

An Investigation on the Training of School Board Members in Zambezi Region, Namibia

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the training of school board members in Zambezi region, Namibia. The study adopted a qualitative research design approach. The data was gathered using interviews and focus group discussions. In this study, the researchers worked with principals and SBMs in Zambezi region, Namibia. The findings revealed that majority of principals and school board members (SBMs) did not seem to have received school board training. They learned their roles and responsibilities through reading the copy of Part V of the Education Act, Act 16 of 2001 and a booklet titled “The work of the school board: A booklet for school boards in Namibia”. The researcher recommends that principals and SBMs need compulsory and appropriate training that will enable them to understand and perform their roles and responsibilities well. Where necessary, school board trainers should employ the vernacular language (or seek the services of an interpreter) so that parent SBMs who are not bilingual can understand and grasp all the essential concepts of the training programme.

Keywords

School Board, School Board Members, Principal, Parents, Teachers, Learners’ Representative Council (LRCs) Members, Training

1. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the training of school board members in Zambezi region, Namibia. Xaba and Nhlapo (2014) affirm that the principal is responsible for the professional management of the school. This entails that in matters of school governance, the principal is answerable to his/her employer by assisting the school board on the performance of its functions and responsibilities in terms of policy and legislation. The study concurs with Naidoo,

Mncube and Potokri (2015: p. 319) who point out that the principal should be seen as a fundamental agent of transformation, creating space for deliberation and dialogue so that all stakeholders are actively involved in the school board. They stress that training or capacity building for all representatives of stakeholders on the school board is recommended. In their research article, Mohapi and Netshitangani (2018: p. 11) outline strategies to empower parent SBMs to perform their governance roles and responsibilities. The strategies include the empowerment of stakeholders, devolution of powers, expected and actual assistance, communication and influence, task orientation and friendliness, as well as support. They state that parent SBMs ought to be supported and encouraged to accept nominations when asked to be part of the school board. In addition, SBMs should treat one another with respect. SBMs need support from the principal and need to be trained in their roles and responsibilities as stipulated in the Education Act (2001). They state that illiterate parent SBMs can be trained their roles and responsibilities in a language and at a level that they understand. Principals and teacher SBMs need to ensure good relations by holding the hands of the parent SBMs.

2. Research Objective

To investigate the training of school board members in Zambezi region, Namibia.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Composition of the School Board (SB) in Namibia

In accordance with the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (2001: p. 16; 2016: p. 2), the membership of the SB depends on the size of the school. It consists of not less than five and not more than 13 voting members. These members include parents with children at the school, but who are not employed there (parents must be in the majority). In addition, school teachers and the principal of the school are members of the school board. Moreover, two learners at the school, nominated by the LRC are members of the school board. However, this is applicable in secondary schools only. Primary schools are encouraged to create platforms for learner participation in school governance. Matsepe (2014: pp. 192-193) states that the reasons advocated for the participation of learners in secondary school governance are that at present schools exist in a democratic era and the term democracy implies participation of all stakeholders in matters that affect them. In addition, it is believed that, if learners are part of governing bodies, they would be part of decisions made to run the schools; therefore, they would have ownership of decisions and obviously stand a better chance to convince fellow members of the student body regarding the good intentions of decisions by the board. Furthermore, if secondary school students learn to make decisions by being members of their school boards at an early stage of their lives, the understanding is to breed good future leaders who will be better citizens with

decision-making capacity.

The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (2001: pp. 16-17; 2016: p. 3) prescribes that a school board must elect office bearers among its members to serve as chairperson, secretary and treasurer. They stress that a principal, teacher or learner of the school must not serve as chairperson of the school board. In addition, the principal becomes a school board member by virtue of her or his position in the school. However, it is stated that a school board chairperson is elected for a period of three years and only one of the parents is elected as the chairperson.

3.2. Characteristics of an Effective School Board

Ehren, Honingh, Hooge and O'Hara (2016: pp. 211-212) provide five characteristics of an effective school board:

3.2.1. Commitment to a Clear and Shared Vision and Goals for Student Achievement and Quality Instruction That Trickle down to the Classroom

The school board should ensure that goals for student achievement include specific targets and standards and are the highest priority in all schools without the distraction of other goals and initiatives.

