

## **Inhibitors for the Provision of Quality of Education in the Selected Rural Secondary Schools from School Governance Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

*Over the years, South Africa has experienced a downward trend in the quality of education at the inception of democracy. Statistics from the Department of Basic Education on the matric results from 2014 to 2016 indicate a downward trend in learners' academic performance from the Eastern Cape Province. This is even though SGB is amongst the major stakeholders tasked to promote the quality of education in schools. This paper, therefore, explored the inhibitors to the quality of education in three rural secondary schools in Buffalo City Metro Education District from a point of school governance perspective. Since this study was premised on a qualitative approach, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from participants. Twenty-two participants were drawn from eighteen SGB members, two secondary school principals, and two Education Development Officers. This paper used the school effectiveness framework as a lens to explain the inhibitors to the quality of education in the selected rural secondary schools from a school governance perspective. Findings reveal a lack of capacitation of SGB by school leadership and the Department of Basic Education (DBE), divergent views about the role of school leadership in ensuring effective school governance, and how SGB is involved in financial matters. Therefore, this paper recommends that the DBE organize extensive training programmes to capacitate school leaders and SGB members on school governance issue, provide supervisory roles in the management of school funding regularly in line with the provision of the SASA 1996*

**Keywords : School Governance; Quality of Education; School Governing Body; School Management Team; School Effectiveness**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This paper explored the factors contributing to promoting quality education in three secondary schools in the Buffalo City Metro Education District, Eastern Cape. Conversations along the path of enhancing the quality of education in South African schools in the recent past have been canvassed by stakeholders. Although Grade 12 results show improvement in the Eastern Cape, there has been low Grade 12 learners' academic achievement in this province in the past ten years (Mdlalana, 2022). The reports indicate that the Eastern Cape has been at the bottom of the ladder compared to other provinces in South Africa in the past ten years. Although Grade 12 results have recently improved, the quality and caliber of these results remain unclear because most learners do not match the minimum requirements for admission to South African Universities (Mahlangu, 2020; Sekonyela, 2021). This could be because of inadequate support and attention to the quality of teaching and learning offered in schools by SGBs' governance processes and policy formulation.

The South Africa School Act (SASA) empowers the school governing body to oversee and provide governance for schools to enhance the quality of education. The SASA also provides guidelines for governing bodies in South Africa that guide their conduct in the discharge of their duties. This study, therefore, is significant in the era of declining quality education and poor academic performance of learners in Matric exams in the Eastern Cape. The paper sought to examine factors that contribute to the promotion of quality education by the SGBs in Buffalo City Metropolitan Education District (BCMED), South Africa. However, establishing the SGBs by the SASA Act was meant to provide a framework for attaining quality education in South

African schools. The composition of the SGBs is of a different caliber, consisting of people who are parents and members of the community where the school is situated. SGBs are expected to function effectively to promote quality education in South Africa. Literature has indicated that some SGBs are not trained or familiar with the SASA 1996. The School Act contains guidelines for SGBs; it is an important document they must be familiar with to provide adequate school governance. Members of the SGB are expected to provide governance to schools as provided in the SASA Act of 1996. We examine some of the factors that support the actualization of the functions of SGBs in the context of the BCMED to determine the extent to which they can enhance the quality of education. This study will provide answers to the following research questions:

- What factors inhibit SGB members to enhance the quality of education in rural secondary schools?

