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# THE ROLE PLAYED BY PARENTS BODIES IN DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOLS IN MUTASA DISTRICT SCHOOLS

**Dr Regis Fanuel Gutuza**  
Zimbabwe Open University,  
National Centre Box 1119 Harare,  
Faculty of Arts and Education,  
Zimbabwe

## Abstract

This article draws on a qualitative inquiry on the contributions of SDCs in a small sample of secondary schools in Mutasa District selected by means of purposeful sampling. The researcher adopted a qualitative methodology using a case study design. Data were gathered by means of semi-structured interviews using an interview guide. Views of the participants were audio-taped, transcribed and became the primary data for analysis. The findings revealed that members of the School Development Committees were not aware of their specific roles in the schools and as a result, there were conflicts with the heads and deputy heads of schools. The study recommends that there should be regular training workshops to equip SDC members with skills to carry out their duties.

**Key words:** School Development Committee, Head, Deputy head, Secondary schools, District.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Parents by virtue of their parenthood are the natural and primary educators of their children (Bude 2005). Parker (2000) corroborates this when he asserts that parents have a natural right, as the first gate-keepers, to make decisions that affect their children. Thus, education managers and parents have to work together in a legally organised and planned fashion to promote the development of schools for children to learn in conducive environments. In Zimbabwe, the establishment of School Development Committees is governed by the Education Act of 2006 (Chapter 25: 04). According to Bowora and Mpfu (2008) the School Development Committee is a body corporate which is a stand-alone committee of the school that can sue or be sued like any other business enterprise. The committee members are elected by parents / guardians of children in each of the schools to act as a link between the general parents and the school administration (Moyo, 2010).



Before the establishment of School Development Committees schools had School Advisory Councils (SACs). Their major weakness was that they were only advisory bodies and it was imperative to have corporate effective bodies capable of suing and being sued in their own rights in the form of School Development Committees (Madziyire, 2010). It was therefore, the thrust of this study to look closely at the contributions of School Development Committees towards the development of education in primary schools.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to Bray (2006) decentralization of education to schools has been called by different names in various countries. In developing countries decentralization came as a result of some injustices that were found in many centralized systems (Abu-Duhoe, 2009). One of the injustices was the inequitable allocation of educational provisions by central governments. The other problem with the centralized education system in Africa during the colonial era was that it was divorced from the interests and problems of the African society (Zobgo, 1997). It was regarded as the system for the privileged few and tended to leave the majority outside the mainstream of development as they were considered too ignorant and uninformed to participate effectively in the education development of their children (Zobgo, 1997).

As Bidwell (2005) asserts, the primary areas of focus for the School Development Committee are support of school wide activities, parent advocacy, community building through special events, some aspects of adult education, and support for the communication between parents and teachers. Additional responsibilities may include the creation of festivals for the school community, all school fundraisers, volunteer coordination for all-school events, and communication relative to whole school activities (Bidwell, 2005). The School Development Committee is therefore a way for parents to get engaged in the life of the school, giving them an opportunity to advance the social atmosphere and culture of the school (Chivore, 2005).

As Ndlovu (2013) argues, one of the most important functions of the SDC is to create a welcoming environment for parents and to make it easier for all parents to participate in their children's education. When schools succeed in engaging parents, there is a strong and positive connection to improved student achievement (Bastianni, 2008). As Cairney (2010) found out, where the parents body is effective it has helped to reduce absenteeism, promote better behaviour and restore confidence among parents in their children's schooling. Studies by Comer (1984); Munn (1993); Gordon (2004); Lemmer (2002) and Swap (1993) found that where parents representatives were working effectively, schools they led produced good academic results, had adequate infrastructure for learning and teaching as well as well behaved students.

