

A qualitative appraisal of the meaning and challenges of the principal's school governance role in the Gert Sibande Region

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14 May 2015

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Declaration

I hereby declare that:

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is my own work, that all the resources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references¹, and that this thesis has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at any other university.

JM Nhlapo

¹ See Notes on page xix

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my father Tayi Jotam Nhlapo, my late mother Roseline Jowi Nhlapo and my late step-mother Beauty Nomthandazo Nhlapo who were a great inspiration in my education.

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I thank God the Almighty for providing me with strength, wisdom and inspiration to complete this thesis.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to appraise the meaning and challenges of the principal's school governance role in the Gert Sibande Region of the Mpumalanga Province. This was premised on the inherent challenges of the principal's role as prescribed in the South African Schools Act, which locates the principal in the school governing body (SGB) as a member who promotes the best interests of the school; as well as an *ex officio* member who represents and promotes the interests of the employer – the Department of Education.

It was found, through the literature review, that the challenges of the principal's school governance role were largely symptoms of different emphases on the various functions of the SGB as listed in the South African Schools Act. As such, the concept of school governance was contextualised into an understanding of the essence of the school governance mandate as concerned with three main roles of the SGB, namely, *providing the school with a strategic direction, the SGB being critical friend to the school and holding the school to account.*

Through qualitative interviews of purposely selected school principals, educator-governors and parent-governors, it was found that the principal's role was influenced by, among others, challenges pertaining to the principals' *ex officio* role, parent governors' low education level, parent governors perceptions about being in the SGB, the perceptions about the principals' role in the SGB by other members and miscellaneous challenges pertaining to perceptions and structural factors about the school governance role. This was found to be a result of the listed nature of the Schools Act's governance roles and responsibilities and pointed to the need for giving context to them through an approach that focuses on the meaning and implications of the school governance mandate. For that reason, this study proposes a Three-step Approach to school governance.

The Three step-Approach to school governance takes the school governance mandate as a point of departure and models the school governance process from

the intention to establish SGBs through elections of a new and incoming SGB while the outgoing SGB is in the final stages of its term of office; to training of SGB members over stages that focus on the relevant content and components of school governors; and culminates into the start of the process of functioning of the incoming SGB. The emphasis of this approach is on fostering a clear understanding of the school governance mandate; how it contextualises the listed functions in the Schools Act; and the need for the SGB to start functioning with members already trained and in full understanding of their roles as they relate to the school governance mandate of promoting the best interests of the schools through the provision of quality education for all learners at the school.

Key words:

school governing body, school governance, school governance roles, school governance functions, school principals' governance roles, promoting the best interests of schools, school governance policies, democratic governance, school governance mandate

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Notes

1. The reference technique and the reference list are written according to the NWU referencing guide (2012) available at <http://www.nwu.ac.za>.
2. Where page numbers are not indicated in sources cited, this is because these sources are from websites that do not indicate page numbers.
3. Where page numbers are not indicated in citations from journal, reference is made to the entire article and not to a particular section or quotation.
4. Where page numbers are not indicated even though the source is numbered, reference is made to the theme of the whole publication and not a specific page reference.

Chapter 1

Orientation

1.1 Introduction and rationale

The institution of democracy in South Africa implied the democratisation of education. In this regard, and according to Dieltiens (2005:11), the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996,² (Republic of South Africa, 1996a) ushered in an era of democratic school governance through the advocacy of active participation of stakeholders in deliberating and reaching consensus on the nature and ethos of schooling. In essence, the Schools Act provides a uniform system for the organisation, governance and funding of schools, which requires the active and innovative participation of educators, parents, learners and members of the community. In principle, the Schools Act provides for a school governing body (SGB) that is constituted by all school stakeholders that include, the school principal as an *ex officio* member, elected representatives of parents, educators and support staff at schools, learners from Grade 8, and co-opted members who can be from the community.

In scrutinising the composition of members of the school governing body, it becomes clear that democracy is upheld in terms of elected representatives of schools stakeholders, in that parents, educators and learners are elected into the SGB. However, the school principal is not elected as he/she, according to Section 23(1)(b) of the Schools Act, is an *ex officio* member, which implies that he/she serves on the governing body in his/her official capacity, which makes him/her an automatic member of the governing body.

The *ex officio* membership of the principal in the governing body poses the first of numerous challenges pertaining to the school governance role of the principal. In view of the *ex officio* membership of the principal, and the fact that he/she may not be a chairperson of any committee of the SGB, the question arises as to precisely what his/her role in school governance is. Section 19(2) of

² Hereafter referred to as Schools Act.

the Schools Act states that the Head of Department (HoD) must ensure that principals and other officers of the Department of Education render all necessary assistance to governing bodies in the performance of their functions. To this end, Joubert (2007:40) points out that the principal must co-operate with the SGB with regard to all aspects as specified in the Schools Act, and further points out that the principal is a state employee and is delegated by the HoD to perform specific functions, which implies that he/she acts on behalf of the Department of Education and is accountable to the HoD. This, according to Davies (2008:80), clearly indicates that in the 'eyes' of legislation, the principal represents the education authority, while the governing body acts on behalf of the school. The implication of this role is that the principal:

- represents the HoD in the governing body when acting in his/her official capacity and thus protects and promotes the interests of the Department of Education; and
- by virtue of being a member of the governing body, promotes the best interests of the school.

Joubert (2007:40) pronounces this as a dual role of the principal in school governance: that of principal or departmental employee and SGB member. In this regard, Davies (2008:81) argues that the principal's position is unenviable because, of all the governing body members, the principal is the one who has to represent the interests of the HoD – which may not be congruent with the more parochial interests of the school. This situation creates a situation where the principal could be in a position of opposition to the remainder of the governing body on any issue where interests cannot be balanced. Heystek (2004:308) points out, in this regard, that by virtue of acting in his/her official capacity and being a member of the SGB, the principal is a key player but is also in a difficult situation in that, on the one hand, he/she is a departmental official representing the government and must do what the employer expects, while on the other hand, his/her appointment was recommended by the SGB, which believes that he/she would serve the school community. Therefore, this clearly places the principal in a challenging and stressful situation.

Apart from the challenge of the principal's *ex officio* status in the governing body, numerous other challenges concerning his/her role are reported in various studies. These challenges are mainly demonstrated in the functioning of the SGB. For instance, Heystek (2004:310), highlighting a challenge pertaining to the principal and functioning of the governing body, states that most principals were used to a situation where they were in charge and had virtually all power, especially regarding school finances, and to a lesser extent, the policies, general management and governance of the school. In the new governance structure introduced after 1996, parents have a far greater say – if not the final say – and principals must consider the inputs of all other role players in the management of their schools and, in addition, parent-governors might have all the required skills and knowledge to manage the budget and set new policies, in which case the principal may feel left out or side-lined in the decision-making process. As such, the principal may feel threatened and disempowered, which will inevitably damage the relationship of trust.

Interference with professional management has also been a problem in many SGBs. Xaba (2004:20) reports of an incident where, for instance, parents demanded rights to hire and fire educators, much against the educators' employment conditions and the prescripts of due processes in dealing with disciplinary issues pertaining to educators. These incidents indicate challenges inherent in the principal's governance role in that there are contested areas, which seem to come from the prescription of the governance functions and the principal's role as accounting officer and professional leader of the school.

Additional challenges that have a direct and/or indirect bearing on the role of the principal highlighted by research into school governance include the following:

- Mncube (2009a:35) found that most governors felt that the principal was the most powerful member on the body, and described the principal as the one who controls or dictates in the SGB. To that end, Mncube (2009a:35) postulates that the view that the principal is the most powerful member of the SGB is questionable as the aim of the SGB is democratic governance, and moreover, the chair of governors should steer the SGB.

- Maluleke (2008:90) reports from his observation of SGB meetings that such meetings seem to be dominated by principals and, that principals remain in control of SGB activities. This is expressed by a principal in that study who stated the following:

As the principal you chair meetings; ... you end up calling meetings come up with agenda ... come up with proposals ... you come up with all what has to be done ... and they (governors) rubber stamp what you say.

- Mkentane (2003:46) posits that principals do not follow rules and policies. After conducting five interviews at one school and using questionnaires at two other schools, Mkentane found that members of SGBs were not structurally involved as expected by the Schools Act; hence they could not make a positive contribution. This implies that functionaries of the SGB usually do not carry out their roles. Instead, principals execute all the functions and roles.
- Kumalo (2009:72) found from the responses of principals that they did not seem to have a clear understanding of what their roles and responsibilities in the SGB were. For example, it was clear that principals, in many instances, saw themselves as the mentors of other members. They also seemed to be doing work for the SGBs in ensuring that there was harmony among SGB members and that, schools were running smoothly. In this regard, one principal stated the following:

Yes. I am helping them to perform their duties. Our SGB is responsible for everything, but I have to consistently help and guide them, to the extent that I end up doing most of their functions.

From the research findings detailed above, there are different meanings attached to challenges of the principal's school governance role and it seems also that principals themselves may not be knowledgeable about their own specific roles. This is understandable considering that even the Schools Act

does not specify categorical roles, but refers to the roles of SGBs with the principal's role of *ex officio* member being, as alluded to earlier, relegated to "*rendering all necessary assistance to governing bodies in the performance of their functions in terms of this Act*". The difficulty seems to relate to the meaning of the role of the principal as a fully-fledged member of the SGB, while being *ex officio* and being accountable to the HoD as understood by school governors³.

While numerous studies have focused, as alluded to earlier, on the challenges of school governance in South Africa, there is no evidence of studies focusing specifically on the meaning of and challenges of the principal's role in school governance and in the case of this study, in the Gert Sibande Region.

1.2 Purpose statement

The intent of this qualitative phenomenological study was to appraise the meaning and challenges of the principal's school governance role at schools in the Mpumalanga Provincial Department of Education's Gert Sibande Region. The study investigated how school governors conceptualise the principal's roles in the context of the Schools Act and in practice. Accounts in this regard were phenomenologically elicited from principals, educator-governors and parent-governors; and were examined to understand the nature of principals' governance roles and the implications of the challenges they experience in executing school governance roles as SGB members, while being accountable to the Head of Department of the provincial Department of Education.

1.3 Research question

To explore the school governance role of the principal, a primary question, secondary questions and study objectives were formulated. Based on the purpose as outlined above, this study was guided by the following primary question:

³ "School governor(s)" is used to relate to members of SGBs, which include the principal, except when specifically related to educator-, parent- and learner-governors.

- *What is the meaning of and challenges in the principal's school governance role?*

This primary research question was addressed by focusing on the following sub-questions:

- What is the nature of the principal's school governance role?
- What is the meaning of the principal's school governance role?
- Which contextual challenges are inherent in principal's school governance role?
- How do school governors in the Gert Sibande Region conceptualise the principals' school governance role?
- What approach to school governance can overcome the challenges inherent in the principal's governance role?

These secondary research questions translated into the following objectives:

- To examine the nature of the principal's school governance role;
- To determine the meaning of the principal's school governance role;
- To determine the contextual challenges inherent in the principal's school governance role;
- To explore how school governors in the Gert Sibande Region conceptualise the principal's school governance role; and
- To recommend an approach to school governance that can overcome the challenges inherent in the principal's school governance role.

The explanation of the nature and challenges of the principal's school governance role was underpinned by a conceptual framework that explains how school governors perceive the execution of this role.

1.4 Conceptual framework

According to the Schools Act, the role of the members of SGBs is to promote the best interests of the school. The execution of this role is dependent on SGB members being able to synergise their operations and the way they carry out this role on the basis of being equal partners and who are able to take decisions on the basis of democratic principles of participation and consensus. In this regard, Roos (2009:58) states:

... once they (SGB members) are elected, they are all equal governors of the school. Their responsibility is to govern the school within the framework provided and not to represent the sectoral interests of the group from which they are drawn.

This statement implies that all members of the SGB, comprising the principal, educators, non-educators, parents and learner representatives act together in promoting the best interests of the school as equal partners and participants in school governance. This also implies a school governance landscape that is founded on principles of stakeholder participation in decision making on all aspects of school functioning (Naidoo, 2005:29). Therefore, the key element in school governance in terms of how SGBs are currently composed, is the participation of stakeholders in decision making at school level, which implies equal participation of the principal, school staff, parents and learners in promoting the best interests of the school community.

The equal partnership of stakeholders is best expressed and captured in the SGB as a body representing school stakeholders. This partnership is what can enable, according to Caldwell and Harris (2008:8), the school to “*build[s] its intellectual, social, financial and spiritual capital and align[s] them to achieve its goals*”. Caldwell and Harris (2008:8) further explain this in the following manner:

- Intellectual capital refers to the level of knowledge and skill of those who work in or for the school.
- Social capital refers to the strength of formal and informal partnerships and networks involving the school and all individuals, agencies,

organisations and institutions that have the potential to support and be supported by the school.

- Spiritual capital refers to the strength of moral purpose and the degree of coherence among values, beliefs and attitudes about life and learning (for some schools, spiritual capital has a foundation in religion; in others it refers to ethics and values shared by members of the school and its community).
- Financial capital refers to the money available to support the school.

These features as described by the scholars above, bring to the fore the actual role and responsibility of the SGB. Taken from the school governance mandate as stated in Section 20 of the Schools Act, that the SGB's main role is that of *promoting the best interests of the schools through the provision of quality education for all learners at the school*, this implies that the SGB must endow all its efforts in promoting the school's interests by acting to implement the capital features described above. This requires unpacking a giving context to the school governance mandate.

Section 20(1) of the Schools Act states that the SGB shall:

- (c) develop the mission statement of the school; and
- (e) support the principal, educators and other staff of the school in the performance of their professional functions.

Considering these roles, it becomes clear that developing the school's mission statement involves a strategic planning process. According to Balarin, Brammer, James and McCormack (2008:16), the school governance of the SGB involves setting the school's vision and strategic direction. Balarin *et al.* (2008:16) further state that the school governance role also implies agreeing on plans and policies, and making 'creative' use of resources. An analysis of these statements also seems to suggest the supportive role of the SGB to the school as a whole – principal, educators and other staff at the school. McCrone,

Southcott and George (2011:6) point out activities that may be considered as supporting the assertion above of the SGB as being required to:

- be actively involved in self-evaluation;
- provide strategic direction alongside the senior leadership team; and
- ensure the school helps to support all children and young people in the local community.

These activities actually translate into what Business in the Community (2008:17) regards as the responsibilities of the governing body, namely to:

- set the school's vision and strategic aims;
- ensure the school is accountable to those it serves; and
- act as a critical friend by providing support and challenge.

These responsibilities seem to contextualise the school governance mandate as set out in the Schools Act. These responsibilities would include, according to Business in the Community (2008:17) monitoring and evaluating performance.

In appraising the principal's role in school governance, this thesis intended to explore the challenges of the principal's role in school governance by exploring the school governance mandate, its implications and how the principal's role is executed at schools. Therefore this study was underpinned by the meaning, implications and challenges inherent to the principal's school governance roles as informed by the three areas of SGB responsibility mentioned above. The study was thus underscored by the three conceptual frameworks giving context to the school governance mandate, namely,

- setting the school's strategic direction;
- holding the school to account to its stakeholders; and
- acting as a critical friend by providing support and challenge.

For that reason, the researcher elicited information about what participants regarded as the principal's school governance role and the challenges experienced in this role to determine the challenges inherent to the principal's school governance role.

1.5 Challenges of the study

The following challenges were envisaged and dealt with:

The scientific field of research with regard to the topic of the role of principals in school governance was found to be very limited. Most literature sources seemed to focus on the functions of SGBs and the role of the principals were thus obscured and not clearly spelt out. However, a cross-section review of literature was thus conducted, including a comparative analysis of international literature.

In addition, other challenges concerned finding participants for the interviews and arranging for interviews. Following correct data collection protocols and establishing rapport with potential interviewees assisted and due to the dynamism of qualitative research, decisions on appropriate action were taken where necessary and were fully accounted in the research report.

1.6 Chapter layout

The chapter layout of this thesis was designed as follows:

Chapter 1 provides a general overview of the study, including the introduction and rationale for the study. This chapter also details the research problem, research questions, and purpose of the research.

Chapter 2 outlines the conceptualisation of school governance by providing a literature review with regard to its contextual meaning.

Chapter 3 presents nature of the principal's school governance role in terms of its meaning and the challenges inherent in it.

Chapter 4 describes the research process in depth, including the research design and methodology followed in the study.

Chapter 5 deals with the findings from the interviews with regard to how principals at schools in the Gert Sibande Region carry out their school governance roles as well as provide an analysis of the data collected.

Chapter 6 summarises the results of the research and makes recommendations on how the challenges inherent in the principal's governance roles can be overcome.

1.7 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the problem statement, the rationale for the study and outlined details of the research method. The conceptual framework and challenges of the study were also provided. Finally, the chapter layout of this thesis was outlined.

The next chapter presents the literature review on the nature of the principal's school governance role as well as the meaning and challenges inherent in it.

Chapter 2

The school governance concept: contextual meaning

2.1 Introduction

School governance plays a critical role in the performance of schools. At the same time, there are numerous meanings on what constitutes the school governance mandate. Consequently, there are different views regarding main elements of the concept, which leads to different interpretation and emphases on the most suitable approach to the governing of schools.

This chapter seeks to present a generally agreed upon view of what school governance means and place it within a context of elements that can be accepted as giving meaning to the school governance mandate.

2.2 School governance: conceptualisation

School governance derives its meaning from the concept of governance, and is defined in various ways. In simple terms, Gisselquist (2012) defines governance as *“the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)”*. The Oxford Dictionaries Online (2012) defines governance simply as the action or manner of governing a state or organisation. The Ontario Education Service Corporation (OESC, 2010:22) articulates governance as providing a framework and a process for the allocation of decision-making powers and defines it as *“the exercise of authority, direction, and accountability to serve the purpose of public education”*.

From these definitions it can be concluded that governance is an act or a process of governing an organisation and more importantly, has to do with conferring decision-making powers of governance to serve the purposes of an organisation. This implies that governance takes place within a structure, which has actors who exercise decision-making in the organisation. In this regard, Gisselquist (2012) further points out that *“governance focuses on the formal and informal actors involved in decision-making and implementing the decisions*

made and the formal and informal structures that have been set in place to arrive at and implement the decision". In this context, governance can then be understood to be exercised by different entities, among others, government or the state and at a very local level in education, the SGB. This meaning of the concept of school governance can be defined in simple terms as:

The activities undertaken by the SGB to govern the school by providing a framework for taking and implementing decisions in pursuance of the school's educative teaching mandate.

Balarin *et al.* (2008:37) further define the concept of school governance and assert that:

... governance is concerned with the system by which organisations are directed and controlled; it relates to the authority structure of an organisation and hence to the arrangements that determine what organisations can do, who controls them, how that control is exercised, and how the risks and returns from the activities they undertake are allocated.

This characterisation of school governance introduces a critical quality in governance, that of accountability as embraced by the meanings that can be attached to what "*organisations can do, who controls them, how that control is exercised, and how the risks and returns from the activities they undertake are allocated*". In fact, Balarin *et al.* (2008:37) further add that governance addresses "*how to secure and motivate the efficient management of organisations by the use of incentive mechanisms such as contracts and legislation*". This points to school governance as not only governing the school, but exercising good governance.

According to OESC (2010:23), good governance is characterised by the structures and processes of decision-making and accountability within the system and the model of a school system where there is a focus on continuous learning, regular review of performance in school governance roles and planning for on-going improvement of governing body practices. Independent

Schools Victoria (n.d.) conveys a much more significant and impactful expression of good governance and states the following:

A sustainable governance structure should produce stable and effective leadership which underpins achievement of the school's objectives, and which is sensitive to guarding the vision and values of the past, whilst being responsive to changes in community values and the preferences of the immediate stakeholders.

To achieve good governance at schools, SGBs must be cognisant of what is relevant to good governance and be mindful of what in particular characterises good governance. To this end, Gisselquist (2012) characterises good governance as “*participatory, consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law and it assures that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making as well as being responsive to the present and future needs of society*”.

In the context of this study, good governance is regarded as an action involving SGBs being responsible for decision-making and ensuring the implementation of such decisions. In essence, the SGB is mandated with the act of school governance. In this regard, the following points can be made regarding school governance and the exercise of good governance by SGBs:

- The school governing body plays a very important role in ensuring that the school is governed efficiently in order to attain set goals. By virtue of being a crucial part of governance of the school, the SGB has critical roles and functions that it must carry out. For purposes of good governance, the governing body must create and develop rules and policies which will be a cornerstone and provide guidelines according to which the school as an organisation will be governed, organised, run and controlled. Therefore, school governance is about making decisions about how the school as an educational institution will be run and reflects

these in well-thought out implementable school policies (Youth Group Fact Sheet, 2011:4).

- It is imperative for the school governing body to clearly define policies to make them meaningful and understandable to the schooling community. This will ensure that everyone understands the policies and will make it easy for them to be implemented. This is the only way in which governance can ensure that the school fulfils its functions and mandate of providing learners with a relevant and quality education (Kjaer *in* Alrens, 2002:21).
- Good governance also involves rules and policies which provide guidance to stakeholders on how things are done at the school. Therefore, such rules and policies must be clear and unambiguous and must not be in contravention of the Schools Act and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Mongake, 2001:9). Furthermore, every policy drafted must aim to achieve specific results, in view of the fact that the intention and function of governance is to provide services by achieving not only results, but specific results (Mestry, 2006:1).

The foregoing exposition outlines what governance and, in particular, good governance entails and how these concepts are conceptualised. This foregrounds the role of the principal in school governance and brings to the fore, the need for exploring and understanding the contemporary perspective on school governance.

2.3 The contemporary perspective on school governance

As outlined above, school governance has evolved over the years from a centralised form of control to decentralised control. Plecki, McCleery and Knapp (2006:5) postulate that the evolution of school governance underscores a persistent mistrust of distant government, and an enduring faith in the principle of local control, which are factors that invoke the notions of decentralisation and self-governance. James, Brammer, Connolly, Fertig, James and Jones (2010:7)

point out that during the final decade of the 20th Century, there was a major shift to the self-governance of schools and although this self-governance has been enacted in diverse ways, the assumption is that greater autonomy will lead to improved educational outcomes. This in fact denotes decentralisation of decision-making to schools and enhanced autonomy of schools as well as features that are common in the governance of schools in many countries (Ainley & McKenzie, 2000:139). Decentralisation of school governance is espoused as the best way of ensuring that schools are managed and governed by the communities they serve and in which they are located. In this regard, Department for Children, Schooling and Families (2006:6) points out that over the course of the last 25 years, school governors have taken on more and more responsibility and their role has increased in importance as schools have gained more and more independence from local authorities.

The concepts of decentralisation and self-governance imply autonomy in the governance of schools. This also implies more responsibility for SGBs and thus calls for an understanding of what SGBs' roles actually are. Indeed, this defines the contemporary school governance perspective. In terms of Section 20 of the Schools Act, the SGB's main role is that of *promoting the best interests of the schools through the provision of quality education for all learners at the school*. Xaba (2004:313) notes that this is mainly a strategic role in the running of the school, which implies *setting the strategic framework, aims and objectives within the school's vision and mission, setting policies and targets for achieving objectives and monitoring and evaluating progress*. In fact, Section 20(1) of the Schools Act specifically directs that "*Subject to this Act, the governing body of a public school must -*

- (c) *develop the mission statement of the school; and*
- (e) *support the principal, educators and other staff of the school in the performance of their professional functions".*

According to Balarin *et al.* (2008:16), this role means that the SGB fulfils this role by executing three essential roles, namely, setting the school's vision and

strategic direction, agreeing on plans and policies, and making ‘creative’ use of resources.

These responsibilities are critical for well-functioning schools and effective governing bodies. While not expansive on these responsibilities, many experts seem to concur with the notion that the SGB has to provide the school with a *strategic direction*, *be a critical friend to the school* and *hold the school to account* (James *et al.*, 2012; Ranson & Crouch, 2009; Balarin *et al.*, 2008; Business in the Community, 2008; Barton, Lawrence, Martin & Wade, 2006; Heystek, 2004). It is therefore important to understand these responsibilities because their implications are critical for the school principal’s governance role.

2.3.1 *Setting the school’s strategic direction*

Open University (2012) describes setting the school’s strategic direction as relating to setting a strategic framework within which the principal will manage the school on a daily basis, and asserts that this means that the SGB has a responsibility for deciding the future direction of the school. Business in the Community (2008:14) expands this definition and states that setting the school’s strategic direction includes setting up a strategic framework for the school, setting its aims and objectives, setting policies and targets for achieving the objectives, reviewing progress and reviewing the strategic framework in light of progress. According to Ranson and Crouch (2009:53), in setting the strategic direction, the SGB acts as “*the trustee of the community while taking into account national and local policies*”.

It is therefore clear that the SGB’s role is that of providing strategic leadership to the school by engaging in a fully-fledged strategic engagement process that involves all stakeholders in setting an agreed upon direction for the school. Open University (2012) points out that fulfilling the strategic role is a three-stage process involving deciding on the aims and values of the school; working out how to put them into practice; and lastly, monitoring that they are working. These stages actually imply a strategic planning process, which, according to, Brenner, Sullivan and Dalton (2002:16), refers to a set of concepts and tools

designed to assist organisations in developing effective strategies to fulfil their missions, meet mandates and satisfy their constituencies in the long term and are, therefore, a process to develop new strategies to cope with change.

Setting the school's strategic direction, therefore, involves a careful and intensive strategic planning or a school development planning process, which is in fact a requirement in terms of the Gauteng Schools Act (Gauteng Department of Education, 1997:22). The school has to formulate its vision, mission and fundamental aims which articulate the reason for the school's existence, what it wants to create and achieve, and what it considers to be the fundamental purpose of education. The planning cycle addresses questions that respond to where the school is currently, where the school wants to be at the end of the planning cycle, how it will get there, how it will check whether it is getting there and how the school will know if it has gotten there (Xaba, 2006:17).

Moore and Diamond (2000) emphasise that together with the mission (purpose) and vision (desired future state), setting a strategic direction (how to get there), if properly developed and carried out, will result in the following critical organisational success factors:

- clarity of purpose and future that can be explained by everyone across the organisation;
- alignment and collaboration where all divisions, sites and teams draw on and build on each other's strengths to achieve a common purpose;
- clearly defined and easily understood value proposition as a market leader – customers know the value of what is offered and competitors struggle to emulate it;
- highly skilled and talented people actively seeking to work at the school; and
- school organisational success through delivery of tangible strategic objectives within the defined time frame.

It is therefore clear that setting a strategic direction for the school is a crucial role of the SGB. This role is of course very relevant in consideration of the SGB also playing a role of acting as a critical friend to the principal and school.

2.3.2 *Acting as a critical friend to the principal and school*

Balarin *et al.* (2008:15) describe acting as a critical friend as implying that the SGB “*shall support the head teacher in the performance of his functions and give him constructive criticism*”. Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2009:7) posits that acting as a critical friend involves providing advice on improvement strategies that will ultimately help shape the school’s strategic plan. Elaborating on this role, Business in the Community (2008:27) cites Deborah Dalglish (Head of UK Trainee Recruitment and Chair of Governors, Redlands Primary School, Tower Hamlets, London) who asserted that in acting as a critical friend to the principal and school, “*you are not there as an education expert, but as a ‘critical friend’ who asks questions and tries to understand what the school is doing well, and where it needs to do better*”. Earley and Weindling (2004:149) link the SGB being a critical friend to “*promoting a climate in which questions about performance – including their own – are openly and honestly discussed*”. Most importantly, these writers argue that a governing body acting as a critical friend provides high pressure but with high support and thus acts in a way that:

- provides an independent voice;
- promotes open and healthy debate; and
- works in the best interest of the school; and
- offers mutual respect.

According to Calow CE Primary School’s (2009) manifesto, being a critical friend to the school and the principal involves:

- monitoring progress;
- valuing and praising achievements; and

- challenging low performance and poor achievement.

This translates into, for example, asking challenging questions such as the following:

- How did you arrive at the conclusions contained within this report?
- Whom have you consulted?
- What improvements are evident?
- How do you know?
- Has progress been as intended?
- What are the main areas for further development?
- Who is responsible for further developments?
- What impact is intended and how will you know how well things are going?

Clearly, asking such questions might seem probing and confrontational in a situation where the environment for critical friendship is not favourable. However, as pointed out earlier, the intention of being challenging would be to offer high support as well.

Acting as a critical friend involves, therefore, giving support to the school, especially the principal in executing his/her day-to-day professional management of the school as well as challenging him/her in terms of school improvement and the achievement of the school's mission and goals. Furthermore, being a critical friend does not imply criticising for the sake of doing so, but providing constructive criticism on school processes and implementation of the strategic vision. This makes sense in that, while the SGB provides the strategic direction for the school, it is the principal who is mandated to ensure its implementation.

2.3.3 ***Ensuring that the school is accountable***

Ensuring that the school is accountable, according to Business in the Community (2008:17), means that the SGB must ensure that the school is accountable to those it serves. Being accountable means, in simple terms, to explain or justify one's actions or behaviour. Maile (2002:313) explains accountability as involving reporting to other people voluntarily or compulsorily and includes having a conscience or a moral responsibility about what one is doing. Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2009:7) argue that accountability involves self-evaluation and review, strategic planning and reporting. This implies that the SGB engages continually in these processes in order to fulfil its governance mandate. In light of the three roles explained above, it means that the SGB sets the strategic direction, which is then implemented by the principal and the school, with constant support and critical friendship offered by the SGB.

The school, therefore, has to account for its performance regarding the mission and goals as contained in its strategic mandate by engaging in the processes mentioned above, and giving account to the SGB and stakeholders of the school. It is important to note that accountability involves not only the school or the principal, but the SGB as well in terms of the performance of all school staff members, administrators and the SGB against learner achievement objectives and entails continually and honestly tracking progress and reporting results, which in essence, means that the SGB measures and communicates how well the vision is being accomplished (Brenner *et al.*, 2002:37).

Radoni (n.d.:33) makes the point that school governance has three dimensions that define accountability. Firstly, sovereign governance which deals with public accountability for the work of the school as a whole and locates it on all the interested parties, including presentation of the annual report to parents. Secondly, judicial governance, which places accountability for meeting all the legal requirements to which the school is subject, including the laws relating to finance, employment, the curriculum, health and safety. Finally, performance governance, which entails accountability for carrying out the activities of the

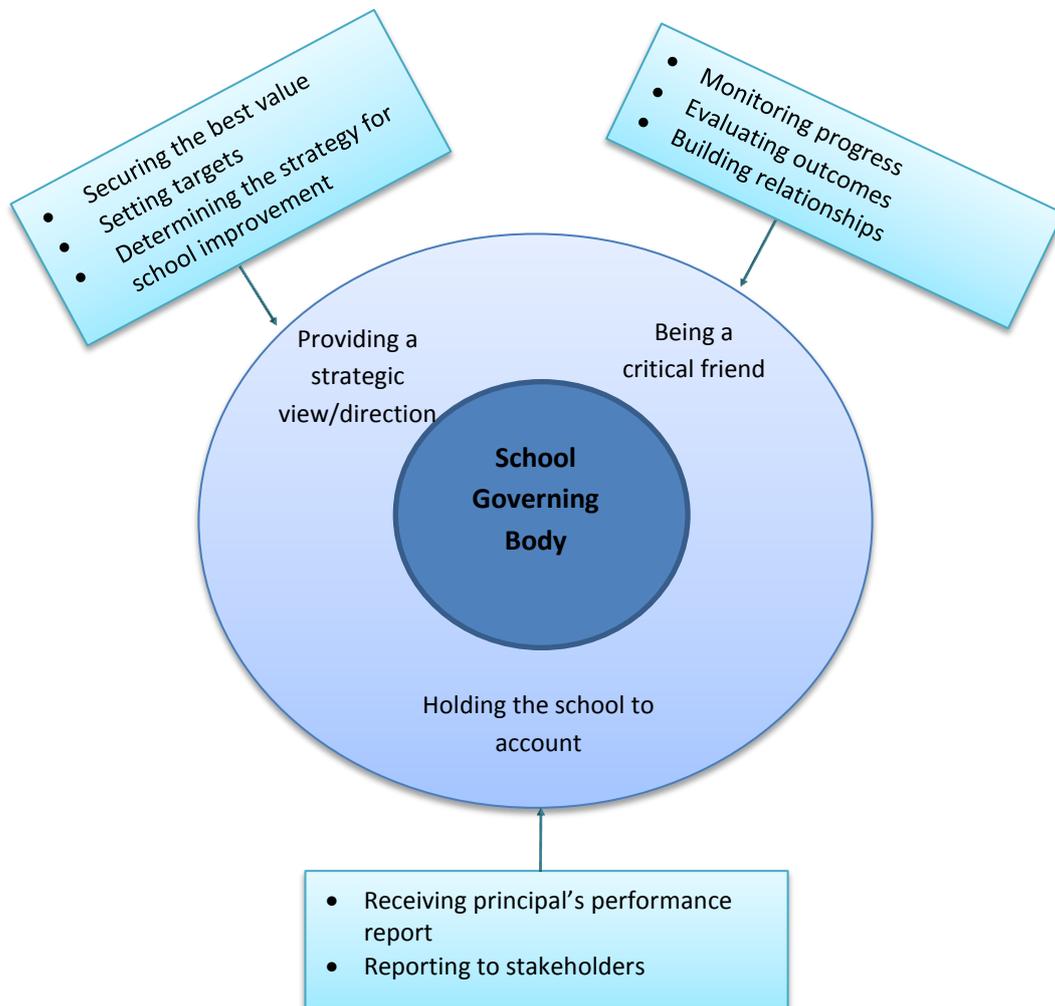
school in order to practise and realise its vision and to provide services to the learners.

