

**THE ROLE OF THE LEARNER IN THE SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY:  
PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF PRINCIPALS, EDUCATORS,  
PARENTS AND LEARNERS.**

BY

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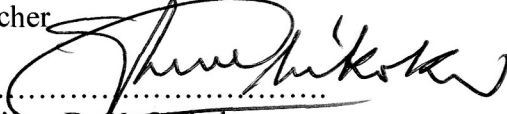
### Declaration

I Mangi , Abide Magadla declare that this dissertation is my own work, and has never been previously submitted by me for any degree to any university and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated by means of a complete reference.

M.A. Magadla

  
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Researcher

  
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Supervisor, Dr. V. Chikoko

## Dedication

This research project is dedicated to my late wife Ntombifuthi Magadla .I know she would appreciate my achievement.

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- With God all things are possible.

## Abstract

After democracy was achieved in South Africa, the South African Schools Act no 84 of 1996 required all public secondary schools to have two learners elected to the school governing body. The question of learner involvement and participation is still a thorny issue in some schools. The study investigated the experiences and perceptions of educators, parents and learners, regarding learner participation in school governance. The study was conducted in four schools in Mpumalanga ward of Hammarsdale circuit. A total of sixteen participants, four from each school comprising of four of each of principals, educators, parents and learners were interviewed. The study adopted the qualitative research design. Qualitative research design was most suitable to this study because it looked at views of different stakeholders entailed talking to people with the purpose of getting in depth information. Semi structured interviews were conducted with all participants. The main finding was that learner participation in school governance is still a problematic issue. The findings revealed that there are huge stumbling blocks that make learners fail to participate effectively in school governance. Democracy has not been achieved as expected, as it is evidenced by silent voices of learners.

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background of the study

The democracy achieved by South Africa in 1994 brought about the need for transformation in the education system. This had to be done in order to address the imbalances of the past. One way of transforming the education system was by involving all stakeholders in school governance. According to the South African Schools Act No 84 of 1996 all schools must have democratically elected school governing bodies. It is composed of the principal as an ex-officio member, parents, educators, non teaching staff and two learners in the case of a secondary school. In that way the democratization of education stretched even to learners. While the Department of Education intends to give everybody a stake in the governance of schools, there is no clear role function of learners in the school governing body. The emphasis is only on what learners can not do as opposed to what they can do in the school governing body. Section 32 (1) of SASA no 84 of 1996 states that a member of the school governing body who is a minor;

- ❖ Can not contract on behalf of the public school.
- ❖ Minors in school governance incur no personal liability in the school governing body.
- ❖ Learners cannot decide on school budget and expenditure.
- ❖ Learners can not participate on activities such as selection and appointment of educators and non-educators, strategic planning and staff development programs.

One wonders how effectively minors can participate in the presence of adults in the school governing body deliberations. This unclear role of learners can result in conflicts and confusion between learners and adult members of the school governing body as it can be seen in chapter four of this study.

Research on learner participation in school governance suggests that this issue is a contested area. To illustrate, Sithole (1998, p. 97) discussed four contending viewpoints



on how different educational and political interest groups in South Africa perceived and articulated the participation of learners in school governance.

The first viewpoint was totally against the participation of learners in the school governing body. This view argued that learners should receive instructions from educators and parents that governance should be left in the hands of the adults. The second viewpoint acknowledged the role played by learners in the struggle for democracy, but claimed that the struggle was over and learners should concentrate on their studies. The third viewpoint supported the participation of learners in the governing body but to a certain degree. The fourth viewpoint argued that learners were one of the most indispensable components of democratic school governance. This viewpoint was informed by the point that democracy came as a result of student's participation in the struggle, so they should participate unconditionally in school governance after the struggle.

According to Bisschoff (1999) learner participation in the school governing body is limited because there are duties that they cannot perform owing to their status as minors. However the informal discussions that I have had with colleagues and my personal experience as a school principal suggest that in some schools, learner's participation is still a challenge. Some parents, educators as well as principals are very skeptical about the involvement of learners in school governance.

These competing views about learner participation in the school governing body necessitated the need for research. Researches to date, for example, Pakoa (1999) tend to emphasize what learners cannot do in the school governing body. Although there are studies conducted regarding learner participation in school governance, one hopes that the system has developed therefore it would be interesting to see if there are developments regarding learner involvement.

## **1.2 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences and perceptions of principals, parents, educators and learners with regard to learner participation in the school governing body of secondary school.

## **1.3 Statement of the problem**

The South African Schools Act no 84 of 1996 recognises learners as important stakeholders in school governance and therefore should be included in the decision making process .The role of learners in the school governing body is unclear and at worst controversial and contested. There is a general perception that learner participation in school governance serve little to no purpose given the limited powers if any, that they have in the SGB. The current study was undertaken to investigate what principals, educators, parents as well as learners had to say regarding the involvement of learners in school governance.