3.2.2. Effective Use of Data

Rhim (2013: p. 15) states that data use is the foundation of meaningful planning and holding principals accountable. High quality school boards are, therefore, data savvy. Thus, effective school boards monitor and utilize data to drive continuous improvement even when the information is negative. In addition, they analyze and discuss trends of dropout rates, test scores and student needs on a monthly basis to identify specific student needs and justify decisions based on those data without ascribing blame or drawing emotional responses.

3.2.3. Strong Accountability and Transparent Evaluation

Effective school boards evaluate and hold their principals accountable for shared goals, mutually agreed upon procedures and the progress of students. In addition, they support decisions that develop the improvement of student achievement rather than the daily management of the school.

3.2.4. Collaborative Relationships and Mutual Trust with Staff and the Community

It is important to note that school boards should have a trusting and collaborative relationship with their principals and engage in a collegial policy-making process that emphasizes the need to find solutions and develop consensus among SBMs and other leaders on the identification and implementation of improvement strategies.

3.2.5. Political and Organizational Stability

The choices regarding goals and resources remain stable over longer periods of

time, and effective school boards and principals have long-term service records, meeting goals and aligning resources to these goals and showing stability in the governance of schools.

In its induction and training manual, [the GM South Africa Foundation \(2012: pp. 9-11\)](#) sets out other characteristics that make an effective school board, and these include:

- Working as a team

Building an effective team requires regular attendance and energetic commitment from all governors and appreciating what each member of the school board has to offer, sharing the workload, showing respect for colleagues and their differing opinions and being a loyal team member.

- Good relationship with the school principal

It is important to establish a good working relationship between the school board and the principal. Each party must have a clear understanding of its respective role. For example, the school board is responsible for deciding the framework for the conduct and development of the school. Within this context, the governing body should respect the position of the principal as the professional leader of the school and the person accountable for the day-to-day management and administration of the school.

- Effective time management and delegation

School boards should identify the priority issues in which they need to be directly involved, including decisions that, according to law, must be taken by the full school board, and delegate the remainder to the committees, working groups or individuals. Equally, the school board should also set clear terms of reference for such delegation, so that everyone knows what they are expected to do and how and when they should report back in full.

- Effective meetings

To make the best use of time at meetings, the school board should carefully plan the agenda to focus on the most important items. It is important for the school board to choose a secretary who can organize meetings and papers efficiently, as well as provide information and procedural advice. In addition, the secretary should ensure that decisions are properly taken and clearly understood. Furthermore, the secretary ensures that minutes are clear and sets out points for action.

- Knowing the school

SBMs should come to know their school through visits organized in close co-operation with the principal to talk to pupils, staff and other stakeholders.

- Training and development

School boards need to take their own development seriously in order to help their schools. They should consider their training and support needs carefully and be prepared to attend training programmes organized by the Department of Education. In addition, SBMs should visit other schools to discuss their activities and allocate funds for the training of the whole school board. This is supported by [the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture \(2016: p. 1\)](#) which affirms that it

is important to train new and current SBMs in school governance on a continuous basis in order to enhance their capacity to support schools. It, furthermore, asserts that training of SBMs is particularly due to the changing nature of issues affecting our society, in general, and our schools, in particular. Similarly, Rhim (2013: p. 14) and Nwosu and Chukwuere (2017: p. 21) stress that training provides SBMs with opportunities to learn about their key roles and responsibilities, as well as more substantive content-related to education policy and practice. Furthermore, the governance manual for primary schools (2015: p. 11) outlines some modules that are covered in the training of SBMs as follows: the school board as a corporate entity – its functions, roles and the school board in action. Other modules covered in the training of SBMs are procedures governing the appointment of staff in schools. In addition, school board finances and the role of treasurer are also covered. It is, therefore, worth noting that legal issues, policies and procedures arising from legislation, guidelines and circulars are some of the modules covered during school board training. Moreover, the child protection and anti-bullying procedures, as well as data protection are among the modules covered by the school board in their training. It is, however, important for SBMs to avail themselves to such training when it is made available.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research Design

A qualitative research design approach was employed using interviews and focus group discussions to investigate the training of school board members in Zambezi region, Namibia. The interviews and focus group discussions in this study were employed to help investigate the training of school board members in Zambezi region and they provided the required information.

4.2. Sample of the Study

The sample in this study included five principals, nine teacher SBMs, ten parent SBMs and four LRCs from primary, combined and senior secondary schools in the Zambezi region. The reason for selecting the twenty-eight participants was their involvement as members of school boards in the Zambezi region.

