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## **Constituency leaders serving as partners in school governance: Do their leaderships portray democratic constituency representation or selfish opportunism?**

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### ABSTRACT

This paper reports on findings emanated from three principals, three school governing body chairpersons and three teacher-union site stewards. (who also happened to be teacher representatives in the school governing bodies at their schools). According to Quan-Baffour (2006) school governing bodies are democratically elected to represent their constituencies. Hence, they are referred to as constituents' leaders in this study. The role of these constituents' leaders is to work as partners to promote the best interest of the school and to ensure its development through the provision of quality education for all learners at the school (SASA 20.1(c)). The study sought knowledge as to whether these democratically elected leaders represented their constituencies or saw such representation as a selfish opportunism in the school partnership based in Durban South area. Discovery of this nature was going to provide a useful information and understanding of school governing bodies' input in school partnership. Knowledge of this nature was needed since Khuzwayo (2007) reveals that during the first decade of an introduction of the school governing body (SGB) in South Africa, some SGB leaders often were at loggerheads. The study adopted two theoretical lenses, namely: participative theory and transformational leadership theory. Furthermore, a qualitative approach, entailing semi-structured interviews on purposively selected constituent leaders served as guidance for this study. Findings show that constituent leaders worked collaboratively.

**Keywords: constituency, democracy, partnerships, selfish opportunism, leadership, ideology, ethics.**

### 1. INTRODUCTION

During the apartheid era, democracy, partnership, and teamwork were discouraged at all costs (Gallo, Wu & Sergie, 2020). This resulted in civic organisations demanded holistic democratic change. There was a campaign from non-white parents, community members and teachers, who organised and revived themselves into forums and teacher - unions respectively (Makau & Liebenberg, 2021). They wanted to be involved in the education of their children, as parents (Klopper, 2021). This resulted in the formation of Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs). Also, various teacher - unions operated along racial lines. But eventually they realised that to attain their demands, they had to work together holistically as non-racial unions (Simuyaba, 2020). Teacher-unions such as Progressive Teachers' union, the National Educators' Union, the Western Cape Teachers' Union most, joined together to form the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU). According to Barchiesi (2011) most of these civic organisations continued working collaboratively until the attainment of democracy. Henceforth, the newly elected democratic government was established and promoted partnership in various new

government policies. The first Act enacted was the Constitution of South Africa 108 which emphasises fundamental human rights. Section 195 (1) (i) of the Constitution provides that public administration (including education) must be broadly representative of South African people to balance the imbalances of the past. This partnership was in line with the Declaration of Education for all, which was formulated in Thailand to promote partnership in schools. South Africa adopted this Declaration to promote school partnership (Mbiti, 2016). This resulted in the enactment of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (SASA). Section 20 of the South African School Act 84 of 1996 makes it compulsory for all public schools to establish the school governing bodies. There are eleven key functions of the school governing body, stipulated in SASA 1996 (section 20). This research focuses on the five sub-sections which are pertinent which are as follows: firstly, to promote the best interests of the school and strive to ensure its development through the provision of quality education for learners at the school Section 20.1(a). Secondly, the school governing body members are expected to adopt a Constitution (Section, 20.1 (b). Thirdly, the SGB is to support the principal, educators, and other staff members. Section 20. 1 (e). Fourthly, to encourage parents, educators, and staff members to render services voluntarily, Section 20.1 (h) Lastly, to recommend to the Head of Department the appointment of non-educator staff at the school (section 20.1 (j)

This Act prioritised collaboration and decentralisation of power amongst all stakeholders, where parents are expected to play a key role in the school governance. The South African Schools Act (1996) Section 20 (a) stipulates that the SGB must promote the best interest of the school and to ensure its development.

The school governing body is a statutory body. The SGB comprises of a school principal, who represents the Department of Education, parents' component represented by the SGB chairperson who must be a parent, educator representative/s represent/s educators, representative of non-teaching staff, and learners' representative (if a school starts from Grade 8). All these elected leaders are referred in this research study as constituent leaders because they represent their constituencies. These constituent leaders' main responsibility is to promote the best interest of the school (Section 20(a). Hence, with all the above-mentioned Acts the researcher had developed keenness to discover the type of leadership and partnership provided by constituent leaders in the school governance. Whether they saw their participation in the school governance, as an opportunity to promote the interest of their constituencies or to promote their personal gains, which is regarded as selfish opportunism in this research study.

