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### CHRONICLING POLITICAL INFLUENCES IMPACTING ON SCHOOL GOVERNANCE IN SOUTH AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF THE ZULULAND DISTRICT

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#### Abstract

The primary objective of this paper is to examine the nature and impact of political influences on school governance in the Zululand District of KwaZulu-Natal province, South Africa. This study employs a comprehensive literature review and an empirical investigation grounded in an interpretivist research paradigm. A qualitative research approach was adopted, and data was collected through semi-structured interviews with nine participants from three purposively selected public primary schools. The literature review indicates that School Governing Bodies (SGBs) are politicized due to their active involvement in party politics. Furthermore, it highlights the inadequate capacity-building efforts for SGB members, limited to a one-time orientation session attended only by SGB Chairpersons shortly after their election. The empirical findings confirm political interference in school governance matters, particularly in decision-making processes within rural public primary schools. SGBs align themselves with political parties to mask their incompetence and inability to govern effectively. Additionally, parent governors often misconstrue the role of SGBs as a political platform. Using Capture Theory, the researchers elucidate how governance capture manifests in rural educational contexts. Political interference has led to discriminatory practices against learners, corruption (e.g., SGB members taking food meant for students), clientelism, and the sale of professional posts to individuals with political connections. Addressing the pervasive issue of political interference in school governance is imperative to prevent paternalistic and harmful practices in rural schools. The paper recommends that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) amend its policies and SGB election criteria to empower SGBs in managing political influences. Furthermore, the DBE should delineate the extent to which political influences are permissible within school governance structures. To reduce corruption, the paper suggests the provision of financial stipends to SGB members, given the high unemployment and poverty rates among parent governors.

#### Keywords

School governance, political influence, rural education, School Governing Bodies, Capture Theory



## **1. Introduction**

In the Zululand District of South Africa, school governance has been marred by violent confrontations between parents and school management, as well as inter-political group conflicts. These issues have recurred in rural public primary schools since the post-colonial era, leaving significant socio-economic consequences in their wake. The proposed study aims to establish whether the historical context of liberation politics is a major source of school governance conflict in Zululand District's rural public primary schools during the democratic transition period. School Governing Bodies (SGBs), often extensions of youth wings from local, provincial, or national political parties, have become vehicles for societal politics within the school governance structure. As a result, the politics practiced by SGB members are driven by emotions rather than democratic rationality, often leading to governance conflicts and inefficiencies. During the democratic transition, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) played a minimal role in mentoring SGB parent members about their roles, values, and leadership development. Consequently, parents have placed their trust in politicians rather than educational professionals, thus becoming vehicles of national, provincial, and local political contestation. This has often resulted in violent outcomes. This study aims to encourage the DBE to rethink the role of SGBs in a democratic era so that they extend beyond welfare demonstrations and contribute to incubating future leaders who can effectively manage school governance challenges. The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 decentralized school governance to communities,

thereby complicating the governance landscape for rural schools. Political and societal priorities, problems, and traditions present a variety of challenges for school governance, particularly in rural public primary schools. Political influence within SGBs emerges as a contested arena in which municipal councils and political parties attempt to expand their control. This leads parents in rural areas to prioritize nepotism and personal interests over school effectiveness (Dinas, 2013; Leiviska & Pyy, 2020). Thus, the paper explores how contemporary rural attitudes may differ from those of older generations who served in school governance. Rural schools are particularly significant in districts like Zululand, which have undergone significant political, social, and economic transformations. However, school governance remains the task and responsibility of SGBs, where parental influence often dominates politics, while other components are deliberately weakened to manage political contestation and prevent alternative power sources from emerging (Cohen, 2019). This dynamic compromises essential actions such as providing resources for teaching and learning. The study will investigate how power struggles during decision-making between parent and teacher governors affect school governance in selected rural public primary schools. Politics should not dominate school governance as it creates and reflects inequalities among stakeholders. The politics of school governance is driven by complex interrelationships between politicians, local authorities, private individuals, teachers' unions, school administrators,