### **The capacity of SGB members to enhance the quality of education**

The significance of SGB members in improving the quality of education in schools cannot be overstated. Their inclusion in SGBs underscores the role of parents in school governance. This suggests that for a school to succeed—meaning achieving good results in examinations—the involvement of SGBs and parents is crucial. Enhancing school performance is not solely the responsibility of educators (Bantwini & Moorosi, 2018; Munje & Mncube, 2018). The role of SGBs in boosting school performance may include tasks related to the curriculum, resource provision, and support for the principal, educators, and other staff. These responsibilities are broad and complex, and the success of SGBs in fulfilling them depends on the social context of the schools and the varying abilities of SGB members. Additional efforts are necessary to ensure a participatory democratic process in school governance across all schools due to the discrepancy, or "policy gap," between policy objectives and actual outcomes (Aboagye & Ahmed, 2019). This may involve adjusting institutional structures at both national and local levels. Some scholars argue that there are broader issues facing the school system or education sector (Xaba & Nhlapo, 2014), while others believe that the primary challenge in school governance in South Africa is the need for capacity building and training of school governors (Moyo et al., 2023; Chauke, 2017; Luphoko, 2019).

The ability to govern effectively has been a major issue in contemporary schools (Nwosu & Chukwuere, 2017). Evidence supporting this claim suggests that despite significant efforts by provincial departments to support skill development and capacity building within SGBs, actual implementation remains challenging (Luphoko, 2019; Chauke, 2017). A study by Maimane and Ndlela (2015) found that in Kwazulu-Natal, a lack of understanding among parents about their responsibilities negatively impacted school governance. Maimane and Ndlela (2015) further noted that despite being the majority in SGBs—especially in the KwaCeza Circuit—parents were often controlled by school administrators. However, even the best government initiatives are unlikely to succeed if people do not understand them (Moyo et al., 2023). Beare (2018) supports this view, arguing that school-based management often involves individuals with little to no experience in running institutions. Therefore, information, communication, and training are essential components of SGB programs.

Xaba and Nhlapo (2014) also highlight cases where the chairperson, despite being a respected community leader, was illiterate and unable to chair meetings, lead decision-making, or facilitate discussions effectively. As a result, the principal would intervene and manipulate the situation as needed. Mavuso and Duku (2014) argue that South African rural schools are still considered inferior, particularly regarding education partnerships and school governance. They recommend that the Department of Education (DoE) implement SGB capacity-building programs tailored to the conditions in rural areas. This view is supported by Wilkins (2015), who acknowledges that school governors lack capacity and need close monitoring, especially regarding performance evaluation. He suggests that where a lack of knowledge and experience

is identified, individuals should be encouraged to seek internal or external training to develop new skills and professional attitudes. Wilkins also notes that governors are typically assessed based on their understanding of school performance and budget management. Therefore, the ability and willingness of school governors to hold senior management accountable are crucial. He justifies these interventions by pointing out the higher accountability risks for schools that neglect oversight, governance, training, evaluation, and challenge, leading to poor standards. Wilkins further concludes that while schools have some autonomy, the state must lead in professionalization and inspection. The lack of improvement in governance and management suggests that SGBs are not fully utilizing available resources, and the effectiveness of training and capacity-building methods remains unclear.

Stakeholders have raised concerns that SGBs lack training before taking on their roles, leading to issues such as not understanding meeting protocols, struggling with specialized language, feeling intimidated, and not knowing how to contribute (Galetuke, 2018; Setshogoe, 2021). This suggests that SGB members may lack the necessary knowledge and resources to perform their duties effectively. Some scholars, such as Moyo et al. (2023), Galetuke (2018), and Bantwini & Moorosi (2018), argue that SGBs struggle to address real-world issues and lack the skills required for sound financial management. This points to a lack of cooperation between principals and SGB members, as principals may hesitate to delegate responsibilities out of fear of losing authority (Kruger et al., 2022). Studies also show that educators within SGBs believe other members lack confidence and are uncertain about their roles, posing an additional challenge to school governance and management (Mohapi & Chombo, 2021). The research further confirms that SGBs lack the necessary training and skills to carry out their duties effectively in many disadvantaged communities. According to the Ministerial Review Committee (DoE, 2004), 47% of teachers surveyed believed that a lack of skills among SGB members hindered the group's effectiveness. Hartell et al. (2016) agree, noting that illiteracy among SGB members—particularly parents—contributes to inefficiencies by limiting their ability to access relevant information. Mavuso and Duku (2014) also argue that school governance under SASA is aligned mainly with middle-class norms, which may marginalize participation from underprivileged communities.