The background of schools which formed part of the research is hereafter discussed.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

The study was conducted on schools in suburban area of Durban. All schools which participated in the research, gradually became multi-racial after the attainment of democracy in 1994. Despite diverse role-players' backgrounds, their core function was to promote unity, good governance, democracy, and harmonious relationship at schools. The South African Schools Act is one of the South African's Acts enacted to enhance positive working relationship amongst stakeholders for the benefit of schools. Furthermore, the aim of the SGB is to encourage parents, learners, educators, and other staff members to offer voluntary service at the school. (SASA, Section 20 (h). The above cited sub-sections from SASA (1996) are

sound and justifiable reasons for the establishment school governing bodies. Unfortunately, findings from Kumalo (2009) produced after a decade, showed that school partners in the school governing bodies had some challenges and difficulties in working together harmoniously.

The first two decades after the introduction of the South African Schools Act, most schools had some difficulties to function effectively. Some of the reasons for this ineffectiveness was because of conflicts, lack of understanding of roles, mistrust, poor working relationship, disrespect, contempt, and corruption. Most of conflicts emanated from some leaders who saw their membership in the school governance as an opportunity to benefit themselves, their friends, and relatives (Khuzwayo, 2007). This mentality of self-opportunism for constituency leaders was also part of some school governance, even ten years later (Khuzwayo, 2019). As much as Section 20.1(h) of the South African Schools Act (1996), emphasises that social partners are to render their service voluntarily, most SGB members had conflicts because they wanted to enrich themselves (Khuzwayo, 2019).

### **3. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH**

According to Msila (2022) it is very common nowadays to find that a teacher representative in the school governing body is also a site steward of a union, not just an ordinary teacher. Hence, it was crucial to conduct this research involving school principals, school governing body chairpersons and teacher-union site stewards in the school governance. The purpose was to ascertain whether their leadership was based on constituents' representation or selfish opportunism. Msila (2022) insists that it is possible for school governing body members representing their constituencies to work collaboratively (Msila,2022). Hence, the researcher saw it vital to explore this possibility mentioned by Msila (2022). If it is discovered that indeed these three constituents' leaders can work in the school governance collaboratively and peacefully, it will be the realisation of the South African Schools Act 108 principles and idealised school partnership. Hence, the researcher saw it necessary to contribute to a further discovery new information, where school governance involves these three constituent leaders.

Basically, for partnership to be strong and effective, members are to adhere to good conduct and collaborative partnership, which can be attained if all school governance members commit themselves to democratic constituency representation (Taute, 2020). But if some SGB members have ulterior motives such as selfish opportunism, there will be no peace and stability among school governance (Khuzwayo, 2019). Words such as selfishness and opportunism carry a negative connotation which does not comply with the intention of the establishment of the school governing bodies globally (Selamolela, 2019).

Dombek (2016) characterises selfish leaders as people who are more concerned with their own needs than the well-being of others. They use manipulation to get what they want. They value material acquisition. Moreover, such leaders display lack of sympathy. They are usually prepared to do anything to get what they want. Furthermore, they tend to be unkind, self-absorbed and do not care about consequences. The worse part of it which according to Dombek (2016), selfish people always have a sense of entitlement and expect everything to go their way.

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Gelderman, Mampayei and Semeijny (2019) describe opportunism as the practice of taking advantage of opportunities or circumstances regardless of following principles, policy, or law but if such an opportunist benefits. Hence, it was crucial to discover the nature of constituents' leadership provided by the democratically elected leaders, to serve in the school governance.

Literature review below reveals how the partnership can be either strengthened or weakened.

#### **4. LITERATURE REVIEW**

This study acknowledges that also in other fraternities such as politics, business world, countries and marriages couples strongly believe that partnership is of cardinal importance. Alansari and Davies (2021) identify the following common features as enablers of partnership: democracy, transparency, collaboration, communication, mutual respect, shared decision-making, clarity of roles and responsibilities, shared leadership, devolution of power, co-operation, equality, human rights, rule of law, humility, respect, responsibility, participation, involvement, democratic decision-making, support, and mutual trust. If these enablers do not feature in any partnership, such working relationship does not last longer (Alansari & Davies, 2021).