It can be concluded therefore, that the contemporary perspective of school governance involves the three roles afore-exposed. Open University (2012) surmises the three roles as follows:

- Providing a strategic view further involves securing the best value, setting targets and determining the strategy for school improvement;
- Being a critical friend involves monitoring progress, evaluating outcomes and building relationships; and
- Ensuring that accountability involves receiving the principal's performance report and reporting to stakeholders.

This summation is illustrated in Figure 2.1 below.

Figure 2.1 **The contemporary perspective on the SGB's roles**



Adapted from Open University, 2012.

The responsibilities of the SGB as exposed above indicate significant if not critical dimensions of school governance that can be drawn from the roles of members. The most critical dimension is that of participatory school governance. Indeed, the contemporary perspective of school governance is largely premised on the notion of stakeholder participation and is expressed by the stakeholder model of school governance. According to Department for Education and Skills (2004:7), the stakeholder model of school governance was designed to ensure representation of key stakeholders (parents, staff, community, local authority, foundations and sponsors) and to help governing

bodies to be accountable to parents, learners, staff and the local community. James *et al.* (2010:11) state that in this model the SGB has a role of balancing stakeholder needs and making appropriate policies and strategic decisions.

The stakeholder model of school governance is in alignment with the contemporary view of school governance in that it seeks to be representative and thus promotes the contemporary governance view that sees all governors as pivotal in school governance. It thus brings to the fore the principles of democratic governance.

2.4 Democratic governance as an element of contemporary school governance

Contemporary school governance, as presented above concerns itself mainly with stakeholder involvement in critical governance roles, which as mentioned earlier, relate to setting the school's strategic direction, acting as a 'critical friend' to the school and principal and ensuring that the school is accountable to the school community. This is precisely what defines democratic governance. Democratic governance in this context relates to school governors' ability to execute these three main roles. However, the execution of these roles demands a much more careful approach, by virtue of the potentially 'confrontational' nature of ambiguities inherent in their execution, for instance:

- Setting a strategic direction for the school might involve functional overlaps between governance functions and professional matters, such as determining curriculum-related directional interventions that might require the involvement of matters of professional work.
- Being a critical friend to the school and principal might be misconstrued and set up the governance structures to act as external agencies offering nothing but criticism of the school and its operations, especially where professional matters are concerned.
- Holding the school to account may be equated to the role of contemporary politics where so-called political parties supposedly hold

the government to account, which in many instances, is confrontational and for mere political point-scoring purposes. Thus, holding the school to account might lose its essential meaning.

It is therefore imperative to have insight into and understand the meaning of democratic school governance.

The meaning of democratic school governance has its roots in the notion of decentralising decision making to schools. In this regard, Dieltiens (2005:8) makes the point that “*the primary value of decentralising decision making to school governing bodies (SGBs) lies in our intuitive belief that it is those at the chalk-face of learning and teaching who are in the best position to make the right decisions for our learners*”. This statement is significant in that it actually alludes to democratic school governance in the sense of it being there to “[decentralise] governing authority to schools” as Dieltiens (2005:9) contends. This insistence on decentralising school governance authority to schools is, as largely documented, a result of struggles against the centralised apartheid authoritarian governance, both at state level and local levels including schools. It is also a much documented fact that the post-apartheid government “*introduced a unitary model of public school governance that devolved significant governance and management decision-making to schools*” (Dieltiens, 2005:9). Indeed, this unitary school governance model at public schools culminated into the Schools Act’s provisions for the establishment of democratically elected SGBs, which comprise school stakeholders that include representatives of schools’ staff, parents and learners (at secondary schools). This then, is the crux of democratic school governance.

Mncube (2009b:86), in defining democratic school governances states:

Democratic school governance refers to the transfer and sharing of power between the state and the school since schools are in the best position to know and understand their own needs, and therefore should be fundamentally self-determining.

Mncube (2009b:86) further states that democratic school governance “*implies that all the stakeholders, including parents, decide on school policies which affect the education of their children*”. Concerning this, Dieltiens (2005:11) points out that the values of democratic school governance lie in “*its promotion of the active participation of stakeholders in deliberating (and reaching consensus) on the nature and ethos of schooling*”. Bäckmann and Trafford (2006:9) state that democratic “*governance is based on human rights values, empowerment and involvement of students, staff and students on all important decisions in the school*”. Mabovula (2009:221) relates to democratic governance as involving deliberative practices that are geared towards a school’s self-renewal strategy to “*be managed collaboratively on a consensual basis by all members of school governance*”. Mncube (2009a:33) makes the point that, in a school situation, democratic governance means:

Powers and responsibilities will be distributed more equally between all the stakeholders of the school, namely, parents, learners and staff. Policies are formulated after rigorous deliberations, and power is equally shared by all governors regardless of age, gender or race, which is a way in which democracy manifests itself.

It seems, from the definitions of democratic school governance that the key principles are those of stakeholder involvement and participation in decision-making. This makes sense in that decisions made at schools are those that ultimately affect people involved at school and in school operations, be they professional or purely organisational-structural decisions that require the execution of governance roles. For this reason, democratic governance has to be seen in the sense of how governors operate in making decisions and seeing to their implementation, which is where the importance and significance of setting a strategic direction for the school, being a critical friend to the school and the principal and holding the school to account are located. Adams and Waghid (2005: 25) contend that democratic governance requires that people actively participate and cooperate and are consulted in whatever decisions are made, which are indicative of the fact that all citizens have equal rights in

democratic governance. In fact, Adams and Wahgid (2005:25) cite Hendricks (2000) who claims the following:

For the democratisation of school governance to take place, it should become the preserve of the ordinary lay person. Policies promulgated in the Act create spaces for the application of democratic principles. These spaces need to be filled or utilised with the distinct purpose of contributing towards sound school governance based on the principles as provided in the Act. Participation in school-based governance has the potential of contributing to the democratic transformation of whole school communities.

Emanating from the foregoing views on democratic school governance, it can be concluded that it is mainly concerned with participation in decision-making on governance matters by stakeholders as equals. The equality principle removes the notion of power centralisation on one person or on certain persons in the school governance structures for any reason. To this end, Xaba (2011:208), as pointed out earlier, argues that there are challenges in executing democratic school governance in the sense, as espoused by Roos (2009), that:

Although governors are elected on a constituency basis, once they are elected they are all equal governors of the school. Their responsibility is to govern the school within the framework provided and not to represent the sectoral interests of the group from which they are drawn.

Governance is complicated by among other factors, “*the attempt by elected governors to watch over the interests of their constituencies*” (Xaba, 2011:208), which, as Xaba (2011:208) argues, “*runs against executing the very core of the school governance main role: promoting the best interests of the schools and learners*”.

The challenges regarding democratic school governance may be ascribed to the legacy of the apartheid school governance model, which located power on the school principal, who also had to toe the line of the state. The next section

illustrates this point through a synopsis of the development of school governance in South Africa.

2.5 The development of school governance in South Africa: a synopsis

The development of school governance in South Africa is explored in terms of the pre-democratic era and the current democratic era.

2.5.1 *Pre-democratic era*

In the period before the dawn of democracy in South Africa, the education system and school governance were in the hands and the control of the state. This was as a result of a separatist policy of the National Party which came to power in 1948. Soon after assuming power, the National Party (apartheid) government introduced the Bantu Education Act (Act 47 of 1953). The aim of this Act was to transfer the control and responsibility of the education of black people from the missionaries to the government. Later, the National Education Act (Act 39 of 1967) was promulgated and was to be responsible for the education of white children. This Act created a national education dispensation, which would serve the interests of the whites by coordinating and securing uniformity in their education (Steyn, Steyn, De Waal & Wolhuter, 2011:19-20).

Some of the main features of the apartheid education system were that education was strictly controlled by the state. The separatist policy of the National Party government advocated for bureaucracy, autocracy and centralisation (Steyn *et al.*, 2011:19-20). According to Ministerial Review Committee (2000:26), “*school level structures existed – in law if not in reality – and were variously known as school committees, school boards or management councils*”. While consisting of parent representatives, Pampallis (2005:6) makes the point that such structures had no significant decision-making powers and that their activities revolved around fundraising, which led to these structures in black communities losing their legitimacy as the struggle against apartheid gained momentum. Notably, during the apartheid era, there was little or no opportunity for parent involvement or participation in education

and school governance at any level (Singh, 2006:69). The main person who had control over the school at local level was the principal. According to Looyen (2000:66), other stakeholders in education such as parents, learners and educators had no decision-making powers in schools or school governance, and thus contributed absolutely nothing to policy making. They were allowed only to support the principal and nothing more.

It is, therefore, clear that school governance did not allow for any participation of stakeholders in decision-making. Consequently, the struggle against apartheid manifested itself in education and saw the formation of such structures as the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) that introduced the concept of People's Education as an alternative education for black children (Duma, Kapueja & Khanyile, 2011:45). Chaka (2008:9) points out what finally took place:

Eventually, parents of black children (and progressive parents of white children) were unwilling to accept this situation any longer as they wanted structures in which all interest groups could participate – including the mass democratic movement (MDM), non-governmental organisations and teacher organisations. Apartheid school governance structures in black schools gave way to Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) in primary schools and Parent-Teacher-Student Associations (PTSAs) in secondary schools. The formation of PTAs and PTSAs was co-ordinated by the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC).

It was during those struggles that black education leaders and learners joined the boycotts and protests which escalated gradually and culminated in the countrywide unrest. It must be noted that it was not plain sailing for the PTSAs as far as carrying out their envisaged functions was concerned. They encountered difficulties such as, among others, hostile authorities, not being clear and not fully understanding their roles as the knowledge and skills they had did not adequately prepare them for the fulfillment of their roles (Pampallis, 2005:7). Irrespective of all the hardships and difficulties, the PTSAs encountered in carrying out their functions they continued to exist and did a

wonderful job of crisis management and conflict resolutions at schools for a long time (Mongake, 2001:6). Ultimately, PTSAs and PTAs in black schools and governing bodies in Model C schools (these were established as part of educational reforms by the apartheid government) formed the basis for the post-apartheid democratic school governance structures.

The democratic era ushered in numerous changes to the education and school governance landscape. This was evident in the advent of democracy, which saw various activities aimed at institutionalising full democratic school governance.

2.5.2 ***The democratic era***

The democratic era evolved, as it were, from the year just before the 1994 elections during which the struggle for a free and democratic South Africa was intensified and which saw the unbanning of organisations like the African National Congress, the Pan Africanist Congress, the Azanian People's Organisation and many others, as well as negotiations for the new South Africa. This era saw the publication of White Papers 1 and 2 on Education and Training, which in essence culminated into the new National Education Policy Act and the South African Schools Act, among others. This period, which is referred to here as the advent of democracy, is the most crucial as it established the ground for the new school governance dispensation in South Africa.

2.5.2.1 *The advent of democracy: towards a new school governance dispensation*

The advent of democracy was characterised by rigorous if not robust negotiations towards a democratic dispensation in all South Africa's societal life and institutions, the outcome of which was a negotiated settlement designed to protect the interests of various class-based and ethnic communities (Fiske & Ladd, 2004:84). The final outcome, according to Duma *et al.* (2011:45), was education policy development, which then shifted to cater for a new type of

school governance, which was then expressed in the passing of the South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996, which effectively broke away from the past and mandated an establishment of school governing bodies that included parents (and learners in secondary schools) in the governance of schools.

This was preceded, as well-articulated by Chaka (2008:10) by, *inter alia*:

- the ANC developing policy options for the post-apartheid period whereby in December 1990, the NECC established the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) to examine policy options in all areas of education, including governance;
- the NEPI's development in 1994 of the ANC's *Policy Framework for Education and Training* and the *Implementation Plan for Education and Training*. These two documents set out the liberation movement's position on various post-apartheid policies, although it had to compromise on certain issues during the development of the South African Schools Act;
- the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996b), which formed the basis for policy development;
- the publication of *White Paper 1 on Education and Training in a Democratic South Africa: First Steps to Develop a New System* in March 1995 by the Ministry of Education, which, among others issues, set principles for the organisation, governance and financing of schools in the new, democratic South Africa and also mandated the Minister of Education to appoint a Review Committee to examine the organisation, governance and funding of schools, and to provide advice to the Minister on these issues;
- the work of the Review Committee culminated into the Hunter Committee Report, which was released in August 1995;
- based on the Hunter Committee Report's recommendations, the Department of Education drafted and released its second White Paper in

1995 – *The Organisation, Governance and Funding of Schools: A Draft Policy Document for Discussion*, which was released as a final version in February 1996; and

- the passing of the South African Schools Act in November 1996.

Since the Schools Act was a product of negotiations and compromises, there were clearly numerous contentious issues. According to Chaka (2008:11), notable areas of contentions included the following:

- Who should form the majority in school governing bodies?
- Who should decide admissions policy at schools?
- How should a school's language policy be decided?
- Should schools be allowed to charge fees?

Indeed, as Chaka (2008:11) argues, these issues were very contentious and many compromises were made to accommodate various views, some of which, it can be concluded, sought to maintain the *status quo* of the then racial divide. It is also a strong possibility that most, if not all of these issues, still are contentious and are at the bane of not only the challenges in current school governance, but the challenges of the principal's role in school governance.

2.5.2.2 *The new school governance model in South Africa's democratic era*

The Schools Act ushered in fundamental changes regarding schools and in particular, school governance. The Preamble to the Act set the tone for the new dispensation:

WHEREAS this country requires a new national system for schools which will redress past injustices in educational provision, provide an education of progressively high quality for all learners and in so doing lay a strong foundation for the development of all our people's talents and capabilities, advance the democratic transformation of society, combat racism and sexism and all other forms of unfair discrimination

and intolerance, contribute to the eradication of poverty and the economic well-being of society, protect and advance our diverse cultures and languages, uphold the rights of all learners, parents and educators, and promote their acceptance of responsibility for the organisation, governance and funding of schools in partnership with the State; and

WHEREAS it is necessary to set uniform norms and standards for the education of learners at schools and the organisation, governance and funding of schools throughout the Republic of South Africa.

The main thrust of this proclamation is in its intent to redress past imbalances and advance democratic societal transformation and set uniform norms and standards for the organisation, governance and funding of schools in the Republic. These issues relate directly to school governance, which, among others issues, has to be democratic and combat racism, unfair discrimination and intolerance. All these issues have an impact on the principal's role as both a school governor and as a representative of the Department and by implication, the state in the SGB. Indeed many challenges emanate from these two roles as will be outlined later.

The democratic era's major contributions through the Schools Act is aptly summarised by Chaka (2008:15) as follows:

- A single, democratic, non-racial and equitable public education system was established.
- Two categories of schools – public schools and independent (private) schools – replaced the various categories that existed during apartheid.
- A uniform system of school governance was introduced in all public schools.
- Important powers and functions were decentralised to the level of the school community, drawing on the traditions of democratic antiapartheid struggles and of the former Model C schools.

Clearly then, the democratic era school governance framework is characterised by *inter alia*, the devolution of decision-making power to schools and the decentralisation of functions that allow for the participation of school stakeholders. These two factors are critical in understanding the new school governance model. Ministerial Review Committee (2000:21) makes the point in this regard that:

Promoting the devolution of authority from the central state to local structures has been a critical element in the new government's transformation agenda and its quest for building democracy. It is central, for example, in the South African Schools Act.

The emergent new school governance model in South Africa became the stakeholder model, which James *et al.* (2010:11) contends, comes into play when a range of players have an interest or stake in the organisation and these different interests need to be recognised in the constitution of the organisation. The stakeholder representatives maybe elected or nominated and, as James *et al.* (2010:11) posits, the governing body plays a role of balancing stakeholder needs and making appropriate policies and strategic decisions. For this reason, SGBs in South Africa comprise representatives of stakeholders and the model, according to the Schools Act, goes to the extent of prescribing the composition and the weighted proportionality of stakeholder representatives, with parent members being in the majority of SGB members. In line with the democratic practice (Ministerial Review Committee, 2000:44), SGB members are elected in a legally constituted process, except for the principal, who automatically becomes a member by virtue of his official capacity.

In terms of the Schools Act, the school governance model also covers areas such as roles, responsibilities and functions, and includes the terms of office of office bearers in the SGB and in SGB sub-committees. However, subsequent to a few years of implementation of school governance in terms of the Schools Act, numerous challenges were encountered. These resulted in a number of amendments to the Act, *inter alia* (Chaka, 2008:19):

- *Education Laws Amendment Act (Act 100 of 1997): Employment of additional staff members.* This amendment enabled public schools to employ additional staff members above the number determined by the MEC, provided that schools could raise funds for this purpose.
- *Education Laws Amendment Act (Act 50 of 2002): Allocation of educators by provincial departments,* which intended to ensure equity in the distribution of educators to schools and thus gave power to provincial departments of education to allocate, without recommendations from SGBs, both new educators and educators who returned after a break in employment, wherein before the provincial department makes an appointment, it must consult with the governing body of the school concerned to ensure that there is a match between the applicant and the requirements of the post, and that the applicant has the prescribed qualifications.
- *Education Laws Amendment Act (Act 1 of 2004): Additional pay for educators,* which was proposed to prohibit the payment by SGBs of additional remuneration to educators employed by provincial departments of education, unless the department gave prior approval and also required any additional amounts paid to educators to be reflected in the school budget.
- *Education Laws Amendment Act (Act 24 of 2005): Establishing national poverty quintiles and no-fee schools,* which was to give the power to the Minister of Education to set national quintiles to help ensure equity in the schooling system, whereas the *Norms and Standards for School Funding* of 1998 provided for the division of schools into five categories, or quintiles, based on the level of poverty of the school and the surrounding community. Quintile 1 consisted of the poorest schools, and Quintile 5 consisted of the rich schools. The quintiles were used to determine the amount of funding that provincial departments allocated to schools. The poorest schools received a greater proportion of state funding.

- *Education Laws Amendment Act (Act 31 of 2007): Functions of principals and miscellaneous issues affecting SGBs.* This was because while the original South African Schools Act addressed the functions of SGBs at great length, it was almost silent on the functions of principals. The amendment starts by making it clear that principals are representatives of the Head of Department with functions related to the management of teaching and learning, management of human resources, management of policy implementation, management of physical resources, governance functioning and providing the SGB with a report about professional management relating to the public school.

The new school governance in South Africa therefore, emphasises participatory democracy through such principles as devolution of decision making and decentralisation of governance functions, which erstwhile were not performed by school stakeholders. Indeed, the cornerstone of the new school governance in South Africa is participatory democracy (cf. 2.3.4).

2.5.2.3 *Participatory democracy*

Contemporary school governance appears to be based largely on the democratic principle of participation. Various terms are used to express this notion, *inter alia*, deliberative democracy, representative democracy, social democracy, inclusive democracy and democratic control. An important consideration of all these expressions is the liberal use of democracy as involving participation in decision making through transferring people's sovereignty to popular representatives (Bovens, 2006:25). The most basic dictionary meaning of democracy is: "*a system of government or governance where people elect their leaders by voting*". (The Oxford Dictionaries Online, 2012; Cambridge Dictionary, 2001). Bovens (2006:25) contends that democracy is a situation where ultimately governance by representatives of the people is a function of accountability. In this regard, Adams (2005:109) makes the point that accountability is the essence of participatory or representative democracy in that representatives act on behalf of their constituencies by considering their interests above their (representatives) own interests. For this reason, Dean,

Dyson, Gallannaugh, Howes and Raffo (2007:13) see governing bodies as forums within which local voices can be heard and the wishes of local people can be realised. They assert that *“the legitimacy of governors in this venture depends on their representing local people in some authentic way, whether by being formally elected, or by being members of local communities, or by acting as advocates for people”*.

The contemporary school governance scenario in South Africa complies with these notions of participatory governance in that SGB members are elected by school community constituencies through voting. An additional significant aspect of school governance in South Africa is that it seeks to give more of a voice to the parent community and thus assigns a higher numerical representation of parent members in SGBs. For purposes of this study, an understanding of democracy as a concept denoting the form of school governance, and participation as a democratic principle that enhances school governance are advocated.

Participation, according to Liebenberg and Theron (1997) as cited by Hilliard and Kemp (1999) means *“an active process in which participants take initiative and action that is stimulated by their own thinking and deliberation and over which they can exert effective control”*. This definition makes it clear that participation entails active involvement. In the context of school governance, an assertion can be made that participation means being actively involved in school governance processes and in the contemporary school governance sense, participation means being actively involved in decision making that concerns promoting the best interests of the school. To this end, this means participating in the three core school governance roles of setting the school’s strategic direction, being a critical friend to the school and holding the school to account.

In light of what democracy and participation mean, it can be surmised that participatory democracy relates to active participation in school governance by people elected into the school governance structures and, it can be added, based on the mandate of the people who elected them. In essence participatory

democracy means power-sharing through parent involvement and participation in decision-making (Smith & Oosthuizen, 2011:59). Mncube (2009a:33) expresses this as referring to *“the freedom of making a choice when sufficient alternatives have been provided on an informed basis, while the will of the majority, rational discussion, tolerance, constant communication and consultation, collaboration, participation and freedom of expression prevail”*. Relating this to a school, Mncube (2009a:33) asserts that *“a democratic school is one that allows all stakeholders of the school to participate in deliberations dealing with all matters of the school, where learners are prepared to live in democracy through the acquisition of suitable knowledge, skills and attitudes”*.

Therefore, in a school situation, participatory democracy includes joint decision making, cooperation, collaboration, team work, and above all, mutual trust among school governors and it provides an opportunity to communities at local level to learn to govern their school and to be transparent and accountable to their constituency about everything they do. In this regard, Obondoh, Nandago and Otiende (2005:46) assert that participation *“allows people to contribute their ideas, build on their skills, talents, and take collective responsibility and ownership of policies, plans and programmes and it further provides a forum for sharing views, experiences and for checking unfair decisions”*.

It can therefore be surmised that participatory democracy is a form of democracy which creates a platform for all stakeholders to participate and to have a say in the governance of schools and institutions that their children attend. Because of the fact that these schools are at the local level, it implies devolution of power from central levels such as national and provincial departments to school level. Consequently, this decentralisation of decision making power to ordinary people at local level not only strengthens or improves school governance, but also creates a feeling of stakeholder ownership of the school. Participatory democracy thus encourages and inspires school governors to work hard and to go the extra mile in carrying out their mandate of serving the best interest of the school and learners.

It must be pointed out that participatory democracy comes with many challenges. Hilliard and Kemp (1999) alludes to the possibility of apathy creeping in because people may feel that their views are not being heard, especially in large organisations as well as the fact that participatory democratic processes can be slow and or time-consuming. It might also be added that participatory democracy at schools may be challenged by feelings of inequality in so far as educational levels and statuses among members are concerned, which might discourage active participation of members whose educational levels and statuses might be lower than those of other members. However, promoting the best interests of the school and learners should work to the advantage of offsetting some of the challenges inherent in participatory democracy processes. Furthermore, participatory democracy enhances and strengthens democratic governance, which Bäckmann and Trafford (2006:11) assert, presents advantages for schools as it improves discipline, enhances learning, reduces conflict, makes the school more competitive and secures the future existence of sustainable democracies. With the foregoing background to the development of school governance in South Africa, the implications of the Schools Act for schools governance are important.

2.6 The South African Schools Act and its implications on school governance

Generally, the Schools Act has numerous implications for school governance in South Africa. Among others, Naidoo (2005:31) points out the following as being pertinent implications:

- The devolution of school governance authority leads to the establishment of the SGB, whose duty and responsibility it is to promote the best interest of the school and community by ensuring that there is efficiency and equity.
- The devolution of authority to the school leads to democratically elected SGB, which results in an increase in parent and community participation in school-based decision-making.

- Democratically elected SGBs attract more funding for schools, which advances the provision of quality education for learners.

The Schools Act therefore, brings decision-making nearer to the operational levels of education in South Africa. Sadly, it seems as if SGBs in South Africa are generally more concerned with matters of school finances than the entire school governance mandate. The following quote cited by OECD (2008:91) attests to this:

... it is clear that School Finances and School Fees occupied a large part of the SGBs' time. Interestingly, matters of teaching and learning were considerably lower on the SGBs' scale of priorities. They did not involve themselves in classroom matters or matters of professional concern.

This is despite the direction of school governance according to the Act, especially with regards to issues relating to implications relating to the purpose of school governance, its structure and the roles and responsibilities of SGBs.

2.6.1 Implications regarding the purpose of school governance

The Schools Act states that the purpose of school governance is to “*promote the best interests of the school and strive to ensure its development through the provision of quality education for all learners at the school*”. This aligns school governance with global trends and therefore means that school governance, and by implication, school governors’ involvement at schools is purely for purposes of the interests of schools and learners. Furthermore, this implies that all members of SGBs operate and execute governance responsibilities as equals and partners (Roos, 2009). However, numerous research reports indicate challenges. Among others, the following are immediately pertinent:

- In his study, Kumalo (2009:v) found such challenges such as a poor understanding of the school governance mandate of promoting the best interests of the school by school governors, the execution of roles and responsibilities being inhibited by poor training and poor capacity building, parent-governors lacking knowledge and school governance

skills, school governance functions requiring specialised knowledge and skills, a lack of trust among school governors and the influence of suspicion and poor teamwork.

- Ngubane (2009:v) found that there was generally a lack of capacity to carry out functions and roles that are essential to promoting the best interests of schools – in this particular case, financial accountability.
- Xaba (2011:208) found in his study that one of the school governance challenges related to the actual execution of school governance functions, which he relates directly to a lack of capacity to execute them. Xaba further points out that “*a factor that further complicates the execution of governance functions (in terms of promoting the best interests of the school together), is the attempt by elected governors to watch over the interests of their constituencies*”, which he points out “*runs against executing the very core of the school governance’s main role*”. This role, he asserts, is located in the understanding that although governors are elected on a constituency basis, once they are elected, they are all equal governors of the school and that their responsibility is to govern the school within the framework provided and not to represent sectoral interests of the group from which they were drawn.
- Bagarette (2012:231) found in his study of power relations in SGBs that “*the key reason for the unsuccessful partnerships is the SGB’s lack of understanding of its roles and functions, (which) may lead to power struggles on the one hand and an abdication of power on the other*”.

These, and many other studies, clearly indicate that the purpose of school governance is wrought with numerous challenges. However, it is also important to note that this role can be executed successfully and requires, among other features, teamwork and an understanding of members’ roles and responsibilities.

In promoting the best interests of the school and by extension, the learner, the one most crucial responsibility is that of a strong partnership and collaboration

on matter of curriculum delivery. This is an area where there are potential conflicts between SGB members and schools' professional staff. However, Taylor (2009:5) makes the point that this can be achieved by SGBs being involved in three areas, namely, developing academic performance improvement plans, being involved in the purchase and management of books and the taking full responsibility for the selection and professional development of educators.

Stefkovich and O'Brien (2004:202) argue that there is no consensus on the meaning of promoting the best interests of the learner. For this reason, they advance that "*our best interests model is based on a new conceptualization of the three Rs. Here, the correlates are rights, responsibilities, and respect*". In terms of rights, Stefkovich and O'Brien (2004:202) submit that "*natural rights granted to all human beings as articulated by philosophers past and present; universal rights recognized by the United Nations, particularly those acknowledged under its Convention on the Rights of the Child; and rights guaranteed by law under the Bill of Rights⁴ ...*" including "*certain fundamental rights as universal despite the fact that some countries ... have not recognized them*". According to Stefkovich and O'Brien (2004:202), such rights "*include freedom of religion, free speech, privacy, due process, and freedom from unlawful discrimination, i.e. equality*", and also include a "*right to dignity, which we interpret as entailing both respect for all individuals and protection from humiliation*". The South African Bill of Rights specifically includes the right to basic education (Republic of South Africa, 1996b). The learner's best interests are therefore included in all universal rights as enshrined in the Constitution.

Stefkovich and O'Brien (2004:203) argue that while people have rights, these are not unfettered but are associated with responsibilities. In this regard, they argue that "*while students may have the right to free speech, they also have the duty to exercise this right responsibly*".

⁴ Although specifically referring to the US Constitution, this may as well apply to SA's Constitution on the Bill of Rights.

In terms of respect, Stefkovich and O'Brien (2004:203) contend that "*respect is part of the cornerstone of ethical behaviour, but we see respect as a more positive, mutual interaction, focusing on the individual*" and aptly describe it as follows:

... empathy, a concept derived from the counselling profession and meaning the ability to put oneself in another's shoes. Thus, for us, respect is mutuality. It involves treating all students with respect but also expecting all students to treat others in the same manner.

Stefkovich and O'Brien (2004:203) further state that respect is based on "*equality, tolerance, acceptance of one's own as well as others' frailties, an appreciation and celebration of diversity, and a commitment to finding common ground in an increasingly multicultural, pluralistic society*".

In agreement with the foregoing authors' assertions, it can be accepted that promoting the best interests of the school and, especially those of learners implies taking cognisance of their rights and responsibilities and proffering them with the necessary respect as human beings who enjoy universal rights as enshrined in the Constitution. Therefore, the implications of the purpose of school governance is for all intents and purposes, to promote the best interests of the learners and associated responsibilities as enshrined in the Constitution's Bill of Rights, which are universal. This translates to the purpose of school governance as "*striving to ensure its (the school) development through the provision of quality education for all learners at the school*".

This requirement can either be strengthened or weakened, among others, by the structure and composition of the SGB and how the SGB fosters its functioning.

2.6.2 Implications regarding the structure and composition of the SGBs

Section 23(1) of the Schools Act prescribes the structure and composition of the SGB and states that the membership of the governing body of an ordinary public school comprises (a) elected members; (b) the principal, in his or her

official capacity; and (c) co-opted members. Section 23(2) further specifically stipulates that elected members of the governing body shall comprise a member or members of each of the following categories:

- (a) parents of learners at the school;
- (b) educators at the school;
- (c) members of staff at the school who are not educators; and
- (d) learners in the eighth grade or higher at the school.

Furthermore, Section 23(9) states that the number of parent members must comprise one more than the combined total of other members of a governing body who have voting rights.

This structure and composition are informed by numerous factors, among others, the quest for the institution of decentralisation and devolution of decision-making. Consequently, the SGB's composition is such that decision-making is based on democratic principles of participation and consensus. Notably, because of the non-inclusive and non-participatory decision making of the pre-democratic school governance structures, the current SGB makes provision for more parent members than other members. The Schools Act also makes provision for the co-option of community expertise and resources into the SGB, although such co-opted members are not allowed voting rights.

The implication of the structure and composition of the SGB, as prescribed by the Schools Act, can be judged on the assumption that the SGB would function efficiently and effectively. This assumption overlooks the reality of what is needed for the proper functioning of the SGB, which, among others, firstly relates to the need for intensive training of SGB members to be on the same level of operational understanding. Indeed many research reports indicate the difficulty in this regard. For example, Heystek (2006:482) reports on the challenges emanating from illiteracy or semi-illiteracy of the parents, that:

Parents do not know why or how they can be involved in the SGB because they cannot read or interpret the legislation and policies. They do not understand the legislation and policies and may even make their

own interpretation or they depend on the principal for the interpretation. If there is not a good relationship between them, this creates problems.