### **Challenges Faced by SGBS when carrying out their duties**

SGBs face significant challenges in fulfilling the responsibilities outlined in the South SASA 1996. These challenges, which have persisted over time, include the following: a lack of experience and training among parent governors in school governance; distrust and suspicion among governors; poor collaboration within SGBs; and a limited understanding among governors of their responsibility to advance the best interests of the school (Kumalo, 2009). Recent observations by King and Mestry (2023) highlight that SGBs often place insufficient emphasis on budget monitoring, leading to the mismanagement of school funds. The absence of essential tools, such as budget variance analysis, which could reduce wasteful expenditure, coupled with deficiencies in developing and implementing financial policies, further underscores the diminishing significance of SGBs' oversight role. Non-compliance with financial policies and the inability of SGBs to act swiftly in resolving financial issues exacerbate the negative impact of poor financial management (King & Mestry, 2023). Consequently, the failure of SGBs to ensure quality education in schools is evident.

Another challenge stems from the role of principals as ex officio members of SGBs. In their official capacity, principals represent and advance the interests of their employer, as outlined in Section 23(1)(b) of the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Section 16(3) states, "The principal shall undertake the professional management of a public school under the authority of the Head of Department," emphasizing the principal's duty to represent the employer and safeguard its interests. This means that while the principal assists the SGB in fulfilling its responsibilities in accordance with laws and policies, they also

have a dual role: as a member of the SGB, the principal is expected to represent the best interests of the school, just like other SGB members (Xaba & Nhlapo, 2014).

In the era of digitalization, SGBs face new and formidable challenges. Their responsibilities in this context include maintaining and monitoring school property, fostering positive relationships between SGB members and the school community, drafting school rules and vision statements that incorporate digitalization, creating technology-focused curricula and calendars, managing school finances to support technological innovations, and acting as mediators in resolving technology-related issues between students and the SGB (Nwosu & Chukwuere, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the limitations of SGBs in utilizing ICT and digital tools to perform their duties effectively. Challenges such as inconsistent network coverage, limited data accessibility, and the older age and varying educational backgrounds of some SGB members contributed to these difficulties (Duku et al., 2022; Olawumi et al., 2022; Duku et al., 2021). Despite these setbacks, there is a growing recognition among school governors of the importance of mobile phones as essential "Tools of Work" for the future. However, SGBs were apparently informed of school governance policies during the COVID-19 pandemic, even without formal meetings. As a result, the Department of Education must ensure that ICT devices, such as laptops and smartphones, are considered when developing SGB induction programs.

## RESEARCH METHODS

A qualitative research approach was adopted for this study. According to Hennik et al. (2020), qualitative research involves collecting, examining, and analyzing data that is not easily quantified or summarized statistically. The study followed an interpretive paradigm based on an inductive approach to understanding social reality. The researcher begins with specific observations and moves toward broader generalizations, shifting from concrete details to abstract concepts (Oosthuizen et al., 2020). From an interpretive viewpoint—also known as social constructionism, constructivism, or constructionism—the reality is not a fixed entity that can be defined, clarified, or reduced to a report by the researcher. Data for the study was gathered through semi-structured interviews (SSIs) and focus group interviews (FGIs). Focus groups were conducted in various settings using different interviewing techniques, such as semi-structured or unstructured formats (Bless et al., 2021; du Plooy, 2017). Consequently, the focus group questions in this study were non-directive and unstructured (Bless et al., 2021; Gaudet & Robert, 2018). They were free-flowing (Kumar, 2018), allowing participants to express themselves without fear or restriction as the format was flexible (Gumbo & Maphalala, 2015). This approach encouraged dialogue among participants and led to various perspectives (Quinlan, 2015). The study's target population consisted of 258 individuals, including 120 SGB members, 120 school principals, and 18 EDOs, selected from the total population of secondary schools and circle management centers within the BCMED. Sampling in this study is defined as a method used to select a smaller group that represents the characteristics of a larger group or population (Faasen, 2021). The study utilized purposive sampling to choose the sample. Purposeful sampling, a type of non-probability sampling, was selected to focus on in-depth topics crucial to the investigation (Cohen et al., 2019). The groups selected through purposive sampling included members of SGBs, school principals, and EDOs. The data collected from participants was analyzed verbatim according to the research questions. The researchers adhered strictly to ethical principles, ensuring participants could withdraw from the study at anytime.