All these features are the opposite of what the apartheid government promoted, since in non-white schools, there were boards and committees who were legally discouraged to play an active and meaningful role (Makau and Liebenberg, 2021). This discouragement resulted in most of non-white parents joining together to form a Mass Democratic Movement, demanding holistic democracy (Karlson, McPherson and Pampallis, 2020). The good part of it was that they worked as partners fighting for the democracy, (including democratisation of schools)

The Department of Education introduced the South African Schools Act of 1996, to promote harmonious relationship among partners, SASA (1996) Section 23(9) stipulates that the number of parent member must comprise one more than the combined total of other members of a school governing body who have voting rights. SASA (1996) the only requirement for a parent to be a member of school governance, is to have a child at school, be a legally entitled to custody of a learner, or be the person who fulfils the parental obligation (SASA, Section 1(xiv) or a guardian (South African Schools Act, 1996). A question that is still an enigma is: the holistic competence and readiness of these leaders to be on a driver's seat to provide leadership to their constituencies in the school partnership, as per the requirement of the SASA (1996).

Parents were part of partnership which involved teacher representatives who also served as teacher-union site stewards whose most members felt that they had been oppressed by system (Baxter & Eheren, 2021). Therefore, some members were prepared to question every decision to be on their favour (Ramokgotswa, 2015). Slabbert (2021) attests to Ramokgotswa's (2015) words, that indeed there was a mistrust among some of these school partners. Slabbert (2021) further reveals that some teacher - union representatives viewed principals as oppressors because they represented the Department of Education, the employer (SASA, Section 23(b). On the other hand, some principals perceived certain teacher - union leaders as troublemaker (Khuzwayo, 2019 & (Msila, 2022). Hence, this research study provides an insight as to how some principals, school governing body chairpersons, and teacher representatives, either truly represented their constituencies or used their leadership to enhance selfish leadership. Did these constituent leaders have the competence to ensure that through school partnership, democracy,

peace, stability, unity, and tolerance prevail? As alluded before, one of the reasons for an enactment of the South African Schools Act (1996) was to encourage all school governance partners to work towards the development of the school. But if the teacher representatives, who also served as site stewards outside the school governing body, wanted to ensure that every decision favours them, may become a problem to the peace and stability (Ramokgotswa, 2015). This type of attitude also displays selfish opportunism which is full of egocentrism (Khuzwayo, 2019). Once members take route of egocentrism in the school governance, usually end up being at loggerheads because of such selfish opportunism.

Armstrong (2015) describes leadership which portrays constituency representation as the one where group members are encouraged to share ideas and opinions. Consultation and communication. are promoted (Alansari, Davies, 2021). The school governing body members are expected to promote these principles in the school partnership (Mfeka, 2012). According to

Richie and Woods (2007) assert that if the members are fully involved in all processes and systems, they develop a sense of ownership, shared responsibility, innovation, feel valued, part of the team, eager to capacitate each other, and enjoy equal membership and power distribution. Hence, distributed leadership, has been adopted as a theoretical framework of this research study.

## 5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Gronn (2000) regards Gibbs as the founder of the distributed leadership theory. Oduro (2004) states that origin of the distributed leadership theory dates back as far as 1250, in the field of psychology. Gronn (2000) points out that distributed leadership has a potential solution to a situation whereby leadership involves leaders from different environments. This description fits into nature of constituents' leaders serve in the school governance. Gronn (2000) further clarifies that in the distributed leadership a set of functions are expected to be carried out by a group, not an individual. The motive behind the enactment of Acts such as the South African Schools Act of 1996, legislates the structural democratisation of schools, which aligns well with the distributed leadership.

Msila (2022) states that school governance would be improved if principals, staff, parents, and teacher-unions work together as a team. Msila (2022) further cautions that harmony and peace can be realised if roles and responsibilities are equally distributed. According to Nguyen (2020) distributed leadership is a collective social process emerging through the interaction of multiple actors. There are two aspects of the distributed leadership, which are known as the "leader plus aspect and the practice plus aspect" (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). The leader plus aspect appreciates and acknowledge contribution of all the individuals, who have contributed to the leadership. The "practice aspect" puts emphasis on the practice of leading and managing. The practice aspect is regarded because of the interactions, amongst leaders and followers. This type of acknowledgement, interaction of all group individuals, are some of the aspects which are promoted in the South African Schools Act 1996 (Khuzwayo, 2007).

