extent to which stakeholders, particularly teachers, were made

to feel invited to participate in school governance and in school finances in particular.

Democratic school governance is a relatively new concept in South Africa (Brown and Duku 2008) having become prominent when the country became a democracy in 1994. The promulgation of the SASA, created a space for parents, learners and teachers to participate in the democratic governance of their schools (Brown and Duku 2008; Mabovula 2009). This legislation devolved certain powers from the national government to school level (Chaka 2008). These included the authority to formulate and adopt school policy on a range of issues such as budgeting, code of conduct for learners, language policy, school uniform, school-community relations, and curriculum development programmes (Chaka 2008; Swanepoel 2008; Mncube 2009). The efficacy of school governance and concomitant concept of local participation is usually based on the assumption that decision-making processes that are closer to the people affected by those decisions are better (Swanepoel 2008; Wadesango 2012). This calls for a genuine handing over and sharing of power with concomitant responsibility and accountability (Mncube 2009). This is better facilitated where leadership provides a climate where stakeholders feel invited to participate (Bhengu 2005).

Purkey and Novak (1996) coined 'invitations' metaphor to describe messages that are communicated to people, (intentional or unintentional), which inform them that they are able, responsible and worthwhile. These 'invitations' are communicated through the leader's interactions with staff and other people; policies, programmes and practices in the school (Purkey and Novak 1996). According to Invitational Leadership theory, the way a leader interacts with others will display either invitations or disinvitations. 'Disinvitations' refer to messages to people (intentional or unintentional), which are uncaring, demeaning, devaluing, intolerant, discriminatory, and hurtful (Stoll and Fink 1996). Therefore, the way in which people respond [to the leader] is usually influenced by the extent to which they feel welcomed or unwelcome. This is helpful in understanding for example, the manner in which various stakeholders respond to the principal's invitations or disinvitations, including teachers' participation in finance related decisions.

Invitational leadership is also premised on principles of optimism, respect, trust and inten-

tionality (Stoll and Fink 1996). Optimism entails holding high expectations of others so that they can perform at their best level. Respect for the individuality and opinions of others, is a second principle. Trust entails mutual belief in the honesty and integrity of the other persons. Intentionality entails the leader deliberately inviting others to participate, intentionally caring, supportive and encouraging them in their professional endeavours (Stoll and Fink 1996). These principles are critical for the leader's ability to provide guidelines and sustain a team focused on achieving institutional goals.

## METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a case study design that comprises of two primary schools, and was located within the qualitative research approaches. Case study design was chosen because the researchers wanted to understand the sites better, particularly in terms of reality in its own uniqueness (Rule and John 2011; Bertram and Christiansen 2014). Case studies are traditionally qualitative, and as such are regarded as a multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). Interpretive research attempts to see how others have constructed their reality by asking about it and also rich descriptive data in respect of a particular phenomenon with the intention of developing an understanding of what is being observed or studied (Nieuwenhuis 2007).

Two primary schools were selected using purposive and convenience sampling methods. Purposive sampling was used because researchers handpick the cases to be included on the basis of typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought (Nieuwenhuis 2007; Cohen et al. 2011). Purposive sampling was also used because it allowed the researchers to choose schools that were geographically easily accessible. Convenience sampling was also used because the researchers wanted to choose the nearest schools (Cohen et al. 2011). Characteristics that were used to select schools were that they had to have Section 21 status, primary schools and had to be located in the Pinetown District for easier access.

Data was generated through the use of semi-structured interviews with two principals from the two schools, teachers (one each school) and

Chairpersons of the SGB. Interviews were deemed appropriate because they provide flexibility (Dahlberg and McCaig 2010) in posing questions; in-depth discussions, follow-ups and probes to clarify the responses (Cohen et al. 2011). Interviews also allowed participants to talk freely (Dahlberg and McCaig 2010). In addition, document analysis was used because it provides tangible written textual information, and was also used for triangulation purposes (Scott and Morrison 2006).