and SGBs. Parent participation in Zululand District has become increasingly conflictual due to rapid political changes (Hickey & Hossain, 2018). This paper investigates whether the failure to separate national, provincial, and local politics from school governance has contributed to high levels of conflict in rural public primary schools (Hoadley *et al.*, 2018). The political process through which SGB positions such as Chairperson, Treasurer, and Secretary are filled often involves national and local political leaders, as well as traditional leaders under the guise of local democracy. This process has led to political infiltration of school governance aligned with different national political parties, such as the African National Congress (ANC), Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), and National Freedom Party (NFP). In many rural schools, some SGB members hold governance positions without having children at the school and often work as general workers or food handlers. This situation, facilitated by principals misleading SGB members, has resulted in politically driven governance crises that contradict DBE principles. School governance stakeholders often experience manipulation favouring certain individuals. There is limited interaction and collaboration between principals and parents due to allegiance to different constituencies, further exacerbating the governance challenges. Beckmann and Prinsloo (2015), as well as Mamokhere *et al.*, (2021), confirm that tension between SGBs and the DBE illustrates questionable political relationships, conflicting goals, and competing claims that concern all stakeholders and observers of the system. Political tensions have historically led to armed conflicts across the

African continent, with such tensions often permeating schools due to parents' political influences. As schools are run by principals, teachers, and other stakeholders, teachers' unions aligned with different political constituencies often complicate the appointment of staff. Masuku and Jili (2019) point out that contested and elected school governance positions generate susceptibility to self-interest, self-preservation, and competition. Teacher-members of SGBs often see themselves as "watchdogs" for teachers' issues (Xaba, 2004), which complicates decision-making further. In this context, the Zululand District is no exception, as questions continue to arise regarding the impact of political influences on rural public primary schools. Allowing such influences could turn schools into political battlegrounds, significantly affecting the security and stability of the education system. Thus, political influence should not be allowed to dominate rural primary schools to the extent that it jeopardizes learning and teaching. There is a notable gap in knowledge regarding the political influences on school governance in Zululand. Despite extensive research on the roles and challenges encountered by school governance stakeholders, the aspect of political influence remains underexplored. This paper seeks to bridge this gap by investigating the role of political influences on SGBs in the Zululand District. The study draws on Capture Theory to understand the dynamics of political interference in rural school governance. Capture Theory postulates that organizations or groups can manipulate regulatory bodies or governance structures for their benefit (Stigler, 1971). Applying this theory will help

elucidate how political parties have captured school governance structures to serve their interests, often at the expense of effective educational outcomes. Overall, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of political influence on school governance in the Zululand District's rural public primary schools. By doing so, it intends to offer practical recommendations for the DBE and other stakeholders to mitigate political interference and promote more effective governance practices that prioritize educational outcomes over political interests. This study is guided by the following research objectives:

- To examine the extent and nature of political influence on school governance structures and decision-making processes within rural public primary schools in the Zululand District.
- To investigate the specific ways in which political affiliations and activities impact the effectiveness of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) in managing educational resources and ensuring equitable access to quality education.
- To identify strategies and policy recommendations for the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and school stakeholders aimed at mitigating the negative effects of political interference on school governance and improving the functionality of SGBs in rural public primary schools.

### *1.1 Theoretical Framework*

This study is underpinned by participatory democratic theory, a concept that has gained significant traction in social, political, and economic spheres worldwide (Vroom, 1960). Participatory democracy emphasizes the role of