Solly (2018) reveals that distributed leadership is required especially in institutions such as schools because leaders are empowered and afforded an opportunity to lead their teams. Furthermore, they work together by driving forward their strategies which contribute towards

the whole school-school priorities. Distributed leadership has three leadership principles, namely: autonomy, capacity and accountability which are interdependent and of equal importance (Solly, 2018). The following characteristics of the distributed leadership match well with expectations of leaders leading their constituencies in the school governance. According to Gronn (2000) distributed leadership involves cooperation among organisational constituents. According to Spillane and Diamond (2007) if leadership is distributed, cooperation is created among the actions of individuals and positive leadership is realised. Solly (2018) postulates that the key to distributed leadership is that leaders within the school need to be given the autonomy to make key decisions in their areas of responsibility. Hence, they will be happily and committed to do the assigned duties and be prepared to exercise accountability. The motive behind an introduction of school governing bodies in South Africa was to strengthen democracy with the purpose of distributing power (Richie and Woods, 2007).

According to Riche and Woods (2007) the focus of distributed leadership is to promote teamwork and collective responsibility. The South African Schools Act (SASA) 84 of 1996 24 (1) (a); (20&21) emphasises democratic and distributed leadership, amongst social partners. According to Taute (2020) as much as leaders are elected by the people but it is difficult to ensure that such leaders honestly, deliver for the people, as some leaders usually tend to take advantage of their positions to focus on their self and personal interest. Ang and Cheng (2016) define self-opportunism as a situation whereby people are taking advantage of their positions to advance their own interests. This research paper illuminates as to how school governing body partners, either democratically represented their constituencies or practised selfish opportunism. Through the following research design and methodology, the information and knowledge regarding the type of leadership provided by these constituent leaders came to light.

## **6. METHODOLOGY**

According to Ahamed (2008) epistemology which is about how knowledge is acquired and ontology which is about how knowledge perceived, are paramount in any research. These views emphasise that knowledge is not produced an objective researcher who collects facts about social world and builds up a chain of causality. But this view insists that reality is socially constructed.

This study used a qualitative approach. Qualitative research elicits lived experiences of the participants (Phoenix, Nguyen, Gentles, & VanderKaay (2018). The study was located within the interpretive paradigm. From an interpretive perspective, participants who have a direct experiences of school partnership as constituent leaders are the individual the researcher interviewed. The intention was to get more information as to whether the representation was based on constituency representation or self - opportunism (Wong, Tjosvold & Yu, 2005). According to Burton, Brundrett and Jones (2014) the interpretive paradigm is a worldview that involves deeper understanding of human behaviour and human experiences. Hence, not all school governing body members as partners met requirements to provide knowledge regarding democratic constituency representation and self-opportunism. The purposive sampling was then selected as the relevant sampling to identify participants who played a unique role in the school governing bodies,

Acharya, Prakash, Saxena and Nagam (2013) explain that purposive sampling is about selecting specific participants based on their knowledge of the phenomenon, which is being investigated. Acharya, Prakash, Saxena & Nagam (2013) further point out that the advantage of the purposive sampling is for a researcher to select a group of people who would be able to respond to questions. Hence, two high schools and one primary school were purposively selected, because of being the only schools, comprising principals, school governing body chairpersons and teacher representatives, who were also site stewards.

Hence, the participants responded to the following questions:

1. How do school principals, school governing body chairpersons and teacher-representatives unions site stewards understand their role in school partnership?
2. What are the experiences of constituent leaders serving in the school partnership?
3. How do constituent leaders promote distributed leadership in the school governance?

The above-mentioned questions served as guidelines in generating data, which is the next stage to be discussed.

## 7. DATA GENERATION TECHNIQUE

There are among others, three types of data generation methods for qualitative research, namely observation, document analysis and interviews (Chenail, 2012). The researcher utilised the semi-structured interview method because it encourages participants' expansion and flexibility (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Flick (2018) argues that a researcher can use one method because the most important thing, is the richness of data. This scholar further postulates that data generation based on one method is sufficient if the study comprises of diversified participants. This paper presents data that was generated from the diversified leaders. Regarding the venues, there were three types of venues that the researcher used: researcher's workplace, participants' institutions and participants' homes. All these venues were recommended by the participants (McGrath, Palmgern & Liljedahl, 2019).