### Theoretical framework

This paper employs the school effectiveness framework as a lens to examine the factors that hinder the quality of education in selected rural secondary schools from a school governance

perspective. School effectiveness is defined as the school's output, typically measured by the average achievement of its learners at the end of the academic year (Sammons, 1995; Scheerens, 2000; Duan et al., 2018).). As school governors, it is the legal responsibility of SGBs to ensure that students perform well academically. They achieve this by establishing and enforcing appropriate policies and regulations supporting high-quality education. This responsibility involves creating a level playing field for both teaching and learning, ensuring that all students can succeed. The primary indicator of a successful school is its quality of education, a key area overseen by SGBs. The school effectiveness framework was applied to explore the challenges that prevent SGBs from enhancing the quality of education in their schools. Scheerens (2000) describes an input-process-output model in which SGBs focus on the inputs necessary to achieve the desired learning outcomes. School effectiveness, therefore, refers to the extent to which schools achieve their intended educational goals.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the study's findings in three sub-themes: empowerment of school governors, the role of School management in ensuring effective governance, and the involvement of school governors in financial matters. It also provides a brief discussion of the findings.

### 1. Inadequate capacitation of SGBs by school leadership and Department of Education

Within this framework, participants acknowledged that raising the standard of instruction in their schools requires them to know their roles and goals. They agreed that because newly elected SGB members receive training from the Department of Education at the start of each term, school governors must be conversant with the duties and obligations outlined in the South African Schools Act (SASA) 1996. Nevertheless, as noted by EDO1, the data showed that the Department of Education is not doing enough to provide SGBs with the necessary tools to carry out their responsibilities successfully. EDO1 noted that:

*"The Department of Education has an obligation to train and capacitate the School Governing Bodies as statutory bodies. This is not happening to my satisfaction. Often, SGBs will only be taken for workshops on how to run finances and recruitment processes. I must admit to the fact that our department will continue to hit the wall in terms of valuable training because of illiteracy among the parents serving in SGBs."*

The excerpt highlights serious concerns about departmental officials' ineffective discharge of duties in ensuring sound school governance. Their selective approach to training SGBs is particularly troubling, raising questions about whether they are adequately equipped or if there is a lack of proper monitoring and evaluation by those responsible. This situation points to the department's central role in the underperformance of SGBs, as it is their responsibility to train and empower these statutory bodies. Consequently, the department is blamed for learners' mediocre academic performance. Additionally, the fact that many learners are under the guardianship of elderly, often illiterate, grandparents—while their biological parents work outside the province to support their families—further complicates the issue. The neglect of foundational education in selecting SGB members is a critical gap that needs to be addressed to achieve the goal of quality education. A certain competency level should be considered a requirement for SGB elections. Thoroughly assessing school governors' roles and responsibilities and ensuring that all relevant stakeholders are involved in decision-making would make them more accountable and effective in their duties. EDO1 further commented:

*"One of the most inhibitors is what can be termed as inferiority complex and cowardice 'ubugwala' among SGB members. Pure cowardice ubugwala' among SGB members manifests itself wherein SGB members would yield to something they know is not in line with their roles and responsibilities because they want to be loved by everybody."*

*Sometimes, SGBs are used as a space to mobilize for a political career." And as a result of this, they compromise their independence, power, and authority. In some instances, SGB members are used by the community to chase out certain educators or even principals instead of supporting them, as outlined in the SASA. In certain scenarios, SGBs will camouflage as residents to achieve their self-interests and greed."*