4.3. Data Analysis

A qualitative data analysis was employed in this study to analyze the data based on an “interpretative philosophy that is aimed at examining meaningful and symbolic content of meaning of a specific phenomenon by analyzing their perceptions, attitudes, understanding, knowledge, values, feelings and experiences in an attempt to approximate their construction of the phenomenon” (Maree, 2016: p. 109). Qualitative data analysis was the method best suited to investigate the training of school board members in Zambezi region, Namibia. The researcher analyzed transcripts of interviews and focus group discussions that were conducted with five principals and twenty-three SBMs, a total of twenty eight participants.

5. Findings

Profiles of principals and SBMs

The data presented on **Table 1** indicate that all five principals interviewed were male. Their ages ranged from forty to fifty-five years. With the exception of one principal with experience of one year and six months, the other principals who participated in this study had much experience as ex-officio members of the school board in the Zambezi region. The principal with one year and six months' experience was the oldest of the participating principals. Of these five, three indicated that they had not received any school board training since their appointment as principals. This was evident from the response of Peter, principal of School Four who said that:

This is a serious problem that we have in the Zambezi region. I will be open and frank. I was fortunate that I was studying with another institution. That is where I learnt and studied regarding the roles and responsibilities of SBMs. That is where I came to know regarding what it means to be a principal and serving on the school board, but generally I would say, I did not receive specific training when I was appointed as a principal that this is your role on the school board. Even our current SBMs they were not trained. I raised this issue of training with the Inspector of Education who is my supervisor. He said that, "let this be the responsibility of the school principals to train their school boards". Then I said no, because SBMs will say that the principal is training us things that does not involve much of our roles, especially finance. They will say that I will be leaving other parts of what they should be trained because I do not want them to know. That is why I said that the Inspector of Education should come and train them.

The data presented in **Table 1** show that, despite the fact that the majority of the principals pointed out that they had not received school board training, some of them acknowledged that they had received school board training when they were appointed as principals. This can be seen from the response of Mark, principal of School Three who responded that:

Yes! I received training. Once you are appointed as a principal you are always inducted. During or in that induction course, they are covering many things that you need to do at the school level without the school board, with teachers, with the school board and with the parents. So, in the training they will always stipulate that you will serve on the school board. They will always direct you that on the school board these will be your roles and responsibilities.

Table 1. Profiles of principals.

Principals	Age	Gender	Qualification	Experience (Years)	School location	# of learners	Training
Mark	43	Male	BEd (Hons)	11	Rural	581	Yes
Samuel	54	Male	BEd (Hons)	1 yr. six months	Rural	659	No
Peter	42	Male	BEd (Hons)	9	Urban	970	No
Luke	44	Male	BEd (Hons)	5	Urban	710	No
John	45	Male	BEd (Hons)	17	Rural	449	Yes

John, principal of School One, who acknowledged that, supported this:

Normally as a trend in the Zambezi region after every three year when the new school boards are elected we go through school board training. This training runs for two to three hours per year.

Though John stated that he had received school board training, he was quick to mention that the school board training was not adequate. He commended the Zambezi education regional office for the effort they were putting in to make sure that principals received the necessary skills and knowledge every three years.

Regardless of their different answers to the question, whether they had received school board training or not, all five participating principals were interviewed to investigate the training of school board members in Zambezi region, Namibia.

The data presented on **Table 2** illustrate that the researcher interviewed ten parent SBMs from six schools in the Zambezi region. Their ages ranged from

Table 2. Profiles of parent SBMs.

Parent SBMs	School one	School Two	School Three	School Four	School Five	School Six
Age	Francis: 63	Collins: 45	Jimmy: 52	Jinny: 51	Lucious: 56	Nick: 48
	Grace: 39		Ricky: 50	Jack: 42		Florine: 45
Gender	Francis: Male	Collins: Male	Jimmy: Male	Jinny: Male	Lucious: Male	Nick: Male
	Grace: Female		Ricky: Male	Jack: Male		Florine: Female
Highest qualification	Francis: DIE	Collins: G:10	Jimmy: G:12	Jinny: BEd	Lucious: G:12	Nick: G:12
	Grace: G:10		Ricky: G:10	Jack: DIE		Florine: G:10
School location	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
School board training attended	Francis: No	Collins: No	Jimmy: Yes	Jinny: No	Lucious: Yes	Nick: Yes
	Grace: No		Ricky: No	Jack: Yes		Florine: Yes
Position on the school board	Francis: Chairperson	Collins: SBM	Jimmy: Treasurer	Jinny: SBM	Lucious: Chairperson	Nick: Treasurer
	Grace: SBM		Ricky: SBM	Jack: Chairperson		Florine: Secretary
Number of years on the school board	Francis: 2 yrs.	Collins: 2 yrs.	Jimmy: 6 yrs.	Jinny: 3 yrs.	Lucious: 16 yrs.	Nick: 6 yrs.
	Grace: 2 yrs.		Ricky: 3 yrs.	Jack: 2 yrs.		Florine: 2 yrs.

