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# **BEYOND THE EVIDENCE: THE CONDUCT OF SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEES IN ZIMBABWE'S EDUCATION SYSTEM**

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#### Abstract

In an effort to analyse the uncertainty and future of School Development Committees (SDCs) in the Zimbabwean education system this paper offers insights on bureaucracy, governance and current situation as it relate to funding. It also explores the evolving changes in the education system which is influenced by local and global trends and demands responsiveness from the government. Hence if the SDCs are to remain relevant in the discharge of their core duty of ensuring development in their schools, they need to be very effective and adhere to the principles of servitude, accountability and transparency. Qualitative research design was adopted in undertaking this study. Out of population of twenty schools, ten schools were purposively selected for convenience and structured questionnaires were analysed based on themes that emerged from the responses given. The paper concludes that the SDC body is relevant in spearheading development in non-government schools and works as a pivot between parents and the school. Parents' involvement in schools emerged to be of paramount importance as enhanced accountability and instilled a sense of community ownership of the school. Furthermore, the paper recommends that SDCs should adopt school development from a business perspective and engage in income generation projects and fund raising activities that can effectively sustain their schools in the absence of levies.

Keywords: Committee, Development, Education, School, Transformation

### 1. Introduction

Community participation in education through School Development Committees was made mandatory by the Government of Zimbabwe through the establishment of Statutory Instrument Number 87 of 1992 for non-government schools and Statutory Instrument Number 378 of 1998 for government schools. Statutory Instrument Number 87 of 1992, (Oyedele and Chikwature, 2016) empowers each non-government school to elect a School Development Committee whose major role will be to mobilize resources to transform its school and enhance the well-being of both teachers and learners. Thus Statutory Instrument 87 of 1992 empowered communities empowered SDCs to take

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charge of schools under their locality in tandem with the Secretary of Education (Rukanda and Mukurazhizha 200). In discharging their duties SDCs are guided and bound by several statutory instruments regulations. It has emerged Coleman (2003) that there is a direct relationship between parental involvement in school development activities and learner's performance. The coming on board of SDC meant that this corporate body has several duties to perform in the running of the school and these duties include thus; provision of resources and help in the running and development of the school; promotion and perpetuation of the cultural, physical, moral and intellectual welfare of current and future teachers, learners and the community at large; manage school assets, employ and fire support staff in the school and stand as a legal persona for the school seeking legal and economic advice on matters affecting the committee and the school (Tshabalala, 2013). However despite the decentralization step made by the government through the Statutory Instrument 87 of 1992 McLennan et al (2003) argue that the SDCs in Zimbabwe were afforded legal power only denied expert power. This stems from the fact that the government after decentralization it did not provide human resources training to the SDCs (Zvobgo, 1997). Thus Winkler (2005) asserts that the absence of real decision making power and adequate resources at the schools resulted in the decentralization of education failing to bring the intended results in many African countries. It should be noted that education without active parental involvement is one sided and the growth of the economy relies on the growth of its education system which in turn relies on the level of community participation (Kumar, 2015). SDCs also face challenges that emanate from emerging socio-economic, political and technological local and global trends. These trends shape or demand a paradigm shift in the way SDCs conduct their business thereby at times bringing uncertainty and re-defining the future in the way SDCs should operate. This demands an innovation in the management of education and management of education incorporates managing work, motivation and commitment, creativity and innovativeness, competence and confidence (Kumar, 2015). It is against this background that the study attempts to look at the uncertainty and future in the conduct of SDCs in Zimbabwe education system.

# **1.1 Theoretical Underpinnings**

In an effort to analyse uncertainty and future in the conduct of School Development Committees in Zimbabwe education system the Hall and Hord's (2001) Concerns Based Adoption Model is the underpinning framework for this study. The evolving changes in the education system are being influenced by the government, local and global trends demands responsiveness from the government and the SDCs if they are to remain relevant in the discharge of their core duty of ensuring development in their schools. Therefore this makes the Concerns Based Adoption Model relevant and appropriate to this study.

# 1.2 Methodology

Qualitative research design was adopted in undertaking this study in order to study the phenomenon under natural settings. This gave the study the advantage of gathering information as it occurs in its natural settings. Population was taken from twenty schools and ten schools were purposively selected for convenience and structured questionnaires were administered to the respondents. The data gathered from the structured questionnaires were analysed based on themes that emerged from the responses given.