The excerpt reveals additional challenges linked to the incapacity of school governors, particularly inferiority complexes and a lack of confidence. These issues hinder school governors from asserting their independence and standing firm in their decisions. Unfortunately, this vulnerability makes them susceptible to manipulation by influential figures in their communities who, rather than focusing on the development of schools, are more interested in exploiting the schools' resources. As a result, the drive and authority of the school governors are compromised. They fail to recognize that, in matters of principle, one must stand firm. This compromises their mandate as outlined in the SASA 1996. EDO2 further highlighted the lack of power to enforce discipline among learners, noting that the final authority on disciplinary matters lies with the Superintendent-General of the Eastern Cape Department of Education, who can overturn any sanctions imposed by the school governors. The absence of a clear and effective disciplinary alternative means that schools will continue to struggle in this area. All three focus groups agreed that significant inhibitors indeed prevent improving learners' academic performance in schools. The inefficiency and ineffectiveness of school leadership were further confirmed by FG3, who stated:

*"The SMT is dysfunctional in our school. This is so because those who support the principal are listened to. And as such, there is no collective decision that has been taken by our SMT. We are operating under those pathetic conditions in our school. There is no school leadership effort or initiative to enhance effective school governance."*

The response from qualitative data indicates that respondents clearly stated that there is a challenge in schools about effective governance. The lack of educators in ensuring that the school governors are fully capacitated to perform their duties as expected can be concluded as the deliberate move by the school management to perform these functions on behalf of the parents. This could mean that the principal and educators are comfortable performing these duties and do not encourage the parents to be involved.

## **2. The role of School management in ensuring effective governance.**

Participants were asked if the school management ensures effective governance. Different responses were received, some participants confirming that in their school, this is happening, whereas others disputed this view. The issue of school leadership that ensures effective governance was confirmed by FG2 when one member stated that:

*"Our school leadership is working tirelessly towards enhancing effective governance. This can be seen in our interactions and deliberations in meetings. These sessions provide us with the opportunity to find one another on matters related to school governance. Suggestions on school governance issues are most welcomed and are translated into programmes to be executed by the SGB."*

The sentiments expressed by FG2 suggest that SGBs operate in isolation and have varying levels of understanding regarding their roles and responsibilities. While they engage in robust discussions aimed at developing clear programs for achieving their goals, school governors' leadership in school governance is inconsistent across different schools. Ideally, this proactive approach should be implemented in all schools to enhance school development and improve learner performance. The responses from the EDOs reflect a normative perspective, where they outlined what should ideally happen and highlighted the challenges that prevent this from being fully realized. P1 noted the following regarding the state of school leadership:

*"The school leadership does not work collectively, especially on policy-related matters. The principal is the one who is seen as a bearer of this important task. In most cases, I*

*would take the initiative and call the departmental officials to come and assist in clarifying certain issues. This is one area that we are still grappling with."*

P1's sentiments highlight a troubling scenario in which a lack of cooperation is evident within the School Management Team (SMT). The SMT should work closely with the principal to ensure that professional and academic activities align with educational policies. However, when the SMT fails to function as a cohesive unit, the quality of teaching and learning suffers, leading to poor academic performance among learners. This situation points to numerous challenges linked to inadequate learner outcomes. FG1 corroborated the dire state of their school's leadership, stating that the management structure itself is ineffective, rendering the situation pathetic. According to FG1, the school management fails to implement the decisions made in their meetings, exacerbated by a lack of oversight from the department. Without being held accountable, the school management lacks a clear plan and focus, resulting in impulsive decision-making. Further evidence of ineffectiveness and inefficiency within the school leadership was provided by FG3, who stated:

*"The SMT is dysfunctional in our school. This is so because those who support the principal are listened to. And as such, there is no collective decision that has been taken by our SMT. We are operating under those pathetic conditions in our school. There is no school leadership effort or initiative to enhance effective school governance."*