Secondly, the Schools Act projects an assumption that SGBs function “*in an open and democratic manner, with widespread consultation among all the stakeholders and on-going attempts to reach decisions by consensus*” (Grant-Lewis & Naidoo, 2004:106). However, the following extract from Grant-Lewis and Naidoo (2004:106) indicate the reality of operation in SGBs:

However, in practice the consultation process is managed by the principal, all stakeholders are not equal participants, and consensus is often more illusory than real. Furthermore, ‘consensus as a decision-making rule’, one of the common unwritten rules of engagement that is perceived by SGB members as democratic, may actually cement the power of principals and impede democracy by privileging the status quo. Not all members of the community are affected in the same way or benefit equally from every SGB decision but SGB members are under pressure to reach a decision the same way on all issues.

Thirdly, there is an assumption that SGB members will understand their roles and responsibilities and perform functions without encroaching on areas they are not supposed to encroach on. In reality this encroachment seems to be a common occurrence at schools. Bagarette (2011:231) found from his research that “*the key reason for the unsuccessful partnerships is the SGB’s lack of understanding of its role and functions*”. Furthermore, Khuzwayo and Chikoko (2009:148) found that principals reportedly could not perform their duties in terms of the Schools Act “*because of what they view as the ‘interference’ of SGB chairpersons*”. It seems that SGB chairpersons did not understand their roles and were inclined to perform duties that were “*outside their area of jurisdiction, such as coming to school to check whether the educators are teaching in their classrooms*”. Heystek (2006:482) echoes this sentiment as he also found from his research that: “*Parents want to rule the SGB and the school. The parents do not know or understand the limits of their functions and*

responsibilities and therefore they infringe on the academic responsibilities of the principal”.

Finally, the structure and composition of the SGB further projects an assumption of school governors being intent only on the promotion of the best interests of their schools and learners. The reality is, however, that SGB members tend to represent and promote the interests of their constituencies. Xaba (2004:316) found in his research that educator-governors largely “*perceive their role as mainly to protect their colleagues’ interests*” which “*may stem from the fact that they are elected and see themselves as representing a constituency*”.

However, the functioning of school governors then is expressed in the execution of governance functions and roles, which the Schools Act outlines and categorises into prescribed and allocated functions, and implies that all SGBs must execute Section 20 functions, while they can apply for and, at the discretion of the Head of Department, be allocated Section 21 functions (Republic of South Africa, 1996a).

The afore-mentioned challenges will most certainly have an influence on the principal’s role in school governance. This can be seen even in the implication of the Schools Act on the roles and responsibilities of the SGBs.

2.6.3 Implications regarding the roles and responsibilities of SGBs

The roles and responsibilities of SGBs derive from the core intent of school governance as pointed out earlier: to promote the best interests of the school and strive to ensure its development through the provision of quality education for all learners at the school. In the context of this study as advocated by Xaba (2004:4:314), this means that all members of the SGB strive for the best interests of the school and learners. As described above, this means seeing to the rights and responsibilities of the learners and ensuring that they are respected both in terms of their rights and responsibilities to quality education and to them as people and members of society. To achieve this, the Schools Act as espoused by Xaba (2004:314), allocates roles and responsibilities to

SGBs that imply that *“that school governors regardless of who elected them have to deal with, inter alia, determining the admission, language and religious policies of the school; determining rules for religious observance at the school; developing and adopting a code of conduct for learners; recommending to the Provincial Head of Department the appointment of educators and non-educators at the school; supplementing the resources provided by the state; and preparing an annual budget”*. Xaba’s (2004:314) emphasis is on the fact that the implication of the Schools Act on school governance is that:

the roles of school governors cannot be compartmentalised into those of the parent-, the educator-, and the learner-governors. All school governors should be involved in the SGB in roles that promote and advocate the best interests of the school and learners.

In this regard, Pembrokeshire County Council (2012) contends that a governing body can do this by helping the school to set high standards by planning for the school’s future and setting targets for school improvement, being a true friend to the school, in good times and bad times, offering the school its support and advice and helping the school to be responsive to the needs of the community and making the school more accountable to the public for what it does. To this end, Pembrokeshire County Council (2012) list the following functional roles as important areas in which the SGB has to be active:

- *Standards*: ensuring a strategic and systematic approach to promoting high standards of educational achievement.
- *Targets*: setting appropriate targets for learner achievement.
- *Curriculum*: ensuring that the curriculum is balanced and broadly based and that the National Curriculum is taught.
- *Reporting results*: reporting on assessments and examination results.
- *Policies*: deciding how, in broad strategic terms, the school should be run.
- *Finance*: determining how to spend the budget allocated to the school.

- *Staffing*: deciding the number of staff, the pay policy and making decisions on staff pay.
- *Appointment*: appointing the head and deputy head teacher and other staff.
- *Discipline*: agreeing on procedures for staff conduct and discipline.

Several important aspects regarding the roles and responsibilities attached to school governance require scrutiny. This is mainly because the Schools Act, although specifying what is attendant to such roles and responsibilities prescribes these in a general manner. However, exactly what these roles and responsibilities translate into in terms of fulfilling the school governance mandate is unclear and requires scrutiny. The three areas of responsibility outlined earlier in this text – providing a strategic direction, acting as a critical friend and holding the school to account – can be further unpacked into what they imply. Emanating from the areas listed above, the first two seem to translate the school governance mandate into what governance is about, while the other listed areas can be considered as catalysts for the achievement of the first two, namely, *setting standards of educational achievement*, *setting targets for learner achievement* and *ensuring that the national curriculum is taught*.

2.6.3.1 *Setting standards of educational achievement*

Setting standards for educational achievement refers to the overall purpose of the school in terms of the delivery of quality education at school. Business in the Community (2008:14) states the following on setting standards for educational achievement:

The governing body has a range of duties and powers and a general responsibility for the conduct of the school with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement, including setting targets for pupil achievement, managing the school's finances, making sure the curriculum is balanced and broadly based, appointing staff and reviewing staff performance and pay and many more.

From this statement, it is clear that the SGB's role is that of setting targets for and promoting school performance and achievement. In the end, setting educational standards aggregates the task of educating children. This can best be understood from the purpose of educating children. According to The 21st Century Schools (2010), education purports to “*enable individuals to reach their full potential as human beings, individually and as members of a society; this means that these individuals will receive an education which will enable them to think and act intelligently and purposefully in exercising and protecting the rights and responsibilities ...*”. This implies that at the end of schooling, children should be successful in public schooling and be prepared for life after public schooling, either at post-secondary educational institutions and/or in the world of work. Therefore, setting standards for educational achievement becomes a long-term purpose of schooling and thus implies that the SGB's role becomes that of setting standards for well-rounded learners who are able to cope with challenges in society after their schooling years. This describes the role of providing a strategic direction in that it requires of the school to determine the ultimate purpose of its educational endeavours.

Setting educational standards for a school should culminate into policies for school operations. In this regard, Center for the Study of Social Policy (2009:19) states that policies relate to educational standards and should be informed by core results and long-term outcomes, and indicators and measures of school educational success. This means that the SGB, in carrying out its overall school governance role of setting educational standards, must be concerned with the impact on learners and the ultimate outcome of the school's educational activities. In this regard, policies of major significance would include policies dealing with, among others:

- educator quality as it relates to educator education and qualifications;
- school quality as it relates to the curriculum, issues of inclusion, class sizes, school size and community connections or relations; and

- learner achievement as it relates to and testing and achievement in core subjects and qualification or graduation requirements.

2.6.3.2 *Setting targets for learner academic achievement*

Academic achievement relates to “*the outcome of education — the extent to which a student, teacher or institution has achieved their educational goals*” and “*is commonly measured by examinations or continuous assessment*” (Wikipedia, 2013). Therefore, while the task of actually teaching learners is a professional responsibility, setting academic achievement targets involves the SGB in its role of providing a strategy for a school’s learning and teaching direction. In this regard, the SGB sets performance standards for the school’s aspirations. Performance targets are characterised by three essential characteristics, namely, outcomes to be aimed for, quantitative and qualitative measurability, and attainability within a specified time (Muller & Associates, 2001:14).

Setting targets for learner academic achievement actually involves the SGB in curriculum matters. Arnold (2007) argues that this involvement determines what support the SGB can offer to the schools and ultimately the learners as governing body members bring a wealth of expertise from their life experiences and working environments – many of which are transferrable skills that can be utilised by the school. However, Arnold (2007) emphasises that to make those targets realistic and achievable but appropriately challenging, school governors rely on the advice of the principal and the curriculum leaders at the school. For this reason, Muller and Associates, (2001:14) posit that the process of performance and academic target setting involves school-level planning to improve student learning outcomes, targeting built into that planning but set at a system level, regular internal review and external audits to assess progress. Ontario Ministry of Education (2001:5) supports this and states that target setting works best as part of regular planning to improve learner achievement and as a process, involves a continuing cycle of steps comprising:

- *Gathering* appropriate information about learner achievement and about the context of the SGB and its community.
- *Analysing* the information in context – looking at individual learners, groups of learners, grade levels, schools, and the SGB – to take stock of the current situation, establish an expectation for future achievement, and identify where improvement is needed.
- *Setting* clear and measurable achievement targets as part of the regular school-year cycle.
- *Using* achievement targets to guide improvement planning, which involves
 - identifying strategies and resources to help reach the targets;
 - monitoring progress towards the targets; and
 - refining the targets and improvement strategies on the basis of experience and results.
- *Reporting* the targets and results to ensure accountability.

In light of the meaning of setting targets for learner academic achievement, it can be concluded that the role of the SGB involves much more than just an oversight role of school activities, but actually giving direction to the school's aspirations. This, however, can be a contested area. For instance, Bagarette (2012:104) reports a study where he found that the literacy levels of SGB members determined the extent to which they were capable of performing their duties and due to high illiteracy levels, most SGBs relied solely on the principals to execute their functions and they had "*become mere observers and rubber stamps, instead of being in a partnership that serves the best interests of the learners*". In another study, Botha (2012:266) found that the role of the principal was seen as being problematic in that he/she was seen as domineering, as expressed by one chairperson

I don't know why our school has a governing body. It is of no use and is really, only a waste of our time. The principal takes the final decision

anyway; we feel like puppets and are only there because it is required of us. I will not be willing to serve again in the future, it is futile.

Clearly then, the implication of the roles and responsibilities expresses their implementation. Evidently, the governance task involves much more than setting the strategic direction of the school, but also involves some involvement in curriculum matters, which can be a contested area if parameters of involvement are not clear and well-defined. This is where the distinction between school governance and professional management is important because the principal is responsible for the day-to-day management of the school, which includes implementing policy directives decided upon by the SGB, and thus his/her role becomes critical.

2.7 Chapter summary and conclusion

This chapter presented a discussion of the theoretical-conceptual basis on which school governance is generally framed. The meaning and context of the school governance mandate was unpacked and revealed three important elements, namely, setting the school's strategic direction, holding the school to account to its stakeholders and acting as a critical friend by providing support and challenge. This culminated in the contextual link of these elements with the concept of democratic governance as an element of contemporary school governance, a synopsis of the development of school governance in South Africa and an understanding of the South African Schools Act and its implications on school governance.

Chapter 3

The principal's school governance role: meaning and challenges

3.1 Introduction

Numerous challenges confront bodies charged with the responsibility of governance at schools. In this regard and in line with the purpose of this study, the principal's school governance role warrants an in-depth scrutiny. To this end, this chapter explores the principal's role as a school governor: both the bona fide and the *ex officio* membership of the SGB and the consequent challenges attendant to this role.

3.2 The principal's role in school governance

The role of the principal in school governance seems to be two-fold. In the first instance, the principal is not an elected member of the SGB. Section 23(1) of the Schools Act states the following about the principal:

23(1)(b) *Subject to this Act, the membership of the governing body of an ordinary public school comprises – the principal, in his or her official capacity.*

Section 23(1)(b) also puts the principal in the SGB in terms of his official capacity. This means that the principal is an *ex officio* member of the SGB. As an ex-officio member of the SGB and being a member by virtue of his/her official capacity, the principal represents the employer and thus promotes the interests of the Department of Education. This is expressed in the Education Laws Amendment Act No. 31 of 2007 (Republic of South Africa, 2007), which states in Section 16A. (1) (a):

The principal of a public school represents the Head of Department in the governing body when acting in an official capacity as contemplated in sections 23(1)(b) and 24(1)(j).

This proclamation adds a dimension of the principal as a member of the SGB, which was not clear in the original prescription of the Schools Act. It actually emphasises the *ex officio* SGB membership status of the principal. Brijraj (2004) states that the principal “*is obliged to liaise with the Department, other departments and agencies regarding all matters pertaining to the wellbeing of the school*”. This implies that the principal is an employee of the Department of Education, and thus represents the employer and must do what the employer expects, which essentially implies that he/she serves in the SGB to protect the interests of the Department of Education (Heystek, 2004:308).

The Ministerial Review Committee (2003:93) makes the point that the PAM policy defines the governance role of the principal as being:

- to serve on the governing body of the school and render all necessary assistance to the governing body in the performance of their functions in terms of SASA⁵;
- to co-operate with members of the school staff and the SGB in maintaining an efficient and smooth- running school; and
- obliged to liaise with the Department, other departments and agencies regarding all matters pertaining to the well-being of the school.

In the second instance, being a member of the SGB, the role of the principal becomes that of an ordinary member like other members in the SGB. This implies that the principal as a member of the SGB, just like it is expected of all members, he/she serves in the SGB to promote the best interest of the school and must strive to ensure its development through the provision of quality education for all learners at the school. This further implies that the principal serves in the SGB on an equal footing with all other SGB members, which is in line with the democratic principle of equality. It can also be asserted that the principal, as a member of the SGB is bound by rules and procedural obligations as agreed upon in the SGB and as pronounced in its constitution. It is, therefore, reasonable to expect that the principal will not occupy any special

⁵The South African Schools Act is sometimes referred to as SASA.

consideration by virtue of his/her position or official capacity, but will serve like other ordinary members.

Emerging clearly from the defined role of the principal in school governance, is the fact that the role is dual in nature. Firstly, the principal's role is that of representing the employer or department in the SGB and, secondly, that of being a member of the SGB striving, like other members, to promote the best interests of the school. This dual nature of the principal's role has far-reaching implications for the execution of the school governance mandate. This is discussed in-depth in the next section.

3.3 Implications and challenges of the principal's school governance role

The implications and challenges of the principal's school governance role can be analysed within the context of being an ordinary SGB member and an *ex officio* member.

3.3.1 *The school governance role of the principal as a member of the school governing body*

As a member of the SGB, the principal's role is similar to the role of other SGB members. This role is underscored by the school governance mandate of promoting the best interests of the school and providing quality education for the learners. This implies that the principal must act as an ordinary SGB member and thus must act in support of decisions taken by the SGB. Promoting the best interests of the school, as pointed out earlier, is three-fold, namely, setting the school's strategic direction, acting as a critical friend and holding the school to account. Therefore, the principal as a member of the SGB takes part, together with other school governors in, setting the school's strategic direction; acting as a critical friend to the school; and holding the school to account. He/she does so under the leadership of the chairperson of the SGB, which makes it imperative that the principal, the chairperson of the SGB and other SGB members operate harmoniously and with trust.

As a member of the governing body, the principal's role has implications outlined in the following subsections.

3.3.1.1 *Working relationships with the chairperson of the SGB*

Sound working relationships in the SGB are a cornerstone for effectively promoting good governance. Among others, relationships involve those between the principal and the chairperson, between the principal and other members of the SGB and relationships among all SGB members.

According to Province of the Eastern Cape (2012:22), the SGB chairperson's role is that of:

- presiding at meetings of the governing body;
- calling meetings after consultation with the principal;
- determining the agenda of meetings after consultation with the principal; and
- presiding at meetings of parents, educators, learners and non-educators called by the governing body.

The chairperson is, therefore, essentially responsible for managing meetings and procedures, which according to Province of the Eastern Cape (2012:22) include;

- calling the meeting to order and making sure that there is a quorum;
- obtaining the meeting's approval before signing as correct the minutes of the previous meeting;
- ensuring that the members keep to the rules and procedures;
- presenting matters in the order in which they appear on the agenda;
- deciding whether any proposals, motions and counter motions presented at the meeting are in order and within the functions of the governing body;
- maintaining order;

- ensuring correct voting procedure;
- decisively ruling on points of order;
- cutting down on unnecessary discussion;
- ensuring that all members have a chance to speak in any discussion;
- protecting a speaker from unacceptable interruption; and
- using a casting vote to decide an issue.

A scrutiny of the chairperson's role sheds some light as to why there can be misunderstandings and conflict with the principal. Clearly the role of the chairperson means he/she takes the lead in ensuring that the governing body functions effectively. James *et al.* (2012:8) point out that an effective SGB chairperson's responsibilities include "*working with the head teacher; acting as a change agent; active participation in the work of the school; organising the governing body; dealing with complaints; working with parents; and chairing the meetings of the full governing body*". Herein lie challenges in many SGBs in South Africa.

Heystek (2006:480) found that chairpersons and other SGB members sometimes seem to overstep their mandate as seen in a case where "*the chair of the SGB locks and unlocks the gates, tells the educators where to park their cars and walks to the classes to 'lend' support*". Bagarette (2012:101) reports another case where principals of schools reported that "*the partnership has been unsuccessful for the past six years, because the chairperson of the SGB does not act in the best interests of the school. He always looks for what he can get from the school*". In the same study, Bagarrete (2012:102) quotes two principals who respectively stated:

Some SGB members are bent on disciplining the principal and want to control me.

Some SGB members, especially the older ones, are under the impression that they should be policing the principal and the educators. This situation creates tension between the two groups.

Bagarrete (2012:231) interprets the above-mentioned issues as power struggles within the SGB. He is of the opinion that these power struggles may be due to SGB members' lack of understanding of their roles. Indeed, there are numerous other studies that show challenges regarding the chairperson's and the principal's roles such as the dominant role principals appear to play in matters of school governance. Karlsson (2002:232) reports from his study, that principals still play a dominant role in meetings and decision-making due to their positions of power within the school, level of education in contrast to other members, first access to information issuing from education authorities, and because principals execute decisions made. Van Wyk (2007:134) also found this 'principal's domination' trend. Her findings include comments such as: "*She dominates the SGB — she is the key player. She wants things done her own way. She does not take the school's interest into consideration*".

Van Wyk (2007:134) also reports that one principal considered the role of the SGB as providing general support and admitted to playing a dominant role in the SGB. She also found from other SGB members that there were feelings that "*principals deliberately hide information from us ...* " This power struggle, as pointed out above, can affect the functioning of the SGB and negatively influence the delivery of the SGB's governance mandate.

Brown and Duku (2008:440) also report challenges that can also be considered as being detrimental to the chairperson and principal's relationship. They cite among others, incidents involving gender and tradition politics, especially in rural areas, where women are not considered appropriate for leadership positions and traditional leaders, by virtue of their 'birth right' as leaders, are considered as automatic SGB leaders; and age differences as being pivotal to who leads the SGB – for instance, a younger chairperson (even if male) would not be considered appropriate as a leader of the SGB where other members are older and, one may add, especially if the principal is an elder or is older.

The relationship between the chairperson and the principal is of such crucial importance that it determines the working relationships with the SGB as a whole.

3.3.1.2 *Working relationships with the SGB as a whole*

An important factor in the principal's role also relates to working relationships with the SGB as a whole. This can include elements pertaining to how the SGB conducts its business and the support the principal provides. Pertinent examples of this can include procedures used in formulating policies, their implementation and interaction with and among other SGB members. According to Province of the Eastern Cape (2012:10), each party must have a clear understanding of its respective role and the governing body should respect the position of the principal as the professional leader of the school and as the person responsible for the day-to-day management and administration of the school.

Findings of numerous research reports indicate that the main hampering factor to good and positive relationships between the principal and the SGB members relate to manner of doing things. One of the constraints reported relates to SGB members acting as watchdogs for their constituencies, which it may be added, is almost always directed at the principal (Xaba, 2004; Singh, 2006; Khuzwayo, 2007; Heystek, 2006; Haines, 2007; Bagarette, 2011). Among other constraints, these research reports indicate SGB members seeking to have their own way in the SGB, the low levels of education of parent members, principals dominating SGB affairs, lack of or no commitment from parent members, misuse and/or mismanagement of school resources including financial resources, one-sided decision-making from either the principal or the SGB chairperson and poor implementation of policies agreed upon. These and many other constraints can be regarded as detrimental to the working relationships between the principal and the SGB. For example, Haines (2007:89) found that many parents complain that schools are uninviting and that principals in particular were not inviting and tended to make parent members feel that they were ignored and therefore not worthy of being listened to. Consequently, they would not attend meetings or contribute their ideas. Bagarette (2011:233) found that participation in the SGB was in some instances minimal or non-existent because, as one principal remarked: *"The SGB is not really involved. They lack the knowledge and experience to make decisions"*.

Heystek (2004:283) also reports constraints that include the notion that *parents want to rule the SGB and the school and “do not know or understand the limits of their functions and responsibilities and therefore they infringe on the academic responsibilities of the principal”*. Heystek also report that in some instances *“principals do not allow active parental participation in the SGB functions as they are wary that parents may take over, parents are not active in the school and especially in the SGB activities”* and as a result, their participation in the SGB is nominal and their actual contribution minimal.

Another challenges in the working relationship between the principal and the SGB as a whole emanates from perceptions that other SGB members are not good enough or enlightened to participate in some school governance matters. In Mncube’s study (2009b:96), parents expressed opinions indicative of this notion. One parent indicated: *“Many activities in these schools are new to black parents. No attempt has been made to educate black parents on their expected role or to provide accessible explanations to them on how they could be involved in school activities”*, while other parents did not challenge matters at school for fear of victimisation of their children. Mabovula (2009:228) reports that in some instances some members were *“sometimes left out deliberately or not even invited when some decisions were taken, which shows that decisions were taken without any form of consensus”*. She further cites a quote confirming this where one principal justified the exclusion of learner members on some matters:

Not always, it depends. I feel it is not good to invite learners in issues like educator misbehaviour and educator conflicts as these might affect the dignity of the educator towards learners. Some issues should be confidential to the school management team and the parent body of the SGB.

The major implication of the challenges cited above is that the SGB members would not be able to act as critical friends to the principal and the school and would also be unable to hold the school to account. Therefore, most SGBs would not be able to carry out their school governance mandate effectively. This

would also have a negative effect on setting the school's strategic direction as can be manifested in promoting educational achievement and learner academic achievement specifically.

3.3.1.3 *Promoting learner achievement*

Earlier, a point was made that the SGB's mandate of setting the school's strategic direction involves setting standards for educational achievement and setting targets for learner academic achievement. At this point, it is argued that the principal as a member of the SGB, is essentially involved in these tasks or roles and that the outcome of the processes of setting educational achievement standards and learner academic achievement are essentially descriptive of the principal's role in his/her official capacity as manager of the school. The first and main role then of the principal is to translate the action plans emanating from the strategic development planning process on these aspects into actionable, day-to-day targets by ensuring that the plans are implemented. Doing so requires the principal to play the roles Leithwood, Seashore-Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004:8) describe as:

- Setting directions, which is aimed at helping people to develop shared understandings about the school organisation and its activities and goals, that can underscore a sense of purpose or vision because, as Leithwood *et al.* (2008:8) argue: "*People are motivated by goals which they find personally compelling, as well as challenging but achievable. Having such goals helps people make sense of their work and enables them to find a sense of identity for themselves within their work context*". This, the principal does and achieves by identifying and articulating a vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals and creating high performance expectations, monitoring organisational performance and promoting effective communication throughout the school.
- Developing people, which Leithwood *et al.* (2008:8) contend involves specific sets of leadership practices that significantly and positively influence people's direct experiences that include, for example, offering intellectual

stimulation, providing individualised support and providing appropriate models of best practice and beliefs considered fundamental to the organisation.

- Redesigning the organisation, which involves developing the school as an effective organisation that supports and sustains the performance of staff, educators and learners. Leithwood *et al.* (2008:8) argue that “*the contribution of schools to student learning most certainly depends on the motivations and capacities of teachers and administrators, acting both individually and collectively. But organizational conditions sometimes blunt or wear down educators’ good intentions and actually prevent the use of effective practices*”. For this reason, these scholars point out that redesigning the school organisation requires that specific practices that include strengthening school culture, modifying organisational structures and building collaborative processes.

Executing these practices should help the principal to promote learner academic achievement. Other scholars cite specific actions that are a requirement for the principal’s role in promoting learner achievement. Seashore-Louis, Dretzke and Wahlstrom (2010:316) assert that the principal has to start with, *inter alia*, a focus on instruction, where the style of teaching and learner engagement are important, instructional leadership as a way for the principal to ensure that he/she understands curricular content, instructional materials and lending support for improved instruction, shared leadership – which “*reflects deliberate patterns of commitment and mutual influence among organizational members*” – and *trust*, which implies that principals build trust indirectly through supportive behaviour, cultivate respect and personal regard for educators, cultivate competence in core role responsibilities and personal integrity, because high-trust schools exhibit more collective decision making and improvements in learner academic achievement.

3.3.1.4 *Ensuring financial accountability*

Robinson and Timperly (2000:67) define accountability as “*a condition under which a role holder renders an account to another so that a judgment may be*

made about the adequacy of the performance". Lewis (2003:8) defines financial accountability as a moral or legal duty, placed on an individual, group or organisation, to explain how funds, equipment or authority given by a third party have been utilised. School financial accountability can therefore be understood as an act of giving account or accounting on the utilisation of school finances to stakeholders in such a way that a judgement can be made as to the adequacy of the school's financial performance and this, it can be added, is a legal obligation as required by the provisions of the Public Finance Management Act No. 1 of 1999 (Republic of South Africa, 1999:44) and Sections 36 and 37 of the Schools Act.

According to Ngubane (2009:57), financial accountability demands that all financial data are recorded accurately and presented clearly and can be disclosed to all stakeholders in education. Ensuring financial accountability also involves self-evaluation and review, strategic planning and reporting (Van Rooyen, 2007:142). Therefore, financial accountability can be seen as a product of a carefully designed strategic development planning process and a thorough, systematic and transparent execution of financial school management. Both processes are, in terms of Sections 37(1) to 37(4) of the Schools Act, responsibilities of the SGB. However, both processes are the principal's implementation responsibility as both an *ex officio* and an ordinary member of the SGB. The implications of these responsibilities for the principal can thus be stated in terms of the principal's status in the SGB thus:

- As a member of the SGB, the principal must see to the proper use of finances in line with the school's strategic thrust as enshrined in the school's vision and mission and the school's overall goals, aims and objectives as well as the core mandate of school governance: promoting the best interests of the school and providing quality education to the learners. This resonates with Section 37(6) of the Schools Act which states that "*all proceeds thereof and any other assets of the public school must be used only for- (a) educational purposes, at or in connection with such school*".

It can thus be concluded that the role of the principal is to be accountable to the school stakeholders about how the school's vision, mission and overall goals and aims have been achieved in financial terms: to be precise, how school finances have been used to achieve the educative teaching goals of the school.

- As an *ex officio* member of the SGB and acting in his official capacity, the implication is that the principal must account in terms of his/her job description and position how he/she has carried out functions attendant to his/her office in terms of departmental procedures and legislative provisions. This includes (1) ensuring that school finances are managed effectively and efficiently by ensuring transparency and accountability by establishing good systems for financial control; and (2) ensuring the prevention of unauthorised, irregular, fruitless and wasteful expenditure and losses resulting from criminal conduct (Republic of South Africa, 1999:440).

These implications are all on the basis of the principal being the school's accounting officer in terms of his/her official capacity or the office he/she occupies (Brijraj, 2004). However, there are numerous challenges to the financial accountability role of the principal. Among others as stated earlier, power struggles within the SGB and between members of SGBs have in many instances, led to poor financial management and accountability. Xaba and Ngubane (2010:140) found cases of irregular financial management. In their study, one district official hinted at shady practices at schools and remarked: *"We know of instances, where principals engage in cheap labour, but pay large amounts of money, and that is wrong"*. An educator-governor in the same study alluded to instance of unauthorised expenditure when she stated *"The principal, at any time when he wants to spend money, just buys without even consulting the SGB"*, and further stated, *"Even if we want to stick to the budget, the principal brings issues that were not budgeted for, and the chairperson will agree with him. We just keep quiet, because our principal wants us to do things the way he wants"*.

These and many other challenges seem rife at schools and are reported in many studies and media reports (Mestry, 2004; Bush, Clover, Bisschoff, Moloi, Heystek & Joubert, 2006; *Sunday World*, 2011; *The Star*, 2012; *West Cape News*, 2013).

3.3.1.5 *Fostering effective communication*

According to Weller and Weller (2000:63), school principals need to have good communication skills to promote effective communication and good human relations. Effective communication ensures that all stakeholders have a similar understanding about various issues concerning their institutions. The principal can achieve effective communication in the school if he/she is able to motivate parents to strive towards the achievement of educational objectives and goals (Haines, 2007:29). Furthermore, the principal must also be able to coordinate various activities at the school with the help of SGB members and must ensure that what is communicated is understood by all SGB members. This will ensure that all members in the SGB work in a harmonious way because as Chance and Chance (2002:155) assert, communication is a social force that facilitates cooperation and mutual trust among individuals in an organisation in order to pursue mutual goals.

The implication of effective communication is that it signals to stakeholders that they are free to approach the principal at any time in case they need help and support. In fact, according to Section 16(a) of the Education Laws Amendment Act 31 of 2007 (Republic of South Africa, 2007), one of the critical duties of the school principal is to support and assist the SGB in the performance of its functions. This implies that the principal is in a better position to communicate, explain and interpret school and education policies to SGB members because he/she has vast knowledge and is better informed on education issues. As such, he/she has the capacity to ensure that the policies and the curriculum are not only interpreted but also implemented.

There are numerous areas about which the principal must communicate effectively with various stakeholders. Among others, he/she should

communicate about school finances as part of his/her accountability role. He/she has a duty to work hand in hand with the finance committee and treasurer to keep the SGB members up to date with the financial position of the school. However, this role can be frustrated by some challenges. In this regard, Mestry (2004:126) argues that in some cases members of the finance committee lack the capacity and experience to draw up a budget or to explain the annual financial statement to parents. In such situations, the principal could assist the SGB by communicating and explaining the position of school finances. If the SGB members have a clear picture of the finances of the school, then they can make informed and correct decisions.

Kumalo (2009:92) emphasises that the principal can support the SGB and other stakeholders (parents and learners) in understanding the financial position of their school by involving them in budgeting so that they own the process. In addition, Kumalo points out that in terms of the Schools Act (Section 38(2)), financial statements from the auditors must be shown to parents and SGB members to ensure transparency. Principals who ensure that the above happens at their schools would be alleviating the problem where stakeholders (parents, educators and learners) can claim that funds are misused and/or embezzled.

Studies report perceptions from most stakeholders as indicating evidence of poor communication about school finances. Among other challenges, there are reports that range from fraud, non-adherence to budgetary control and monitoring processes, misappropriation and mismanagement of funds, unaccounted for expenditure to the non-banking of school funds as required by the law (Mestry, 2006; Mbatsane, 2006; Ngubane, 2009; Xaba & Ngubane, 2010; Kumalo, 2009).

Another area that needs effective communication is learner performance, which it can be said, plays a crucial role in judging whether a school is functional or dysfunctional and which indicates whether effective teaching and learning takes place at a school. It is therefore imperative that the school principal keeps proper records of the performance of learners at his/her school in order to be

able to inform stakeholders about the performance at his/her school, especially in terms of the school's strategic direction as reflected in its vision, mission and objectives. One way in which the principal can report the performance of learners to parents and school governors is by providing the parents with a summary of results at the end of each school term, after which a meeting could be arranged for discussing problems identified and for seeking solutions.