thirty to seventy years. Two of the participating parent SBMs were chairpersons of their respective school boards, two were treasurers and one a secretary. Of the ten parent SBMs, only two were female. The majority of participating parent SBMs were male. Their years of experience as members of the school board varied from two to sixteen years. Two of the parent SBMs interviewed had Diplomas in Education (DIE) and Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree qualifications. The majority participating parent SBMs had qualifications ranging from Grade 10 to 12. The data presented in **Table 2** reveal that five parent SBMs had received school board training. This is stated in the response of Lucious, a parent SBM at School Five who pointed out that:

I received a school board training when I first became a school board member that was around 2003 or 2004.

He affirmed that some new SBMs who joined them did not know their roles and responsibilities. He stated that in 2017 he spoke with the Circuit Inspector of Education to arrange a one or two day training workshop so that other SBMs could learn their roles and responsibilities.

Among the five parent SBMs who had not received school board training was Jinny at School Four, who stated that:

No, since I was elected as a school board member at this school I have not received any training, except getting a copy of the Education Act, Act 16 of 2001 and not the whole document of the Education Act 2001 but just the part that concerns the school board. The full document, I just downloaded it last week. They was no training, they was no workshop at the school where we could talk regarding the roles and responsibilities of SBMs.

Similarly, Grace, a parent SBM at School One, concurred with Jinny at School Four to affirm that:

“We didn’t receive any school board training. We just know our roles and responsibilities through a booklet titled ‘the work of the school board: A booklet for school boards in Namibia’. We read and share this booklet to know what we are supposed to do on the school board. This booklet is the one which is helping us, but we have not undergone any school board training”.

Despite their different responses to the question whether they had received school board training or not, the ten parent SBMs were all interviewed by the researcher to investigate the training of school board members in Zambezi region, Namibia.

The data presented in **Table 3** show that the researcher had conducted focus group discussions with nine teacher SBMs from six schools in the Zambezi region. Their ages ranged from twenty to sixty years. Among the nine teacher SBMs with whom the researcher conducted focus group discussions, two were serving as secretaries of their respective school boards. They were Ann from School Two and James from School Five. Four teacher SBMs were female and five male. Their years of experience as members of the school board varied from two to six years. Eight of the teacher SBMs with whom the researcher conducted

Table 3. Profiles of teacher SBMs.

Teacher SBMs	School One	School Two	School Three	School Four	School Five	School Six
Age	Maggy: 55	Rose: 47	Ben: 27	Linus: 57	James: 48	Nina: 56
		Ann: 42		Fidel: 49		Kenny: 29
Gender	Maggy: Female	Rose: Female	Ben: Male	Linus: Male	James: Male	Nina: Female
		Ann: Female		Fidel: Male		Kenny: Male
Highest qualification	Maggy: DIE	Rose: BEEd	Ben: DIE	Linus: BEEd	James: G.12	Nina: MEEd
		Ann: DIE		Fidel: BEEd		Kenny: BEEd
School location	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Number of learners enrolled	449	1420	581	970	659	710
School board training attended	Maggy: No	Rose: No	Ben: No	Linus: No	James: No	Nina: No
		Ann: No		Fidel: No		Kenny: No
Number of years in school board	Maggy: 1 yr.	Rose: 2 yrs.	Ben: 6 yrs.	Linus: 2 yrs.	James: 1 yr.	Nina: 2 yrs
		Ann: 3 yrs.		Fidel: 2 yrs.		Kenny: 2 yrs.

focus group discussions had Diplomas in Education and/or Bachelor of Education degrees and one had a Master of Education (MEEd) degree. Only James from School Five had a Grade 12 certificate.