collective decision-making in governance and organizational management. The origins of the theory can be traced back to the writings of philosophers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who advocated for citizens' active involvement in societal and political life (Moote *et al.*, 1997). Participatory democracy, as a theoretical framework, posits that members of society should actively engage in decision-making processes within governmental, educational, and other societal forums (Adams & Wagid, 2005). The theory assumes that all members of a group or organization should be equally involved in decision-making processes (Leithwood *et al.*, 1999). This collective participation is believed to enhance productivity, commitment, and a sense of belonging among members (Rafiq & Chisti, 2011). In the context of school governance, the participative model aligns well with the democratic values espoused by the new South Africa (Bush, 2007). The South African Constitution explicitly commits to participatory democracy, emphasizing concepts like accountability, transparency, and public involvement (Smit & Oosthuizen, 2011). Consequently, schools are expected to function as arenas where participatory democracy is practiced (Karlsson, 2002). The establishment of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and School Management Teams (SMTs) exemplifies a strong commitment to this democratic ideal, advocating for inclusive decision-making processes. Participatory democratic theory is particularly relevant to the dynamics between parents and teachers in the governance of South African schools. The theory suggests that parents and teachers should work

together in a partnership, sharing ideas, setting mutual goals, and discussing relevant issues (Sayed & Soudien, 2003). However, given that parents and teachers often approach school governance with different beliefs and understandings, there is potential for friction and conflict, with teachers perceiving parents as overstepping their bounds (Bush, 2007). Moreover, participatory democratic theory recognizes the importance of inclusivity in governance processes. It emphasizes the role of community engagement in fostering a shared sense of purpose and accountability (Rafiq & Chisti, 2011). In the South African context, the involvement of parents in SGBs is crucial for creating a democratic and inclusive school environment. However, challenges arise when parents lack the necessary capacity or understanding of their roles, leading to political interference or power struggles (Karlsson, 2002). The application of participatory democratic theory in this study aims to shed light on how political influences impact school governance structures and decision-making processes. By understanding the principles and tenets of participatory democracy, such as inclusivity, collective decision-making, and transparency, this study seeks to explore how these ideals are either upheld or undermined in the Zululand District's rural public primary schools. The theory provides a lens through which the relationship between parents and teachers, as well as the broader political dynamics affecting school governance, can be critically examined. Ultimately, the theory justifies the need for empowering SGBs and SMTs to foster a more democratic and participatory governance structure. By ensuring

that all stakeholders are adequately trained and equipped to fulfil their roles, the ideals of participatory democracy can be realized, reducing political interference and enhancing the overall governance of schools.

### *1.2 School Governance in South Africa*

The discourse on school governance in South Africa, particularly in the context of rural public primary schools in the Zululand District, reveals a complex interplay of historical, political, and socio-economic factors. This paper seeks to critically examine the governance framework established by the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 and its amendments, probing why these legislative measures have not effectively delivered on their promises of equity, redistribution, and redress. The legislation was intended to democratize and diversify school governance structures, yet, as Davids (2020) argues, the role of School Governing Bodies (SGBs) in this process has been largely overlooked. This research explores the conceptual flaws, operational failures, and implementation naivety that have hindered the realization of these objectives, advocating for a social justice model that might better serve the governance of schools. Historically, the governance of rural schools in black communities was managed by school committees that were not democratically elected but appointed by local headmen, leading to governance structures that were both illegitimate and undemocratic (Gwija, 2016). The democratic transition post-1994 sought to overhaul this by mandating democratically elected school governments through SASA. These bodies comprised various stakeholders including the

principal, teachers, non-teaching staff, parents, and in secondary schools, learners. The White Paper on The Organisation, Governance and Funding of Schools published in 1996 further emphasized the government's commitment to fostering democratic governance in schools by actively involving all stakeholders in a structure designed to encourage rational discussion and collective decision-making. This shift towards democratic governance was envisioned as a mechanism to embed democratic values within the school system, aligning school governance with broader national objectives of democracy, equity, and equality (Bush, 2007). School governance was expected to evolve into a prime vehicle for addressing local issues and contributing to the long-term improvement of schools (Mestry, 2018). However, the reality on the ground has often contrasted sharply with these aspirations. The legacy of apartheid has left a lasting imprint on the involvement of black parents in the educational governance of their children, as discriminatory policies historically excluded them from meaningful participation (Ndlazi, 1999). The apartheid era characterized school governance as involving parents superficially while retaining ultimate control with the government, limiting parents' rights and their ability to challenge educational authorities (Visser, 1981). This historical context has complicated the transition to a more inclusive and democratic governance framework in the post-apartheid era. Despite the legislative framework intended to empower parents and other stakeholders, many challenges persist. These include misunderstandings of the roles and powers of SGBs, ongoing political interference, and