The principal's communication about learner performance has been found to be less than effective in most instances at schools. This has been due to factors within the school, the principal himself/herself and factors beyond his/her control. Studies on this cite such factors as difficulties in dealing with legal procedures where learner performance suffers due to misbehaviour and discipline problems, parents' low educational levels and lack of understanding of reports from the school and poor parental participation in educational matters and language and cultural barriers as a result of English being the dominant language of communication in meetings (Mestry & Grobler, 2007; Mncube, 2009b; Jooste, 2011).

3.3.1.6 *Promoting parental participation in school governance matters*

Good and effective schools have at their helm principals who take leading parent participation seriously. This involves parents as governors and the general parent population. Participation in school governance for parents is at the core of the Schools Act and for this reason, parent members in SGBs form the majority and are in a powerful position and should therefore be involved in matters of governing the school (Van Wyk, 2007:132). Participation in governance means that parents must have a say in the core mandate of school governance. Therefore parent participation implies being involved in setting the strategic direction of the school, being critical friends to the principal and school and holding them to account. The principal must thus lead the SGB in soliciting parent's views on these matters and actually involving them in final decision-making. This also implies ensuring that the parent-governors represent the larger parent body and articulate their views and aspirations.

The principal therefore, by virtue of his/her position at the school, has the responsibility, according to Haines (2007:13), not only to encourage but also to motivate parents to participate actively in the provision of quality education at schools. To achieve this vital goal, the principal has to lead by motivating the parents to give their best as well as by:

- offering opportunities for parents to govern the school, as this is their legitimate right which they need to exercise;
- by acting in such a way that parent can trust, respect and feel free to approach the principal; and
- by acting in an open-minded and tolerant manner towards parents and other stakeholders.

From the implications of participation in school governance matters, it can be concluded that this does not only imply involvement in such activities as raising funds and keeping the school clean, but also involves participation in the very core of school governance. However, numerous challenges exist in this regard. Studies on parent participation in school governance indicate hindering challenges such as the poor educational levels of parents, difficulties in attending meetings, the legacy of the past which causes the majority of parents still to be unable to have the tradition of participating in school matters, uninviting schools, a lack of effort from the part of principals to involve parents and be fully transparent and a lack of parental know-how regarding participation and actually contributing in governance matters (Heystek, 2003; Heystek, 2006; Van Wyk, 2007; Brown & Duku, 2008; Kumalo, 2009; Mncube, 2009a; Xaba & Ngubane, 2010; Xaba, 2011; Duma *et al.*, 2011).

These challenges are intensified in situations where principals themselves do not have the skills of inviting parent participation as well as principals feeling threatened and afraid of losing power by allowing parental participation through transparency and accepting parents as critical friends and rightfully worthy of demanding accountability. These factors compel one to conclude that in such circumstances, parents by virtue of being adults, can sense if their presence

and involvement in the activities of a particular school are not welcomed and appreciated by the principal and educators and therefore, tend to withdraw, which does not augur well for effective school governance.

3.3.1.7 *Ensuring the implementation of school development plans*

The implementation of school development plans is perhaps the most important element of the principal's school governance role. While school development plans are all-embracing and involve all school stakeholders as indicated earlier in this text, the implementation thereof requires the leadership of the principal. Furthermore, a school development plan provides for the core areas of school functionality in that they express the SGB's mandate of setting the school's strategic direction. Because the school development plan covers all areas of school functionality, it follows that most of the developmental activities contained in them would be geared towards providing effective teaching and thus would relate to everyday activities for which the principal as professional manager is responsible. The implication of this is that the principal must make sure that he/she leads the implementation of such plans. This is critical in his/her governance role because he/she not only has to account to the SGB, but must implement the development plans as a way of promoting the best interests of the school and the learners. In addition, this is his/her duty in his/her official capacity because it is also a legal requirement as prescribed in the Schools Act.

Challenges regarding to the implementation of school development plans are related to the ability to create conditions for effective implementation, both behavioral and contextual to the school. Xaba (2006:24) lists among other such challenges as school development planning being done as a departmental requirement and not for truly improving the school due to a lack of know-how in strategic planning; involvement of a low spectrum of stakeholders in development planning due to illiteracy and community apathy; some parents being at work, whilst others simply did not care and lacked commitment; and the focus on operational matters rather than on strategic matters.

Clearly then, implementing the school development plan can be a challenge for the principal, especially if structural factors are also considered. These structural factors would include a lack of resources, difficulties in securing funding for numerous activities and projects and the complex structural compositions of schools like in comprehensive or technical schools.

3.3.1.8 *Promoting teamwork in the governing body*

The SGB is a structure that is composed of different people – young and old, male and female and from different backgrounds. In addition, these people may belong to different political parties and may thus have different ideologies. It is therefore clear that some of these ideologies may unfortunately disagree and even be in conflict. Despite, the above situation, Haines (2007:25) is of the opinion that the principal must find a way to support the governing body to establish good relationships and teamwork, otherwise effective teaching and learning and providing learners with quality education will be impossible at the school.

According to Marishane and Botha (2011:47), the devolution of decision making powers to the school and the accountability that goes with it, demands that all stakeholders work as a team under the leadership and guidance of the principal. The principal, by virtue of being a team builder, must use his/her communication skills to convince all stakeholders, namely, parents, educators and community members of the need for them to work together as a team in school governance in order for the school to achieve its goal of providing quality education to its learners. If the principal is capable of accomplishing this task, his actions would be to support the SGB to govern the school successfully.

Haines (2007:25), however, cites Harvarson, De Lange and Motchumi (1997) in arguing that for the stakeholders in school governance to work together as a team, they must trust and respect one another. Furthermore, they point out that trust is built and developed only when the people get to know one another's beliefs, values, strengths and interests. Trust will develop between the members of the SGB over time and they will start to be more open to one

another, for example, they will share their opinions, take risks and resolve problems and conflicts in a positive way.

According to Salis (2003), the responsibility of ensuring that stakeholders in the SGB work as a solid team rests on the shoulders of the principal and, the following be indicators to the principal when his/her governing body members are becoming a solid team:

- *Sharing of work* – When members of the governing body have some work to do, they first need to agree on what the work entails and how it will be done. Secondly, in order for the work to be easier and to be completed within the specified time, the work needs to be shared among them. This will develop among all of them the feeling that they own the work.
- *Members valuing one another* – If stakeholders are to develop into a solid team when tackling work, they need to appreciate the presence and contribution of each member of the team. This means they have to value one another, and then go on to share, not only their goals, but also their values and principles.
- *Accepting and welcoming new members* – This should be the norm in the SGB. All SGB members must be willing to accept and welcome new members who join the SGB. This will make new members feel at home and thus be able to work to the best of their abilities. Besides, when task should be done, they need to be divided and equally shared among all the members – new and old.
- *The chairperson carrying out his/her role properly* – For the chairperson to be able to carry out his/her job as expected, he/she needs to have leadership skills and above-average knowledge of the duties of the SGB, the Schools Act and policies. This will ensure that the chairperson will be able to assist the members of his team to accomplish their work and thus make it possible for the school to provide quality education to learners.
- *Sharing responsibility* – SGB members form a solid team. In times of success they should all take credit and celebrate together as winners. In

the same vein, when something has gone wrong with the work they have done, they should all take responsibility and share the blame. This will make them a solid team that works together through thick and thin.

- *Regular communication and support* – It should be noted that without regular communication, no team can sustain its good work. Regular communication, support and encouragement amongst team members in the SGB should be the order of the day. This action will revive commitment to the work at hand and instil hope and courage to team members who would be likely to lose hope.
- *Involvement of all members and cooperation* – The SGB should make opportunities available for all members of the team to be involved in decision-making about important issues in the school. No member of the governing body should be prevented from taking part in any decision-making or duty. Above all, members of the team must at all times cooperate to attain goals and to reach the targets they have set for themselves. However, it is crucial to bear in mind that to attain goals and to reach targets, school finances must be managed properly.

3.3.2 *The school governance role of the principal as ex officio member of the governing body*

The principal as *ex officio* member of the governing body fulfils the role of being in the SGB in his/her official capacity. As pointed out earlier, this role means that the principal represents the Department of Education in matters of school governance. Acting in his/her official capacity also means that the principal promotes the interests of the Department. The following example illustrates how as an *ex officio* member, the principal promotes the interests of the Department:

School A requires additional classrooms and the Department seems to delay the provision of the needed classrooms. The SGB and the parent community decide that the entire school community must embark on a public protest demonstration and present a list of demands, with a time ultimatum, to the Department. The principal of the school knows that due to budgetary reasons, the classrooms will only be constructed in the

following financial year. His official capacity in the SGB requires him to explain and defend the Department's position in this matter, which also means that he/she cannot lead the protest action decided upon by the SGB. It, therefore, becomes his/her responsibility to protect the interests of the department by communicating and persuading the school community against such a protest action.

Very often this role of the principal seems to create challenges that lead to conflict. There are instances where the principal has acted in the best interest of the school as agreed upon in the SGB, only for him/her to be found at fault by the Department for not carrying out lawful instructions. Numerous court cases have been reported where the role of the principal as an *ex officio* SGB member has featured prominently. For instance, Smith (2009:228) relates the issue of disrespect for language rights at public schools as having resulted in a number of court cases. In one case, Smith (2009:228) recounts the matter between *Laerskool Middelburg vs Departementshoof, Mpumalanga Departement van Onderwys* in 2003, where it was held that a decision by the provincial Department of Education to enforce the inclusion of an English medium course on an Afrikaans medium school was an irregular and unjust administrative action. The court criticised the "*inordinately politicised action of the Education Department*". The action of the Department of Education was found to be irregular because the National Language Policy Guidelines for filling available schools before requiring single medium schools to become double medium were not followed, and above all, the SGB's right to determine the school language policy was ignored (Smith, 2009:228).

In this scenario, it is clear the principals' dual role can create challenges. On the one hand, the principal as a member of the SGB of Laerskool Middelburg had been involved in the formulation of the language policy of this school, thus serving the interest of the parents and school community. On the other hand the principal as the departmental official, representing the employer must have had a challenge regarding agreeing to the Department's directive or of supporting the SGB's language policy. At this point, the argument is that as a

representative of the department, the principal was supposed to defend the Department's position, while at the same time, he/she also had to support the SGB, based on the school's language policy.

Another case concerns bureaucratic indifference to openness and deliberation in the matter of Despatch High School vs Head of Department of Education, Eastern Cape, 2003. According to Visser (2004:150), the Eastern Cape High Court declared its unhappiness at the closed way in which the Education Department in that province had dealt with a complaint against an educator who stole a school cell phone and thereafter lied about it. The Department investigated the matter and found the educator guilty of misconduct. The SGB wanted the educator to be charged with misconduct and dismissed, but the Department only gave the educator a final written warning. What is of concern here is, on the one hand, the manner in which the Department acted uncooperatively by disregarding the SGB's complaints and participation. In this case, the principal was part of the decision to have the educator fired, as a member of the SGB who promotes the interests of the school. On the other hand, as an employee of the Department which directed that the educator not be fired, but be given a final warning, it was expected of the principal to promote the Department's interests and endeavour to make sure that the Department's action was understood and accepted. This further implies that the principal would have had to uphold the rights of the educator against any victimisation and/or harassment in light of the Department's decision not to expel him/her. This is another clear example of the difficult situation in which the principal may find himself in when carrying out his school governance role.

These and numerous other cases indicate the challenges inherent in the principal's role as *ex officio* member of the SGB. Indeed, it often means a difficult act of balancing the fine line between being an ordinary SGB member and being an SGB member in an official capacity.

3.4 Chapter summary

The focus of Chapter 3 was also on the literature review. This chapter explored issues related to the principal's school governance role finally, the meaning of and challenges that the principal encounters in school governance, which of course are the main focus of this thesis.

The next chapter concentrates on the research methodology used in an attempt to uncover the meaning and the challenges inherent in the principals' school governance role in the Gert Sibande Region.

Chapter 4

Research methodology

4.1 Introduction

This study sought to determine the meaning and the challenges of the school principal's role in school governance. Data were collected, firstly through a literature review to gain an understanding of what the nature of the principals' governance role and challenges are. Secondly, to generate empirical data, interviews of a one-to-one type were used to collect data on the role of principals in school governance.

This chapter presents a detailed exposition of the empirical research, beginning with the research methodology.

4.2 Research methodology

The research methodology includes matters pertaining to how the research unfolded in terms of the research paradigm, design, strategy of inquiry, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, my role as researcher, participants and their selection, quality standards and ethical standards. The research paradigm is discussed in the next subsection.

4.2.1 *Research paradigm*

The study followed a social constructivist worldview. Social constructivism, according to Creswell (2009:8), "*holds the assumption that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work and thus develop subjective meanings of their experiences, meanings directed towards certain objects or things.*" In this regard, McMillan and Schumacher (2001:396) state that people form constructions in order to make sense of entities such as events, persons, processes or objects and reorganise them as viewpoints, perceptions and belief systems. Within this paradigmatic orientation, the researcher relies as much as possible on people's views of the situations being

studied by focusing on specific contexts in which people live and work in order to understand subjective meanings that people negotiate through social, cultural and historical interaction with others.

Based on a social constructivist paradigmatic orientation, the objective of this thesis was to understand principals' experiences of their school governance roles. Because principals themselves ascribe meaning to this phenomenon, experiences were critical to understanding their governance roles. Equally important were educator and parent-governors' viewpoints about their principals' governance roles. Therefore principals, educators and parents were critical participants in this study. Consequently, data gathering took cognisance of assumptions that participants construct meanings about the principal's role as they engage with and interpret the concept of school governance and that they engage with their world and make sense of it based on their social and historical interaction; and that the basic generation of meaning is always social, arising out of interaction with a human community (Creswell, 2009:8). In line with these assumptions, the questions were open-ended. Participants' contexts or settings and information gathering were done personally and an inductive analysis was used to generate meaning from the data collected in the field (Creswell, 2009:9).

For the reasons expressed above, this study adopted a phenomenological research design.

4.2.2 Research design

Qualitative research was deemed appropriate for this study because it "*elicits participants' accounts of meaning, experience or perceptions and it also produces descriptive data in participants' own written or spoken words*" (Fouché & Delport, 2002:77). Fouché and Delport (2002:79) further describe qualitative research as idiographic and holistic in nature and aims to understand social life and the meaning people attach to everyday life. Gay and Airasian (2003:13), argue: "*... qualitative research seeks to probe deeply into the research setting*

with an intention of obtaining a deep understanding about the way things are, as well as how participants perceive them”.

In line with this description of qualitative research, this study purported to appraise the principal’s school governance role by probing into the meaning of the school governance phenomenon and eliciting meanings assigned to school governance from principals, educators and parent as members of SGBs. This was enhanced by delving into what is ascribed as the principal’s role in his/her interaction with school governance activities and other role players.

4.2.3 Strategy of inquiry

A phenomenological research strategy was used, which suited the purpose of this study as well as its conceptual and paradigmatic orientation. This is because phenomenology as a strategy “*seeks to understand and interpret the meaning that the people give to their everyday lives*” (Fouché, 2002:273), which implies that the study describes what meaning a phenomenon, topic or concept has for various individuals and is a strategy that identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants through seeking to understand their lived experiences (Creswell, 2009:13). To this end, in-depth interviews were used to elicit views about the phenomenon of study from principals, educator-governors and parent-governors as stated above.

In using the phenomenological strategy, an attempt was made to understand and explore the principal’s governance role through listening to principals’ views about their school governance roles as well as educator-governors and parent-governors’ accounts of the principal’s governance role. This information flowed from participants’ accounts of their lived experiences as far as principals’ roles are concerned.

4.2.4 Selection of participants

Participants in this study comprised SGB members in the Gert Sibande Region of the Mpumalanga Department of Education. This is because participants who had served in and had experience in school governance were sought. However,

for feasibility purposes concerning the data sought, participant selection was confined to principals, educator-governors and parent-governors as the participants deemed most likely to articulate authoritative views about what they regarded as the school governance role of the principal as well as the challenges principals experience in this role. The participants were also considered very suitable because they were serving the last period of their terms of office. No distinction was made to the differences in responses between participants from township and suburban schools as the aim of the study was to appraise the meaning and challenges of the school governance role of the principal. Therefore no attempt at a comparative analysis was made.

Learners in secondary schools, who are also governing body members, were purposely omitted as they were not deemed adequately knowledgeable enough to provide information-rich data for purposes of this study.

Purposive selection was used in this study because participants were selected with a specific purpose in mind, for example, participants who were knowledgeable and informative about school governance (Maree & Pietersen, 2007:178). In addition, participant selection was convenient and dimensional, which implies selectivity "*that is based on the researcher targeting a particular group, in the full knowledge that it does not represent the wider population*" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2002:102). In this regard, convenience selection involved choosing the nearest individuals to serve as participants and continuing the process until the required size had been obtained. According to Strydom and Venter (2002:207), dimensional sampling entails only a few cases to be studied in depth and ensures that each population dimension or stratum is represented. For this reason and for convenience and dimensional purposes, a respective simple proportional mathematical ratio (2:2:1) of 20 principals, 20 parent governors and 10 educator-governors was used to select participants for in-depth interviews. Furthermore, the selection ensured a spread over primary and secondary school participants. However, 11 educator-governors were finally interviewed because of an additional educator-governor who voluntarily availed himself and requested to be interviewed.

4.2.5 *Data collection*

Background information was first collected through an extensive literature review to gain an understanding of what the nature of the principal's school governance role was. This was in order to "*share with the reader the results of other studies that are closely related to the one being undertaken*" and "*provide[s] a framework for establishing the importance of the study as well as a benchmark for comparing the results with other findings*" (Creswell, 2009:25). The literature was reviewed extensively to reveal the context of the meaning and challenges inherent in the principal's school governance role, especially in light of the *ex-officio* role and the bona fide membership of the SGB.

To search for relevant literature, the World-Wide Web was used including search engines and databases such as Google, EbscoHost, Eric as well as books, journals and newspapers. Key words for this purpose included the following:

school governing body, school governance, school governance roles, school governance functions, school principals' governance roles, promoting the best interests of schools, school governance policies, democratic governance, school governance mandate.

To generate empirical data, interviews of a one-to-one type were used. Greeff (2002:292) cites Kvale who describes interviews as attempts to understand the world from the participants' point of view, to unfold the meaning of people's experiences and to uncover the lived world prior to scientific explanation. In this regard, the interview was chosen as the most appropriate data collection mode for this study because interviews provide opportunities for gathering data through direct verbal interaction between individuals, gaining in-depth understanding of participants, following up where necessary for purposes of clarity, fostering mutual respect, sharing information with the participants, establishing rapport with the participants and therefore gaining cooperation and conducting interviews in a natural and relaxed setting (Cohen *et al.*, 2002:260).

The interviews were semi-structured and were conducted with an open orientation; allowing for directed two-way conversational communication and consisting of a set of open-ended questions as a starting point to guide interaction (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:184; Greeff, 2002:302). These were reflected in the interview schedules (cf. Annexures 2 – 4) which were prepared with due consideration to guidelines provided in this regard by various experts (see McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:443; Mouton, 2001:195; Greeff, 2002:292).

The data collection unfolded over two phases. The first phase involved conducting a trial run of the interview questions. According to various experts in qualitative research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003:95; Greeff, 2002:300; Cohen *et al.*, 2002:279), the interview process must be well prepared for. After the finalisation of the interview questions and schedule, interview questions were first piloted with six participants (two principals, two educator-governors and two parent-governors) who would not be part of the final selection. The intention for this process was to come to terms with some of the practical aspects of establishing access, making contact and conducting interviews as well as testing interviewing skills – including testing the validity of the questions. This process also included a critical discussion of the schedule with the study promoter to ascertain the correctness of the interview schedules.

The second phase, which involved the actual interviews, entailed making arrangements in advance for the interviews in terms of the dates, places and times of interviews. Interview rooms were prepared to be quiet and to be without interruptions to ensure privacy, comfort and accessibility. In all interviews, schools where participants were SGB members were selected, with permission from the SGBs and principals. Finally, the interviews were conducted after school hours at times convenient to the participants. Most interviews took one hour, although a few took an additional half an hour due to note-taking instead of recordings. The entire process of interviews spanned just less than two months. This was because not only one stratum of participants was selected for interviews, but three.

4.2.6 ***Data analysis and interpretation***

Data analysis involves bringing order, structure and meaning to the data collected and searches for general statements about relationships among categories of data (De Vos, 2002:340). As described in Creswell (2009:185):

- Data were organised and prepared for analysis through *verbatim* transcription.
- The second step involved reading and re-reading to get a sense of the information and its overall meaning. This included writing notes in margins on aspects such as the tone of the ideas and the overall impression conveyed by the data.
- The third step involved coding, which entailed organising data into segments of text before bringing meaning to the data by categorising and labelling. This involved identifying topics in the data, clustering similar data into columns of major or unique topics and peripheral ideas. This step also involved abbreviating topics into codes and placing them next to appropriate columns or segments and finding the most descriptive wording and turning them into categories, thereby also reducing the categories by grouping those that relate to one another and finally, deciding on the final categories and clustering data according to the categories and conducting a preliminary analysis.
- From the identified categories, an attempt was made to identify emerging patterns and themes and sub-themes and sought connections between and among them.
- The fifth step involved deciding and advancing how themes would be represented in the study report, which would be narrative.
- Finally, data were interpreted by looking at and scrutinising what they conveyed; that is, what data portrayed about the school governance role of the principal, the challenges inherent in the role and the implications thereof.

Tobin and Begley (2004:391) assert that qualitative research is dynamic and interactive and is not linear. Thus, being mindful of this dynamic nature of qualitative research cognisance of the fact that the steps outlined above would, in the end, not necessarily be followed 'as is' was taken. Therefore, decisions based on the data collected through the literature review, which on its own generated categories, might necessitate *a priori* or predetermined category analysis and thus deviate from the coding and thematising method of data analysis. Indeed, in analysing the data, pre-determined categories found from the literature review and other studies were first used. This was, however, followed by a careful inductive analysis as described in the steps above, mainly for purposes of gaining insight and data reduction.

4.2.7 ***The role of the researcher***

According to Maree and Van der Westhuizen (2007:41), the researcher's role should empower him/her "*to enter into a collaborative partnership with the respondents in order to collect and analyse data, with the main aim of creating understanding*" and he/she will need "*to be a sensitive observer who records phenomena as faithfully as possible while at the same time raising additional questions, following hunches and moving deeper into the analysis of the phenomena*". Among others, the researcher's role, according to Joubert, as cited by Maree and Van der Westhuizen (2007:41), includes, *inter alia*, preparing and structuring interviews, conducting interviews, analysing data and triangulating and/or crystallising data.

As researcher, the interview schedule was designed and developed with a number of questions using data collected through the literature review. Person-to-person type interviews were then conducted. In this process, participant interviewees and were engaged on the phenomenon of the study in a setting that was relaxed and that allowed for free interaction. This process ended up by the analysis and interpretation of the data and the compilation of a research report in the form of this manuscript.

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005:139), researchers have to suspend any preconceived notions or personal experiences that could unduly influence them during the collection and analysis of the data, such that the data collected reflect the perspectives, opinions and thoughts of the participants as accurately as possible. Having piloted the schedules and made sure that the questions were appropriate, it was ensured that personal biases did not taint data collection, analysis and interpretation as explained on quality assurance measures below. Cognisance of the difficulty of being objective in qualitative, especially phenomenological interviewing was taken, as pointed out by Nieuwenhuis (2007c:78-79), who argues that qualitative research is based on a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in a context (or real-world setting) and, in general, the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomena of interest. Instead, Nieuwenhuis makes the point that in qualitative research, being 'carried out' in a real life situation, it is accepted that researcher subjectivity is something that cannot be completely eliminated, since the researcher is also seen as the research instrument in the data-gathering process.

4.3 Quality assurance

The nature of qualitative research requires that reliability and validity be treated differently than in quantitative research. According to Cohen *et al.* (2000:118), unlike quantitative research which assumes replicability if similar methods are used with a similar sample, qualitative research cannot be replicated. Instead, as explained in Bogdan and Biklen (2003:190), in qualitative research the concern is with the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the data, and reliability is viewed as a fit between what is recorded as data, and what actually happens in the setting under study, rather than the literal consistency across different observations or situations.

To ensure the quality of the study's research process, the following issues were imperative in ensuring trustworthiness:

- Member checking, which aims to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings by taking the final report back to the participants to find out if they agree with and find it accurate (Creswell, 2009:191). In this regard, most of the data as reported was confirmed with the participants.
- Keeping notes of decisions taken during the research process and especially in relation to data collection and analysis (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b:114). This included notes pertaining to category labelling. Consequently, it was sure that a 'paper trail' that helped during analysis and review of the report was kept.
- Requesting independent coding and verification (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b:114), with which the study promoter helped. This also applied to the findings, which helped in verifying and validating them. To this end, many inconsistencies and contradictions were identified and assigned to appropriate categories and interpreted as such. After the initial analysis and interpretation, every aspect of the analysis scrutinised together with the study promoter. Rephrasing, rewording, rearrangement, correction of sentences and re-clarification of meanings attached to participants' words and statements were done carefully – which then informed the final report.
- Eliminating any bias that may creep into the study by constantly reflecting on the research process (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b:114) and applying aspects detailed above. This is tantamount to ensuring confirmability, which according to De Vos (2002:352), captures objectivity and removes evaluation from some inherent characteristic of the researcher and places it squarely on the data by answering the question: Do the data help to confirm the general findings and lead to implications? In this research, objectivity was ensured through neutrality and focusing on data collected. Findings and implications were therefore based purely on data collected. The study promoter and I also went through this process carefully by asking questions on statements I

had made to ensure that they represented the participants' views and were devoid of any preconceived beliefs and biases. Subsequently, a number of such occurrences were eliminated.

- Avoiding generalisations since that is not the aim of qualitative research, and trying to answer questions relating to the uniqueness of individuals, groups, situations or issues to seek insight into participants' perspectives, experiences, attitudes and behaviours (Nieuwenhuis, 2007b:115). The findings and interpretation thereof are all devoid of generalisations. Similar processes were followed with the study promoter.
- Locating the data analysis within the parameters of school governance and the principal's role as prescribed by relevant legislation and as revealed through the literature study of this research, assisted with seeing how this research ties into a body of existing theory as stated by De Vos (2002:352). Comparisons with existing studies were made and inferences were thus drawn as confirmatory of the existing body of knowledge in school governance. Although there were numerous positive aspects of school governance issues from some participants, the challenges of the principal's school governance role were purposely focused upon as conveyed by the participants in order to ensure that the main objective of the study was achieved.
- Consistently identifying the subject of the study as *the role of the principal in school governance*, which was also described in the selection of participants (De Vos, 2002:351).
- Ensuring credibility by quoting participants' verbal accounts. Thus, participants' words were extensively used instead of my own attachment of meaning (cf. Bogdan & Biklen, 2003:190).
- Finally, to ensure trustworthiness, the limitations of the study were stated in the report.

Ensuring quality also included ethical measures taken in the study.

4.4. Ethical standards

Before the research commenced, I obtained permission from the manager of the Gert Sibande Region to conduct research by following the prescribed departmental protocol. Furthermore, ethics approval was sought from the North-West University Ethics Committee and was granted. Permission was also sought from SGBs and school principals for access and entry into school premises used for meeting interviewees and conducting interviews.

Regarding the participants, it was ensured that the correct ethical measures were adhered to, including:

- *Ensuring that they gave informed consent and participated voluntarily.* In this regard, participants were informed of their right to decide on participating or not, and that their participation was voluntary (Mouton, 2001:244; Strydom, 2002:74). This included a full disclosure of the purpose of the research and a request for participants' permission to record the interviews. Participants were also informed that they could decide to withdraw their participation at any time if they so desired. They were also informed that they could refuse to answer questions they felt uncomfortable with or those that they did not want to answer for any reason.
- *Protection from harm.* To this end, I strove to be honest and respectful towards all participants and no situation that would put participants at risk was envisaged (Mouton, 2001:245).
- *Ensuring participants' privacy, confidentiality and anonymity.* In this regard, and flowing from their right to participate, participants were guaranteed that their participation would be treated confidentially, their privacy would be respected and that the report would use pseudonyms to ensure the anonymity of their participation (Mouton, 2001:243; Creswell, 2009:89).

In addition to these measures, the write-up was such that it reflected research ethical standards in so far as data analysis and interpretation were concerned, which included keeping analysed data for the prescribed period of five years, providing accurate accounts of data and using acceptable scientific language in the write-up (Creswell, 2009:91). The data collected through tape-recordings and note taking would be in the study promoter's safekeeping for the prescribed period.

4.5 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the empirical research by outlining the research design and methodology. The qualitative approach was used to gather data from the population, which comprised school principals, educator-governors and parent-governors. A discussion of aspects such as data collection, the role of the researcher, quality assurance and ethical consideration was also included in this chapter.

The next chapter will present the data presentation and analysis.

Chapter 5

Data presentation and analysis

5.1 Introduction

This study sought to determine the challenges of the principal's role in school governance. As explained and detailed earlier in Chapter 4, data were collected, firstly through a literature review to gain an understanding of what the nature of the principals' governance role and challenges thereof are. Secondly, to generate empirical data, interviews of a one-to-one type were used to collect data on the role of principals in school governance. The next section presents the participants' profiles.

5.2 The profile of the participants

Participants in this study consisted of SGB members in the Gert Sibande Region of the Mpumalanga Department of Education. This is aimed at looking for participants who had served as school governors and had experience in school governance in an area with similar features insofar as school demographics were concerned. Hence, the selected participants were from a mix of township and suburban schools⁶ in the region. Therefore, to gather data, participants were confined to school principals, educator-governors and parent-governors from schools in the region.

Although there was no intention to quantify the collected data through statistical analysis, the demographic profile of the participants in the study is generally detailed using statistics in order to give a clear picture of them and their schools. Although this was not used for purposes of generalising the findings, it provides insights into the potential challenges the schools might have with regard to governance matters, *inter alia*, the effects of, for example, school

⁶ Suburban schools are schools that catered only for whites during the apartheid education dispensation in South Africa.

enrolments, school locations and years of participants' experience as school governors.

For ease of reading, it is worth reiterating that 51 participants were involved in this study. Of these 20 were principals, 11 were educator-governors and 20 were parent-governors. The breakdown of participants' profiles per stratum is illustrated in tables in the following section.

5.2.1 *Principals*

Twenty school principals participated in this study. They were from primary and secondary schools located in townships and suburbs in the Gert Sibande Region. Table 5.1 depicts the profiles of the principals who participated in the study.

Table 5.1 **Profile of participant principals (*Ex officio members*)**

Participant	Gender	Years as governor	Type of school	Location	Enrolment
A	Male	06	Primary	Township	754
B	Female	08	Primary	Township	606
C	Male	09	Secondary	Township	490
D	Female	05	Primary	Township	800
E	Female	02	Primary	Township	409
F	Female	25	Secondary	Township	900
G	Male	05	Secondary	Suburban	1 209
H	Male	02	Primary	Township	550
I	Female	06	Secondary	Township	1 000
J	Female	03	Primary	Township	600
K	Female	09	Primary	Township	755
L	Male	03	Primary	Township	750
M	Male	01	Primary	Township	995
N	Male	08	Secondary	Township	1 100
AA	Female	20	Primary	Suburban	841
BB	Male	18	Secondary	Suburban	463
HH	Male	10	Primary	Suburban	531
KK	Male	08	Primary	Suburban	735
II	Male	15	Secondary	Suburban	695
MM	Male	04	Primary	Suburban	839

As illustrated in Table 5.1, of the 20 school principals interviewed, the following features were notable:

- Twelve were males and eight were females.
- Male principals (BB and II) had experience in their positions of more than 10 years, while only two female principals had experience of over 10 years (F and AA).
- It can also be noted that eight school principals, namely D, F, G, T, M, N, AA and MM managed schools with enrolment numbers of over 800. Two school principals, G and N were from schools with enrolments of over 1 000 (1 209 and 1 100 respectively). This implies that they are principals of relatively big schools, which, it can be assumed, would present numerous school governance challenges with regard to governance responsibilities requiring clear strategic direction setting and accountability from the principal.
- It was also found that all suburban schools visited were managed by male principals (6 out of 6), while this was not true of all township schools visited. For instance, participants B, D, E, F, I, J, K and AA were female principals managing township schools. Males managing township schools were A, H, L, M and N.