The responses from qualitative data respondents indicate challenges related to effective school governance. The lack of efforts by educators to fully equip school governors with the necessary skills to perform their duties suggests a deliberate move by the school management to assume these responsibilities on behalf of the parents. This implies that the principal and educators may be comfortable handling these functions, discouraging parental involvement. The Education Department Officials' (EDOs) feedback reflected an idealized perspective, outlining what should happen while highlighting the existing challenges. As EDO1 observed:

*"Ordinarily, principals and the entire school leadership are supposed to be leading in terms of ensuring the enhancement of effective governance, but I must admit that this is a challenge from one to another. Principals in some schools do not train their SGBs but dictate terms to SGBs. Curriculum related issues, for example, where SGB should play a critical role, you will find the opposite taking place, wherein teachers determine the curriculum. They did that to ensure their job safety without identifying critical areas that have to be introduced to the school in line with community needs. The department needs to ensure that SGBs are capacitated to understand their expected roles."*

This section presents a perfect situation for how school administration should contribute to efficient school governance. The EDO does, however, include a disclaimer stating that this is not happening in practice. There is evident partisanship among stakeholders in certain schools. Educators let the principal set the parameters rather than giving the SGBs more authority. This predicament is because educators find it more comforting to assume that school governors are ill-prepared and have difficulty understanding their duties, as stated in SASA (1996). This dynamic benefits educators when curriculum-related issues are discussed, as the school governors—who should be leading these discussions—fail to participate, leaving educators to dominate the curriculum decisions. According to the South African Schools Act (1996), parents and school governors should lead curriculum decisions, ensuring the curriculum aligns with community needs. However, when school governors are illiterate, educators craft a curriculum prioritizing their job security. EDO2 further confirmed the issue of inadequate preparation among school governors, stating that SGBs must be fully equipped to avoid manipulation by the principal. Capacity-building for all SMT members is also crucial. If the SMT is well-prepared, school governors can fulfill their mandate confidently and impartially.

### 3. Involvement of SGBs in school financial management matters

EDO2 also highlighted the challenges to the effectiveness of the training that the employer is offering. This is what he had noted.

*"I am not afraid to say that our SGBs are brainwashed in those induction workshops. The reason for this is that the material provided is written in English, and most of our parent components are illiterate. Induction workshops are called for the purpose of compliance. In such workshops, only two areas are emphasized: recruitment process and financial management."*

The induction and capacitation of newly elected SGBs are often treated as a procedural formality rather than a meaningful exercise. This is evident from the statement of a senior departmental official (EDO), who candidly admitted that these induction workshops often serve to indoctrinate rather than educate. The primary focus of these workshops tends to be on handling the recruitment process and managing finances, even though these are just a fraction of the responsibilities mandated by the SASA of 1996. Despite this focus, ample evidence shows that SGBs often lack true mastery of these areas. During recruitment processes, enlightened stakeholders frequently manipulate school governors, appointing unqualified candidates over qualified ones, resulting in numerous disputes.

Similarly, in financial management, there have been cases where SGB signatories, such as the treasurer and chairperson, are coerced by principals into misappropriating school funds. These issues underscore the need for the proposed Bill that aims to implement stricter measures in this regard. When asked about these challenges, both P1 and P2 acknowledged that they struggle in these areas. FG2 also confirmed that school governors are actively involved in financial matters, noting that.

*"Our understanding of our roles and responsibilities has assisted us because we clearly understand how the public purse should be managed. We are very clear on the roles and constitution of our sub-committees, such as the Finance and Procurement committees. This makes us very happy because no level of manipulation can see the sun's light under our watch. In summary, we are handling and not only involved in the school's finances."*