the struggle to reconcile local governance practices with national educational policies and objectives. The decentralization of education governance was intended to empower local communities and enhance their involvement in school management. However, the actual implementation has been fraught with difficulties, as local school governance structures often remain "contested and misunderstood" (Ehrensall & First, 2008). State legislatures determine the powers of these local bodies, which are meant to implement and monitor state educational policies at the local level, yet their legitimacy is continually questioned (Land, 2002). Moreover, the roles of SGB members are complicated by the political dynamics of their constituencies. Members often gain their positions through support bases that may prioritize constituency interests over the broader educational needs of the school (Xaba, 2014). This political entanglement challenges the ideal of SGBs as non-partisan bodies focused solely on the best interests of the schools they govern. Thus, this paper argues that the governance of rural public primary schools in the Zululand District is a microcosm of larger national issues relating to democracy, equity, and the effective implementation of educational policies. By exploring the interactions between politics and school governance, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges and to propose pathways towards more effective and equitable governance practices that truly reflect the democratic aspirations of South Africa.

### *1.3 Power relations within the school governance*

Makara (2018) emphasizes that meaningful decentralization involves an organized dispersal of power in society across political, social, and economic domains. This implies that various actors in society must be empowered and have the autonomy to participate meaningfully in governance. Within the educational context, power is typically devolved to school-level governing bodies, while operational management remains the principal's responsibility (Bush & Gamage, 2001). However, as Foucault (1982) asserts, "power always entails a set of actions performed upon another person's actions and reactions." Thus, the power struggles between School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and principals are rooted in each party's desire to maintain or exert authority within the school. Bagarette (2011) identifies that many principals undermine the status, roles, and functions of SGBs in their schools, leading to power struggles and conflict. McLellan (1996) argues that principals can no longer regard themselves as the sole governors of their schools and must share power with SGBs. This shift is challenging for many principals, particularly since SGBs now have the responsibility of managing school finances (Mestry, 2018). Bagarette (2011) further notes that some principals resist sharing power because they are accustomed to managing all school affairs, including finances, unilaterally. The reluctance to relinquish control creates friction between SGBs and principals, especially when financial management is involved. Beyond financial matters, power struggles between SGBs and principals also

arise from broader issues of authority. Misunderstandings frequently emerge when either the principal or the SGB chairperson attempts to dominate the governance process. Skinner, Amy, Blum, Nicole, Bourn, and Douglas (2013) note that problems with stakeholder participation in school governance are not unique to South Africa. Similar challenges have been observed in countries such as Wales, Australia, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Portugal, Spain, and the United States, where schools have shifted toward self-governance under the concept of democracy. Lavonen (2017) identifies divisive and competing interests and decision-making processes as common challenges in school governance. In light of these challenges, McLellan (1996) argues that fostering a collaborative environment between principals and SGBs is crucial for effective governance. However, this requires a change in mindset from both parties. Principals must recognize the legitimacy of SGBs' roles and responsibilities, while SGBs should work to support the principal in managing the school effectively. As Mestry (2018) suggests, building mutual trust and understanding is essential to overcoming power struggles and achieving a shared vision for the school's success. Ultimately, the complexities of school governance in South Africa reflect the broader issues of decentralization and the distribution of power. By addressing the root causes of conflict and promoting collaboration, schools can create governance structures that are more inclusive and democratic, fulfilling the principles of meaningful decentralization outlined by Makara (2018).