5.2.2 Educator-governors

The profiles of educator-governors who participated in the interviews are depicted in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2 Profile of participant educator-governors

Participant	Gender	Years as governor	Type of school	Location	Enrolment
Q	Male	03	Primary	Township	606
R	Male	02	Primary	Township	650
T	Male	01	Secondary	Township	780
W	Female	05	Secondary	Township	754
X	Female	05	Secondary	Suburban	463
Y	Male	02	Secondary	Suburban	841
CC	Female	04	Primary	Township	755
DD	Female	03	Primary	Township	1 030
GG	Female	05	Primary	Township	958
YY	Female	04	Primary	Township	878
EE	Male	05	Secondary	Township	671

The profile of educator governors who participated in this study indicates some distinctive features. The following were noticeable.

- There were a total of six female educator-governors and five male educator-governors.
- The male educator-governors had the least experience in the SGB at three years. For example, participant Q=3 years, R=2 years and T= 1 year, while the female educator-governors had the experience mostly of four years and above, for example, W=5 years, X=5 years and CC= 4 years. What is apparent is that most female educator-governors were in their second terms of office as members of the SGB, which is indicative of the fact that female educator-governors have accumulated more experience in school governance than their male counterparts, who were mostly in their first 3 years in school governance.
- It was also a noticeable trend that most SGBs were dominated by the female educator-governors. Female educator governors who participated in this study seemed to have more experience in the SGB (\pm five years) than their male counterparts, whose experience ranged between one and

three years. This was also noticeable in the case of serving as governors in primary schools. It was also found that the majority of female educator-governors were serving in the primary schools while fewer male educator-governors were serving in township primary schools.

5.2.3 *Parent-governors*

The 20 parent-governors who participated in the study were school governors from both primary and secondary schools located in suburb and township schools in the Region. Their profiles indicate some distinct characteristics as illustrated in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 Profile of participant parent-governors

Participant	Gender	Years as governor	Type of school	Location	Enrolment
O	F	04	Secondary	Township	490
P	M	03	Secondary	Township	934
S	M	02	Primary	Township	754
U	M	02	Secondary	Township	1 050
V	M	03	Secondary	Township	1 114
FF	F	05	Primary	Suburban	839
JJ	F	03	Primary	Suburban	864
LL	F	05	Primary	Township	606
NN	M	04	Secondary	Township	949
OO	F	05	Secondary	Township	780
PP	F	02	Secondary	Township	567
QQ	F	05	Secondary	Suburban	841
RR	M	02	Secondary	Township	487
SS	F	05	Secondary	Township	1 100
TT	F	02	Primary	Township	841
UU	M	03	Primary	Suburban	531
VV	F	05	Secondary	Suburban	463
WW	F	05	Primary	Township	650
XX	F	05	Primary	Suburban	531
Z	F	05	Primary	Township	755

- A total of 20 parent-governors were interviewed, seven were males and 13 were females.
- The majority of female parent-governors, (10) had experiences of four to five years or two terms in the SGB. The majority of their male counterparts, *i.e.* five had the experiences of two to three years or one term the SGBs. Parent-governors, who have more than one term (four to six years) serving in the SGBs can be considered as more experienced than those who had less than one term. Female parent-governors – O, FF, LL, OO, QQ, SS, VV, WW, XX and Z – can therefore be classified as experienced while their male counterparts – P, S, U, V, RR and U can be classified as not experienced.
- It was also noticeable that more female parent-governors (seven against six) served in primary school SGBs, while male parent-governors (five against two) served in secondary school SGBs.
- As far as enrolment is concerned, it was noticed that the highest enrolments were in township secondary schools, where male parent-governors were serving as SGB members, for example, U=1 050, V=1 114, NN=949, SS=1 100, while most female parent-governors were serving in suburban schools where there are lower enrolments, for example, parent-governors FF= 839, JJ=864, QQ= 841 and VV= 463.

5.3 Data analysis

The SGB mandate, as stated earlier in the text, is that of promoting the best interests of the school and striving to ensure its development through the provision of quality education for all learners at the school. This mandate is given expression by the three main categories of SGB responsibilities, namely, providing the school with a strategic direction, acting as a critical friend and holding the school to account as found in the literature review (cf. 2.3). Data analysis flowing from the three categories culminated into the following main and sub- themes identified from participants' responses:

- The meaning and implications of the school governance mandate.
 - Creating conditions for effective teaching and learning.
 - The execution and implications of the school governance mandate.
- The nature of the principal's school governance role.
 - Representing the Department of Education.
 - Supporting and guiding the SGB in the performance of their functions.
- Challenges of the school governance role of the principal.
 - Challenges pertaining to the principal's ex-officio role.
 - Challenges pertaining to parent-governors' low educational levels.
 - Challenges pertaining parent-governors' perceptions about being in SGBs.
 - Miscellaneous challenges in the principal's school governance role.

5.3.1 ***The meaning of the school governance mandate***

The school governance mandate, as revealed in Chapter 2 (cf. 2.3) concerns three main responsibilities, namely, providing the school with a strategic direction, acting as a critical friend and holding the school to account. Therefore, the data analysis sought to gain insights into how this mandate was perceived, how it was seen to relate to the execution of school governance and what challenges were experienced in its execution at schools. Although participants did not directly address themselves to these three responsibilities, their views were found to allude to some aspects of these responsibilities. In response to what the school governance mandate means and requires, participants alluded to the governance mandate as implying creating conditions for effective

teaching and learning and referring to the execution and implications of the school governance mandate.

5.3.1.1 *Creating conditions for effective teaching and learning*

Commenting on the creation of conditions for effective teaching and learning, participants generally held similar views about the meaning of the school governance role and its implications. In this regard, the following views were expressed:

Principal II stated:

This mandate requires the SGB to assist the principal and the SMT and teachers to make the teaching process a success.

Principal E, expressing a view that emphasised the school's resource conditions and rationale remarked:

This mandate requires the SGB to use all the resources of the SGB (financial or material) to promote the interest of the school and the child. The SGB must ensure that all learners receive quality education to prepare them for their future careers.

Principals K and G respectively echoed similar sentiments and stated:

This mandate I think requires the SGB to play a leadership role at the school, to ensure all learners receive quality education that will prepare learners for life at work.

I will say it requires SGB to create conditions favourable for education to take place

Educator-governors similarly expressed notions emphasising conditions for effective teaching and learning. Participant W, an educator-governor, pointed out that the SGB, in executing the school governance mandate, needed “*to take education seriously as an important tool for transforming society*” and:

They must make the interest of the child a priority ... ensure the children's right to receive education is not violated or compromised, [and] above all, they must educate parents about the importance of education and the role parents must play in the education of their children.

Participant R, also an educator-governor, commented on teaching and learning as an important role required by the school governance mandate:

This mandate requires the SGB to support and protect the school and ensure that teaching and learning takes place without any hindrances.

Participant EE, an educator-governor, alluded to the SGB in creating conditions for effective teaching and learning, and being expected to give direction on school operations as he stated:

The mandate of the SGB is to put in place a framework according to which all stakeholders will operate to achieve the goals of the school. This task is critical for the SGB to promote the interest of the child.

Participant GG, also an educator-governor, emphasised planning of school activities and providing for the needs of the school. She stated:

To plan all school activities and to ensure everything the school needs is available, be it equipment, furniture, books and other resources. This is the mandate of the SGB to see to it the school runs smoothly and learners get the best education possible.

Parent-governors interestingly, were more specific in their responses regarding what the school governance mandate implied in terms of creating conditions for effective teaching and learning. For example, Participant SS, a parent-governor, stated that the school governance mandate “*requires the SGB to engage in strategic planning and to draft policies according to which the school will be managed, and to ensure finances are used to benefit the child, nothing else*”. The mention of strategic planning was very significant as it is at the very core of the school governance mandate of providing the school with a strategic direction.

Participant QQ, a parent-governor commented about resourcing the school as a responsibility tied to ensuring that effective teaching and learning takes place. She commented thus:

We have a responsibility to see to it that the child gets quality education. We have to provide all the necessary resources the child requires, for example, books, furniture, teaching aids and other equipment to assist the child.

Parent-governor OO emphasised the place of a child at school. She stated the following:

Our primary duty is to make sure the child is in the centre of all activities at the school. We plan how this can be made possible.

The views expressed by participants regarding creating conditions for effective teaching and learning revealed a number of important aspects. Prominent among their views was their description of the school governance mandate: the promotion of the school's interests through the provision of quality education for the learners. This was expressed in various ways, which included creating favourable conditions for education to take place; playing a leadership role; supporting and protecting the school so that teaching and learning can take place, implementing a framework according to which all stakeholders can operate to achieve the goals of the school; planning all school activities to provide for the school's needs and engaging in strategic planning and drafting policies and providing all the necessary resources.

From the findings on the school governance mandate and its implications it is clear that the roles of SGB members are crucial for the successful implementation of the school governance mandate. It is also clear that based on the need for democratic principles of stakeholder involvement and collective decision-making, the role of the principal in school governance needs a clear definition and understanding, especially considering how school governance was conducted in the previous education dispensation (see 2.4.1). For this

reason, the views of the participants regarding the nature of the principal's role in school governance were explored.

5.3.1.2 *The execution and implications of the school governance mandate*

The execution of the school governance mandate requires, as pointed out earlier (cf. 2.3), that the SGB to sets the school's strategic direction, acts as a critical friend to the school and demands accountability. In the current study, participants mentioned a variety of issues they viewed as requirements for executing and realising this mandate.

Most principals seemed to consider policy-making and holding meetings as requirements for executing the school governance mandate. In this regard, Principal M commented in the following manner:

“The first thing I realised as the principal of the school is that the SGB is involved mainly in policy formulation to make sure the atmosphere and conditions in the school are serving the best interest of the child”.

Principal E responded in the following manner:

To accomplish this goal the SGB must have policies in place to guide all stakeholders towards the realisation of this goal. The policies the SGB formulate to realise its mandate must at all times be in line with the Schools Act and must not contravene or be in conflict with any departmental policy or the Constitution of the country. This means that all activities or decisions taken by the SGB or the school must support the policies of the department and the laws of the country.

Principal K made the point that to realise the school governance mandate, “*the SGB has to formulate policies at the school which will serve as a guide to all activities and decisions that are taken at the school*”. Principal K explained the implication of that action, namely:

The SGB must make sure that all decisions it takes in their meetings are not in conflict with the Schools Act. And that those decisions will serve the best interest of the child.

Principal C, in explaining how and what the school governance mandate implies, provided a contextual framework within which it should be executed. She stated:

The SGB must have systems and policies in place. Stakeholders like parents, learners and educators must know their responsibilities. Even general workers are also important, e.g. they open classrooms on time for teaching and learning to start. They also ensure that classrooms and the premises are clean.

It is clear from Principal C's assertion that a system within which school governance could be executed was important in order for all stakeholders to know how they should carry out their responsibilities. However, it must be noted that the example he used could be one of the challenges in that general workers and their duties as staff members and employees of the department, fall directly under the management domain of the principal. This could confuse the SGB if it were to be considered a role for which they have to develop a policy framework.

Principal C went on to express the importance of drafting policies as a way of maintaining discipline but also added the important role played by a vision to achieve goals. He stated the following:

I think this mandate requires the SGB to regulate and to draft policies in order to maintain discipline and to run the school effectively. The SGB must have a vision of how to achieve its goals. This will guide the SGB towards promoting the interest of the learner by ensuring the learner is getting quality education.

Principal AA elaborated on the notion of structures or systems within which the school governance mandate had to be executed by stating the following:

The SGB must develop policies and put structures like various committees in place, which will ensure all activities are done according to what policies say.

Principal L expressly emphasised regular meetings. He remarked:

To realise this mandate, the SGB must meet regularly to chart the way forward for the school and taking the lead in their children's education

Principal B raised communication as an important aspect. She pointed out that “all the *stakeholders must communicate constantly via meetings and workshops*” which she implied were planned activities and that these “*must have impact or positive results*” and would “*be an indication that our SGB's mandate has been realised*”. Similarly, Principal H stated the monthly meetings as an important feature of realising the school governance mandate and added that they had “*committees within the SGB. They sit once a month and often give feedback to the SGB*” and “*... review policies on three year basis and whenever needed*”. He also mentioned the following as aspects related to executing and realising the school governance mandate:

The financial committee takes financial decisions but the SGB must approve them. Any item, equipment or machine the SGB wants to buy must have at least three quotations. Every quarter we have a meeting where the SGB talks to parents about discipline, occupational therapy etc. Financial feedback is given in the fourth term to parents and the budget is put to them and approved by them.

Although most responses regarding the execution of the school governance mandate related mainly to policy-making and meetings, some principals expressed other views. For instance, the matter of the implementation of policies was also mentioned as crucial by some principals. Principal HH alluded to this important fact in his response where he stated: “*... the SGB puts policies in place and ensure it is [sic] implemented, and give feedback to parents*”. Similarly Principal L commented and added examples of policies: “*The SGB*

must develop policies and implement them, e.g. finance, admission, language and religious policies”.

Principal F expressed the view that executing the school governance mandate at his school concerned the visibility and vigilance capability of some SGB members. She stated:

I am fortunate because I have two SGB members who stay very near the school, so most of the activities that take place here at school, they witness them, and if there is something that is taking place that they are not aware of, they call me and I have to clarify what is happening. ... So, if there is a high rate of late-coming, for example, they raise that in the meetings and if they see that during a certain day many learners were outside, then they raise that and request an explanation.

To a certain extent, this action of SGB members involves being a critical friend to the school as well as demanding accountability. Principal H emphasised knowledge of how to govern the school as a requirement for executing the school governance mandate. He stated:

First of all I would say all SGB members must be knowledgeable. In order to gain knowledge they must attend workshops and be developed. Through workshops they will get more knowledge on how to govern schools and they need to work hand-in-hand with the principal to realise the goals of the school.

Principal BB raised the issue of belonging to committees such as safety and security, quality learning and teaching committee, irregularity committee and finance committee as aspects of executing the school governance mandate.

Although all principals who participated in the study seemed to cite one or other issues on the execution of the school governance mandate, Principal N stated:

In our schools it is very difficult to realise the mandate of the SGB because basically, most of our parents are not educated. If we had more of the parents who are educated, we would be in a position of realising the SGB

mandate. But the challenge is that most of the parents are not educated. This frustrates the mandate.

This statement was the first from the participant principals that indicated the reality of the governance situation, especially since it correlated with the challenges directly mentioned by other principals as well.

Educator-governors also underlined policy-making and meetings as an important aspect of realising the school governance mandate. They also emphasised the importance of the implementation of and compliance with such policies. For example, Educator-governor W stated: *“To realise this important mandate, the SGB must work hand in hand with educators and other stakeholders”* and added the following:

They must create policies in consultation with all stakeholders, and make sure policies are implemented correctly. For example, the admission policy in SASA states that no child should be discriminated on the basis of language, race, religion, gender or culture etc. The SGB must ensure that this policy and other policies of the Department of Education are complied with.

Educator-governor CC also emphasised that the SGB must ensure that *“all policies and activities it has planned are understood by all, for them to be implementable. Meetings must be held from time to time to explain and interpret these policies and activities”*. Similarly, Educator-governors GG, DD, Y, and X stated the following respectively:

To realise this mandate, the SGB must ensure that policies they have formulated are complied with and are implemented by all stakeholders”;

Regular meetings are held in our school to discuss these policies to ensure all SGB members understand them. Parents are also invited to meetings where schools policies are explained. The input of the stakeholders is considered very crucial when important decisions are to be taken which affect the education of learners.

Planning in advance must be emphasised in all meetings. Sticking to policies and the drafted budgets are important ways of ensuring the school succeed in achieving its goals of promoting the interest of the school and the learner.

The SGB does its work by meeting on a regular basis. In these meetings members are reminded of what the different policies say and are urged to operate and perform their roles while keeping these policies in mind. Members are also encouraged to make sure the school sticks to its budget to avoid landing into financial difficulties.

Other aspects of importance to the realisation of the school governance mandate from educator-governors included the following matters:

The SGB must ensure no class of learners is without a teacher. When a teacher has left or passed on, a consultative meeting must be convened to make sure the vacancy is filled as soon as possible. The SGB must also make sure the required resources are available, e.g. charts, chalk, textbooks, so that teaching and learning take place effectively. As part of the policy-making structure at the school, the SGB must develop a code of conduct to ensure there is discipline and effective teaching and learning take place. Lastly, the SGB must be involved in designing the curricular for the school – Educator-governor W.

We make sure that stakeholders know their roles and responsibilities. Knowledge of roles and responsibilities eliminate conflicts when duties are performed. The SGB organises regular workshops to update members, parents, educators and learners about their responsibilities. This is done to promote the interest of the child – Educator-governor EE.

The SGB should see to it that the SASA's interests are upheld and maintained by seeing to it that educators teach, learners learn and SGB's govern – Educator-governor Q.

This mandate requires the SGB to support and protect the school and ensures that teaching and learning takes place without any hindrances – Educator-governor R.

This mandate requires the SGB to draft the school code of conduct and to protect the facilities of the school. SGB members must also participate in disciplinary measures of the school, and to ensure that funds are used for the education of the child – Educator-governor T.

Other than policy-making and holding meetings, interesting points noted by educator-governors included the mention of “*no class of learners is without a teacher*” which directly relates to the best interests of the learners; “*SGBs must be involved in designing the curricular for the school*” which relates directly to setting the strategic direction for the school; “*seeing to it that educators teach, learners learn and SGBs govern*” which relates to being a critical friend to the school and demanding accountability; and “*ensure that funds are used for the education of the child*” which is also related to accountability. It is interesting to note that these views came from educator-governors, in particular, the view that relates curricula design to the SGB’s functional areas.

Parent-governors also provided varied responses regarding how they worked to realise the school governance mandate. Prominent issues raised included knowledge of school governance, involvement in decision-making so that policies were implemented, constant communication through meetings and workshops and working as a team as expressed in the following statements:

First of all, SGB members attend workshops to enhance their knowledge on school governance. Then the principal involves them in decision-making and in making sure policies are implemented – Parent-governor SS.

They must work with all other stakeholders cooperatively to ensure policies are implemented, funds are not mismanaged and that all activities of the school serve the best interest of the child – Parent-governor TT.

We hold regular meetings to plan, discuss and decide about the above issues and other issues we regard as important for the school – Parent-governor WW.

SGB must constantly communicate via meetings and workshops. This, I think, is the only way the mandate requires the SGB to act – Parent-governor RR.

We work as a team to realise the goal of promoting the best interest of the child. When we work as a collective, it is easier to achieve set goals – Parent-governor PP.

We have monthly meetings as the SGB, where we discuss our duties and policies and further explain and interpret policies. In these meetings we also discuss problems facing the school – Parent-governor NN.

To be able to draw up school policies, SGB members must be aware what the SASA and other departmental policies say to be able make policies that are not in contradiction with departmental policy – Parent-governor FF.

In my school the SGB show interest in all activities of the school. They attend meetings where they plan the activities, they take decisions that contribute to the success of the school, and they participate and involve themselves to promote the interest of the child. SGBs also ensure that all policies are implemented – Parent-governor Z.

The most interesting response came from seven parent-governors who related directly to the three areas of the school governance mandate. Parent-governor QQ commented: *“We sit as the SGB to do thorough planning. This gives us an indication as to how many of the above named items we need ...”*.

Similarly, Parent-governor VV made reference to aspects of the strategic planning process by remarking as follows:

At parents meetings the vision and the mission are discussed so the parents and other stakeholders can understand them and make sure they are realised. Policies are also visited, explained and clarified to all stakeholders.

In a similar manner, Parent-governor XX made reference to the planning process as an important part of realising the school governance mandate as she stated:

The SGB engages in planning, drafting policies, management of finances, management of buildings, equipment and premises.

Parent-governor LL also made reference to the strategic planning process as she commented:

The SGB must engage in thorough planning. First they must develop policies which will guide all activities at the school, and then they must ensure the policies are followed and implemented. These will ensure everyone knows what to do and what not to do.

Parent-governor JJ made reference to the critical friendship role and holding the school to account through monitoring. She stated:

To realise their mandate, the SGB checks and monitors whether the above happens because it has a right to consult the principal to ensure the above happens.

Parent-governor UU justified the drafting and use of policies and commented:

Our duty is to make sure that all resources available at the school, be they financial or material are used efficiently and economically. This can only happen if the school has developed policies to guide the use of such resources.

Finally, Parent-governor OO emphasised the importance of understanding their roles and responsibilities as a way of working to realise the school governance mandate. She stated:

We make sure we understand our roles and the roles of different committees, for example, the finance committee must know how to effectively manage school finances.

The foregoing exposition highlights participants' views regarding the meaning of the school governance mandate, its execution and implication. It was clear that emphases on these issues were placed on various elements of the execution of the school governance mandate. Few participants expressed views that included the most crucial aspect of strategic direction, namely, the formulation of the school's vision and mission.

Principal I stated that the SGB should make sure that it develops a vision and a mission for the school. This means that this principal knew and understood that the first task of the SGB is to formulate a vision, mission and aims for the school, which articulates the reason for the school's existence, and that all stakeholders, namely, educators, learners, parents and community members know and understand the mission and vision of their school.

Consistent with the above viewpoint, Participant Y, an educator-governor, stated:

To plan all school activities and to ensure everything the school needs is available, be it equipment furniture, books and other resources. This is the mandate of the SGB to see to it that the school runs smoothly and learners get the best education possible.

In support of the above response, Participant CC, an educator governor commented "*In a nutshell they [SGB] must plan all the activities of the school*".

From the comments of Educator-governors Y and CC, like the comment of Participant Y, it can be concluded that they knew very well that to ensure that their schools were successful and functional, the SGB must engage in setting the strategic direction which involve a meticulous, intensive school development planning process.

Some of the parent governors shared the same sentiments as with the above viewpoints because their responses indicated they understood, knew and were aware of the SGB's crucial role of setting the strategic direction for the school. The majority of parent governor participants cited the mission and vision or strategic planning as the key role of school governors. This is the same viewpoint which was held by school principals and educator-governors.

Participant VV, a parent-governor, hinted at the need for developing a mission and vision for the school and ensuring that it is realised. She responded by stating:

The SGB must develop a mission and a vision for the school and make sure it is realised by all stakeholders.

Parent-governor RR said:

I think our mandate is to plan activities of the school. Also to ensure finances are used to the benefit of the learner.

In the same vein, Participant SS, a parent-governor, also seemed to understand their mandate when she commented that this mandate required "*the SGB to engage in strategic planning*".

Similarly, Parent-governor LL stated:

The SGB must plan activities that will enhance teaching and learning at schools. Learners' time for learning must never be disturbed or wasted. Extra-mural activities must be done after school so as not to deprive learners of their time to learn.

The comments on the matter of policy-making indicate that participants generally understand the school governance mandate, albeit from different viewpoints and with varying emphases on particular aspects. It can be concluded that this demonstration of understanding implies that schools from where participants were drawn, execute some aspects of the school governance mandate. However, responses proffered gave the impression that

as much as there were aspects emphasised, the execution of the school governance mandate was also done in a manner that emphasises certain aspects more than others. This became evident as challenges of the role of the principal were discussed.

5.3.2 ***The nature of the principal's school governance role***

Although participants expressed varied responses to the nature of the principal's governance role, their views seemed to converge on a number of aspects.

5.3.2.1 *Representing the Department of Education*

Participants generally demonstrated knowledge of the meaning of the *ex officio* designation of the principal in the SGB, although they emphasised different aspects. The emphasis was mainly on the official capacity of the principal as a representative of the Department of Education as employer. A significant implication of the meaning of the principal's role was articulated as him/her being the 'direction-giver' in the SGB. This is evident from the following responses expressed by three principals:

My role as an ex officio member in the SGB is to represent the interest of the Department of Education; that is my employer. This role I must carry out by guiding and advising the SGB against taking decisions that are in contravention to the policy of the Department of Education. If, for example, the SGB decides that teachers must use corporal punishment to curb misbehaviour, late-coming, absenteeism and truancy by learners, it is my duty as an ex officio member to tell the SGB members that the policy of the Department and the Constitution of the country forbids the use of corporal punishment in schools. – Principal E.

I represent the interest of the department. I ensure every policy is in line with the Schools Act and other policies in the department. I ensure every policy is in line with the Schools Act and other policies of the Department. – Principal HH.

The understanding I am having as an ex officio member is that I am representing the interest of the Department of Education in the SGB – Principal M.

Views expressed by some educator-governors also indicated knowledge of the *ex officio* school governance role of the principal. Educator-governor EE, for example, indicated that the principal “*is a member of the SGB by virtues of his position*”, which relates to the principal’s official capacity as the manager of the school. Educator-governor GG stated:

The role of principal as an ex officio member in the SGB is to serve the interest of the Department of Education, who is his employer. For example, the principal must make sure the policies of the department are not breached or violated.

This was also expressed by Educator-governors Y, and DD, who respectively commented:

The principal as an ex-officio member protects the interest of the department of education by planning and interpreting the requirements of departmental policies and ensuring that such policies are implemented.

As an ex officio member, the principal must serve the interest of the Department of Education in the SGB.

Of the 20 parent-governors, only four specifically addressed the *ex officio* role of the principal in the SGB. Parent-governor UU stated:

He [the principal] is a representative of the Department of Education, and is there to ensure the policies of the department are respected and followed.

Parent-governor NN also stated:

The principal as an ex officio member ensures policies of the Department are complied with. This means the principal as an ex officio member serves the interest of Department of Education.

Parent-governor FF elaborated on this role and remarked that the role of the principal as *ex officio* member of the SGB was:

to ensure all activities the school/SGB engage in are permissible in terms of the policies of the Department of Education. In other words, the principal as an ex officio member protects the interests of the Department of Education”.

Finally, parent-governor LL explained that being an *ex officio* SGB member, “*the principal has the task of making sure all SGB members and staff know and understand school policies, and act accordingly. By so doing, the principal will be protecting the interest of the Department of Education”.*

From the views stated above, it seems that participants have an understanding of what it means for the principal to be an *ex officio* member of the SGB. Indeed, as stated earlier, the role of the principal as an *ex officio* member implies that he/she represents the Department of Education and promotes its interests (cf. 2.6).

It was, however, even more remarkable that, on the one hand, principals and educator-governors emphasised the principal being in charge with ensuring that legislative and departmental policy were not violated by the SGB. For instance, their comments on the meaning of the role of the principal in the SGB generally indicated that being an *ex officio* member meant seeing to the implementation of legislation and departmental policy as expressed in the following comments:

My role as an ex officio member is to support the SGB by helping them to understand their roles, the role of the principal, stipulations in the Schools Act and other policies of the department. By so doing, the principal will be making sure the Schools Act and other departmental policies are not flouted and contravened – Principal K.

So, the role of the principal is to make sure that he is clear on the policy of the Department of Education such that in the discussions in SGB meetings where we see that the discussion is going astray, the principal has to

come in and say, 'but if we do this thing in such a way we will be wrong because there is policy which is saying we cannot do this'. ... As a principal you are the eyes and the ears of the Department in the SGB, such that any laws governing the school are not in contravention to the laws of the country and the laws of the school. So that is my role as a principal, to caution the SGB on the laws they are making for the school – Principal M.

My role is to unite and give all SGB members direction in relation to education rules and laws – Principal G.

I represent the interest of the Department. I ensure every policy is in line with the Schools Act and other policies of the Department – Principal HH.

This is a difficult position for the principal because he is expected ... to ensure policies do not contradict the Constitution of the RSA, SASA and other policies of the Department of Education – Educator-governor CC.

His duty in the SGB is to make sure policies developed by SGB do not contradict policies of the Department of Education – Educator-governor EE.

... the principal must make sure the policies of the Department are not breached or violated – Educator-governor GG.

He makes SGB members aware of what the policies and regulations of the Department of Education say and require. This duty rests on the shoulder of the principal in his capacity as an ex officio member because he is the one who understands these policies better than all other members – Educator-governor DD.

Parent-governors on the other hand seemed to give the support and guidance role of principals more emphasis and prominence. This, in a way, seemed to suggest that parent-governors were helpless, and mainly played a compliant role in that they were not knowledgeable and as such needed to be 'helped'

'guided' or have a person overseeing their work. This can be deduced from the following statements:

He is a representative of the Department of Education, and is there to ensure the policies of the department are respected and followed – Parent-governor UU.

The principal allows us to perform our duties and if he sees there is something we are not doing correctly, he comes in and gives us direction. He ensures we work according to what policies say – Parent-governor SS.

He advises us in terms of our powers, duties and responsibilities – Parent-governor QQ.

To guide and show SGB members who are mostly poorly educated, how to make or to draw policies that are in line with the Schools Act – Parent-governor PP.

The principal as an ex officio member ensures the SGB performs its role according to policies of the department and to protect the interest of the Department of Education – Parent-governor WW.

There principal as an ex- officio member is there to explain, interpret and to protect the policies of the employer, the Department of Education – Parent-governor RR.

The principal as an ex officio member ensures policies of the department are complied with. This means the principal as an ex officio member serves the interest of Department of Education – Parent-governor NN.

The principal as an ex officio member is there to guide, advise and to assist the SGB in the performance of their duties – Parent-governor OO.

As an ex officio member, the principal plays a very crucial role in the SGB – that of guiding, advising and interpreting the policies – Parent-governor VV.

These comments also seemed to place the principal's role above that of other SGB members and projected them as entirely dependent on the principal. For instance, Parent-governor TT commented that the principal's role was to empower the SGB by giving direction. Parent-governor Z portrayed the principal's role as that of overseeing "*the activities of the SGB*" and added that in that context, "*Nothing happens without his knowledge. He must know how school finances are used. For example, he must know the income and the expenditure*". In a similar manner, Parent-governor JJ stated:

The most important role of the principal is to develop members about their roles and responsibilities– Parent-governor JJ.

The views of the participants regarding the principal's school governance role of representing the Department of Education revealed two main aspects. Firstly, it was revealed that the role of the principal had to do with protecting and promoting the interests of the Department, especially with regard to adherence to legislative imperatives and policy matters. This seemed to imply that it concerned the principal being a 'watchdog' for the Department and calling the SGB to order whenever it transgressed and seemed to violate departmental directives – by ensuring the implementation thereof. Secondly, the views expressed seem to project the principal's role as that of directing SGB activities, empowering the SGB and being the approver of activities and decisions taken by the SGB.

This has serious implications regarding the equal partnership between and among SGB members (cf. 2.3.4). The principal seems to be held at some level that is detached from the SGB and not as a member of the SGB himself/herself. In fact, it can be concluded that the principal's seems to be viewed as an entity outside the SGB and that is there to 'enforce' departmental policy and play watchdog over SGB activities. This seems to go against the new governance mandate that sees the SGB as a whole being responsible for providing the school with a strategic direction, being a critical friend and actually and holding the principal to account.

5.3.2.2 *Supporting and guiding the SGB in the performance of its functions*

As noted earlier, most principal participants were of the opinion that their role was to give guidance to other members of the SGB. This is in line with the Schools Acts' prescription that the governance role of the principal is to serve on the governing body of the school and render all necessary assistance to the governing body in the performance of its functions in terms of Schools Act (cf. 2.6). In this regard, participating principals appeared to see their school governance roles as concerned with giving support and guiding the SGB. This is because they saw other SGB members as uneducated and illiterate, thus being incapable of understanding policies and doing things correctly. In explaining what supporting and guiding the SGB entail, some peculiar findings came to light.

Firstly, an impression was created that principals as members of SGBs were above or superior to other SGB members and that their task was to oversee SGB activities, guide members and apply corrective action by calling members to order when they seemed to stray. A consideration of the following remarks about what supporting the SGB meant to the principals supports this impression:

Support means when the SGB needs information it is my duty to supply them with the relevant information ... I guide them if they go astray. – Principal II.

Supporting the SGB actually means empowering the SGB members by teaching them their role and guiding them – Principal K.

So, supporting the SGB means guiding them so as not to confuse governance and management. The SGB must know that management of the school is the domain of the School Management Team (SMT) – Principal L.

Supporting the SGB, in my understanding, is to give them information. It means I initiate sessions to give them information because information is power. In the Schools Act, there are roles of the SGB, which you need to

sit them down and unpack these roles to them. Tell them their roles where they begin and end – Principal M.