In Zimbabwe as Mupindu (2012) discovered, the involvement of the SDC members in decision making greatly contributed towards the academic performance of learners at their schools. This observation by Mupindu (2012) is in line with the objectives of School Development Committees as stipulated by the Government which are to:

- Do all it can to preserve and maintain the school property and facilities to promote learning.
- Use money appropriately for the development of the school.
- Do all it can to operate, extend and develop the school in the best interests of its present and future pupils, parents and teachers (Education Amendment Act, 1991).

In South Africa, Chisholm and Vally (1996) observed that schools were still gravely affected by the consequences of discrimination, the political struggle and socio-economic problems and desperately needed maximum parent involvement to improve the culture of teaching and learning. Endeavours by the Department of Education to promote broader and varied participation of the parent body are absent or perfunctory. As Nardine and Morris (1991) posit, technical support or financial incentives to schools deemed essential to enact parent involvement are entirely absent.



According to Powers (2010) it is only through the community's direct participation in the running of the school that the institution can act as a focal point for integrating and projecting local community life. This is what engenders in the community a strong sense of ownership of the school and thus guaranteeing it the community's maximum, moral, political and material support (Banks, 2005). Powers (2010) is convinced that people cannot be developed, they can develop themselves. However, Weber (2002) states that while recognizing the ideals of local community initiatives, support and control, there are inherent complexities that go with this approach. It has to be borne in mind that when school support depends more and more heavily on School Development Committees, then school development largely becomes a function of the strength of local community's resource base as well as the community's will to commit a proportion of these resources to education. As Powers (2010) postulates, the result is that the wealth within schools will generally reflect the wealth of the communities that support them. This may create inequities in the different schools which calls for equalization policies by Government to avoid conflicts.

The contributions of SDCs to schools also tend to enhance devolution of decision-making. As Nardine and Morris (1991) observe, the local leadership tend to understand better their local people and their context, and can make a more accurate assessment of their needs, desires, problems, constraints and opportunities. However, as Banks (2005) posits, the assumption is that the local people have both the power for self-determination and the knowledge required to achieve what they plan to achieve. This might not always be the case. Using a Marxist framework to analyse developments in America, Bowlers and Girtis (1977) concluded that, the educational demands of unorganized people, farmers and workers are almost impossible to discover. According to Heystek and Louw (2009) the argument that local control enhances the quality of decisions can be fallacious because where locals lack the expertise to decide wisely, their decisions are products of external manipulation.

### **3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

It is mandatory for every school that is not a Government school to create a School Development Committee that helps to involve parents in school processes. School Development Committees are expected to promote the academic, sporting, infrastructural and moral aspects of the children in the schools.

### **4. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The study sought to establish the contributions of School Development Committees in order to come up with practical suggestions of enhancing their efforts.

#### **4.1 Research Questions**

The study had a four-pronged sub-question.

1. In what ways have School Development Committees contributed towards the development of secondary education?
2. Are members of the School Development Committees aware of statutory instruments governing their operations?
3. What challenges are faced by School Development Committees in their work?
4. Do School Development Committees have power to make substantive decisions in the schools?

#### **4.2 Significance of the Study**

The study's significance is premised on the assumption that if communities are made aware of their contributions in the development of their schools, they are likely to double their efforts to improve the condition of their schools. The study may also inform policymakers about the state of implementation of policies governing the creation and duties of SDCs so that these could be modified if need be.



## 5. METHODOLOGY

As a qualitative inquiry, the overall aim of the study's design was to understand the perceptions of members of the School Development Committees towards their contributions in the schools they lead.

### 5.1 Case Study as a Strategy

Data was probed from the sites through the use of a case study strategy. The strategy was used to inquire into the situation existing in six secondary schools pertaining to the contributions made by School Development Committees. In this study, collective case-study type was used. A collective case-study strategy was adopted in order to understand the views of members of the School Development Committees from a number of secondary schools towards their work or duties. This collective nature allows the researchers to identify similarities and differences with regard to the six different school cases.