## 2. Research Methodology

In crafting the research methodology for this study, the researchers explored various paradigms, such as positivism, interpretivism, realism, pluralism, pragmatism, and constructivism (Maree, 2007; Ngulube, 2015). Ultimately, the interpretivism paradigm was chosen due to its interpretive and meaning-oriented assumptions, which align with the study's aims. According to Creswell (2012), the interpretivism paradigm is characterized by unique ontological and epistemological assumptions that distinguish it from other paradigms. While positivism assumes a singular reality, interpretivism posits that multiple realities exist (Maree, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Creswell, 2012). This paradigm enables the exploration of participants' unique perspectives and experiences, making it suitable for understanding the political influences on school governance in the Zululand District. Krauss (2005) affirms that individuals interpret reality differently based on their experiences and perspectives, reinforcing the interpretivist view. Given the interpretivism paradigm's assumptions, a qualitative research methodology was employed. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives, contrasting with quantitative research, which relies on numeric data (Merriam, 2009). To deeply understand the impact of political influences on school governance, a case study approach was chosen. Rule and John (2011) highlight that case study research provides rich, holistic, and situated understandings of a phenomenon. Stake (1995) defines a case study as

an inquiry technique that explores a program, event, or activity in depth, using various data collection procedures over time. In this study, data were collected through observation, document analysis, and semi-structured interviews, ensuring triangulation and enhancing the credibility of the findings. The target population included rural public primary school principals, departmental heads, post-level one teachers, parents, and SGB chairpersons who have served or are serving in school governance. Purposive sampling was used to select participants, focusing on the most relevant variables (Merriam, 1998). Three rural public primary schools in the Zululand District were purposively sampled to gain a comprehensive understanding of political influences on school governance. The final sample included three principals, nine teacher governors, and nine parent governors from these schools.

### 2.1 Presentation of Findings

Semi-structured interview data were thematically analysed, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) procedures. Themes generated have been presented below:

### 2.2 The Impact of Politics on School Governance

This study highlights the substantial influence of political factors on the management of schools at the community level. Zenda (2021) observes that inadequate parental involvement in school administration frequently arises from political coercion exerted by other parent governors, a notion shared by SGB 2, who stated their readiness to join due to the lack of other parents showing interest. Participant E3 provided additional details



on the matter, emphasising how political affiliations during SGB elections might have a negative impact on the functioning and performance of schools. This is consistent with the idea of "political deployment" in school governance elections, when politicians intentionally position members for political advantages (Buthelezi & Ajani, 2023; Stier *et al.*, 2018). Nevertheless, in the midst of these obstacles, the study also uncovered certain favourable features of political impact on school governance. According to Montiel, Uyheng, and Dela Paz (2021), skillfully managing political dynamics is essential for attaining success in school government. SMT 2 recounted her personal encounter, highlighting the significance of political affiliations in surmounting administrative obstacles and acquiring essential resources. Similarly, SMT 1 demonstrated the favourable effects of political campaigning on school financing and policies, resulting in reforms such as the implementation of free education. In contrast, SMT 3 highlighted the possible disadvantages of an overwhelming political influence, emphasising its capacity to negatively affect the performance of schools. However, SMT 3 also recognised the advantages of political involvement through forums like as war rooms, where community concerns are collectively handled by different government and political participants. This highlights the inherent duality of political influence, as examined by Jonah *et al.* (2021), wherein competent administration can result in favourable consequences, while mishandling can worsen difficulties.

Overall, the results indicate that political factors have a substantial impact on the dynamics of school governance, affecting how decisions are made and resources are distributed. Although political meddling has the potential to impede good governance, deliberate political participation can also serve as a catalyst for positive transformations in school policies and resource management. These observations underscore the intricate relationship between politics and the management of education, underscoring the necessity for subtle strategies in dealing with political pressures in educational settings.