# **1.3 Parent Involvement in Schools**

Parents are key stakeholders in the development of schools in their locality Madziyire (2010) because they provide moral, financial and material support to the school. It is the parents who pay fees and levies for their children therefore this makes them an important cog in the wheel of education and development at their children's school. The Global Education Monitoring Report (2017/18) asserts that parents are the ones who are held accountable for their children's education by the SDCs. Involving parents in school activities ensures that accountability, transparency and teamwork are taken to a higher level in schools. Tshabalala (2015) argues that effective parent involvement in the running of schools in their community is a prerequisite for enhancing the culture of teaching and learning in schools and from his study it emerged that more was being done by schools to involve parents than is legally required. Thus effective leadership from school heads coupled with formal organization of parental involvement has helped in building parent-friendly schools, routine homeschool communication and innovative parent volunteering. The participation of the communities in educational management will result in stakeholders' participation in decision making and management of schooling activities at the school level (Kumar, 2015). Thus this will result in educational management being more democratic and contextual, in addition to tapping local knowledge and resources for good governance. Kumar (2015) asserts that in the absence of community involvement it would be difficult to improve equity, equality and quality of education. Thus parent involvement in schools ensures that the community is afforded latitude for considerable self-determination in the pace, quality and quantity of development which the local experience. However Chivore, Machinga and Chisaka (2003) argue that while it is important to recognise the ideals of local community initiative, support and control it should be realized that there are inherent complexities that are associated with this perspective. Thus by relying heavily on parents it means the development of the school will to a greater extent become a function of the strength of the local community's resource base as well as the community's will to participate and commit a proportion of these resources to education. In this case the result is that the assets and wealth within schools will generally be a reflection of the wealth of the communities that support them (Chivore, Machinga and Chisaka, 2003)

### **1.4** Role of SDCs in Zimbabwe Education System

SDCs came into effect through the pronouncement of Statutory Instrument Number 87 of 1992 by the Government of Zimbabwe. This statute gave SDCs the mandate to govern non-government schools. Nyandoro, Mapfumo and Makoni (2013) describe an SDC as comprising of a school head, deputy head, a teacher of the school, five individuals elected by parents of learners at the school and a councilor appointed by the local authority. The Statutory Instrument 87 of 1992 was critical in ensuring the decentralization of education, promotion of accountability, transparency and accuracy in the running of education in Zimbabwe. Chivore, Machinga and Chisaka (2003) assert that the SDC's biggest responsibility is that of funds, the committee is required to establish a school fund current account with a commercial bank. The account will ensure that the SDC will utilize the school funds through the bank and this promotes accountability of funds and makes it easy to trace the funds from time to time. Mupindu (2016) asserts that the main function of SDCs in schools is to engage in the mobilization of resources required in school to ensure the attainment of improved academic results and improvement of available resources. From the statutory instrument SDCs should ensure the development of school infrastructure, maintaining of school assets, accounts for school funds received to both parents and the Permanent Secretary and invest idle funds in the school. Holding festivals for community, fund raising, income generation for the school and communicating school programs to parents are additional responsibilities of SDCs, (Bidwell, 2015). In this regard the SDC has the power to engage parents in school activities, thereby enabling the parents to have a voice in shaping the school atmosphere, destiny and culture, (Chivore, 2005). Therefore the SDC is there to add value to the school and this is made easier when the SDC and school administration work together effectively. The Global Monitoring Report (2017/18), point out that school heads and parents should co-exist in a legally organized and planned manner to enhance the development of schools for learners to learn in a friendly environment. Ultimately this will in turn promote better outcomes for learners. However, Oyedele and Chikwature (2016) argue that for SDCs to be effective they should not mix school business with party politics and should be aware of the Statutory Instrument 87 of 1992 which govern their obligation. This demands a certain level of literacy on the part of SDC members.