The above sentiments indicate that the manipulation of school governors in financial management is a genuine concern. According to Section 20 of the SASA, while the principal is the chief accounting officer, the school governors bear primary responsibility for managing finances. Therefore, school governors must take a proactive role in financial oversight and should not rely solely on educators and the principal. The focus group discussion highlights that contrary to this expectation, many schools knowingly or unknowingly limit the SGBs' involvement in financial management by failing to empower them. This lack of empowerment prevents SGBs from playing an active and effective role in school finances. EDO1 and EDO2 confirmed that school governors are involved in financial matters. P1 further noted that:

*"In terms of SGB involvement in financial matters, I can proudly say that the SGB is hands-on. When the school receives its paper budget, SGB will be called, and the following steps to be taken to adopt the budget, SGB is part of that. In our school, we use in-contact; the chairperson and the treasurer are the recipients of this arrangement for transparency and accountability. Financial reports are tabled quarterly by the SGB to the general meeting of parents. I am playing the role of giving advice to the SGB as outlined in SASA (1996) and ensuring that public finance is utilized as enshrined in both the Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) and Treasury Regulations."*

These sentiments were also echoed by P2, as he alluded that they have a functioning finance committee and procurement committee, which are SGB sub-committees. Parents are represented in these committees, and as such, they are signatories, both the chairperson and the treasurer. They took part in all finance-related matters.

On the contrary, both FG1 and FG2 disputed what other respondents had uttered about SGBs' involvement in financial matters.

FG1 uttered that:

*"The school has been operating with a skeleton SGB structure without full complement. In our school, when one is talking about SGB, you are referring to the treasurer and the chairperson. Those are the people who are working closely with the principal in terms of school finances. The SGB is not involved in the budgetary processes, and the signatories are just signing cheques that are not accounted for."*

The very sentiments were further confirmed by FG3, who noted that:

*"The SASA (1996) gives financial powers to the school governors. The treasurer and the chairperson are the only people the principal respects because they are the signatories. We initiated online banking as a school, which the parents agreed upon and endorsed, but the principal decided to terminate such services without any meeting being held. So, the school's finances are in the hands of the principal and the signatories, meaning that the entire SGB does not have powers in the school finances."*

The divergent views expressed by the focus groups regarding their involvement in school finances reveal that in some schools, the school governors are actively engaged in financial management. This situation highlights a severe challenge and a troubling scenario in school governance and the management of public funds. It's particularly concerning that principals are not exempt from financial embezzlement, mismanagement, and maladministration. The principal acts as the accounting officer, providing guidance, and the school governors are mandated by the South African Schools Act (SASA) to handle the school's finances. Every participant concurred that, as intended by SASA, the participation of SGBs in financial affairs needs to be promoted. This would guarantee the institution's seamless running because accountability and transparency would avert needless financial disputes. All ought to understand the proper management of public funds. Creating specialized subcommittees for finance and procurement is essential to preventing manipulation. These opinions suggest a serious problem with school governors being manipulated regarding financial management. As per Section 20 of the SASA, the school governors are primarily responsible for managing funds, but the principal acts as the main accounting officer. Therefore, rather than depending exclusively on teachers and the principal, school governors must take the initiative in financial management. The focus group has shown that they are involved in the school's financial operations and manage them well. Regarding the financial difficulties faced by schools, EDO2 observed that:

*"I must say that it is a known fact that SGBs in most schools are side-lined on financial matters. Chairpersons and Treasurers are just consulted when a cheque must be signed; hence, they become victims of this anomaly. They are taken for a ride because they lack accountancy skills. Principals are usually culprits in this regard. When this happens, principals must be taken to task by the Department of Education because parents depend on the resource person for further guidance."*