Ja, it is very key that the principal becomes an ex officio member because he is there to give guidance. Among those parents who are not educated, the principal serves as a guide because without the principal those who are not educated will not have information – Principal N.

... but I allow the SGB members to play their role and participate fruitfully in the governance of the school. Their knowledge is not that much, that is where I come in to enable them to participate fruitfully in governance of the school – Principal H.

I must also stress that my role as principal is different from that of the SGB. Their role as SGB is to govern the school, for example, look after buildings, finances, etc. – Principal AA;

An analysis of the expressions and words used above, conjure an organisational environment of a 'master' and 'learners' who must be taught to do certain things. The argument raised here is that the SGB includes the principal on an equal basis and as partners with other SGB members.

Secondly, it must be noted that being a resource person and lending support, assumes that the other partners are inept and incapable of participating fully at a level suitable to their capacities. As alluded to earlier, the main reason for this impression is because the level of education of SGB members is generally considered to be low. This raises a question of who the SGB is. From the statements made regarding the levels of education of parent members of SGBs, it seems that the SGBs are considered as being the parent-component. This is also supported by educator-governors' views on this issue. It was found that most educator-governors interviewed seemed to agree with the principals' viewpoints in terms of the principals supporting the SGBs in the performance of their duties. For example, Educator-governor DD commented:

Support means the principal must make information accessible to members of the SGB. As a resource person and someone who is in a better position to have a lot of information about departmental policies and school governance, it is his responsibility to share it with other members in the SGB ... because he is the one who understands these policies better than all other members.

Educator-governor CC also made the point that “*support means the principal has a thorough knowledge of all departmental policies and information and as such, he gives guidance to the members of the SGB*”. Other educator-governors made the following statements:

... ensuring they understand policies of the department and implement them correctly – Educator-governor EE.

... the role of the principal is to serve as a resource person. To supply relevant information about the Department of Education to parents so that parents can understand their limitations, For instance, parents cannot come to school and prescribe to teachers how to teach and what to teach in a specific subject because this is not their field and, besides, the teacher is informed by policy documents – Educator-governor W.

Similarly, parent-governors seemed to place emphasis on the principal’s role as that of teaching them (the parents), as can be seen in the following comments:

The principal allows us to perform our duties and if he sees there is something we are not doing correctly, he comes in and gives us direction. He ensures we work according to what policies say – Parent-governor SS.

The principal ... ensures the SGB performs its role according to policies of the department – Parent-governor WW.

... He thus ensures we always act in compliance with the policies – Parent-governor QQ.

... Nothing happens without his knowledge. He must know how school finances are used, for example, he must know the income and the expenditure – Parent-governor Z.

As an ex officio member, the principal has the task of making sure all SGB members and staff know and understand school policies, and act accordingly... – Parent-governor LL.

Although supporting the SGB also involves providing guidance regarding legislation and policies, it must be pointed out that this is not the only meaning of the role. For instance, other participants pointed out different but valid views on this matter. To this end, Educator-governor W stated:

Supporting the SGB means the principal must always work hand in hand with the SGB. They must plan together, take decisions together, implement policies together and make everything together.

This was found to be an insightful view of the principal's school governance role because it put emphasis on equal partnerships and collaboration in the SGB. Parent-governors RR, NN, JJ and XX also made similar points with the following assertions respectively:

This means the SGB and the principal work as a team. The principal is open to the SGB about everything and the SGB does not hide anything from the principal. This makes the principal part of the SGB.

I think it means the principal must work side by side with other members to promote the interest of the child.

Support means the principal and the SGB must work as a team. The principal must support the SGB in whatever project they undertake and the SGB must also support the principal.

Support means the SGB is assisted to get all it needs to govern the school effectively and efficiently. The principal is not a separate member of the SGB. He is equal to other members.

Although some of the comments have been cited elsewhere in this text, they are also used here to point to the context of the requirement for the principal to support the SGB in the performance of its duties. It is important to note that the Schools Act refers to principal's role as being "*to support the SGB in the performance of its duties*" and the views expressed above seem to refer to the role of directing, correcting, informing and calling to order, as it were. This is made even clearer with comments pertaining to the challenges of the role of the principal as discussed later in the text.

5.3.3 Challenges of the school governance role of the principal

Challenges related to the school governance role of the principals were found to be numerous and expressed in varying ways by the participants. However, challenges raised by most participants pertained to the principal's *ex officio* role, parent-governors' low educational levels, parent-governors' perceptions about being in SGBs and other miscellaneous challenges in the principal's school governance role.

5.3.3.1 Challenges pertaining to the principal's *ex officio* role

As pointed out earlier, the *ex officio* role was found to be generally and correctly understood to mean that the principal's role in the SGB is that of promoting the interests of the Department of Education. This role, however, was found to bring with it numerous challenges for the principals and SGBs. Principal F, for instance, opined that the role was difficult one as she was perceived to be controlling and dictating to the SGB. She explained in the following manner:

... because serving in my official capacity, the employer expects me to give all the legislature and the laws to guide the SGB, to take the correct decision and to formulate policies, so that at the end, the SGB does not have policies that have loopholes and contradict the Schools Act and the Constitution of the country. I say it is difficult because some members interpret that as controlling or like I am dictating to them, whereas your role is to guide them so that they don't come up with policies that don't

comply with the laws of the country and the laws that govern education. So it is very difficult because some members interpret that as dictating”.

She also highlighted that her role as a member of the SGB clashed with her role as an *ex-officio* member or as an employee of the Department of Education:

Yes ... it happens that in certain issues the SGB members feel that being an SGB member gives you privileges above other members, like they expect, maybe, let's say, for example, there is a vacant post at the school and among the candidates is a relative of the SGB member. By law the member has to excuse himself and not participate in short listing and interviews. But even if he is not there, he will influence other members that 'one of the candidates is my cousin' and you will find that even relatives feel that this relative has to be appointed. If it does not happen or the SGB member's relative is not appointed, the SGB member will resign or not attend meetings thereafter. I don't know whether this is because of the fact that SGB members are not paid for their participation in school governance. Really this issue has to be reviewed because SGB members sacrifice a lot of their time for the school. They attend meetings, and put family matters on hold for the school, they do a lot of work. It is not everybody who can be a member of SGB, it takes certain types of people.

Another challenge pertaining to the role of the principal concerned decision-making combined with parent SGB members' illiteracy, as explained by Principal E:

The challenge I experience as an ex officio member is to ensure that the SGB take decisions that are in line with the policies of the Department of Education. I must also ensure that all members attend SGB meetings so that they should be part of all decisions taken. The fact that some members of the SGB can hardly read or write is a big problem for the SGB.

Principal K related to conflict of being an SGB member and acting in her official capacity:

The challenge I experience as an ex officio member is to balance the interest of the department as my employer and that of the SGB of which I am a member. These two interests often conflict and as an ex officio member, I am the only one who must ensure these two do not clash. This is sometimes very difficult for me to do.

Expressing a similar sentiment, which impeded participatory decision-making, Principal B stated:

... For instance, whatever decisions taken by the SGB, I am part of it by virtue of being a member of this body. Sometimes it happens that the decision taken by the SGB of which I am a member, contradicts the policy of the Department. Because I represent the employer [serving as an ex officio member], I am the only one who must advise the SGB against such wrong decisions.

Principal F emphasised the clash of roles:

One of the biggest challenges is that the principal serves as an ordinary member of the SGB and at the same time as the ex officio member meaning that he also represents the interest of the department. Sometimes these two roles clash and cause the principal a lot of trouble and difficulties.

The views of the educator-governors also seemed to support the principals' views. For instance, the matter of balancing role of being *ex officio* and bona fide SGB members was also identified as a challenge. In this regard, Educator-governor CC stated the following:

As I have stated, ... the principal sometimes finds himself in a situation where he has to balance the interest of the school/parents on the one hand, and the interest of the Department of Education on the other hand.

5.3.3.2 Challenges pertaining to parent-governors' low educational levels

A challenge that seemed to be considered the most critical concerned the illiteracy of the parent-governors. In most cases this was put forth as a reason for the difficulty of fulfilling the obligations of school governance. Principal K, in this regard, stated:

Another difficulty I come across is to develop and ensure parents in the SGB understand the stipulations and the content of each departmental policy. This becomes more difficult because some parents in the SGB are illiterate and cannot read or write.

Principal N and Principal B respectively echoed the same feeling. They remarked:

The difficulties are the ones that I have mentioned that the type of parents who are there do not assist much. If these were educated, coming with different backgrounds, for instance, in an institution where some parents from legal field, you have a doctor, a teacher, an accountant, people who are enlightened you are in a position of achieving the objectives of the school. But now if you are running short of such people then you have a very serious challenge because whatever you say is taken, there's no person who comes with new knowledge that can assist the school.

Others are not educated and this causes problems because they can't read, write or understand manuals written in English. When SGB members' term of office expires, you may get new members or replacements who are not active.

Similar comments were made by the educator-governors. Educator-governor CC pointed out that SGB members who were not literate “*are also a problem because they don't assist the school in any way. They are shy and feel inferior and this makes them just to rubber stamp whatever the principal is saying*”. Similarly, Educator-governor W commented that principals experienced literacy problems. She further stated that the problems experienced by the principal were consequently because “*... parents don't know their limitations; they are*

not aware of their roles and go beyond” as a result of being illiterate. This was also expressed as a challenge by Educator governors EE and Y who respectively said:

Poor level of education of members in the SGB causes a headache for the principal especially because they cannot read or write and also do not understand policies and how to implement them. Other challenges are the SGB chairman who wants to dominate the principal and SGB members who always want to have their own way, and non-attendance of meetings by some members of the SGB.

Challenge faced by principal is that members who have low educational level are discouraged by this condition from active participation in school governance. The principal find it difficult to persuade such members to participate actively. Those members who try to participate do not know the limit of their roles.

The matter of illiteracy was also articulated by the parent-governors. Parent-governor SS stated the following:

I would say, because some of us are illiterate and it takes time for us to understand all the different policies, the principal has to explain, interpret and guide again and again.

Parent-governor TT commented that it was difficult for the principal to work with mostly illiterate members in the SGB because:

They tend to rubber stamp everything the principal says without questioning it. This does not assist the SGB in anyway.

The views that parent-governors were illiterate were also expressed by Parent-governors UU and OO respectively in the following manner:

Most parents are illiterate and struggle to understand policies and legislation.

The principal experiences challenges of members who are poorly educated...

5.3.3.3 *Challenges pertaining to parent-governors' perceptions about being in the SGB*

One of the challenges that seemed to be emphasised concerned the motives of parent-governors for being in SGBs. It appeared that most parent-governors were in the SGBs for possible benefits they hoped to receive. In this regard, the following statements were made by the principals:

Some SGB members constantly complain that they do not receive payment for the duties, time and transport money they spend doing the job for the school – Principal B.

Another challenge has to do with members who constantly complain or demand payment for the duties they perform in the SGB. Some of these challenges I cannot solve as they are beyond my power – Principal E.

The other problem is that it is written in black and white in the School Act that it is not allowed to pay SGB members. Some parents in the parents meeting, they think that when elected in the SGB they will get paid. When they realise it is not the case, they start dragging their feet and jump out. Most of SGBs are not functional today because of that – Principal M.

You get new members elected. They disappear because there are no incentives. ... Look, these people come to meetings using transport, and attend meetings at night, they use their money for transport. But they get no compensation at all – Principal G.

I can also add that some SGB members are very sensitive about their children, they want to see all of them passing, if not, they stop coming to meetings – Principal F.

More than once they said the Provincial Legislature, and councillors who serve in those bodies are all getting paid. They asked why they can't get paid as well – Principal A.

Other members come to SGB with agendas' to try to benefit out of their membership in the SGB, for example, they would say 'Why did my child not get an award?' or 'Why was my child detained?' – Principal K.

This clearly seemed to be a real concern for the principals, especially as it would affect the functioning of the SGB. This was also supported by parent-governors. Parent-governor SS said the following in this regard:

Another difficulty is caused by SGB members who made themselves available for election, thinking that they will benefit financially or otherwise. When this did not happen they started to stay away from SGB meetings.

Parent-governor OO commented that apart from being 'poorly educated', there were also those parent-governors "*who are having agenda's, for example, who thought they would benefit themselves and their families by being elected to the school governing body*".

Parent-governor NN expressed a similar sentiment when she said:

Some SGB members demand that they get a stipend for being members of the SGB".

This was also stated by parent-governor TT in the following statement:

One other challenge the principal faces is that we want to be paid a stipend for our participation in the SGB. Yes, this is true. We spend money coming to SGB meetings.

Parent-governor WW also commented about SGB members:

... who do not know their roles and yet demand compensation for their membership of the SGB. Compensation? What for? Because they do nothing to assist the school.

While some of the statements relating to the issue of seeking compensation or benefits were strongly worded, they indicate how strongly participants felt about this issue.

5.3.3.4 *Miscellaneous challenges in the principal's school governance role*

Participants also highlighted miscellaneous challenges regarding the principal's role. The most common included the following:

- **Non-attendance of meetings and lack of commitment of SGB members**

The non-attendance of meetings was seen by participants as one of the biggest obstacles to the effective execution of the school governance mandate and a major challenge for the principal in his/her governance role. Principal A observed that he was not getting any help from the SGB because he had to do things himself "*and they just 'rubber stamp'*". This, he attributed to their suffering from an 'inferiority complex' and he stated:

Some shy away from training and when the implementation phase comes they claim to be blank. When we organise other meetings of the SGB, where we need to bring them on board, the quorum will not be formed because they stay away from meetings.

Principal F also added the view that because SGB members do not get their own way and privileges they envisaged from being elected to the SGB, they resigned or stayed away from meetings. This was because, as she stated an example:

... Sometimes it happens that in certain issues, an SGB member feels that being an SGB member gives you privileges above other members; like they expect maybe let's say, for example, there is a vacant post at the school and among the candidates is a relative of the SGB member. By law, the member has to excuse himself and not participate in shortlisting and interviews. But even if he is not there, he will influence other members that 'one of the candidates is my cousin' and you will find that even

relatives feel that this relative has to be appointed. If it does not happen or the SGB member's relative is not appointed, the SGB member will resign or not attend meetings thereafter.

Principal K stated that the effect of continuous absenteeism by some SGB members in meetings was also a challenge because decisions were taken without their involvement or participation. This was similarly expressed by Principal H who felt that when he arranged meetings, SGB members failed to honour them and

... only two or three members come and when they come they don't participate. They just look at you. I am there to dictate to them what they do. When we expect everyone to participate fully, this does not happen. This frustrates me. This should not be a one man show. The members must participate fully to make the school effective.

Other principals' comments also emphasised the issue of non-attendance of meetings as indicated in the following:

The challenge is that the level of commitment of SGB members is not up to the required level. Some members attend meetings but others are not available and we end up having few members of SGB in our meetings. Sometimes it's even difficult to carry on with the meetings. You get new members elected, they disappear because there are no incentives – Principal G.

The challenges have to do with members who fail to attend meetings, and members who fail or neglect their duties as SGB members – Principal AA.

Some parents are constantly absent from meetings because of work commitments – Principal B.

None [referring to other challenges], except the one I have mentioned above of members who fail to attend meetings – Principal AA.

Educator-governors also raised the issue of the non-attendance of meetings. The following comments were made in this regard:

Non-attendance of meetings by parents retards progress – Educator-governor W.

... and non-attendance of meetings by some members of the SGB – Educator-governor EE.

I can say challenges the principal experience are non-attendance of meetings by members, late-coming in meetings, disrespect of the principal by some SGB members ... – Educator-governor X.

This sentiment was also expressed by the parent-governors. For example, Parent-governor SS stated:

Another difficulty is caused by SGB members who made themselves available for election, thinking that they would benefit financially or otherwise. When this did not happen, they started to stay away from SGB meetings.

Similarly, Parent-governor UU stated that most “*parents were illiterate ... Others don’t attend meetings, they are absent in most meetings*”, and Parent-governor QQ also indicated the challenge of “*Parents who do not come to parents’ meeting to hear what the school expects them to do*”.

Parent-governor Z also added to this challenge by stating:

The first challenge the principal experiences is poor or non-attendance of meetings by parent members. Decisions on urgent or sensitive issues cannot be taken because the quorum is not formed.

Parent-governor FF also identified the challenge that made the principal end up doing all the work as she said the following:

Difficulties occur if members are ‘lazy’ and not committed to performing their duties. This becomes a challenge to the principal because she has to perform the work of other members.

From the views expressed above, it seems that the challenges regarding poor attendance of meetings are a real challenge for principals. Combined poor meeting attendance with a lack of commitment and the alleged intention of receiving incentives and getting preferential treatment by some SGB members, make the principal's role in the SGB a difficult one. However, it must be observed that these views were expressed in connection with parent-governors of SGBs, which, it can be argued, may also be the very reason that leads to them feeling inferior and perhaps feeling ‘attacked’ as causes of poor performance of SGBs. It can also be argued that there could be other reasons for parent-governors’ alleged ‘lack of commitment’ and non-attendance of meetings. For instance, Principal M gave another reason for this and said:

... it becomes very difficult to have female members in the SGB because most of the meetings of the SGB must sit after work, around six in the evening. And if you are a female member of the SGB by six in the evening you must be at home, preparing food, bathing the children, doing homework with the children and now you are required to be in SGB meetings and it is already dark by then. The husband is going to come from work and want food and you are not at home. This has caused a fight in the family and the female members resigned from the SGB.

Similarly Principal G argued:

You get new members elected. They disappear because there are no incentives. ... Look, these people come to meetings using transport, and attend meetings at night; they use their money for transport. But they get no compensation at all.

Although making a valid point, it must be pointed out that in terms of the use of school funds, SGB members can be compensated for transport and food when attending meetings and workshop or any school governance-related matters.

Another possible reason for non-attendance of meetings was articulated by Principal B who argued:

People are not the same, other members in the SGB are against progress. They manipulate progress and above all, are not reliable. This causes a challenge.

Educator-governor Y stated another reason for the non-attendance of meetings and the alleged lack of commitment on the part of parent-governors. He stated:

A challenge faced by the principal is that members who have low educational levels are discouraged by this condition from active participation in school governance. The principal finds it difficult to persuade such members to participate actively. Those members who try to participate do not know the limit of their roles.

▪ **Overstepping limits of roles and responsibilities**

Participants made reference to the 'crossing of lines' in so far as the roles of SGB members were concerned as well as the display of behavioural and attitudinal challenges. For instance, parent-governors were reportedly, because of not being adequately educated, overstepping their limits by encroaching onto professional matters. Principal L in this regard, pointed out the following:

I experience challenges when, for example, the SGB wants to overstep its authority by saying pregnant school girls will be expelled from school because that contravenes the departmental policy.

Principal F bemoaned the behavioural and attitudinal challenges from some SGB members. He commented as follows:

Some members gossip and become more friendly and attached to some staff members. Immediately that happens then as a principal you are in trouble because these members cross the line from governance to professional part of the school. Then they start taking sides, they interfere with the daily running of the school, you find that they come in without

informing you, you find them walking around the school not having reported to you. Some may even intimidate some staff members. Instead of being neutral they take sides.

Principal HH, though indicating the occurrence as having happened only once, indicated the following:

Only once in my nine years as a principal and it was not a challenge, it was a decision the SGB wanted to take. When I advised them, they wanted me to leave. This concerned finances. They wanted to withhold reports of learners and I said it was not allowed.

Other challenges pertinent to the matters were indicated in the following ways:

One challenge is that people get elected into the SGB not knowing what is expected of them. Another challenge is that the teacher component causes a lot of challenges by fighting the principal, in most cases they do not build, but have a vendetta against the principal. So the principal must always strive to build good relations to avoid these challenges – Principal C.

I don't really think I have problems. Only the one of people who want to find fault. One who looks for the negatives – Principal KK.

In times of conflict you are alone. It is easy for the SGB to abandon you and support educators in times of conflicts. At times there is a lot of pressure from parents and communities. If it is an issue favouring educators you are also alone. It's all the stakeholders against you. At all times the principal must put the interests of the child first. Principals at times forget we all must promote the interests of the child. Sometimes we want to celebrate here at school. However, at school there is a policy that says we don't smoke and drink. But on days when we have functions here at school people would take chances and say 'learners are not here, so let us smoke and drink'. But because the policy forbids us from doing that, I never allow this to happen – Principal F.

Parents expect the principal to assist them even when they have family problems. They come to you expecting you to assist them to solve all their problems. They expect the principal to be everything; social worker, police, magistrate, pastor, advisor etc., when in actual fact, this is impossible. ... Some educators have a problem of looking down upon parents who are not literate. This leads to such parents not attending meetings and staying away from school activities because they feel they are not welcomed – Principal B.

Educators also expressed their views on behavioural and attitudinal challenges created by some SGB members. For instance, Educator-governor EE made reference to the SGB chairperson's behaviour and attitude in the following statement:

Other challenges are the SGB chairman who wants to dominate the principal and SGB members who always want to have his own way ,...

Similarly, Educator-governor X commented on this and stated:

Some SGB members want to have their own way and sometimes show disrespect to the principal.

Furthermore, Educator-governor W remarked that “*Sometimes there is not enough communication between stakeholders in the school*”, which can be considered as a reason for overstepping on responsibilities and/or failure to adhere to specific school governance-related matters and encroaching on professional matters. This, Educator-governor Y viewed as “*Lack of/or poor implementation of policies*” that seemed to “*create problems for the principal*”.

Parent-governors were mostly open and direct regarding the challenge of overstepping the boundaries of roles and responsibilities. Parent-governors PP, for example, complained about members who wanted to dictate how the principal had to carry out his/her role. She said the following:

The only challenge we have in our SGB is that of a few members who want to overstep their authority by telling the principal how to perform his professional duty of managing the school on a daily basis.

Parent-governor LL also made an observation regarding this challenge:

I think the principal experiences challenges when some members of the SGB flout the policies and act contrary to what the policy says. Also, when members of the SGB overstep their mandate by wanting to police learners and educators. This indicates that some SGB members do not know their roles and responsibilities.

Parent-governor NNs also expressed this sentiment:

Members of the SGB who think their duties are to monitor the actions of the principal, educators and learners.

Parent-governor Z commented on the incorrect execution of duties as a challenge as she pointed out:

When SGB members are not loyal in the performance of their duties, these create a problem for the principal. For instance, if cheques are signed and items bought without the principals' knowledge or the chairperson organises parents' meeting without discussing it with the principal.

Other challenges in this regard were more attitudinal and behavioural, as indicated in the following statements:

Sometimes the principal experiences challenges of staff members or SGB members who are not on speaking terms. The principal has to intervene and restore good working relations – Parent-governor WW.

Members who always oppose decisions of the SGB or who come with an agenda make work difficult in the SGB – Parent-governor OO

The principal faces challenges of teachers who show disrespect to his authority. Some educators even influence learners to disrespect the principal – Parent-governor JJ.

Members who because of their low level of education, are shy to voice their opinions because they think it will not be accepted so they rubber stamp everything which is said – Parent-governor LL.

Participants' views regarding the limits concerning the roles and responsibilities seemed to reveal serious challenges in the principal's school governance role. This is because the execution of governance roles is at the very core of the SGB's functionality and effectiveness. Crossing the line may just be the unnecessary ingredient that leads to conflict situations and may be a tool used by some stakeholders whose intention is not necessarily to advance the interests of the school, but to benefit and gain privileges unfairly in pursuance of their own agendas. This is even more serious when relationships in SGBs are considered and how they impact on the principal's role in the SGB.

▪ **Relationships between and among SGB members**

Some views regarding relationships in SGBs have been briefly highlighted in the foregoing subsections. Among others, it was found that there were challenges regarding:

- gossip and parent-governors who fraternise with educators;
- SGB members who take sides and they interfere with the daily running of the school, for example, visiting the school without informing the principal and just walking around the school without having reported to the principal;
- some members intimidating staff members; educators who fight the principal and have vendettas against him/her;
- principals feeling isolated when there is conflict and feeling abandoned by other SGB members who support educators in such conflict

situations; some educators looking down upon parents who are not literate, which leads to such parents not attending meetings and staying away from school activities because they feel they are not welcome;

- staff members or SGB members who are not on speaking terms;
- educators who disrespect to the principal's authority and even influence learners to disrespect the principal; and
- poor and/or lack of effective communication between and among stakeholders.

All these issues are perfect examples of challenges relating to relationships, which it must be stressed, do not help to advance the best interests of the schools and the learners. Just how serious these challenges are to the principal's role, was best articulated by Principal HH, who lamented:

One problem I have is that I don't have power to expel. I can only make recommendations to HOD.

▪ **Lack of and poor training for SGB members**

Another challenge continuously referred to concerned training of SGB members. It must be pointed out that, even in this case, reference was made to parent-governors. This was largely seen as the reason for parent-governors' poor commitment, failure to participate actively in SGB meetings, overstepping the limits of their roles and responsibilities and flouting policies as presented in in the foregoing subsections. However, on the question of whether training received by SGB members was suitable for the governance needs of schools and beneficial to members in their different portfolios, all principals and educator-governors responded affirmatively. Responses to what could be done to overcome the challenges participants had mentioned indicated the contrary. The following statements indicate the views to this effect.

Principal B expressed a wish that "*manuals must also be written in all official languages so that all members can understand*". This suggests that the training

that SGB members received could have been ineffective as a result of the language used in the training material. This contradicts principal B's assertion about governance training that:

Definitely yes, these trainings have been suitable because they helped to improve the level of understanding, our responsibility as SGB members; they also helped to enhance communication among all stakeholders. They have increased interest among members because they now value what the principals do to ensure the school delivery of quality education to learners.

Similarly, Principal H expressed the view that training was suitable “*though I have mentioned that training is conducted in English. Some parents who are not literate do not understand English. This makes some parents not be able to participate effectively*”, which in essence suggests that it was really not suitable.

Furthermore, Principals E, K and M who respectively, also had indicated that the training received by SGB members was suitable and beneficial to their school governance needs, similarly stated the following about the need for training and capacity building of SGB members:

The school has to organise internal training at least every month to ensure that SGB members understand and are able to implement school policies correctly

... ensuring all SGB members understand policies of the school and those of the Department to avoid them taking decisions that are in conflict with the school policies.

The main thing that we need as schools is training, training of SGBs. All these challenges can be overcome if you could train the SGBs because the Department of Education is not training them. The training they offer is not enough.

Educator-governors also expressed the need for training of SGB members as indicated by Educator-governors GG and X respectively:

Capacity-building workshops are imperative to overcome some of the problems.

Training, training and training! If SGB members are exposed to training about their roles and responsibilities, most challenges can be overcome.

Educator-governor X expressed the latter statement, although having stated earlier:

Look, SGB members are trained and made aware of their roles and responsibilities. They also know the roles and responsibilities of the principal. They easily call the principal who deviates from rules and procedures to order.

Parent-governors also expressed similar sentiments in terms of training, perhaps more passionately. The following statements were made in this regard:

These challenges can be solved by the SGB embarking on a programme of training, especially to empower them in their roles and responsibilities – Parent-governor TT.

To resolve these problems, principals must organise workshops where SGB members will be taught their duties – Parent-governor UU.

Training of members should be done continuously, to make sure they know their responsibilities in the SGB – Parent-governor WW.

The Department of Education must continuously support the principal by organising more training workshop for SGB members – Parent-governor OO.

By making sure SGB members know what their roles and responsibility are to avoid members acting outside their mandate – Parent-governor NN.

These challenges can be overcome by ensuring SGB members undergo thorough training about their roles and responsibilities in school governance – Parent-governor Z.

The views pronounced in this section give an indication of the challenges that the principal faces in his/her school governance role. Participants also articulated other challenges that they viewed as impacting on the principal's role. One view that seemed to dominate concerned how principals were perceived by other SGB members.

▪ **Perceptions of the principals' role in the SGB by other SGB members**

It seems that most SGB members accord the principal a special position that makes it seem as if he/she is above them, hence the 'rubber stamping' mentioned earlier. For example the following views were articulated by principals:

They perceive me as an expert. They rely on me because I am knowledgeable and I have spelt out my role – Principal BB.

Other governors look at me as somebody who is knowledgeable and somebody who knows everything. They push everything to me, of which it is impossible. I cannot be everywhere, every time and do everything. They say that because I am always at school I must see to it that everything is attended to – Principal H.

They seem to rely more on me as principal because I am on the ground, but it is not a good thing. Because of their work commitments, they claim they do not have enough time to be around. They rely on the principal for most of the things – Principal G.

They perceive me as a centre of everything that happens or should happen at school – Principal C.

Other governors in the SGB put their trust in me. That is why they perceive me to be their leader, advisor and mentor. They believe whatever I say and do is correct. However, they forget that I am also a human being and not perfect – Principal E.

In fact, SGB members perceive me as the SGB. For example, people would write a letter to request to use school facilities. The SGB would refer the letter to me to take a decision. I would tell them that you are the people who must take decisions because this request falls under governance and it's you who must give permission. Most of the time the SGB perceives me as somebody who is above them and who must always give authority. That is why I say they perceive me as the SGB whereas I am supposed to implement what they say and their policies – Principal A.

They also see me as a person who they can believe in and trust. They trust that whatever I do and say is what is expected and is according to the stipulation of the departmental policy – Principal B.

They perceive me to be the CEO of the school – Principal HH.

The views expressed by the principals above clearly indicate that the principal is regarded as above other SGB members and as the sole possessor of knowledge. This, it can be pointed out, leads to the principal's dominance of school governance matters and may also lead to abuse of power. In fact, some principals, as reported earlier, confirmed that they ended up dominating the SGB.

The views expressed by the principals were also supported by other participants. Educator-governor W, for example, stated that she perceived the role of the principal as that of sharing information, being a resource person and promoting good relations and cooperation. This view also isolates the role of the principal to that of a person outside the SGB and who has specific functions. Similarly, Educator-governor EE saw the principal's role as consisting of specific functions, such as being a resource person, guiding and providing information to the SGB; while Educator-governor GG saw the role of the principal as that of being "...someone we can rely on". Educator-governor Y viewed the role of the principal as that of "*making sure relationships are good in the SGB, and to ensure there is financial accountability so that the school finances are managed effectively and efficiently by ensuring there is good system for financial control*".

All these views lend weight to the disconnectedness of the principal's role in relation to the SGB. An intriguing factor is that the role of the principal is not defined in terms of him/her being a member of the SGB, who, while being a 'resource' person, works together with other members to carry out the duties of the SGB.

Parent-governors also seemed to share similar views as expressed by the principals and educator-governors. Parent-governor PP expressed the following view:

Governors perceive the principal as a 'father' and themselves as children who are dependent on their father for everything, e.g. their protection, survival etc.

This view actually indicates clearly how the principal's role is perceived. Being seen as a 'father' and SGB members as 'children' indicates the extent of the power the principal is given and supports the argument that the principal is not considered as an ordinary member of the SGB in the spirit of the new school governance mandate and composition of the SGB as prescribed by the Schools Act. Other similar statements expressing this view were as follows:

We perceive the principal to be a resource person and as someone who guides us – Parent-governor VV.

The principal is perceived to be a helper, advisor and direction giver – Parent-governor TT.

We perceive the principal to be our advisor and direction giver. Because of him we do the right things – Parent-governor UU.

He's perceived to be someone who is knowledgeable in the school and in school governance, someone on whom other governors rely for information and guidance – Parent-governor RR.

We perceive the principal as 'everything' in the SGB he is the source of all information – Parent-governor QQ.

Other governors perceive the principal to a library which is rich with up to date and relevant information – Parent-governor NN.

I perceive the role of the principal to be a resource person, information giver and a guide. We get information from him to be able to participate in the governance of the school. He capacitates us and guides us about policies in the SGB. He is the helper and a trustworthy person – Parent-governor JJ.

As members of SGBs and governors, we perceive the principal to be our 'light'. He clarifies whatever is not clear and problematic to us – Parent-governor FF.

They perceive the principal to be a leader, mentor and supervisor – Parent-governor LL.

The analysis of the collected data indicates that generally there are numerous challenges pertaining to the school governance role of the principal. Notably, some challenges emanate from factors outside the role or the principal, while others are a result of the principals' own perceptions and attitudes. It is, however, clear that the principal's school governance role is not an easy one and that attention needs to be paid to how the role is executed and how it is executed.