However in a study carried out by Gutuza (2015) it emerged that the majority of SDC members had low educational qualifications. In addition Mupindu (2012) asserts that SDCs lacked the initiative to embark on fundraising and income generation initiatives. Besides that Chivore, Machinga and Chisaka (2003) argue that Statutory Instrument 87 of 1992 has a provision which may need reviewing which has to do with the term of office of the committee members which is one year. Considering that training is an expensive and slow undertaking it becomes unwise and less cost effective to commit resources into training human resources who may vacate office within a few months due

to the annual elections which are mandatory. Chivore, Machinga and Chisaka (2003) thus point out that the effectiveness of SDCs remains threatened by several problems which are a result of lack of resources due to the prevailing macro-economic environment, limited management training on their part, government policies and legislation disharmony and confusion on educational administration and the resultant unending conflicts with government. Arachchi (n.d.) from a study he carried out it emerged that it seems that most schools do not implement authentic and participatory decision making in schools. These findings are a result of the criteria used to choose SDC members who participate in the running of the school affairs. Anyone whose child is a learner at a given school is eligible to be chosen as an SDC member regardless of level of literacy. Studies by Mestry (2004) reveal that most school heads had been holding power on SDC members who will be illiterate and possessing insufficient knowledge on financial matters.

# **1.5** The Necessity of School Development Committees

The coming of SDCs in schools meant the cutting and reduction of bureaucracy and redtape in education in certain areas. Fullan (1991) asserts that the delegation of financial management to the level of SDCs is a progressive step. SDCs are a necessary element in the education system as they bring greater transparency and accountability in schools and Lewis and Naidoo point out that there is a positive relationship between capacity building and school community relationships. Teamwork, commitment and a sense of ownership is breed among parents where SDCs are involved as they realize that their interests are represented in the school by the SDC. This results in increases parent participation in school programmes. Howes and Stephens (1990) argue that SDCs are important as they bring schools closer to the community it serve. This in turn will influence the quality and quantity of the physical resources offered by the community through the democratically elected SDC members to the school management body. It is against this background that Chivore, Machinga and Chisaka (2003) argue that SDCs should be meaningfully empowered so that they become the prime focal point of school based educational administration. Moreover the SDC will ensure that school programmes remain in touch with the expectations of the local community. However it should be noted that the government is not readily willing to ensure total autonomy to SDCs because they may implement programmes and curricula contradictory to its policies (Chivore, Machinga and Chisaka 2003). From this view point the SDCs are mandated to work in tandem with the district, provincial and head office in seeking approval for levies and fees increase and the implementation of several programmes. Thus while SDCs are necessary, their operations are monitored by the government. However Cummings and Riddel (1993) contend that while it is vital to genuinely grant autonomy to SDCs state intervention is imperative to in order to correct imbalances, set standards and regulate disparities. Therefore SDCs are a necessary body whose function cannot be ignored but their operations need to be monitored to ensure maintenance of minimum and uniform standards and coherence across the education system (Chivore, Machinga and Chisaka, 2003). This promotes the standardization of procedures and enhances effective monitoring.

# **1.6 Technological Transformation**

Ndou (2008) argues that technological transformation carry with them the need for different accomplishments and management competencies from those formerly used. There is need to adapt to change brought about by the advance in technology since it always brings with it new dimensions that need to be upheld. Thus, Pretorious (2001) point out that these new competencies include competence in the science of numbers, computers, literacy and logical thinking, the ability to utilize resources and information constructively, the ability to comprehend systems and master technology and flexibility to adapt to change in the workplace. It remains to be seen how SDCs have been able to adapt to the demands of new competencies ushered in by technological advancement and transformation. Alava, Haittunen and Riskin (2012) argue that information as a management tool its serviceability has grown phenomenally and has become progressively challenging due to technological developments. Thus information has become more diverse and the need to utilize technology in education management by SDCs cannot be over-emphasized. The issue of embracing technology is no longer meant for learners and teacher only but it is now an issue for all stakeholders in education because today technology is now the way to go. Looking at the amount of capital needed to ensure that all schools are technology compliant there is need to cultivate partnerships in this area as envisaged by Microsoft (2006) which argues that partnerships are the sole sensible direction for a country to achieve appropriate and sustainable ICT resources. The pooling of resources between different stakeholders in both public and private sector will go a long way in ensuring that ICT use in all schools can be achieved expediently. This will benefit not only the school, teachers and learners but the SDCs included.