The data presented in **Table 3** reveal that the nine teacher SBMs had not received school board training. This was evident from their responses:

So far for the past six year that I have been a member of the school board, I have not undergone any school board training. No training that was given to me. After I was elected to be a member of the school board, I was given some handouts, which indicate the roles of SBMs. These handouts are the one, which I read through to know the roles of the SBMs. It was just copies of the roles of the SBMs that I read. That is where I got the knowledge and experience of what a school board member is supposed to do (Ben, the longest serving teacher SBM from School Three).

I think that is a weakness. School board training was not given to us. We were given handouts outlining the roles and responsibilities of SBMs by the principal. We never received any proper training whereby we could have received some responsibilities in detail (Rose, an HOD at School Two and an ordinary member

Table 4. Profiles of LRCs serving on the school board.

LRCs serving on the school board	School Four		School Five	
	Matengu	Shozi	Mateu	Thandi
Age	15	15	17	17
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female
Grade	10	10	12	12
School location	Urban	Urban	Rural	Rural
Number of learners enrolled	970	970	659	659
School board training attended	No	No	No	No
Number of years in school board	2 years	2 years	2 years	2 years
Position in the LRC	Head boy	Head girl	President of LRCs	LRC for culture

of the school board).

The data presented in **Table 4** show that the researcher had conducted focus group discussions with four LRCs serving on the school boards of School Four and School Five in the Zambezi region. Their ages ranged from fifteen to seventeen years. Two LRCs serving on the school board were girls and two boys. Matengu and Shozi at School Four were head boy and head girl respectively. Mateu was president of the LRCs and Thandi was LRC for culture at School Five. All LRCs serving on the school board had two years' experience as SBMs. The data presented in **Table 4** reveal that not all four LRCs serving on the school board had received school board training. This can be seen from the response of Matengu, head boy at School Four who was quick to point out that:

No, we never received any school board training.

Thandi who stressed that, acknowledged Matengu's response:

No Sir, we haven't received any training to prepare us as SBMs and even as LRCs.

6. Discussion

The findings from interviews and focus group discussions revealed that training should be organized for all SBMs, including principals. The majority of participating principals and SBMs did not seem to have had school board training. They learned their roles and responsibilities through reading the copy of Part V of the Education Act, Act 16 of 2001 and a booklet titled "The work of the school board: A booklet for school boards in Namibia". These findings confirm what Bayat, Louw and Rena (2014: p. 354) stress in their research article that some members of the school governing bodies are not working properly because they do not have the necessary skills and they are not sure of their roles and responsibilities. They emphasize that this situation happens mostly in poorer communities, where people have few resources and many cannot read and write. Furthermore, this situation is made worse by the fact that some of the schools do not receive enough money, support and training from the government. The

study revealed that principals and SBMs who received training indicated that it was not adequate to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge of their roles and responsibilities. This might be the case, because the training lasted only for two to three hours. It seems that too much content regarding their roles and responsibilities was covered in these limited hours, making the training incomplete. The findings are in agreement with Rhim (2013: p. 14) who stresses that training provides SBMs with opportunities to learn about their key roles and responsibilities, as well as the more substantive content related to education policy and practice.

7. Recommendation on Training of SBMs

The study revealed that there was a lack of school board training for principals, teacher SBMs, parent SBMs and LRCs serving on the school board. Therefore, the researcher recommends that principals and SBMs need compulsory and appropriate training that will enable them to understand and perform their roles and responsibilities well. Where necessary, school board trainers should employ the vernacular language (or seek the services of an interpreter) so that parent SBMs who are not bilingual can understand and grasp all the essential concepts of the training programme. The researcher, furthermore, recommends that school board training for principals, parent and teacher SBMs should take place after every two years while LRCs serving on the school board should be trained once a year immediately after their election. The researcher also recommends that the current school board training programme for principals and SBMs should be evaluated with the aim of identifying opportunities for improvement. The training should improve the literacy levels of parent SBMs and LRCs serving on the school board to enable them to understand their roles and all the other associated policies. This should help them to perform to expectations.

8. Conclusion

The aim of the study was to investigate the training of school board members in Zambezi region. The findings revealed that there is a lack of adherence to policies, such as offering training to SBMs in order for them to perform their roles and responsibilities effectively, staffing the school board with elderly parents with poor educational backgrounds who struggle to understand policies and perform according to expectations.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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