5.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has dealt with the analysis of the data collected through interviews. The data analysis flowed from three main categories, namely, the meaning and implications of the school governance mandate; the nature of the principals' school governance role; and the challenges of the school governance role of the principal, and its sub-categories.

The findings from the principals' responses indicate that there are many inherent challenges to the principals' role in school governance. However, some participants seem to differ in terms of solutions to some of the school governance challenges related to the role of the principal.

The next chapter presents the summary, findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Chapter 6

Summary, findings, conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter presents the summary, findings, conclusions and recommendations. An overview of the findings of the study in terms of the literature review is first summarised. Thereafter the findings of the empirical study are presented and, contextualised and conclusions are then drawn. This culminates into recommendations and implications for future research.

6.2 Summary

The general orientation to the study was presented in Chapter 1 by means of the presentation of the problem statement concerning the qualitative appraisal of the meaning and challenges of the principal's school governance role at schools in the Gert Sibande Region, which culminated into the exposition of the primary and secondary research questions, the conceptual framework, overview of the research methodology, possible contributions of the study, possible challenges of the study and layout of chapters.

Chapter 2 focused on the literature review on the trends and challenges regarding school governance and the principal's school governance role. This was achieved through conceptualising and defining the importance of school governance (cf. 2.2). Existing literature was also reviewed to expose the contemporary perspective on school governance (cf. 2.3) and democratic governance as an element of contemporary school governance. Furthermore, literature was reviewed to reveal a synopsis of the development of school governance in South Africa (cf. 2.5) from the pre-democratic era (cf. 2.5.1) through to the current school governance dispensation (cf. 2.5.2), which culminated in an exposition of the South African Schools Act and its implications for school governance (cf. 2.6).

In Chapter 3 the role of the principal in school governance was exposed, with the role specifically discussed in subsection 3.2. Furthermore, the implications and challenges of the principal's school governance role (cf. 3.3) were discussed with reference to his/her role as a member of the governing body (cf. 3.3.1) and as *ex officio* member of the SGB.

Chapter 4 described the research process was described in depth. This included the research design and methodology followed in the study (cf. 4.2). The following concepts were outlined: the research paradigm (cf. 4.2), research design (cf. 4.2.2), strategy of inquiry (cf. 4.2.3.1), selection of participants (cf. 4.2.4), data collection (cf. 4.2.5) and data analysis and interpretation (cf. 4.2.6). The role as a researcher (cf. 4.2.7), quality assurance (cf. 4.3) and ethical consideration (cf. 4.4) were also dealt with.

In chapter 5, the focus was on the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data. Responses from participants were sought from three main themes: the meaning and implications of the school governance mandate (cf. 5.3.1); the nature of the principals' school governance role and challenges of principals' school governance role (cf. 5.3.2).

Chapter 6 focuses on using the information gathered from the literature review and the qualitative data to determine the meaning and challenges of the principals' governance role as well as to develop an approach to address these challenges.

6.3 Discussion of findings and conclusions from the research

The objectives of the study were formulated as follows:

- To determine the nature of the principal's school governance role;
- To determine the challenges inherent in the principal's school governance role;
- To explore how school governors in the Gert Sibande Region conceptualise the principal's school governance role; and

- To recommend an approach that can assist to overcome the challenges inherent to the principal's school governance role.

6.3.1 ***Findings and conclusions to objectives #1 and 2***

To address the first two objectives, a comprehensive literature review was conducted and presented in Chapter 2. The following were found regarding the nature of and inherent challenges in the principal's school governance role:

- Firstly the nature of the principal's role in school governance derives from the meaning of governance, which is the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented and more precisely, the activities undertaken by the SGB to govern the school by providing a framework for taking and implementing decisions in pursuance of the school's educative teaching mandate (cf. 2.2).
- The principal, in contemporary school governance, is a member of a democratically elected SGB, which is inclusive of stakeholders all working together to govern the school as equal partners pursuing the goal of promoting the best interests of the school, regardless of their constituencies. In South Africa, the stakeholders include parents, educators and learners (in secondary schools) (cf. 2.3).
- The principal, however, is unelected because he serves in the SGB in his official capacity as an *ex officio* member, which implies that while he/she is a fully-fledged SGB member, he represent the Department of Education and thus promotes the interests of the employer – the Department of Education (cf.3.3 & 3.3.1).
- Serving in the SGB as a member of the SGB, the role of the principal involves promoting the best interests of the school in terms of providing the school with a strategic direction, acting as a critical friend to the school and holding the school to account (cf. 3.3 & 3.3.1).

- In serving in his/her official capacity, the principal's role involves ensuring that the interests of the Department are protected, which includes, serving on the governing body of the school and rendering all the necessary assistance to the governing body in the performance of its functions in terms of the Schools Act; cooperating with members of the school staff and the SGB in maintaining an efficient and smooth-running school and being liaising with the Department of Education, other state departments and agencies regarding all matters pertaining to the wellbeing of the school (cf. 2.6 & 3.2).
- Inherent challenges in the principal's school governance role are located in his/her role as an ordinary SGB member, equal and in partnership with other SGB members; and in his/her role as an *ex officio* member of the SGB. This role, while complementary, may appear dual in nature and can lead to conflict and misunderstanding of what exactly the principal's role is and how precisely it is to be carried out. This much is evident in numerous challenges that have led to court cases (cf. 3.3.1).

It can therefore be concluded that the nature of the principal's role in school governance is that of being an ordinary bona fide SGB member and an *ex officio* member serving, in essence, the interests of both the school in terms of setting academic and learner achievement standards and making sure that the SGB performs its duties within the directives of the Department of Education in terms of policy and legislative matters (cf. 3.3.1 & 3.3.2).

6.3.2 ***Findings and conclusions to objective #3***

The third objective of the study explored how school governors in the Gert Sibande Region conceptualised the principal's school governance role. This was achieved by collecting data from purposely selected principals and educators and parents serving in SGBs. In exploring how school governors conceptualised the principal's school governance role, the challenges of this role were elicited from the participants in the interview process. The findings

and conclusions for the third objective are presented in terms of the themes emergent from the interview data analysis.

6.3.2.1 *The meaning and implications of the school governance mandate*

Findings and conclusions regarding the meaning and implications of the school governance mandate are detailed in relation to subthemes pertaining to creating conditions for effective teaching and learning and the execution of the school governance mandate. These were important issues because they form the basis of the principal's school governance role by virtue of explicating the meaning of school governance as well as exposing their overall understanding and insight of school governance foundational levers.

▪ **Creating conditions for effective teaching and learning**

According to the Schools Act the aim of school governance is to promote the best interests of the school and that of the child (cf. 2.2; 2.3). It was found that this mainly, although expressed differently by the participants, meant creating conditions for effective teaching and learning as the key mandate of the SGB. Almost all participants pointed out ensuring the provision of quality education for learners. The conclusion drawn is that the school governance mandate means, to the majority of the participants in this study, creating conditions for effective teaching and learning. Participants related to creating conditions for effective teaching and learning as implying different aspects of school functionality, such as, among others that the SGB must:

- provide leadership to ensure that learners receive quality education;
- ensure that children's right to education is not violated;
- support and protect the school and ensure that there are no hindrances to education provision at school;
- provide the framework for stakeholders to achieve school goals;

- plan all school activities by providing resources and equipment for teaching and learning;
- engage in strategic planning;
- draft policies; and
- ensure that finances are used for educational purposes only.

It can be concluded from these aspects that the school governance mandate was seen to imply engaging in activities such as planning and setting policies, aims and objectives as part of schools' strategies to ensure that learners receive the best possible quality education. This is consistent with views and findings from other studies and from different scholars. For instance, Xaba (2004:314) asserts that creating conditions for effective teaching and learning *"implies that the SGB, promoting the best interest of the school and in particular of learners is responsible for developing a strategy for ensuring that quality education is provided for learners"*. These views also resonate with Joubert's (2008:235) assertion that the SGB is mandated with specific areas, including guiding and directing activities and behaviours of people in a school for effective teaching and learning to take place. Duma's (2014:385) view that the SGB's mandate includes determining aims and the overall conduct of the school can be added to Joubert's assertion.

It can, therefore, be concluded that SGB members in this study, indicated a relatively accurate understanding of the meaning and implications of the school governance mandate, albeit expressed in different manners and with varied emphases. This can be attributed to the manner in which the roles and responsibilities of SGBs are listed in the Schools Act, which opens the collective meaning of the school governance mandate to interpretations that aggregate it to promoting the best interests of the school and providing quality education to all learners at schools. This is even clearer in consideration of the findings pertaining to how participants viewed the execution of the school governance mandate.

▪ **The execution of the school governance mandate**

The aim of school governance is to promote the best interests of child and the school. To execute this important mandate, the SGB has to consider the three areas of the school governance mandate, namely, providing a strategic direction; becoming a critical friend; and holding the school to account (cf. 2.3.1 – 2.3.3). It was important to explore the views of the participants regarding how the school governance mandate was executed by their SGBs, especially because while there are three discernible areas that are interlinked and cannot be executed separately or in isolation of one another (cf. 2.3.4).

Participants in this study cited different issues they thought were pertinent to executing and realising their governance mandate. They also mentioned issues they thought fostered the school governance mandate or what they thought the school governance should be. Emphases were placed on different aspects as was the case with the mandate itself. Notable issues mentioned in this regard pertained to:

- policy-making and formulation, which were viewed as the means to ensure that there guidelines for stakeholders regarding legal implications of school governance, knowledge of execution of roles and responsibilities, systems and structures that dictate operational procedures, including procedures for managing finances, discipline, policy reviews and efficient use of resources;
- implementation of and compliance with policies, of both the Department and the schools;
- decision-making in a way that ensures that the interests of the learners are promoted;
- checking and monitoring whether financial and or other school resources were used solely for the best interest of the child;
- working as a team in carrying out governance responsibilities; and

- regular meetings of the SGB to deal with, *inter alia*, feedback on financial matters, problems at school, planning and training workshops.

A number of notable aspects were found concerning the execution of the school governance mandate. Firstly, most participants stressed meetings as a way of ensuring the execution of the school governance mandate. Principals and educator-governors in particular referred to the importance of meetings. Although meetings were seen thus and were seen as avenues to dealing with important aspects of the functioning of SGBs, participants did not mention how meeting outcomes translated into action or how discussions led to the implementation of resolutions or plans, though the participants emphasised the need for implementation.

Secondly, another notable aspect concerning the execution of the school governance mandate, related to some participants' assertions that the execution of the school governance mandate required the SGB to be a 'watchdog' over school affairs, which could be related to demanding accountability, though this was related only to financial accountability as well as being a critical friend, by demanding the raising of issues members observed at schools, such as disturbances or disruptions to normal schooling. It was also noted that this seemed to be referred mainly to parent-governors.

Thirdly, it was found that emphasis was put on the SGB being knowledgeable on how to govern the school as a requirement for executing the school governance mandate.

The fourth notable aspect was the description of the school governance mandate as requiring that the SGB provides a strategic direction through strategic planning, developing a vision and mission for the school and planning all activities of the school, including the design of the curriculum to enhance teaching and learning.

Taken together, these findings resonate with findings from others studies regarding what governors saw as a way of promoting the best interests of the school. Mncube (2009b:90), in analysing data found, among others, the

following as actual functions SGB performed, which in this study translate to what participants referred to as requirements for executing the school governance mandate:

- Discipline issues.
- Daily running of the school.
- Monitoring school performance.
- Communication.
- Formulating school policy.
- Ensuring the culture of teaching and learning.

Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009: 129) also emphasise that the SGB must work as a team to successfully fulfil its school governance mandate. Xaba (2004) places emphasis on school development planning as a tool for a holistic approach towards ensuring that SGBs execute their roles and responsibilities. Bagarette (2012:105) recommends the need to act decisively and to implement measures that enhance the principle of a partnership between the SGB and the principal, in the best interests of the learners and the school.

These aspects and findings described earlier led to the conclusion that, while school governors did not articulate the school governance mandate in specific terms and according to specific implications, they have a fair knowledge and understanding of what is required to promote the best interests of the school. However, it is also significant that this knowledge seems interpretive and fragmented; as against being well-rounded and expressed with reference to the whole meaning of the school governance mandate.

6.3.2.2 *The principal's school governance role*

In order to create the context concerning the challenges of the principal's school governance role, it was also necessary to determine the views of participants with regard to their perceptions of the nature of the principal's school

governance role. Participants largely perceived the school governance role of the principal to be that of representing the Department of Education or the *ex officio* role and that of supporting the SGB in the performance of its governance functions. In most instances, it was clear that the principal's role was seen as that of involvement in the SGB and not necessarily that of being a member of the SGB until specific questions were directed to this issue as presented in next subsection.

▪ ***Ex officio* role or representative of the Department of Education**

The majority of the participants showed an understanding of the meaning of the *ex officio* membership of the principal in the SGB. Most principals were categorical in their responses to their governance role: they were members in the SGB in their official capacities as principals and therefore, representatives of the employer – the Department of Education. As such, their major role in the SGB was to serve and protect the interests of the Department of Education and be accountable to it. This role, they further explained as implying that they were there to guide, advice the SGB against acting in contravention of departmental policies. This view, which was also shared by educator-governors, was largely, expressed through phrases such as:

- *Tell SGB members that ...*
- *Guide and advice against ...*
- *Help to understand ...*
- *Caution the SGB on the laws ...*
- *Give SGB members direction ...*
- *Make sure that policies developed ... do not contradict policies of the Department ...*
- *Make SGB members aware of ...*

From the use of such expressions, it becomes clear that the principal occupies a special place in the SGB, which makes it appear as if he/she is not part of the ordinary and equal membership of the SGB, but is there as a watchdog and enforcer of rules and policies. In this regard, Xaba (2011:208) makes the point that “... *in practice, the matter of equal governors, all in pursuance of the best interests of the schools has proved difficult, as found in participants’ accounts*” and further argues:

This role might have a tendency to position the principal above all other members of the SGB and thus create conditions for his/her dominance, which contradicts the notion that once in the SGB, all members assume equal status as governors.

Such views were also shared by educator-governors. The emphases seemed to be on the principal being responsible for ensuring that legislation and policies were not violated. This is consistent with the research findings of Mncube (2009a:35) where participants stated that the principal represent the Department of Education by ensuring that the requirements of the Schools Act are adhered to.

Parent-governors, while expressing the view that the principal’s *ex officio* status meant representing the Department in the SGB, seemed to articulate this in a way that projected a superior status on the principal. Their views put the principal in an elevated position as evident from the following phrases:

- *Directing SGB activities.*
- *Enforcing the implementation of policies of the Department.*
- *Allowing ‘us to perform our duties’ ...*
- *If he sees that there is something we are not doing correctly, he comes and gives direction.*
- *He advises us in terms of our powers, duties and responsibilities.*
- *To guide and show SGB members who are mostly uneducated.*

- *He is there to explain, interpret and protect the policies ...*
- *He ... plays the role of guiding, advising and interpreting policies.*
- *Nothing can happen without his knowledge.*

The views expressed in these phrases, seem to project the principal's role as that of directing SGB activities, empowering the SGB and the one who approves activities and decisions taken by the SGB, which resonates with the findings of Mncube (2009a:33) where participants felt that the principal in the SGB "is the *finger on the pulse of what is happening*"; as well as "*the resource person for other members of the SGB*"; and "*the engine of the institution*". This projection of the principal as a member elevated in status above other SGB members is a contentious issues in that it elevates him/her to a dominant position in the SGB. As such, he/she is seen as somewhat superior in the SGB, which, as alluded to earlier, contradicts the principle of equality and partnership among SGB members.

It can be concluded that the term 'ex officio status' of the principal in the SGB, while understood and well-articulated, meant different emphases in as far as what it meant and implied. It can be concluded that this can have a negative and unintended effect of making the principal a dominant figure in the SGB on whose approval all activities depend, and it locates excessive power on the principal and can have other adverse effects on the functioning of the SGB and the principal's role in school governance matters.

▪ **Supporting and guiding the SGB in the performance of their functions**

Supporting and guiding the SGB in the performance of their functions is according Section 19(2) of the Schools Act, a listed function if the principal. This suggests that the opinions of principals highlighted earlier are in line with this stipulation of the Schools Act. While this is so, the impression formed by how participants assigned meaning to this, implies a 'master' and 'pupil' relationship in that giving support to the SGB implies acting on the SGB, by advising,

providing information, empowering members by ‘teaching them about their roles’, and generally guiding them not to ‘go astray’ or not to go wrong. It can also be argued that this elevates the principal’s role above that of other SGB members as borne by principals’ expressions such as:

- *If they go astray ...*
- *Teaching them their role ...*
- *The SGB must know that management of the school is the domain of the school management team.*
- *You need to sit them down and unpack these roles to them.*
- *Tell them their roles where they begin and end ...*
- *Without the principal those who are not educated will not have information.*
- ... but I allow the SGB members to play their role and participate fruitfully in the governance of the school. Their knowledge is not that much, that is where I come in ...
- I must also stress that my role as principal is different from that of the SGB. Their role as the SGB is to govern the school, for example, look after buildings, finances, etc.

The argument raised here is, as pointed out earlier, that the SGB includes the principal on an equal basis and as partners with other SGB members. Secondly, it must also be noted that ‘being a resource person and lending support’, should not lead to an assumption that the other SGB members are useless and are not capable of participating fully in line with their educational levels and capabilities.

Educator-governors seemed to emphasise the principal’s supporting role as being a resource person. They saw the principal as someone who understands the policies better than all the other members as well as someone who supplies

relevant information to parents so that they understand their limitations and as someone who is obligated must make information accessible to SGB members.

The main conclusion drawn is that the principals' role supersedes that of all other SGB members, including the educator-governors. Furthermore, it was found that parent-governors were perceived as the ones who must be supported, guided, taught, supplied with information, made aware of their limitations and directed.

The views expressed by the principals and educator-governors on this aspect actually seem to have been accepted and internalised by some parent-governors themselves. In this regard, it was found that parent-governors viewed the supporting role of the principal as directed at them, as is evident from expressions like:

- *The principal allows us to perform our duties and if he sees there is something we are not doing correctly, he comes in and gives us direction*
- *Nothing happens without his knowledge.*
- *As an ex officio member the principal has the task of making sure all SGB members and staff knows and understands school policies*

However, other parent-governors interpreted the supporting role of the principal as that of a co-member of the SGB who must work with the SGB as a team member, as evident from expressions such as:

- *This means the SGB and the principal work as a team. The principal is open to the SGB about everything and the SGB does not hide anything from the principal. This makes the principal part of the SGB*
- *The principal must work side by side with other members to promote the interests of the child*
- *Support means the principal and the SGB must work as a team. The principal must support the SGB in whatever project they undertake and the SGB must also support the principal*

- *Support means the SGB is assisted to get all it needs to govern the school effectively and efficiently. The principal is not a separate member of the SGB. He is equal to other members*

It is argued, contrary to expressions relating to the supporting role of the principal, that supporting the SGB implies the principal working with the SGB as equal partners and not as some external entity meant to direct. For this reason, it can be concluded that the views expressed make the role played by the principal inadvertently dominant in the SGB and too powerful, which dilutes the notion of equal partnerships in the SGBs. The finding that some parent-governors articulate the view of equal partnerships, suggests strongly that not all parent-governors are illiterate. If that is the case, then it can be concluded that perceptions about the role of supporting the SGB vary among principals, educator-governors and some parent-governors, and that their views also differ in as far as emphasis and implications of the role are concerned.

6.3.2.3 *Challenges of the school governance role of the principal*

Challenges of the school governance role of the principal were found to be in relation to the principal's ex-officio role, parent-governors' low educational levels, parent-governors perceptions about being members of the SGB, parent-governors' perceptions of the principal's role in the SGB and other miscellaneous challenges pertaining to SGB functioning.

▪ **Challenges pertaining to the principals' *ex officio* role**

The main challenge of the principal's role was found to be in connection with balancing the interests of the Department of Education against the interests of the school.

From the participants' accounts, it was clear that the principal's *ex officio* status entailed representing the interests of the Department in the SGB. It was also clear that the principal was also seen as a bona fide member of the SGB whose role was to promote the interests of the school. Therefore, the principal was seen as having to fulfil two roles:

- promoting the interests of the Department; and
- promoting the interests of the school.

Firstly, in promoting and protecting the interests of the Department, the principal was seen as dominating, controlling and dictating as one principal put it:

... serving in my official capacity, the employer expects me to give all the legislature and the laws to guide the SGB, to take the correct decisions ... so that at the end, the SGB does not have policies that ... contradict the Schools Act and the Constitution of the country. ... some members interpret that as controlling or like I am dictating to them ...

Furthermore, it was found that serving as an *ex officio* member sometimes created conflict when decisions had to be taken. One principal succinctly put it in the following manner:

The challenge I experience as an ex officio member is to balance the interest of the department as my employer and that of the SGB of which I am a member. These two interests often conflict and, as an ex officio member, I am the only one who must ensure these two do not clash. This is sometimes very difficult for me to do

Another principal cited the following example:

... For instance, whatever decisions taken by the SGB, I am part of it by virtue of being a member of this body. Sometimes it happens that the decision taken by the SGB of which I am a member contradicts the policy of the department. Because I represent the employer, serving as an ex officio member, I am the only one who must advise the SGB against such wrong decisions.

From these accounts and numerous others gleaned from the principal's views, it is clear that the principal's role is indeed difficult, especially where interests of the school clash with those of the Department of Education. The sentiments expressed by principals are consistent with findings in other studies. For

instance, Mncube (2009a:35) argues that principals are faced with a complicated task of representing the Department and of being a member of the SGB at the same time because it demands that the principal 'serves two masters' at the same time. Xaba (2011:209) makes a similar point by posing the question:

The difficulty with the role of the principal as set out above seems to be: when does he/she represent the HoD and when does he/she promote the interests of the school as a fully-fledged member of the SGB?

In fact, in one study, Xaba and Nhlapo (2014:437) found that due to the complicated nature of the principal's role, principals sometimes ended up acting unlawfully as they were "forced to beat the system' ..., while 'walking a thin line' to comply with policy". These scholars found that this happened where the principal had to promote the interests of the school above those of the Department.

The conclusion drawn here is that the role of the principal is complicated by having to be both an *ex officio* and a bona fide member of the SGB, which creates a struggle of balancing the interests of both the Department and the school. This is also complicated by the fact that being recommended for appointment by the SGB, the principal has to account to the SGB as well (Wildy & Loudon, 2000:181).

▪ **Challenges pertaining to parent governors' low education level**

Another major challenge found in the principal's school governance role concerned the low educational level of parent-governors. For instance the following statements from the participant principals indicate just how much of a challenge this is:

Illiterate parents do not assist the school in any way.

They are shy.

They rubber stamp anything the principal says.

Parents don't know their limitations.

They can't read or write and don't understand manuals written in English.

It takes time for illiterate parents to understand all different policies.

These challenges, according to participants' accounts created difficulties for the principal in the execution of his/her school governance role. For example, because of illiteracy and/or low education levels, it was found that it became difficult for principals to develop parent-governors and to ensure they understood the stipulations and the content of departmental policies and that parent-governors ended up accepting whatever the principal says without contributing anything to discussions. It was also found that it took time for parent-governors to understand governance issues and by the time they begin to grasp these issues, their term of office was almost over; new members would have to be elected. Participant principals felt that this was a vicious cycle that led to ineffective participation by parents and the often-mentioned consequence of principals running SGBs and governance matters.

The views pertaining to the illiteracy of parent-governors were also supported by both educator-governors and parent-governors themselves. It was found that parent-governors were, as a result of illiteracy, often shy and rubber stamped decisions without questioning them, and in the worst cases, stayed away from SGB meetings and ultimately left the SGBs. This was said to be the reason behind the dominance of principals in the SGBs. This view is best captured by one educator-governor Y and one parent-governor SS respectively in the following statements:

Challenge faced by principals is that members who have low educational level are discouraged by this condition from active participation in school governance. The principal find it difficult to persuade such member to participate actively. Those members who try to participate do not know the limit of their roles.

I would say, because some of us (SGB members) are illiterate and it takes time for us to understand all the different policies, the principal has to explain, interpret and guide again and again.

The findings relating to low educational levels of parent-governors and their effect thereof on the SGB and the principal in particular, resonate with findings from other studies. For example, Haines (2007:81) found that where parents were illiterate, an added responsibility rested with the principal who had to ensure that these parents were empowered to be able to perform their duties. Duma (2014:387) asserts in this regard that the illiteracy of parents is a great challenge in school governance. Xaba (2011:205) also found that “*parent-governors’ low education levels, which, according to them [participants], resulted in parent-governors being unable to execute their roles and responsibilities, being easily manipulated, unable or unwilling to participate in decision making and continually absent from meetings and workshops*”.

Just how serious the literacy issues are, can be seen from a statement made by a principal in a study conducted by Xaba and Nhlapo (2014:430) made the following statement:

The language there, is, you know, the legal language issue ... and as is well-known, parents are by and large not educated or versant with legislation, while the language is difficult. To start with, as a principal, it’s difficult for you to understand fully. So, it becomes even more difficult with the parents.

The conclusion drawn here is that the views regarding challenges relating to the educational levels of SGB members strongly suggests that they impede the execution of SGB functions and thus become a challenge for the principal. However, it must be noted that these views seemed to focus only on parent-governors. Although sounding true, it appears that too much emphasis is put on parent-governors’ ability to read and write. This suggests that both principals and educator-governors perceive the SGB as parent members, whereas the

SGB comprises the three components, namely, the principal, educators and parents (including learners in the case of secondary schools).

▪ **Challenges pertaining to parent-governors' perceptions about being in the SGB**

The Schools Act prescribes that parent-governors must form the majority of SGB members, which indicates the importance of parent participation in the SGB. Because members of SGBs are elected, they canvass to be elected, and thus may have motives for wanting to be in the SGB. This is the crux of the challenge to the principal's school governance role as identified in this discussion. It was found that most parent-governors were in the SGBs for possible benefit motives. For instance, it was found that some SGB members complained that they were not receiving payment for their involvement in school governance duties. Some members actually demanded to be compensated. Consequently, upon realising that they were not going to be compensated, they then left the SGBs. The challenge then for the principal is to function without a full SGB complement – forced to act alone with educators and a few parents who themselves are not motivated and do little to participate fully. Principals found this situation immensely challenging in that they had no power to do anything about this challenge.

The second challenge found concerned parent-governors who expected 'favours' where their children were concerned. For example, it was mentioned that they expected their children to pass or receive rewards regardless of their performance at school. If this did not happen, it was reported that such members stopped attending SGB meetings to the extent of disappearing from the SGB.

The third challenge concerned parent-governors who, on being elected, expected to benefit financially or in kind. For example, it was reported that when there were projects that involved tendering, some members expected their family members or connections to be awarded such tenders regardless of the prescribed procedures that included the fact that members with an interest in

such ventures had to recuse themselves from the process leading to the awarding of tenders for projects. This was also found in cases where appointments of staff were concerned, wherein some SGB members expected their relatives or connections to be given preference for appointments – regardless of prescribed processes. When these expectations were not realised, such SGB members would become disillusioned and absent themselves from meetings or disappear. This is a real challenge for the principal as it affects the functioning of the SGB.

The challenges cited above are consistent with findings in Xaba and Nhlapo's (2014:435) study. In this regard, these scholars state:

Finally, some parent governors apparently become school governors to satisfy ulterior motives, mostly financial. Such parents often want to be involved in matters pertaining to tendering for major services like, procurement of cleaning materials, learning and teaching support material and major services like repairs to infrastructure. This is done by blocking any service providers from outside the school's immediate communities and even threatening 'mass action' against any provider from outside the community.

The conclusion drawn here is that the challenges for the principals was found to relate to having to work with SGBs that had members who had ulterior motives; who expected things the principal could not provide; and working with SGBs that had fewer members than is supposed to be and thus having to take most of the decisions and as a result, being labeled as domineering and acting without parent participation.

- **Challenges pertaining to other SGB members' perceptions of the principals' role in the SGB**

One of the major findings of the challenges of the principal's role in the school governance role concerns the perceptions of the role. It was found that most participants perceived the role of the principal as that of a member of the SGB who is actually 'outside' in that he/she is accorded a special place that

differentiates him/her from other members. In fact, the principal was seen to be 'above' other members. Principals themselves made reference to this, as evidenced in phrases and expressions such as the following:

They perceive me as an expert.

They rely on me because I am knowledgeable.

Other governors look at me as somebody who is knowledgeable and somebody who knows everything.

They perceive me as a centre of everything that happens or should happen at school.

Other governors in the SGB put their trust in me. That is why they perceive me to be their leader, advisor and mentor.

They believe whatever I say and do is correct.

Most of the time the SGB perceives me as somebody who is above them and who must always give authority.

They perceive me to be the CEO of the school.

Educator-governors also seemed to lend support to the notion that the principal was above other school-governors. This was expressed in statements describing the role of the principal as:

that of sharing information, being a resource person and promoting good relations and cooperation;

consisting of specific functions of being a resource person, guiding and providing information to the SGB;

making sure relationships are good in the SGB, and to ensure there is financial accountability, so that the school finances are managed effectively and efficiently by ensuring there is good system for financial control; and

that of someone we can rely on.

Similarly, parent-governors also expressed sentiments setting the principal aside as expressed in the following statements:

A 'father' and themselves as 'children' who are dependent on their father for everything, e.g. their protection, survival, etc.;

The principal is perceived to be a helper, advisor and direction giver;

He's perceived to be someone who is knowledgeable in the school and in school governance;

We perceive the principal as 'everything' in the SGB;

I perceive the role of the principal to be a resource person, information giver and a guide;

We perceive the principal to be our 'light'. He makes clear whatever is not and is problematic to us; and

... a leader, mentor and supervisor.

Since the principal is perceived as a 'father' and SGB members as 'children', it means that the principal is perceived as being above other members in school governance and is therefore not considered as an ordinary member in the spirit of the new governance mandate and the composition of the SGB as required by the Schools Act.

The viewpoints that the principal in school governance is considered to be above and superior to other ordinary members in the SGB, is supported by Mncube's (2009:35) findings wherein governors perceived the principal in school governance as, among others: "*a resource person; the engine of the school; the finger and pulse of what is happening at school; setting the tone of meetings*". This, clearly indicates that the principal is viewed as an unlike member or a better member than the other members of the SGB,

notwithstanding the fact that this perception is against the spirit of the new school governance mandate and the composition of the SGB.

6.3.2.4 *Miscellaneous challenges in the principals' school governance role*

Apart from the main challenges identified in the foregoing sections, there were other challenges of a miscellaneous nature that were found. An important consideration regarding these other challenges is that they are in various ways related to the main challenges earlier. These challenges included the following:

- **Non-attendance of meetings and SGB members' lack of commitment**

Participants generally bemoaned the non-attendance of meetings as a challenge for the principal in executing the school governance mandate. In most instances, where non-attendance was rife, meetings failed to take place because a quorum could not be formed or meetings proceeded without absent members. Participants attributed this to various reasons. Among other reasons, they attributed non-attendance and poor attendance of meetings to such reasons as the following:

- Members who did not get their own way or did not receive privileges from being elected into the SGBs and subsequently resigned or just simply stayed away from SGB matters.
- 'Laziness' and a low level of commitment by some parent-governors.
- Lack of or no incentives to motivate members to attend meetings.
- Illiteracy and consequent inferiority complexes regarding not being able to participate or understand issues being dealt with in SGB meetings.
- Females whose home and family commitments disable them from attending meetings especially in the evenings and who subsequently resigned from the SGB.

The non-attendance of meetings poses numerous challenges for the principal. It was found that this resulted in the following challenges;

- Members who are present in meetings not being fully involved and just rubber stamping decisions.
- Principals having to do things themselves due to not receiving assistance coming from the SGB.
- Having to repeat training and development for members to catch-up because different members avail themselves at different meetings and occasions.
- Meetings taking decisions even though a quorum is not formed, otherwise there would be no progress at schools.
- SGBs failing to execute other necessary functions because decisions cannot be taken with most members being absent from the meetings.