### 5.2 Research Techniques

The face to face interview technique was used to gather primary data from the respondents. An interview schedule was prepared for use in the interviews and it was made up of open ended items seeking for information regarding what the respondents thought were the contributions of the School Development Committees in the development of the schools. Purposive sampling was used to come up with the respondents because the researchers selected the people with a particular purpose already in mind (Kelly, 2006) and these were the School Development Chairpersons, Secretaries, Treasurers, Heads and Deputy Heads. However, as Cohen and Manion (2011) argue, the purposive sample is not suitable for large samples where the size of both the universe and the sample is considerably large. All interviews were audio-taped, transcribed and became the primary data source for analysis conducted by the researchers. The aim was to understand experiences from the participant's point of view (Kumar, 2008). No attempt was made to generalize the findings. A transparent disclosure of the role of the researcher and his or her relationship with the participants, the 'volunteering' of participants and description of the School Development Committee members' setting was done to contextualize the research and to allow for the impact of the researchers' role and participant selection on findings. The use of a small sample is common in qualitative research, where the aim is depth and not breadth (Borg and Gall, 2012).

## 6. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study sought to investigate the contributions made by School Development Committees towards the development of secondary schools in Zimbabwe. This section presents and discusses the findings after the demographic data.

**Table 1: Category of Respondents (N=30).**

| Category                     | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| SDC (Parents) Members        | 24        | 80         |
| School Based Heads / D/Heads | 6         | 20         |
| <b>Totals</b>                | <b>30</b> | <b>100</b> |

The data in table 1 shows that the bulk of the respondents (80%) represented parents who are members of the SDCs. The head and the deputy heads who constituted (20%) of the sample are members of the committee by virtue of their positions in the school.



**Table 2: Experience of respondents as members of a School Development Committee (N=30).**

| Experience in Years | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------|-----------|------------|
| 0-2                 | 8         | 27         |
| 3-5                 | 2         | 7          |
| 6-10                | 4         | 13         |
| More than 10        | 16        | 53         |
| <b>Totals</b>       | <b>30</b> | <b>100</b> |

Table 2 above shows that more than half the members of the SDCs had served in the committees for over 10 years (53%), while 27% had served for between 0-2 years and 7% were within the 3-5 years experience as SDC members.

**Table 3: Qualifications of Respondents (N=30).**

| Qualifications      | Frequency | Percentage |
|---------------------|-----------|------------|
| Primary Education   | 12        | 40         |
| Secondary Education | 10        | 33         |
| Tertiary Education  | 8         | 27         |
| <b>Totals</b>       | <b>30</b> | <b>100</b> |

Table 3 above shows that 40% of the respondents were in possession of a primary school qualification, 33% had a secondary school qualification and 27% had some tertiary qualification.

## Actual Research Findings

According to international and local literature, parents still play very marginal roles with regards to the decision-making affecting their children in schools. This inquiry suggests that School Development Committees are striving very hard to develop schools; but face a number of obstacles. Results from the study reveal that the majority of SDC members have over 10 years of experience as members. This is in spite of the fact that Statutory Instrument 87 of 1992 stipulates that the life of an SDC should be one year. This means that most of the current members have been recycled for many years or that they are in existence because they are in good books with school heads.

The information from the study also reveals that the bulk of the members of the SDCs are in possession of very low educational qualifications. Most of them went as far as primary school. The implications of this information is that most members of the School Development Committees may not have the literacy levels that could enable them to participate fully during debates in their meetings. This tallies with observations by Powers (2010) who stated that the empowerment of the larger parent body depends on the efficacy of the liaison between them (parents) and the school governing body as well as the capacity of elected parent representatives to function effectively as parents leaders. Many working-class and rural black parents face constraints in terms of participation in school governing bodies as a result of poor education and literacy levels (Bidwell, 2005). This situation compromises the power of the School Development Committee members to make meaningful decisions.