The data was transcribed from audio-tape into written form and was manually analysed using qualitative data analysis methods. These entailed creating codes of meaning which were later organised into Chunks of meaning (Creswell 2011). Ensuring trustworthiness of the findings is important. Guba and Lincoln (1985) framework was used, which talks about four criteria, namely, credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability. To enhance credibility, different data generation methods and different data sources are used. To enhance dependability the use of inquiry audit, was used by ensuring that reviewers examine both the process and the product of the research. Transferability can be described as a way of producing detailed and rich descriptions of the contexts (Cohen et al. 2011). Throughout the study ethical considerations were observed. These included seeking and obtaining ethical clearance from our university and also obtaining permission from the provincial department of education. Permission was also obtained from the principals of the participating school.

### **Profiling the Two Schools**

School-A is a Section 21 school located in a socio-economically challenged area. It was built by the Roman Catholic Church in 1949. In 2011, its enrolment was 890 learners accommodated in 12 fixed classrooms and 3 mobile, prefabricated classrooms. There is an administration building, comprising a principal's office and the school's administration clerk, and no staff room. Although the school has no staffroom, it does have a computer room which was donated by private companies and these computers are used by learners and teachers. Staff meetings are held in classrooms when learners have left. In 2011, school fees had been set at R80 per year but payment was poor. Due to this problem, the SGB had ap-

plied to the education department to have the school declared a "No-Fee" school. The staff complement comprises 23 teachers, all female, a principal, deputy principal (the only male staff member) and 3 HODs. Each school day starts at 07:30 for the staff and at 07:45 the assembly starts, characterised by singing of choruses and prayers. The principal also uses the assembly to talk to the learners, reminding them about school rules and regulations and also to make announcements. School day ends at 13:30 for learners and at 14:30 for the teachers.

Unlike School-B, this is a No-Fee, Section 21 school situated on the river boundary between an informal settlement and traditional authority land under Inkosi (chief). It serves the learners from both communities. School-B was built less than ten years ago. It has an enrolment of 365 learners accommodated in 7 classrooms, and another big room used for Grade-R class. There is electricity and clean-piped water. Some rooms did not show signs of stability while others were well built with ceiling boards and all the modern fittings which are considered as standard features of an ordinary classroom. No additional rooms such as staff room, library or computer rooms are available. Staff meetings are held in classrooms after school when learners have left. No fees are paid due to the school's 'No-Fee' status. Staff complement comprises 10 teachers (7 females and 3 male), a principal and an HOD who also serves as deputy principal in the absence of the principal. Each day starts at 07:00 for the staff and at 07:45 an assembly commences while classes start at 08:00 and end at 13h30 for the Foundation Phase, and 14h15 for both Intermediate and Senior Phases. Staff members leave at 14h30.

## **RESULTS**

The results of the study are presented under six themes, namely (a) Teachers' perceptions and experiences of their roles in financial decision-making processes (b) Teachers' views about their participation and learners' needs (c) The ways in which teachers participate in the schools' financial matters (d) Teachers want to be kept informed about expenditure (e) Factors that promote teacher participation (f) Factors that hinder teacher participation. These results are discussed below.

## DISCUSSION

### Teachers' Perceptions and Experiences of Their Roles in Financial Decision-making Processes

Legislation (SASA) dictates that teachers are full members of the SGB, and that, they are also expected to participate in the fund raising committees as provided for in Section 30(1) of SASA. However, the findings show that teachers had difficulties fulfilling this mandate. This has frustrated them as they believe that they should play a meaningful role in influencing decisions, particularly in relation to finance issues. They perceived their roles in financial decision-making to be important if learners' needs were to be adequately met. Justifying the importance of teachers in financial matters, a teacher in School-A said:

*Schools cannot function without teachers playing active role in the financial decisions that are made (Teacher-A).*

In support of this view, the teacher from School-B highlighted that teachers were central in identifying and meeting the needs of the learners. She maintained that:

*...it is them (teachers) who know their needs, they need to know about school finance and need to ensure that the money is used for those needs.*

While there was agreement among teachers in both schools, about the critical role that they should be playing, it was found that they did not play any meaningful role in finance matters. Nevertheless, principals and SGB Chairpersons accepted that teachers were important stakeholders, and that they somehow, need to participate in the activities of the SGB. While there was broad agreement among participants that teachers were legitimate members of the SGB, parents and principals did not believe that they were supposed to play any significant role in it. When asked about this, the principal of School-A said:

*Yes, they are a stakeholder in a school. I think it is important for them to have an input, not to decide, but to have an input (Principal-A).*

This view was supported by the Chairperson of the SGB when he said that decision-making is the prerogative of the SGB. It must be noted that when the Chairpersons of SGBs refer to this structure, they usually refer to parents that serve in it, and not the other components of

the SGB. As long as teachers make inputs, that is sufficient, but should not make decisions.