From the findings presented above on the non-attendance of meetings and the lack of or poor commitment of some SGB members, it can be concluded that participants place major importance on meetings as a way of ensuring that the principal's role is carried out effectively. It is also noted that these weaknesses are mainly attributed to parent-governors, who incidentally also seem to agree with this view. This is consistent with findings from other studies. In this regard, Duma (2014:465) found poor and irregular attendance of school governance meetings to be the fourth most prevalent challenge at schools. Duma *et al.* (2011:51) also found that problems encountered when attempting to engage parent-governors in the governance of schools such include the high rate of illiteracy among parent SGB members and their irregular attendance of school governance meetings.

A point to be made here is that these perceptions seem to suggest the entire school governance execution, especially the negative aspects, to be because of the parent-governors. This is considered unfair because the contemporary school governance by its very nature requires cooperation and partnership

among all stakeholders. While the views expressed may very well be true, in most or some instances, it raises a question on the leadership role and supportive role of mainly the principal and the SMTs; and educators themselves in making sure that the school governance mandate is executed in a way that caters for the weaknesses reported. Xaba and Nhlapo (2014:432) regards this as “*attitudinal reference to parent-governors, as if they were the governing body and imposed to be a burden on the principals’ efforts to run schools effectively ...*”.

It can be concluded that the poor and/or non-attendance of meetings poses challenges for the principal’s school governance role in that, despite these issues, schools governance must take place, the governance mandate must be carried out and the interests of the school and learners must be promoted. This also seems to lend weight to the notion that principals find themselves in situations where they have to act alone or with the few SGB members who avail themselves.

▪ **Overstepping limits of roles and responsibilities**

Participants cited “crossing of lines” by SGB members as one of the many challenges facing principals in their school governance role. Parent governors, are the ones who are, in most cases, accused of overstepping their limits by encroaching onto professional matters because of their low levels of education. Participants mentioned actions such as:

SGB members overstep their mandate by wanting to police learners, educators and the principal.

... interfering with the daily running of the school.

... the chairperson organises parent meetings without discussing it with the principal.

... coming to school without informing the principal and just walking around the school without having reported to the principal.

Some studies confirm the existence of challenges in terms of SGB members who overstep the limit of their roles in school governance. For example, Heystek (2006:480) cites a case of a chairperson of the SGB who told educators where to park their cars and 'entered' to classes to lend support. Xaba (2006:20) cites a case of parents who demanded rights to hire and fire educators, although this is against the stipulations of the Education Labour Relations Act and the principle of due process in dealing with disciplinary issues concerning educators. Heystek (2004:310) also cites SGB parents who intruded on the professional management of the school because they believed they were supporting the overworked principal.

A conclusion drawn regarding parent-governors overstepping the limits of their roles and responsibilities is that it is a challenge for the principal and can lead to conflict in and among school governors. Worse still, it can lead to the principal being seen as domineering and dictatorial in trying to defend his/her professional management territory, which would then detract from the main responsibility of promoting the best interests of the school.

▪ **Relationship between and among SGB members.**

Participants expressed views which highlighted a number of issues which were problematic in school governance and management. These issues indicated that there were poor relationships between the principal and SGB members, especially parent members. Issues which caused challenges to the principal in his/her execution of the governance role and impeded the functionality and effectiveness of the SGB were found to include the following:

- Gossip and parent-governors who fraternise with educators;
- SGB members who take sides and they interfere with the daily running of the school, for example, coming to school without informing the principal and just walking around the school without having reported to the principal;
- Some members even intimidate staff members;

- Educators who fight the principal and have vendettas against him/her;
- Principals feeling isolated when there is conflict and feel abandoned by other SGB members who support educators in such conflict situations;
- Some educators looking down upon parents who are not literate, which then leads to such parents not attending meetings and staying away from school activities because they feel they are not welcome;
- Staff members or SGB members who are not on speaking terms;
- Educators who show disrespect to the principal's authority and even influence learners to disrespect the principal; and
- Poor and/or lack of effective communication between and among stakeholders.

The challenges listed above may have numerous causes and sources. Similarly Heystek (2004:310) found that when parents have the required skills and knowledge to manage and formulate new policies, the principal may feel threatened, disempowered and isolated and even side-lined. This situation does not promote a good relationship between the principal and the parents in school governance. Instead it creates challenges for the principal in the execution of his/her school governance duties. Mahlangu (2005:8) expresses the opinion that relationship problems in school governance are caused by the undemocratic behaviour and domineering attitudes of principals and educators when dealing with parents. Other causes may include a lack of knowledge about roles and responsibilities, educators who feel that decisions about education are their domain (Duma *et al.* (2011:40), parents who feel that educators undermine them because of their (il)literacy levels and the nature of the school governance functions in terms of their specialist nature (Xaba, 2011:205).

- **Lack of and poor training of SGB members**

The training of SGB members is one of the challenges mentioned by most participants in this study. Indeed, it appeared as if parent-governors were the SGB members who needed training the most. The lack of and poor training of SGB members was largely seen as a reason for their non-participation and poor understanding of policies and responsibilities. Poor training was also attributed to the training manuals used – which seemed to be inappropriate, basically because the dominant language used was English.

The matter of poor or inadequate training of SGB matters is reported widely in various studies. Van Wyk and Lemmer (2009:128) agree that provincial government must provide training for governing bodies. Furthermore, they also assert that the provincial departments do not provide adequate training for SGB members because they do not have the resources to do so. Similarly, Van Wyk (2004:53) found in her research that many educators felt that the workshops for training SGBs should be improved. Numerous other studies report on the findings that indicate the need for proper, suitable and needs-driven training of SGB members (Mncube & Naidoo, 2014; Xaba & Nhlapo; 2014; Duma *et al.*, 2011; Xaba, 2011; Bagarette , 2011; Xaba & Ngubane, 2010; Heystek, 2004).

A conclusion drawn regarding the training of SGB members is that due to poor and/or lack of training, the principal is faced with challenges of having to assist and support the SGB that has little or no capacity to govern. This opens up gaps that can result in unilateral decision-making, lack of or poor participation of other SGB members, difficulties in balancing roles and generally poor execution of the school governance mandate by the SGB.

While there are numerous challenges in the principal's school governance role, it seems that these are inherent in the role and in the way the Schools Act details roles and responsibilities of SGBs. For one, the listing of functions and the specific mention of the principal's role seem to generate separateness in the understanding and execution of functions. It is therefore concluded that the challenges in the principal's school governance role are actually inherent in the

functions, roles and responsibilities of SGBs as detailed in the Schools Act and are not, by themselves, a result of the role of the principal *per se*. Therefore, an approach to school governance that integrates all the essential elements of school governance, from the elections to the functioning of the SGB seems to be a possible solution to these inherent challenges.

6.4 Recommendations for an approach to school governance: The Three Phase Approach

The fourth objective of this study was to recommend an approach that can overcome the challenges inherent to the principal's school governance role. The findings regarding the challenges in the principal's school governance role, as alluded to above seem inherent by virtue of the Schools Act listing functions and thus creating an unintended understanding of separateness of functions themselves and of functionaries. In other words, the listing of functions seems to streamline the functions in such a way that they can be perceived as self-standing functions that can be performed in isolation of other functions, as long as the goals of the school are pursued and achieved. For example, it was clear from the findings that emphases on various aspects were not the same and that some SGBs seemed to do better in some aspects than in others. Some schools can even attribute the success in improving matric results to aspects of good governance, which detracts attention from the holistic development and promotion of the best interests of the school. Xaba and Ngubane (2010:154) found as much in their study of financial accountability as a functional responsibility of SGBs. In this regard, they stated:

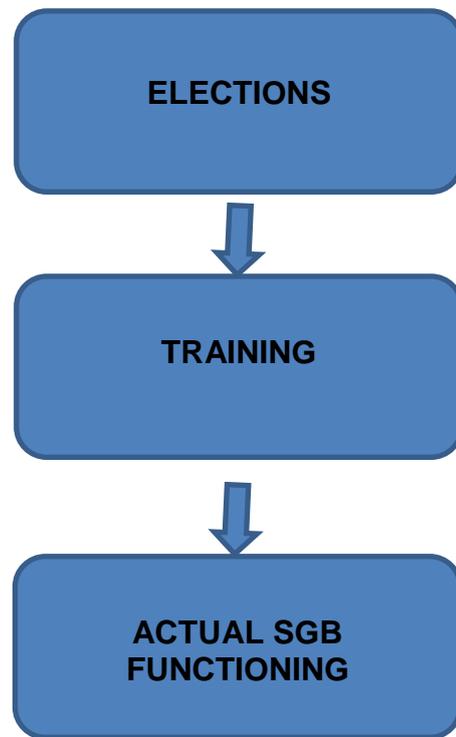
While some schools seemed to be doing well in terms of internal financial control as evidenced by financial records being kept up to date, regular reports being given to the school governing body, educators and parents, as well as documentation of all the deviations and accounting to the school governing body, which are examples of good practice in financial monitoring and accountability in general, it was clear that other schools did not exercise this function.

For this reason, a Three-phase Approach to school governance is recommended to address the challenges inherent in the principal's school governance role and the Schools Act's listing of roles and responsibilities of SGBs.

6.4.1 ***A Three-phase Approach to school governance***

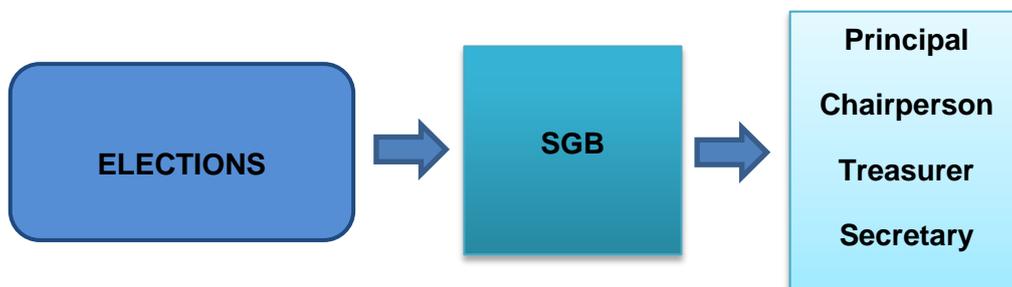
The Three-phase Approach (TPA) to school governance seeks to address school governance from the process of SGB elections and establishment, the training of school governors and the actual functioning of the SGB. With this approach, it is argued that the solution to current challenges in school governance and, by extension, to challenges related to the principal's role, lies in the understanding of what the school governance mandate means and what its implications are in practice. Therefore, the purpose of this approach is to foster a comprehensive understanding of the school governance mandate from the very beginning of the SGB's existence to its actual focus on implementation of measures to execute the school governance mandate. The Three-phase Approach to School Governance is depicted in Figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1 The Three-phase Approach to School Governance



As illustrated in Figure 6.1, the TPA consists of three main phases, namely, the election of the SGB, training and the actual SGB functioning. The first phase involves the election of the new SGB as it is currently done at schools. However, the critical feature of this phase is that, the SGB election also involves the election of the office bearers who will form the SGB Executive Committee (Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2 Phase one of the TPA to school governance



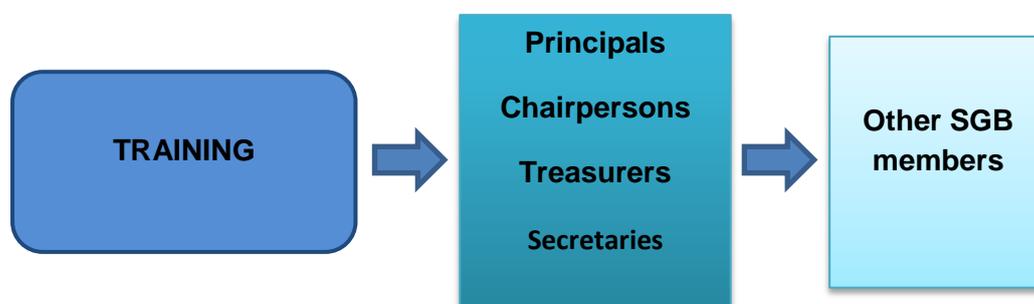
The office bearers are the chairperson, treasurer and the secretary of the SGB. The principal, as an *ex officio* member is automatically a member of this

committee. The rationale for this is to be found in the next phase of the approach – the training phase.

The office bearers are elected at this stage so that they can facilitate the functioning of the SGB and, most importantly, so that they can receive a full handover from the outgoing SGB. To do this, the new Executive Committee should be in a position to attend meetings of the sitting SGB as observers. This will serve two purposes, namely, to observe the functioning of the sitting SGB, especially the conduct of meetings; and to receive mentoring on issues related to meeting procedures. However, for this to be successfully and effectively undertaken, the election of the new SGB must take place during the latter period of the outgoing SGB. This implies that the SGB elections should be conducted at least before the expiry of the current SGB's term of office.

The second phase of the TPA involves training of the SGB (see Figure 6.3), which will be a two-stage process. The most important aspect of this training will be the content of training.

Figure 6.3 Phase two of the TPA



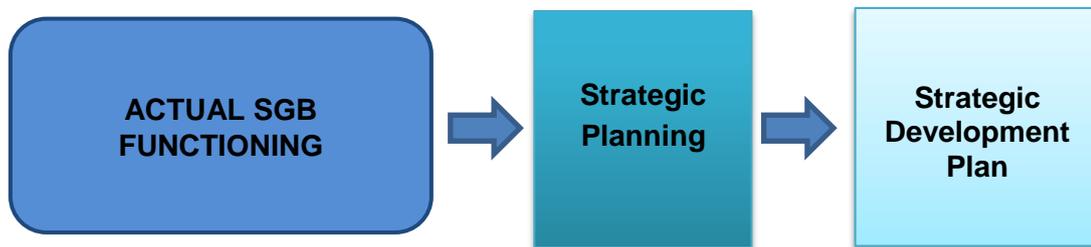
This phase should unfold over two stages with specific training contents. The first training stage will involve training of the office bearers of the SGB. For instance, chairpersons will receive training that is directed at their roles as facilitators and leaders of SGBs; treasurers will receive training on their role as SGBs' custodians of school finances and as chairpersons of school finance committees; principals will receive training on their roles as *ex officio* members

and as ordinary bona fide members of SGBs and the implications thereof; and secretaries will receive training on their roles and functions.

The second stage of this phase, on a different day and date, will involve the training of the entire SGB. At this stage, the SGB should receive training on a thorough grounding on the meaning of being an SGB member and, most crucial, the meaning of the school governance mandate. This is where the SGB is trained to get a thorough understanding of promoting the best interests of the school as comprising the three key areas of functioning, namely, providing the school with a strategic direction, acting as a critical friend and demanding accountability. This will ensure that all SGB members have the same understanding of their roles and responsibilities as opposed to being trained in listed functions without providing the context of how they feature in promoting the best interests of the school. It will also ensure that SGB members know exactly what the next stages of their functioning will involve.

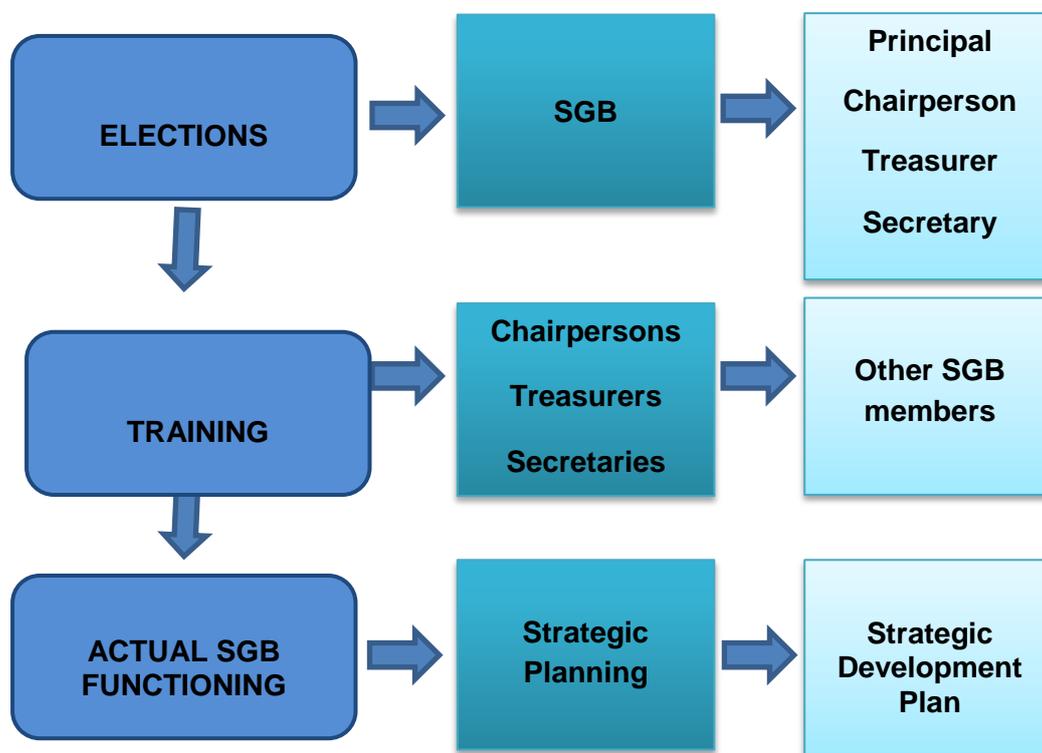
The third phase of the TPA will involve the actual start of the functioning of the SGB (Figure 6.5). At this stage, the SGB as a whole has office bearers and has received initial training in what is involved in promoting the best interests of the school. SGB members also have knowledge of one another's roles, but do not have the actual knowledge and skills of executing specific functions as listed in the Schools Act. This will be in the domain of the outcomes of the third phase and the on-going capacity-building that the Department must undertake on a regular basis.

Figure 6.4 Phase three of the TPA



This phase involves the first activity of the SGB, namely, that of providing the school with a strategic direction. A rigorous process of strategic development planning (cf. 2.2.3) is undertaken on various areas of school functionality as prescribed by departmental policies. This is an important stage that must be undertaken carefully in that it is at the core of the successful school governance and overall performance in pursuit of school goals. The outcome of this process is the school development plan, which will include priorities for all school sectors. For instance, the SGB will prioritise its functions from drawing the constitution, electing committees, establishing the finance committee and reviewing and/or drawing policies and setting standards for academic performance and achievement. The TPA in its entirety is illustrated in Figure 6.5.

Figure 6.5 The complete Three Phase Approach to school governance



The TPA as depicted above can have strengths and limitations.

6.4.1.1 ***Strengths of the TPA***

The TPA to school governance can be a useful and powerful tool for setting the course of effective school governance. Firstly, this approach, instead of trying to address challenges on a singular and unidirectional basis, seeks to integrate elements of school governance from the initial stages to the crucial functioning stage of the SGB. The benefits of starting with the election process at a much earlier stage than is currently the practice is the following:

- i. The timing provides an advantage regarding the governor recruitment process. The fact that it is done early enough provides opportunities to ‘appraise’ elected governors, in terms of office bearers to identify knowledge and skills’ gaps in time for capacity-building purposes. It also

affords them the opportunity to pledge themselves or recuse themselves from the task of governing while there is time for recruiting substitutes.

- ii. It affords the time for capacity-building training processes even before the SGB resumes work in its term of office. This, especially the training of office bearers on the essentials of their functions and provides them with the opportunity to internalise the basic knowledge and skills they need for the task of governing the school.
- iii. It presents opportunities for capacity-building processes to focus on relevant training content and ensures that school governors understand the school governance mandate in the correct context of a holistic focus on school development and performance. The emphasis of the training process would be on school development and performance, rather than on governing by focusing disjointedly on the listed functions in an uncoordinated manner. For this reason, the training process would emphasise 'first things' first rather overwhelming school governors with lots of information that would need to be further processed into workable school governance processes.
- iv. It encourages the provision of the school's strategic direction by making sure that the strategic development planning process is part of the approach and receives priority even before the new SGB starts functioning. This is crucial because the SGB and the school is afforded a plan for taking the school forward in a manner that addresses all school functionality areas.
- v. It affords the incoming SGB office bearers with the opportunity to receive a full handover from the outgoing SGB. This implies that the outgoing SGB has to account for its term of office operations and this promotes transparency. It further ensures that demanding accountability becomes a feature of school governance activities.

- vi. Finally, it affords the incoming SGB the opportunity to experience how school governance works by allowing the new members to observe the outgoing SGB in action over a reasonable period.

6.4.1.2 ***Possible limitations of the TPA***

The TPA to school governance, while purportedly a good instrument for addressing challenges in school governance on a holistic basis, has potential limitations such as the following:

- i. It requires proper and careful planning in terms of execution; most important would be planning to effect a smooth transition from the outgoing SGB operations to the incoming SGB members.
- ii. Departmental officials responsible for school governance would have to be well-capacitated themselves to oversee and provide the necessary support to schools in executing this approach, especially since it emphasises the timing and the content of capacity-building training processes.
- iii. It might be costly, especially since training of school governors has to unfold over stages that are relevant to governors' areas of functionality. However, the costs incurred can be seen as being offset by the envisaged immense benefits of effective school governance, with minimal challenges experienced on issues that can be addressed through starting the school governance process properly.
- iv. The transition period from elections to the actual functioning of the SGB might be hampered by time constraints especially if the third and fourth quarters of the school term are taken into account. This is important since the best time for the TPA process would require adjusting SGB functioning to coincide with the beginning of the financial year.
- v. Finally, in small rural and farm schools, this approach might prove to be difficult to implement. However, this suggests the need for urgency in addressing the matter of such schools through exploring possibilities of

clustering school governance. It is recognised that this, would be a big challenge, especially in areas where there are large distances between schools and districts. This is, however, a subject of another enquiry.

Despite the limitations highlighted above, the TPA to school governance holds immense advantages of having SGBs that are functional and that take as their point of departure, the promotion of the best interests of the school by providing quality education to learners.

6.5 Recommendations for future research

There is a need for a comprehensive and holistic study that evaluates the effectiveness of SGBs in executing their functions as listed in the Schools Act. This will hopefully reveal how effective SGBs execute their functions, especially with regard to the functioning of the office bearers.

There is also a need for research of how effective SGBs attain their success given the largely reported impact of the low educational levels of parent-governors, especially considering their majority status in SGBs and the requirement that SGB committees should be chaired by parent-governors. This is because community members in townships, from where most of the so-called uneducated SGB parent-governors are drawn have been found to manage successful economic ventures such as the 'stokvel' concept (Xaba, 2015:207) despite their being of low educational levels.

A study that seeks to propose how officials at departmental level can assist SGBs in the execution of their functions is also recommended. This will be valuable in suggesting ways in which there can be continuity in the support of SGBs between and among provincial, district and circuit levels of the Department of Education. It is apparent that there is a lack of effective training and support of SGBs on a continuous basis, hence the apparent challenges besetting SGBs in various areas.

6.6 Contribution of the study

The study contributes to the practice of school governance in South Africa by providing an approach that addresses the challenges of the principal's school governance role in a holistic manner. School governance practitioners are provided with a context through which they can gain more insight into the meaning and implications of the school governance mandate as stated in the Schools Act. Furthermore, the TPA approach to school governance models school governance for institutional development and support officers with an instrument that can be customised to facilitate effective development, support and monitoring of SGBs.

By contextualising the school governance mandate, the study contributes to a conceptual understanding of the context of challenges often experienced by SGBs in that it unpacks the governance mandate into three distinct and pursuable areas of functioning, namely, the school strategic direction, demanding accountability and acting as a critical friend to the principal and the school. In South Africa, this translates to a contribution to the conceptualisation of school governance because the Schools Act only lists functions and does not locate them in a context that aligns them to the governance mandate. In this way, the study provides a conceptual framework within which school governance can be grounded.

6.7 Limitations of the study

The main limitation of the study concerned the insistence of some participants not to be tape-recorded during interviews and as a result in interviewing, reliance was on note-taking which proved a difficult undertaking. Consequently, some interviews took longer than the envisaged one hour. However, an attempt was made to include their views as originally and as accurately as note-taking would permit.

Secondly, it was not possible to obtain views of departmental officials in charge of school governance for reasons of 'work commitments' that did not permit time

for interviews. However, the views of the participants in this study provided valuable insights into the challenges of the principal's school governance role.

Finally, literature on the challenges of the principal's school governance role was found to be very limited and, as such, literature on the meaning and implications of the school governance mandate was drawn mainly from British, which was used to contextualise the South African school governance mandate.

6.8 Chapter summary

Chapter 5 presented the summary, findings, conclusions and recommendations. The information gathered from the literature review and participants' responses (qualitative data) was used to determine the meaning and challenges of the principal's governance role. The findings from the responses of participants culminated in the researcher developing an approach of addressing these challenges as well as determining the contribution and the limitations of the study. Furthermore, the study enabled the researcher to recommend further research on school governance matters..

6.9 Conclusion

This study set out to appraise challenges in the principal's school governance role. This aim was translated into research objectives that sought to examine the nature of the principal's school governance role and the challenges inherent in the principal's governance role. This was achieved through a rigorous literature review which examined challenges related to the role based on the school governance mandate as stated in the Schools Act.

The study also sought to qualitatively appraise the actual challenges in the principal's school governance role in the Gert Sibande Region. This was achieved through qualitative interviews with school governors in the Region, which involved the principals, educator-governors and parent-governors. The main challenge seemed to amount to perceptions of the principal's role in terms of his/her role as an *ex officio* and an ordinary SGB member; and this mainly

came down to the understanding of the school governance mandate and the approach SGBs took towards their governance role.

In light of the findings from both the literature review and the empirical study, the TPA approach to school governance was developed. This approach takes the school governance mandate as the point of departure and models the school governance process from the intention to establish SGBs through elections of the new incoming SGB while the outgoing SGB is in the final stages of its term of office to training of SGB members over stages that focus on relevant content and components of school governors, and culminates into the start of the process of functioning of the incoming SGB.

The study thus achieved its aim and objectives, notwithstanding its limitations in other areas. These, however, open avenues for further research in school governance matters.

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Annexures

Annexure A: Permission to conduct research at schools

11 2011 2:34PM FAX 0178113442

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

02 905170001



education
DEPARTMENT: EDUCATION
MPUMALANGA PROVINCE

Gert Sibande Regional Office
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LITIKO LE TEFUNDVO UMNYANGO WEFUNDO DEPARTEMENT VAN ONDERWYS UMNYANGO WEZEMFUNDO

FACSIMILE TRANSMITTAL SHEET

16 NOVEMBER 2011

Mr JM Nhlapho
PO Box 490
STANDERTON 2430

Dear Mr Nhlapho

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH

Permission is hereby granted to conduct research in pursuit of your studies for a PhD degree in the Gert Sibande District.

Kindly observe the necessary research ethics.

We hope your research will advance the course of schooling and management in the Province.

C O M M U N I C A T I O N S


for DIRECTOR,
GERT SIBANDE REGION

Together Educating the Nation

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MPUMALANGA
A Pioneer of Spirit

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Annexure B

Interview schedule: Principals

1. According to the South African Schools Act, the main aim of school governance is to promote the best interests of the school and therefore, the best interests of the child. What do you think this mandate requires the SGB to do?
2. How does your SGB work to realize this mandate?
3. How would you describe your role as *ex-officio* member of the SGB (i.e. serving in your official capacity)?
4. What would you say are the difficulties or challenges you experience as a principal/*ex officio* member in your school governance role?
5. Numerous research studies on school governance challenges and difficulties report other SGB members as commenting that principals dominate and they control SGBs and governance functions. It is claimed that principals display dominate the SGB, they are reluctant to share power and influence, they are willing to involve other governors in decision making and manipulate governance in matters pertaining to finances and staff appointments. What is your opinion on these comments?
6. The Schools Act says the principal must support the SGB. What does that mean seeing you, as the principal, are a member of the SGB yourself? Doesn't that make you a separate member of the SGB? What does support the SGB actually mean?
7. In support and assisting the SGB in the performance of its duties, how would you describe this role in your SGB in terms of:
 - a. ensuring that the SGB is accountable.
 - b. ensuring that there is financial accountability
 - c. ensuring that there is effective communication with the SGB in relation to the staff, parents, learners and communities.
8. How would you describe relations in the SGB? For example:
 - a. In the whole SGB.
 - b. Between you and the chairperson.
 - c. Between you and the parent members.
 - d. Between you and educator members
9. You have presumably attended school governance training over the years. Was this training suitable to the governance needs of your schools in terms of:
 - other SGB members?
 - you personally as SGB member and as employee of the department and *ex-officio* member?
 - for various governance functions and functionaries/office bearers?
10. What do you think other governors perceive your role to be?
11. In what way do you promote good governance in your school?
12. What other challenges would you say you encounter in your school governance role?
13. How do you think these challenges can be overcome?

Annexure C:

Interview schedule: Educator-governors

1. According to the South African Schools Act, the main aim of school governance is to promote the best interest of the school and therefore, the best interest of the child. What do you think this mandate requires the SGB to do?
2. How does the SGB work to realize this mandate in your school?
3. How would you describe the role of the principal as an ex officio member of the SGB (i.e. serving his/her official capacity)?
4. What would you say are the difficulties or challenges principals experience as ex-officio member in his/her school governance role?
5. Numerous research studies on school governance challenges and difficulties report other SGB members as commenting that principals dominate and the control SGB and governance functions. It is claimed that principal dominate the SGB, they are reluctant to share power and influence, they are not willing to involve other governors in decision making and manipulate governance in matters pertaining to finances and staff appointments. What is your opinion on these comments?
6. The Schools Act says the principal must support the SGB. What does that mean seeing the principal, is a member of the SGB him/herself? Doesn't that make him/her a separate member of the SGB? What does support the SGB actually mean?
7. In supporting and assisting the SGB in the performance of its duties, how would you describe the principals' role in terms of:
 - a. Ensuring that the SGB is accountable?
 - b. Ensuring that there is financial accountability?
 - c. Ensuring that there is effective communication with the SGB in relation with the staff, parents, learners and community?
8. How would you describe relations in the SGB? For example:
 - a. In the whole SGB?
 - b. Between the principal and the chairperson?
 - c. Between the principal and parent members?
 - d. Between the principal and educator members?
9. You have presumably attended school governance training over the years. Was this training suitable to the governance needs of your schools in terms of:
 - other SGB members?
 - you personally as SGB member?
 - for various governance functions and functionaries/office bearers?
10. What do you perceive the principals' role to be in the SGB?
11. In what way does your principal promote good governance in your school?
12. What other challenges would you say the principal encounter in his/her school governance?
13. How do you think these challenges can be overcome?

Annexure D:

Interview schedule: Parent-governors

1. According to the South African Schools Act, the main aim of school governance is to promote the best interest of the school and therefore, the best interest of the child. What do you think this mandate requires the SGB to do?
2. How does the SGB work to realize this mandate in your school?
3. How would you describe the role of the principal as an ex officio member of the SGB (i.e. serving his/her official capacity)?
4. What would you say are the difficulties or challenges principals experience as ex-officio member in his/her school governance role?
5. Numerous research studies on school governance challenges and difficulties report other SGB members as commenting that principals dominate and the control SGB and governance functions. It is claimed that principal dominate the SGB, they are reluctant to share power and influence, they are not willing to involve other governors in decision making and manipulate governance in matters pertaining to finances and staff appointments. What is your opinion on these comments?
6. The Schools Act says the principal must support the SGB. What does that mean seeing the principal, is a member of the SGB him/herself? Doesn't that make him/her a separate member of the SGB? What does support the SGB actually mean?
7. In supporting and assisting the SGB in the performance of its duties, how would you describe the principals' role in terms of:
 - a. Ensuring that the SGB is accountable?
 - b. Ensuring that there is financial accountability?
 - c. Ensuring that there is effective communication with the SGB in relation with the staff, parents, learners and community?
8. How would you describe relations in the SGB? For example:
 - a. In the whole SGB?
 - b. Between the principal and the chairperson?
 - c. Between the principal and parent members?
 - d. Between the principal and educator members?
9. You have presumably attended school governance training over the years. Was this training suitable to the governance needs of your schools in terms of:
 - a. other SGB members?
 - b. you personally as SGB member?
 - c. for various governance functions and functionaries/office bearers?
10. What do you perceive the principals' role to be in the SGB?
11. In what way does your principal promote good governance in your school?
12. What other challenges would you say the principal encounter in his/her school governance?
13. How do you think these challenges can be overcome?