The study also revealed that there were a number of initiatives other than school levies that were used by the SDCs to raise funds towards developing the schools. It was clear from the findings that School Development Committees depended mainly on sourcing donations which were not readily available most of the time. This tallies with findings by Mupindu (2012) who discovered that most School Development Committees relied on donations which were not reliable



since most donors were affected by the volatile economic challenges that Zimbabwe was experiencing. In other words, they lacked the initiatives of fundraising and running money making projects (Mupindu, 2012).

On specific developments that they had brought to the schools most of the committee members indicated that they had constructed classrooms, teachers' cottages, toilets, school fences and also mobilized resources to procure learning materials like furniture, books and other stationery. The SDCs were involved in the collection of fees and in the hiring of personnel for undertaking construction work in the schools. However, when they were further probed to check their involvement in the budgeting process, most of the members usually referred the researchers to the head's offices for further details. It, therefore, became apparent that most of the SDC members followed what the heads had planned and they merely endorsed these plans.

The study revealed that School Development Committees experienced a number of challenges. The most common ones included lack of cooperation by most parents to support the plans of the SDCs. For example, some parents did not pay fees even if they had the capacity, others did not attend meetings, yet others absented their children thereby comprising the standards of education in the schools. Others indicated that it was a nightmare to work with their heads as some heads thought they did not have the skills to handle issues particularly academic related issues. This tallies with observations by Ndlovu (2013) who discovered that most heads did not want parents who interfered with their professional business. The other prominent challenge that most members stated was political interference with their work. They stated that some political leaders like councillors, chiefs, and political party structures tended to control events in schools as a way of exercising their powers thus crippling plans of the School Development Committees. This confirms findings by Mafa and Nyathi (2013) who state that the bone of contention between School Development Committee members and other key stakeholders is that some aspiring holders of political office may discourage parents from paying levies when campaigning so as to be voted into office promising parents and guardians that if elected, they will provide free education services.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

In view of the above findings, the researchers make the following conclusions:

- School Development Committees strive very hard to develop their schools.
- The majority of School Development Committee members have over ten years of service with various School Development Committees.
- Most School Development Committee members have very low educational qualifications.
- School Development Committees relied mainly on school levies to finance school projects since donations and fundraising activities were not yielding much.
- Most School Development Committees initiated the construction of classrooms, teachers' cottages, toilets, school fences as well as facilitated the procurement of furniture, books and other teaching / learning resources.
- Some heads excluded School Development Committee members from the budgeting process and as a result, the School Development Committee members merely rubber-stamped the head's budget plans.
- Some stakeholders like politicians, chiefs, councillors, civic leaders and church leaders interfered with the work of School Development Committees.

## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusively, the findings of this study suggest that School Development Committees have made a significant contribution towards the development of schools in Zimbabwe. Based on these findings, School Development



Committees have the potential to bring schools to a higher level of development. The following recommendations are put forward by the researchers.

- The School Development Committee executive members should be elected into office after three years. This would allow for more stability, continuity and accountability. Alternatively, the office bearers can leave office on a rotational basis. Currently, the policy stipulates that elections should be held annually.
- There should be more systematic training for School Development Committee's members. Such training should comprise longer courses which focus on the development of specific skills such as the prioritization of needs, familiarization with legal instruments governing School Development Committees and other related legislature, as well as strategies for the mobilization of community support and the diversification of sources of funds.
- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should come up with minimum educational qualifications which each aspiring candidate for the School Development Committee should possess, for example, a minimum of an Ordinary Level Certificate. This should not be a high demand because all communities have many holders of these qualifications across Zimbabwe.
- Heads of schools should work closely with members of School Development Committees even in those areas that the heads deem too technical for the parents like budgeting, needs identification as it is within the right of School Development Committee members to be involved in these activities.
- School Development Committees should be given powers to arrest and have those stakeholders who interfere with their work arrested to curb disruptive behaviour by politicians and other community leaders.

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