The participants were interviewed as per agreement. Each interview took an average of 50-60 minutes. From these sessions, the researcher was able to generate a lot of descriptive data from the participants (Wilson & Miller, 2014). During this process of data collection, the researcher encouraged the participants to use a language of their choice (Resch & Enzenhofer, 2018). In this article, most participants chose to use either English or isiZulu. Out of 15 participants, three participants preferred to do the code switching of these languages. The language, which was used for the code switching, was fortunately, the vernacular language of the researcher. Hence, the information was generated without any difficulty. Seemingly, the researcher's flexibility motivated the participants to speak their minds. The participants felt valued because their opinions were taken into consideration (Tenny, Brannan & Brannan, 2017).

Although this was the data generation stage, the researcher as an active participant also engaged in data analysis process.

## 8. DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher analysed data through the General Process of Inductive Analysis (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The data was firstly transcribed verbatim from an audiotape into written form. The purpose was to make sense from raw data. During this transcription process, the researcher identified categories and patterns. Data from these categories, patterns and codes were grouped into themes (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013). The researcher thereafter interpreted the discovered themes in relation to the research questions. Prolonged engagement method was also adopted when the researcher satisfactorily sought detailed data. The second method was member-checking. This was when the participants were afforded an opportunity to check if their responses were correctly captured or not (Candela, 2019). All the participants expressed satisfaction and confirmed that everything was accurate.

## 9. ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

The researcher firstly sought and obtained the University Clearance. Secondly, the Department of Basic Education and the identified schools were approached accordingly. Permission was granted to the researcher to conduct the study for this research paper. Thereafter, a letter seeking informed consent from the identified participants was issued. The letter explained the objective and nature of the study. The researcher further explained participants' rights, such as privacy, confidentiality, and voluntary participation (Lewis, 2015). Furthermore, the participants were given an assurance regarding pseudo-names to be used to protect their schools and identities (Heaton, 2022). All partners expressed satisfaction with all the ethical principles. The participants thereafter signed the consent forms.

## 10. INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS AND SCHOOLS

School	Participants	Type of work	Experience as SGB	Qualification
Orange H.	Mr Ngodini	Teacher	25 years	M.Ed. Degree
	Mrs Maguban	Factory industry	1 year	Grade 8
	Mr Sokhela	Teacher	1 year	Diploma
Apple P.	Dr Mncenge	Principal	18 years	PhD
	Mrs Hlubi	Principal	16 years	B. Ed (Hons)
	Ms Manuel	Teacher	10 years	B. Ed. Degree
Banana H.	Ms Mkunya	Principal	2 years	Diploma
	Mr Bhewula	Self-employed	6 Years	N4 -FET
	Mr Mabhongo	Teacher	10 years	B. Ed Degree

## 11. DATA PRESENTATION

The first question was about the role of constituent leaders in the school governance. The purpose was to ascertain constituent leaders' knowledge of their role.

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### 11.1. *Constituent leaders understanding of the role.*

Mr Ngodini, the Principal of Orange High school reported understanding of his role as follows:

*My role is to work peacefully with all SGB members. But sometimes it becomes difficult if you are in school partnership with people who are not on your level of understanding.*

Mr Ngodini elaborated his difficulty and frustration as follows:

*Our thinking is never the same. My responsibility is to promote professional development. But unfortunately, I work with a school governing body chairperson, who is a shop steward at his workplace. Everything is unionised. Same thing applies with our site-steward, again, everything is unionised. But I continue doing my role by capacitating them regarding the importance of collaborative teamwork as partners and leaders of our constituencies.*

This insistence of Mr Ngodini to promote collaboration, teamwork and capacity building displays leadership which can enhance unity amongst school governance as per the requirement of the South African Schools Act, 84 of 1996.

Mrs Magubane, a school governing body chairperson, was asked about her role. This was how she had responded:

*My role is to ensure that employees' rights are protected. Furthermore, I feel comfortable to work with someone who is a unionist just like myself.*

The response from Mrs Magubane showed that she misunderstood her role as the SGB chairperson. But she was guided by her comfort in working as a unionist. Seemingly, her presence in the school governing body was not about her constituency, but for selfish reason.