### **1.7 Internet Banking**

Despite having a significant development in the financial sector in the past four decades due to advancement in Information Communication Technology, Muzividzi, Mbizi and Mukwazhe (2013) argue that the embracing of internet banking has remained slow. This is despite efforts made by banks to promote the use of the technology by its customers. However despite the reluctance by some schools to adopt technology and internet banking it is important for SDCs to be competent in the use of technology in general and internet banking in particular. Muzividzi et al (2013) point out that with internet banking individuals and organisations' benefit in that they are able to transfer funds, effect payment of bills, inquire balances, view their accounts, print and download account statements. In addition Christiansen (2001) emphasizes that internet banking reduces

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administration costs, cycle times, streamlines business processes and enhances relationships with business partners and customers. These immense benefits have been made possible by technology. This has seen some customers migrating from traditional banking to online banking system, (Quereshi, 2008). The shift has been as a result of the perceived convenience, usefulness and security provided by online banking. Muzividzi et al 2013 assert that literature on internet banking shows that there are challenges when it comes to the embracing and utilization of internet banking in Africa due to lack of experience within individuals and organizations' and above all the majority of the potential users are unqualified. Besides that Mahajan (2000) identified several barriers to electronic banking which include lack of awareness, uncertainty about the benefits, lack of knowledge, customers' lack of enthusiasm, ignorance, negative attitude, limited human resources and skills, high set up costs, security concerns, legal and liability aspects and high costs of development. Furthermore in developing countries Kapurubandara (2009) noted that the adoption of internet banking was affected by lack of Information Communication Technology infrastructure, lack of skills among consumers, slow ICT penetration and lack of legal and regulatory framework.

# **1.8** The Issue of Debtors in Zimbabwe Schools

The 1991 Education Amendment Number 26, Education Act, Statutory Instrument Number 87 of 1992, Secretary's Circular Number 2 (Chivore, 1995) give nongovernment schools the authority for proper management of financial matters. In addition Statutory Instrument Number 70 of 1993 and Statutory Instrument Number 87 of 1992 provide guidance to government schools and non-government schools respectively in the collection and use of school funds (Pedzisai and Tsvere, 2013). These legal instruments are there to help in functioning and development of schools, Chiwaro and Manzini 1995. They also promote the well-being of the school for the benefit of the current and future learners, teachers and parents. However Mupindu (2012) noted that nearly fifty percent of Zimbabwe parents are unable to meet their fees and levies obligations on time. Besides that the Basic Education Assistance Module (BEAM) has also failed to service its obligations to schools in time and Dzvimbo, Magijani and Zimhondi (2018) point out that BEAM disbursements were have a backlog of 2014 despite selection and allocations having been made since 2016. Furthermore, Ngwenya (2016) argues that school heads have noted BEAM to be more of a liability since its payment to schools was erratic and unpredictable. Thus parents failure to meet their financial obligations to schools and the delays in BEAM payouts have resulted in schools being owed huge sums of money. Pedzisai and Tsvere (2013) argue that the mounting debt is growing in schools and schools are failing to handle the debt problem decisively. Therefore an indebted school will not be able to engage in meaningful development, provide teachers with adequate accommodation and above all Dekker and Schalkwyk (2007) crucial teaching and learning materials will not be adequate and available. While the Zimbabwe Government Education Act (2004) stipulates that pupils

who fail to pay fees should not be enrolled by the school head, the government on the contrary issued a directive which instructs schools not to exclude learners for failure to pay fees. Such exclusion is said to unconstitutional and illegal (Constitution of the Republic of Zimbabwe). Ultimately this has worsened the debt problem in schools because while it is mandatory for schools to collect money from parents for effective education management and development the government has put in place legal instruments to protect learners from being excluded from schools. However Matimbe (2014) argues that levies payment by parents to schools is not mandatory, as a result parents do not pay out on agreed time by the SDC. This has resulted in challenges to schools in terms of levies collection. Thus accumulating parent debts in schools have threatened the existence of SDCs and their ability to discharge their mandate effectively is uncertain under the prevailing circumstances.