*Actually I can't say that they take decisions, it is us who take decisions- they only make suggestions. It is not them who take decisions. Do you get that? They tell us that they need this and that. They bring requests to us to consider (SGB Chair of School-B).*

It is evident that from principals' and Chairpersons of SGB perspectives, teachers do not have to have a strong voice in decisions of the SGB or Finance Committee; being represented in these structures was sufficient. The principal of School-A, had this to say:

*As much as they are represented eh...eh... eh ...the SGB looks at the need. The SGB also involves teachers because there is teacher representative in the SGB (Principal-A).*

It is noteworthy that while SGB members prided themselves for power they enjoyed compared to the teachers, they also admitted their own shortcomings which made the principals to be more powerful than everybody else. They admitted not to have sufficient knowledge about school finances, and they rely solely on the principal:

*...if our school budget is R100 000.00, the money is not deposited in our accounts, we cannot see it. Principals have cell phones, which notify them and say here is R100 000.00. So as the SGB we cannot disagree with the principal. We just say yes we understand (SGB Chair of School-B).*

This point is noted by Chaka (2008) when she claims that members of SGBs serving poor communities usually do not have the necessary knowledge and skills required to undertake their responsibilities.

### Teachers' Views about Their Participation and Learners' Needs

It is evident from the findings that teacher participation does not and cannot assist in ensuring that learners' needs are met. This is due to the nature of their participation which is largely minimal and cosmetic. While acknowledging this reality, a teacher from School-B, blamed the teachers for not asserting themselves sufficiently; she felt that teachers did not claim their position and role as vigorously as they should. Her remarks were as follows:

*Teachers in the SGB need also to view themselves as legitimate stakeholders who have every right and responsibility to discuss and debate issues of school financial policy with other stakeholders (Teacher-B).*

### **The Ways in Which Teachers Participate in the Schools' Financial Matters**

There are four ways in which teachers participate in the financial matters of their schools. The first is needs identification wherein they submit their class needs to their respective HODs who, in turn submit to the principal, who ultimately submits to the Finance Committee for deliberations. The second is consultation with the SGB or the principals. This usually happens when the principal requires clarity in relation to priorities. The third is supportive roles wherein, they do administrative duties to assist the principal and also in fundraising campaigns for the school. Although teachers did not influence decisions about school finances, principals, from time to time, sought their support administratively. Both schools studied were Section 21 and poor (Quintile 1). As Section 21 schools, the participating schools were responsible for purchasing stationery, textbooks, furniture, and pay for water and electricity. Such activities require a lot of administrative work which sometimes is burdensome to principals. Teachers' assistance in alleviating administrative work was crucial. In this regard Hansraj (2007) states that Section-21 has made life harder for school principals by increasing their administrative and financial management role.

Besides these roles, teachers also participated in fund raising campaigns although the researchers have learned that such an activity had evoked some tensions with school management. It has also become evident that when teachers get involved in this activity, two problems arise; first they are not informed about how monies raised were spent, and second, principals and parents do not seem to like it when teachers do such an exercise; tensions prevail. With regards to lack of transparency about expenditure of funds raised, this is what the teacher from School-A had to say:

*As person who spoke to the people who donated the money I don't know what happened to the money. What followed was an old windy-house which we were told was bought with that*

*money, only to find that the windy-house was also donated by someone to the school(Teacher-A).*

Besides the lack of transparency, tensions arose especially between school management and teachers. It appears as if teachers venture into a terrain where they are not welcome. Apparently, teachers are expected to respond only when they are consulted on finance matters, and not to take initiatives in fund raising. A teacher from School-A captures this when she says:

*...if there is an issue that is not on the agenda yet they (teachers) wish the issue to be discussed at the SGB they are free to say they want the issue to be taken to the SGB (Teacher-A).*

This was done so that teachers who represented other teachers could carry their views to the SGB.

### **Teachers Want to be Kept Informed About Expenditure**

Teachers demonstrated contradictory views about active participation in the SGB generally and Finance Committee in particular. While they have expressed desire to actively participate in decision-making processes about finance issues, they also claimed that, what they were interested in more, was being informed about financial expenditure. A teacher from School-A put it like this: *"...we need to be informed about school financial management matters"*. She went on to explain how this could be done, *"...we as teacher would like to have a copy of the auditor's report"*.