Unlike Mrs Magubane, Mr Sokhela who was a site steward and the teacher representative, revealed that her intention to serve in school governance, was not for the development of the school. This was what Mr Sokhela had to say:

*I must always protect my union members at all costs. In fact, this was one of the reasons that made me to serve in the school governing body. I protect teachers from any form of exploitation either from the principal or SGB members who represent parents.*

The response from Mr Sokhela indicated that although the constituency was represented, but this representation was wrongly performed at the school governance he was not elected just because he was the union site representative. It could have been any teacher who is not a site steward.

Dr Mngcenge (principal) of the Apple Primary School had expressed understanding of his role as follows:

*As members of school governing body, we must treat each other with respect. We are all equal as partners. We must work together as partners to develop our school. My understanding is that we need to promote teamwork and harmonious relationship*

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*amongst school governing body members. As a departmental representative at the SGB, I always promote democratic values.*

Mrs Hlubi echoed the same sentiment as Dr Mngcenge. This was what she had to say:

*As a school governing body chairperson democratically elected by parents, my role is to support the principal, and all other members in the school governance. We have a responsibility to fulfil parents' will, to ensure that their reputational school is functioning smoothly and effectively.*

Ms Manuel had a similar opinion. This was what she said:

*As much as I represent teachers, but I always make sure that we promote peace, teamwork, democracy, and respect. I allow teachers to express their views. If there is a thorny issue, firstly, I discuss it with our principal before it is tabled at the SGB meeting. If it escalates to SGB meeting, we discuss it in a constructive way, without creating any conflict.*

At Banana High school, Ms Mkhunya - the principal, understood her role this way:

*I am duty-bound to promote unity among SGB members. This can be possible if as members and partners, we respect one another. For instance, it is of importance to encourage democratic values, such as respect, transparency, communication, shared decision-making and human dignity.*

Ms Mkhunya further elaborated as to how she valued the school partnership. She expressed the following commitment to the school governance.

Mr Bhewula a school governing body chairperson responded as follows:

*My role is to ensure that I encourage all members of the school governing body to work as a team. But to be honest, I am still not sure what is expected of me. I am very fortunate because Ms Mkhunya is sacrificing a lot of her time capacitating me. I am also making more effort to read documents to understand my role function.*

Mr Mabhongo expressed his understanding of his role as follows:

*My role is to work collaboratively with all social partners. My involvement in various leadership roles in the community and schools have taught me to respect all members in partnership. Hence, I am fully aware that professional matters, are principals' domain. When we deal with governance matters our SGB chairperson drives that seat. On matters pertaining to labour, I work collaboratively with the principal.*

In this first question it was noted that most members were fully aware that serving as school governing body member, it was important to work collaboratively with other partners. But it was also crucial to understand the participants' experience.

### **11.2. Constituent leaders' experiences of school governance partnership**

Constituent leaders in the school governance were asked to share their experiences in the partnership. It was through this question, where it became clear whether they adhered to their constituencies' expectations or use this opportunity to benefit themselves.

## SAJELM 3 (1)

At Orange High School, Mr Ngodini responded as follows:

*I sometimes find it very difficult because I am leading a school in a professional way, yet governance decisions must be approved by the SGB chairperson. I do not have a problem about that approval because that what the policy requires. The problem starts when such decisions are not made timeously because of little knowledge pertaining to school matters. Through these delays to make decisions or sign departmental documents, I am the one who is being perceived as a failure to take actions.*

Mrs Magubane, a school governing body chairperson shared a similar sentiment regarding professionalism. This was what she said:

*I must admit, school governance is not my entirely understanding, because I am coming from an industrial environment. But through working with the principal, who always shares valuable information, gradually, I am learning. In fact, both the principal and a teacher-union site steward are very helpful.*

Ms Hlela, the site-steward of Orange High school echoed a similar sentiment, regarding high level of professionalism and effective partnership, in the school governing body. This was her response regarding working experience:

*I have a good working relationship with both Mr Ngodini and Mrs Magubane. As much as we represent different constituencies, but we work as a team. As the teacher representative and the site steward, I promote what will benefit union members. What I personally want comes last. What comes first is what my union members, Due to collaborative partnership with principal and SGB chairperson as leaders, we all put as a priority what will eventually benefit our school.*

Constituents' leaders from the Orange High school although coming from the different backgrounds, seemingly through tolerance, respect, communication, and preparedness to work as a team strengthened their school partnership. There is this element of high level of professionalism in leading their constituencies. A similar teamwork and team spirit were shared by school governing body leaders from the Apple Primary school.