### *2.3 Relationship between Parent and Teacher Governors*

The study's findings emphasise notable conflicts within school governance institutions, specifically between parent and teacher governors, primarily influenced by political loyalties and power dynamics. According to Szafruga (2021), politics in educational contexts refers to the decision-making processes and power dynamics that have a direct impact on the distribution of resources and the implementation of policies. The research uncovered widespread power conflicts inside SGBs, where parents frequently establish coalitions based on their political beliefs to exert control. Participant SGB 2 explained that certain parent governors, who lack educational knowledge, use their authority and even intimidate teachers by leveraging their positions within the SGB, thereby jeopardising their job security. Additionally, participant E3 highlighted the impact of trade unions in intensifying political conflicts within schools. They observed that being associated

with particular unions can shape how individuals are viewed and welcomed in conversations about school governance. This sentiment highlights the process of making educational matters political, where people's connections can overwhelm the strengths of the alternatives being presented. The SMT 2 raised concerns about parent governors overstepping their positions and exerting excessive influence in decision-making processes. They emphasised the absence of professional respect and collaboration between parents and educators. This supports the finding of Mohapi and Chombo (2021) that when School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and School Management Teams (SMTs) fail to successfully work on governance issues, it hinders the overall functioning of the school and leads to strained relationships between the two (Dlomo *et al.*, 2022). These findings highlight the intricate dynamics involved in school governance, where political connections and power conflicts can have a substantial influence on decision-making and relationships among stakeholders. The study highlights the necessity for enhanced cooperation and mutual esteem between parent governors and professional educators in order to cultivate more efficient governance procedures. To tackle these difficulties, it is necessary to implement policies that reduce political influence, foster transparency in decision-making, and improve the professionalism and educational qualifications of all individuals involved in governance (Mkhasibe *et al.*, 2021). By implementing this approach, educational institutions can work towards achieving more cohesive and efficient systems of

governance that prioritise academic achievements and the welfare of all individuals engaged.

#### 2.4 Further Findings of the Study

The study revealed various significant obstacles within School Governing Bodies (SGBs), highlighting the harmful consequences of unclear roles and ineffective governance (Nyawo *et al.*, 2024). Mohapi and Chombo (2021) contend that the presence of ambiguous positions and overlapping responsibilities among members of the School Governing Body (SGB) is a major factor in the occurrence of conflicts within school governance structures. This was apparent in the recent study, when parent governors frequently exercised their authority without a distinct comprehension of educational matters or their designated responsibilities. Participant SGB 2 observed that the divides and power struggles among parents inside the SGB worsened tensions and impeded the ability to make effective decisions. Governance inefficiencies hinder the joint efforts between educators and parent governors, which are crucial for creating a favourable learning environment. Furthermore, the study revealed widespread problems of corruption and mismanagement in SGBs, namely related to the distribution of resources and the management of tenders. According to Bagarette (2011), principals frequently oppose giving up control over financial affairs, which can worsen power disputes and result in difficulties in governance. Participant SMT 2 offered valuable observations regarding situations where individual interests and political allegiances took precedence over the school's requirements, leading to fraudulent practices in the allocation of

resources. Participant E3 identified poverty as the underlying cause of these problems. They saw that members of the SGB were more focused on personal benefits gained from affiliations and political alliances, rather than prioritising the educational objectives of the school. The results of this study are consistent with Szafruga's (2021) description of politics in educational environments, highlighting how the allocation of resources and social standing can give rise to favouritism and corruption. The findings highlight the pressing necessity for thorough training and clear definition of roles for SGB members in order to improve governance effectiveness. Establishing clear boundaries of duties and implementing strong monitoring systems are crucial in order to minimise conflicts and avoid failures in governance. Enhancing accountability measures within School Governing Bodies (SGBs) is essential for fostering transparency and integrity in decision-making processes. This is important for protecting educational resources and maximising their influence on student learning outcomes. Moreover, it is crucial to promote a culture of professionalism and ethical behaviour among SGB members in order to establish confidence and create collaboration between educators and parent governors. By aggressively confronting these difficulties, schools can develop more unified governance systems that prioritise academic superiority and fair allocation of resources, ultimately benefiting the entire school community.