### **Factors That Promote Teacher Participation**

Trust, in the principals, transparency and principals' attitudes towards teacher participation were found to be the main factors that promoted it and/ or even willingness to participate. This is what the teacher from School-A had to say which clearly demonstrated her trust in her school principal:

*We know her in terms of money she is not the type of a person whom you can give money and she will steal it. She does not involve herself with the school money. The money is controlled by the financial committee and the SGB. It is the principal who motivates us to participate in school financial management (Teacher-A).*

Trust and transparency seemed to go together, and reciprocity also emerged. That is, where teachers did not express trust in the principal, reasons for that seemed to be based on the perception that the principal was hiding things from the staff, and implied mistrust of the staff was observed. The lack of transparency could be related to multiple factors. These included apparent lack of financial management skills by the principal, hiding certain information from the teachers, and a sense of territoriality. Finance issues are not the domain of the teachers but that of the principal and SGB (read parents). Therefore, they are not welcome to participate. Messages of disinvasion prevailed.

Where the principal's attitude was positive towards teacher participation, teachers tended to want to and actually actively participated, and where the attitude was negative, there was no willingness to participate. Findings have shown that minimal participation occurred, for instance, in the form of consultation, and participation in fund raising.

#### **Factors that Hinder Teacher Participation**

Trust, transparency and principals' attitudes towards teachers' participation has been highlighted as influencing their participation, either in promoting it, where these factors were positive, or inhibiting it, where these were negative. Where principals displayed disinvasions (Purkey and Novak 1996), teachers did not want to be involved and, certainly, did not want to initiate fund raising activities. Another factor raised by teachers and principals was that of capacity of teachers to deal with finance issues which was found to be lacking. Teachers were aware of this reality, and so were the principals. On this aspect, this principal noted:

*...it is important to educate them so that they have the know-how. This will make them know that at the end, the amount the department deposits into the school's account; even that amount is ring-fenced. Some, complain, asking why we spend R98000 bying books instead of using that R98000, for instance, to fence the school (Principal-A).*

#### **CONCLUSION**

Stakeholder participation in the affairs of the schools generally, is still a serious issue in South Africa. It has certainly raised a lot of interest

among both erudite and novice researchers. Participation in financial management is just a small part of this bigger phenomenon with which South Africa as a country is still grappling. While no intention to arrive at generalisable conclusions was made, this qualitative study suggests that despite two decades of democracy in South Africa, genuine democratic participation of teachers in finance issues has remained elusive in some areas.

Using the invitational leadership metaphor, it is evident that teachers do not feel invited to participate in what continues to appear to be sacred spaces for the few (that is, parents in the SGB and principals). Views from the principals and the SGB Chairpersons seem to reinforce the notion that teachers can participate to a limited extent. They are not viewed as legitimate members of the SGB. That may not be a surprise that the dominant narrative from this category of participants emphasise that the teachers have to make inputs rather than making decisions. These results are inconsistent with the tenets of participative management which emphasise the involvement of the employees in setting goals, resolving problems and making decisions that affect the entire organisation. Further, it is concluded that school principals in the study have not begun to treat teacher participation in decision-making in a serious light that it deserves.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

School principals are crucial in influencing teachers to participate effectively in the affairs of their respective schools. For that to happen, teachers need to feel invited to participate as legitimate stakeholders in school governance. It is therefore important that their participation should be substantive rather than superficial as the results of this study suggests. For any substantive participation of the teachers in decision-making processes, school principals need to embrace participative management and recognise the need for effective teacher participation in school governance generally and financial issues in particular.

#### **LIMITATIONS**

The study was a small scale one comprising two schools. The results therefore cannot be generalised over a wider population. Secondly,

the focus of the study was on the perspectives on the teachers of their participation in school governance generally and on issues relating to issues of finance.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Previous research has suggested that teachers want to participate in school governance. This study has produced similar findings and further suggested that teachers want to be treated as legitimate stakeholders that should fully participate in decision making processes. It has also emerged that school principals have not begun to understand the importance of involving teachers given the benefits of their participation. Further research is needed that will attempt to find out why some school principals still do not embrace teacher participation despite twenty years of democracy in South Africa.

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