The EDO's assertion confirms ongoing challenges in managing school funds, likely due to the lack of accounting skills among SGB members, which leaves them vulnerable to manipulation by other stakeholders. Such manipulations critically undermine school effectiveness. An effective school is typically characterized by students who exceed expectations. Still, when SGBs are manipulated, school funds are embezzled, depriving learners of adequate support for learning materials, a conducive learning environment, and a relevant curriculum. One of the main components of successful schools is curriculum development, which never stops. School governors are required under SASA to uphold the school's best interests and endeavor to secure its growth by offering all students a high-quality education. High-caliber pupils are just one aspect of a superb education; other elements include excellent content and a nurturing learning environment. The difficulties brought to light by the EDOs are

regrettable since they jeopardize the goal of obtaining high-quality education. These observations correspond with the provisions of SASA (1996), which delineate the roles and obligations of school governors, encompassing the delivery of high-quality education, creating a student code of conduct, and assisting the principal, teachers, and staff in discharging their responsibilities. The study does not claim how school improvement will happen if school governors support them. Instead, it implies that elevating the SGBs' function could improve the standard of instruction in schools. SGBs support the transparent financial management of schools, which enhances public education and fosters efficient governance. They accomplish this by endorsing the school budget.

#### **4. Discussion of findings**

This study examines factors inhibiting quality education from a school governance perspective. The findings of the study showed that the SGB members could not provide quality education, and there were divergent views about the role of school leadership in ensuring effective school governance. The findings also revealed a lack of teamwork and collaboration among SMTs to provide adequate school governance, which was also noted as a concern. Furthermore, participants differed on how SGB is involved in financial matters.

Regarding SGB members' inability to deliver high-quality education, it became apparent that they lacked the necessary expertise and capability to manage matters about school governance. Their low literacy rates and the flimsy nature of the DoE's capacitation training programs were the causes of this. The incompetence of SGBs almost reached the point where they could not lay the foundation for providing quality education to their schools. This directly conflicts with the requirements outlined in SASA (1996). SGBs are responsible for advancing the standard of education in their schools, as stated unequivocally by SASA (1996). The inability of SGBs to address issues related to school governance, which among others is the delivery of high-quality education, was a sign of their schools' decreased effectiveness, which made Sammons' (1995) theory of school effectiveness impossible.

Regarding divergent views about the role of school leadership in ensuring effective school governance, it appeared that parent SGB members and government employees (school leaders and Education Development Officers) had contradicting views about how school leadership supports SGBs to implement effective school governance. For instance, FG2 noted that their school leadership was doing well in terms of providing support to the SGBs in their pursuance of school governance. However, FG3 indicated they were not supported by their SMT, attributing this to their dysfunctionality. On the other hand, P1 and EDO1 reported that SGBs were provided with insufficient support to handle school governance matters. The fact that there was disagreement among SGB parents was the indication that SGBs do not have the same understanding of their roles in ensuring effective school governance that will promote quality education. Furthermore, principals and Education Development Officers, on the one hand, believed there was a lack of capacitation. Some parent SGB members, on the other hand, believed that school leadership was supporting them as an indication that there was a lack of shared understanding of how school leaders should play their roles in supporting SGBs to enhance the quality of education in schools. This situation indicated that SGBs were not adequately promoting the quality of education in a manner that complies with the School Effectiveness framework. The DBE supervisory role must be intensified to ensure that all the stakeholders, especially the SGB members and the SMT, collaborate to enhance quality education in their schools. Improving the frequency and quality of the monitoring and support services provided to schools through the district offices can assist the SGBs in enhancing the quality of education.

Lastly, the data showed that in pursuance of their mandate to support SGBs in promoting the quality of education in schools, SMTs lacked teamwork and collaboration among SMTs. This indicated that SGBs could not discharge the statutory obligations of leveling the fields to provide quality education in schools. SGBs are tasked, among others, to deal with school

finances, yet the inadequate support received from school leadership inhibited them from discharging this responsibility.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, SGBs' incapacity to handle matters about school governance while still delivering a high-quality education was a symptom of their institutions' declining efficacy. This circumstance demonstrated that SGBs were not effectively advancing educational quality in a way that aligns with the provisions of the SASA (1996) and the School Effectiveness framework. Additionally, their inability to manage school funds well due to a lack of support from school leadership hinted that the selected secondary rural schools were not providing a high-quality education. The diverse views about how SGBs are supported by school management were another indication that the stakeholders understand the issue of school governance differently

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