### **3. Discussion**

The study highlights the complex nature of political influence on school governance in rural public

primary schools. Political interference, particularly during SGB elections, often results in dysfunctional school governance structures and strained relationships between parents and teachers (Stier *et al.*, 2018). Despite these challenges, political influence also positively impacts schools by providing resources, advocating for free education, and addressing governance issues through war rooms and other political forums (Montiel *et al.*, 2021). The findings support Jonah *et al.*'s (2021) assertion that politics is an inevitable phenomenon that can yield positive or negative outcomes depending on how it is managed. To leverage the positive aspects of political influence, school governance structures must strike a balance between political advocacy and educational priorities. This requires a transparent election process that minimizes political deployment and a collaborative relationship between parent and teacher governors (Mohapi & Chombo, 2021). Moreover, the strained relationships between parent and teacher governors are often rooted in power struggles and political affiliations (Szafruga, 2021). These conflicts are exacerbated by trade union involvement, with teachers perceiving colleagues from different unions as representatives of opposing political parties. Addressing these challenges necessitates fostering a culture of mutual respect and collaboration among all school governance stakeholders. In conclusion, this study underscores the need for clear guidelines and training to help SGB members navigate the intersection of politics and school governance. By understanding the nuanced impacts of political influence, schools can harness the positive aspects

of politics while mitigating its negative consequences on governance and relationships.

#### **4. Recommendations**

Based on the study's findings, it is imperative that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) revamps its approach to training and empowering School Governing Bodies (SGBs). First, comprehensive training programs should be designed and implemented for all SGB members, with a particular focus on clarifying roles and responsibilities. This training should include conflict resolution techniques, financial management, and strategies for fostering healthy relationships between parent and teacher governors. As Mohapi and Chombo (2021) suggest, clear understanding of roles is crucial to reducing conflicts and enhancing governance effectiveness. By ensuring that SGB members understand their duties and the boundaries of their authority, the DBE can mitigate the power struggles and role ambiguities that currently plague many SGBs. Second, the DBE should consider reviewing and amending the SGB election criteria to ensure that only genuinely interested and qualified individuals are elected. The current study found that some parents were unwilling to participate due to political intimidation or lack of interest. Therefore, implementing a more rigorous vetting process, including interviews and background checks, can help to identify individuals committed to serving the school's best interests. Additionally, providing financial stipends or incentives for parent governors could increase participation rates and reduce the allure of corruption, as noted by participant E3. Third, to combat corruption and mismanagement,

the DBE should strengthen oversight mechanisms for SGBs. Regular audits of financial records, tender processes, and resource allocation should be conducted to ensure transparency and accountability. Moreover, establishing an independent complaints committee, where teachers, parents, and other stakeholders can report corruption and governance issues, will promote whistleblowing and increase accountability. Bagarette (2011) emphasizes that transparent governance is essential for effective school management, and implementing such measures will encourage ethical behavior among SGB members. Lastly, political influences on school governance must be managed carefully. The DBE should establish clear policies on political involvement in school governance, emphasizing that SGB members must prioritize educational outcomes over political allegiances. Montiel *et al.*, (2021) assert that politics can be navigated effectively to improve outcomes, but it requires careful management. Therefore, guidelines on acceptable political involvement should be included in SGB training programs. The DBE should also work with local political leaders to discourage political interference in SGB matters and promote a culture of prioritizing education over partisanship. By implementing these recommendations, the DBE can foster more effective and ethical governance structures in South African schools.

**5. Conclusion** Although small in scope, this research provides important insights and greater understanding of the views currently held by parent and teacher governors with regards to political influences on school governance in rural public

primary schools in the Zululand District. SGBs are at the center of the political interferences in all schools under the current paper. The results revealed bribery, irregularities in procurement and employment, mismanagement of funds, and theft of resources are the primary forms of SGB corruption. In almost all schools, political interferences occur as a result from one or some of these indicated factors. Data gathered from the interviews, support the fact that participants believe that political influences exist, and several participants referred to political influences as a blocker to effective school governance. However, the paper revealed dichotomic viewpoints. Even though some participants considered political influences present, some of the SMTs did not seem to totally agree with the rest and found it difficult to acknowledge and accept that political influences exist.

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