At Apple Primary, the principal Dr Mngcenge was very clear that all constituents' leaders must adhere to policies. This was what she had to say:

*My experience in working with other school governing body leaders is very positive, because I am always guided by policies. As school governing body leaders, we work cooperatively and adhere to the principles of the Constitution such as human dignity. Our goal is to ensure that our school maintains its reputation of being one of the top schools.*

Mr Hlubi conceded and elaborated as follows:

*As the SGB members we do things transparently. If there are projects here at school, our school governing body committee democratically invite suitable service providers. The intention is to ensure that as constituent leaders we do not influence decisions.*

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When Mr Hlubi asked about his feeling and experience regarding method of process, he had responded in the following fashion:

*I am happy about every process because it prevents a situation whereby as leaders, we end up focusing on enriching ourselves than serving our constituencies. We have a responsibility to always display selfless leadership.*

Ms Manuel, a teacher representative, echoed the same sentiment regarding democracy and transparency at the Apple primary school. This was how she had expressed her experience.

*Apple Primary school is very fortunate to have leaders of this calibre serving in the school governing body. Both the principal and school governing body chairperson enhance democracy and transparency.*

Ms Manuel continued expressing her willingness for the school to prosper.

*My heart is in this school. My satisfaction would be achieved when one of my capable and committed colleagues applies in this post I am acting for. My mandate as the teacher representative is to ensure that the suitable candidate takes the position to improve our school. It should not be about me. But it must be about merits.*

When she was asked as to why they had to ensure that the best candidate was recommended, her response was as follows:

*Our principal and school governing body chairperson encouraged communication. Furthermore, we do things democratically. The focus is on the democratisation of school without compromising quality service delivery.*

At Banana High school, leaders of the constituencies also responded by putting more emphasis on democratic values just like the Apple Primary and the Orange High school. Ms Mkhunya, the Principal of Banana High school responding to the question experiences on working with partners in the SGB had this to say:

*At our partnership in the school governing body, we promote unity in diversity. We are fully aware that we have different backgrounds. Despite having diverse background, in our operation as school governing body members, we enhance democratic values, such as respect, transparency, communication, shared leadership and human dignity.*

Immediately, as a researcher, when I heard Ms Mkhunya, insisted on the democratic values, my mind concluded that this was another school where Principal, School Governing Body Chairperson and teacher-union work collaboratively.

Mr Bhewula, the school governing body chairperson expressed his experience of being part of this partnership as follows:

*It is a pleasure to be part of partnership in this school governing body. To tell you the truth, when I was encouraged by parents to represent them at the school governing body, I was hesitating, because of my low level of education and the nature of work of being a construction worker. I now feel like a valued member because of the principal and other school governing body members. We are united as a family here.*

## SAJELM 3 (1)

When Mr Bhewula was asked as to what motivated him to continue being part of the school partnership, despite his initial fear and reluctance. This was what he had to say:

*Honestly speaking, initially, I saw it as an opportunity to prosper my construction company by doing all school's building projects. But this whole mentality has changed since the principal and other school governing body members insist on democratic process and selfless leadership to be followed. I have learnt that not to use opportunity as the SGB member to benefit myself at the expense of parents.*

Ms Mabhongo a union representative concurred with both Ms Mkhunya and Mr Bhewula that all school governing body constituents' leaders at Banana High school worked as a team.

### **11.3. Promotion of an effective distributed leadership**

The last question was based on how constituent leaders' promotion of an effective distributed leadership.

At Orange High School, Mr Ngodini's response was as follows:

*As a Departmental representative, I make sure that the school governing body is established as per the policy. I use my academic experience in leadership and management to ensure that leadership is distributed accordingly to avoid unnecessary conflicts. School governing body members are consistently trained regarding the distributed leadership, and roles and responsibilities.*

Ms Magubane the school governing body chairperson, attested to Mr Ngodini's statement.

*Trainings we receive at the beginning of every term help us to keep on being knowledgeable regarding our leadership, roles and responsibility which are distributed accordingly.*

Mr Sokhela expressed a similar sentiment.

At Apple Primary School, Dr Mngcenge corroborated with Mr Ngodini. This was how she responded:

*Before I became a principal, I was very active in the union, in fact, serving in all ranks. Furthermore, in both my master's and PhD Degree studies, the distributed leadership theory was the main theory. Hence, skills and knowledge as well as the selected distributed leadership theory help to have an effective school governance. I use powers vested in me as the Departmental representative to encourage all members to provide strategies which promote distributed leadership, where ethical leadership prevails.*

. Mr Hlubi contended that indeed leadership was distributed accordingly.