# 2. Results and Discussion

From the study it emerged that the SDC body is relevant in spearheading development in non-government schools and works as a pivot between parents and the school. Parents' involvement in schools emerged to be of paramount importance as enhanced accountability and instilled a sense of community ownership of the school. However the study also found out that while parents play a significant role in school building their failure to fund the school through levies payment weighed down the SDCs' development potential in the school and this made SDCs to seem irrelevant in the schools. SDCs were found to make the education more understandable to parents. However political influence were also found to hamper the effectiveness of SDCs. Ninety percent of the respondents were elderly and above forty five years of age and they were computer illiterate. As a result the chances of adopting ICT in the management of school funds and other activities seemed lukewarm at SDC level. Twenty five percent of the schools in the study had internet connectivity and utilized the services of internet banking. This concurs with findings made by Bauer and Hein (2016) who noted that older customers were less keen to adopt internet banking. It also emerged that most of the respondents were less experienced on internet use. This also concurs with findings made by Jiang et al (2000) who considered that the adoption of internet technologies was directly linked to one's experience on internet use. Besides that the unavailability of communication network connectivity and infrastructure in seventy five percent of the schools was found to be a great hindrance in the adoption of internet banking. This is confirmed by Chiemeke, Evwiekpaefe and Chete (2006) who found out that inadequate ICT infrastructure hindered the embracing of internet banking. On levies collection 85% percent of the schools had a levy collection rate below forty percent and the respondents bemoaned the undependability of BEAM and bemoaned government directive which prohibits the exclusion of learners from schools due to non-payment of levies The nonpayment of BEAM funds to schools corroborates with findings made by Dzvimbo et al (2018) who found out that BEAM still owes schools 2014 payments although selection

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of BEAM beneficiaries has been on-going since 2016. Thus while development in schools requires financial resources the crippling debts in schools emanating from parents and the government has made the major role of SDCs of ensuring development in schools a pipedream. Besides that SDC elected members raised the issue of their exclusion from being signatories of School Improvement Grant funds and described it as discriminatory. They felt they were being undermined as ineffective in handling SIG funds which were in most cases less than the total income they managed in their respective schools annually. The respondents raised the issue of having to serve the school for only a year and vacate the office. This policy requirement they pointed out that it brings instability in the SDC especially when the committee is handling projects which have a life span of more than a year. This finding agrees with the findings made by Chivore, Machinga and Chisaka (2003) who found out that Statutory Instrument 87 of 1992 has a provision which may need reviewing which has to do with the term of office of the committee members which is one year.

# 3. Conclusions and Recommendations

It has emerged from the study that SDCs play a pivotal role in the development of schools. The future of SDCs lies in their dynamic ability to adapt to the prevailing socioeconomic, political, legal and technological trends in order to ensure that their roles remain relevant to the development agenda. The uncertainty of SDCs manifests in their inability to embrace technology in all its dimensions in school management, their failure to realign levy collection strategies in relation to statutory dictates, failure to be proactive the volatile macro-economic environment in which the government is failing to honour its financial obligations in time and being sidelined on the handling of SIG funds. This is evident especially where they are not part of signatories to SIG funds. This gives a sense of uncertainty to the elected SDC members in spite of the explained reasons. Therefore to securely put the SDC in the driving seat there is need for the government to ensure that all SDCs are trained in ICT use and internet banking, stipulates minimum qualifications of people eligible to be SDC members and government should come clear on the issue of BEAM and device policies to curb mounting debts in schools without prejudicing the learners at the same time. BEAM disbursements should be timeous to ensure that the funds are utilized in the financial year which they are budgeted for to ensure that learners and schools are not prejudiced in terms of teaching and learning materials. Besides that SDCs should adopt school development from a business perspective and engage in income generation projects and fund raising activities that can effectively sustain their schools in the absence of levies. There is great and urgent need for government to harmonize and align its policies to ensure that the term of office for SDC members is reviewed to ensure that they serve for at least two years and ensure that parents meet their financial obligations to schools so that schools are not weighed down by debts from parents.

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### **Competing Interests**

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal gain that may have influenced in writing this article.

#### **Authors' Contribution**

Funnycall and Masimba introduced the manuscript, wrote the problem statement, background, literature review, theoretical concepts and gathered data. Munyaradzi and Kelvin conceptualised, drafted and revised the original manuscript and analysed as well as interpreted the data.

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