*In every project requires school governing body members, we work as a team. We encourage different committees which are led by different school governing body members. The motive is to ensure that all members feel empowered by taking leadership roles. I always encourage SGB members to be in leadership. Hence, my contribution to distributed leadership is based on motivation, support, encouragement, and trust.*

Ms Manuel echoed a similar sentiment with Mr Hlubi.

At Banana High School, Ms Mkhunya explained that this was how she promoted the distributed leadership:

*I value the contributions of school governing body members. I keep them busy, by making sure that together we identify areas which need to be attended to. Once, we agree regarding such projects to be attended, we all agree as to who should be leading that project. There is a high rate of delegation, and accountability. But all members are empowered to leaders of the assigned tasks.*

Both Mr Bhewula and Mr Mabhongo attested to this statement.

Responses from all constituent's leadership show that indeed it is possible to have peace and teamwork amongst partners in the school governance if there is an effective distributed leadership.

The responses from most of the participants brought new knowledge that school governing body members although they represent different constituencies, it is possible for them to serve their constituencies, without focusing on selfish opportunism. The participants' understanding of their roles, experiences, and promotion of distributed leadership, show that there is a new page opening regarding school governance in South Africa.

## **12. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS**

### **12.1. Theme 1: New notion of acceptance**

Based on all participants' responses regarding their roles working as partners, it was clear that most members displayed an understanding of being constituents' representatives. Hence, their decision-making process was characterised by democratic principles. The decisions taken were for the benefit of their constituencies which also contributing positively towards positive school governance. This new knowledge is crucial because it shows growth and maturity of democracy. This revelation also discards findings from previous scholars that most South African school governing body leaders are seemingly corrupt and selfish (Khuzwayo, 2007). Out of nine participants only one participant who expressed openly that the main aim to be part of the school governance was to benefit his construction company. This is a great achievement, because findings from the previous research show most school governing body members' members only to personally benefit (Khuzwayo, 2019). Based on the participants' responses there is evidence of selfless leadership. They accepted each other as members of school governance to enhance school governance.

### **12.2. Theme 2: Enhancement of support**

The findings show that it is possible for the constituent's leaders in the school governance to achieve numerous things if they support each other and work as a team. It gives more hope to see that school governing body members can prioritise their constituencies' needs, at the same time, striving for an improvement of schools and teamwork.

### **12.3. Theme 3: Advancement of democratic principles**

This research also revealed that through school governance democratic principles are promoted. It was inspiring to note constituent leaders encouraging communication, respect, human dignity, transparency, and shared decision-making process.

#### **12.4. Theme 4: Promotion of sense of ownership**

It has been noted that constituent leaders through distributed leadership had worked hard to help fellow members. They felt being important members of the school governance, where contributions were recognised. Finally, this study reveals that stakeholders such as principals, school governing bodies chairpersons and teacher union-sites or representatives can work together to improve education.

### **13. RECOMMENDATION**

As I had alluded, previous studies had been focussing on two school governance leaders, such as principals and school governing body chairpersons or one of the two and teacher union (Khuzwayo, 2007). As a researcher, I highly recommend that more studies involving these three school governing body leaders to be conducted frequently. This research study was based on a particular area (urban). Hence, having similar research on other areas would give more knowledge, regarding these partners, and school governance constituent leaders, as to whether they carry mandate of constituencies or selfish opportunism. But findings of the recent research, conducted by Msila (2022) gives hope, as this scholar adamantly and repeatedly says “it is possible for school principals, school governing body chairpersons and unions to work as an effective team in the school governance.

### **14. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In summary, school leaders from all three schools had displayed that they were true constituent leaders. But most important achievement was that their contribution to the school governance was about the benefit of the schools. The focus was on wider school leadership, as they were prepared to use their various expertise to benefit school governance holistically. This is the type of true leadership required to ensure that school governing bodies function effectively. These leaders were leaders who provided an ethical leadership. They were selfless leaders who did not use their leadership positions in the school. Evidence shows that they serve their constituencies. These constituent leaders were guided by ethical leadership, adhered to the constituency’s expectations rather than selfish opportunism.

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