## **1.4 Research questions**

- (1) Do secondary school learners understand their role in the school governing body?
- (2) What are the stakeholders (principals, educators, parents, teachers, and learners) experiences and perceptions regarding the involvement of learners in the school governance?
- (3) How can learner participation in school governance be enhanced?

## **1.5 Significance of the study**

This investigation hopes to shed light on the participation of learners in school governance. It is hoped that the information gathered will help in mapping solutions towards effective participation of learners in school governance.

## **1.6 Assumptions**

The issue of learner participation in school governance is a topical issue and is in the heart of school governance. Decentralised school governance where all stakeholders including learners as part of decision making process came as a result of the new dispensation in South Africa. I assume that stakeholders will be willing to share their experiences and perceptions with me. I also assume that learner participation in school governance is still an issue that warrants research in order to contribute constructively in the transformation of the SGBs.

## **1.7 Organisation of the study**

Chapter one consist of the introduction of the study which forms a theoretical frame work of the study.

Chapter two reviews literature. The policy framework guiding the public secondary school bodies is discussed.

Chapter three describes the methodology of the study. Research design and instruments are discussed.

Chapter four presents and discusses data collected from four secondary schools in Mpumalanga ward of Hammarsdale circuit.

Chapter five gives summary of the study, draws conclusions from the findings suggest recommendations in response to conclusions. Lastly it addresses limitations of the study.

## CHAPTER 2 : LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature related to learner participation in school governing bodies. First the chapter examines the concepts: governance, school governance and participation. Second it discusses decentralisation of school governance. The chapter proceeds to discuss the legal framework guiding the formation of school governing bodies. This is followed by contesting views regarding learner participation in the school governing body. Lastly previous studies conducted on learner participation are reviewed.

### 2.2 Definition of concepts

**Governance:** According to the *Readers digest reverse dictionary* (1989) governance refers to the rules, processes and behaviour that affect the way in which powers are exercised, particularly with regards to openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence. It can be understood as the integrated management of the complex political, socio economic and institutional relationships between the stakeholders of any particular sector. Policy (and normative and regulatory frameworks) and power (distribution and utilization of power and authority networks) in order to ensure effective and efficient service delivery.

**School governance:** School governance refers to the formation and implementation of school policies by the school governing body. The policies and rules determine the manner in which the school is to be maintained and controlled in order to achieve the set goals. The aim is to bring democracy to the level of the school. The school governing body is responsible for school governance.

**Participation:** According to Naidoo (2004), participation refers to the involvement of stakeholders in decision-making. Participation is also about the situation of all

stakeholders working together and making decisions in pursuit of a common interest. South African Schools Act no 84 of 1996 provides for the election of school governing bodies by learners, parents and staff. In theory it grants schools and their constituent communities a significant say in decision making by devolving power to stakeholders who participate in democratic governance of schools. However the concerns about the levels of participation remains an issue especially on learner participation and these will be discussed in details in this chapter.

### **2.3 Decentralisation of school governance**

According to Lauglo in Coombe and Godden (1996) decentralization can be defined as means of distributing authority to the different agencies' groups and stakeholders. This is based on the notion that local communities understand their needs and are also in the best position to solve their problems (Department of education 1997). This shows commitment among education authorities that decision making about schools should lie as close as possible to each schools in order that full knowledge of circumstances be taken into account. Bhengu (2005, p. 7) argued that if decisions are made closer to the clients better decisions will be made and greater achievements will result. This means that learners as part of the decision making structure their interest will be best served. The inclusion of learners in school governance structures is in line with the democratization of education where in they are able to participate in the activities of the school. Bush and Heystek (2003) claim that such an action reflects a strong commitment to participatory democracy and decentralisation of control. Whilst there is a need for stakeholder participation it is important that everyone involved must respect the opinions of others and be in a position to make decisions together if the objectives of the school are to be achieved. However what remains an issue is whether the inputs of learners in decision making process are respected or not.

## **2.4 Legal framework of the study**

The establishment of school governing bodies in all South African schools emanated from the South African Schools Act no 84 of 1996. By voting the school community chooses who it wants as members of the school governing body. The aim is to bring democracy to the lowest level of the society. The South African Schools Act no 84 of 1996 lays down norms and standards for school governance.

Section 23 (2) of the South African Schools Act no 84 of 96 stipulates that the democratically elected members of the school governing body shall comprise of members of the following categories:

- ❖ The principal as ex officio member
- ❖ Parents of learners at the school
- ❖ Educators at the school.
- ❖ Members of staff at the school who are not educators.
- ❖ Learners in the eighth grade or higher at the school.

## **2.5 Duties of the school governing body**

The school governing body is responsible for the following duties:

- ❖ Formulate the vision and mission of the school.
- ❖ Organize all activities, which support teaching and learning.
- ❖ Promote best interests of the school.
- ❖ Decides on school times.
- ❖ Adopts the constitution and the code of conduct.
- ❖ Ensures the development of the school by providing quality (high standard) education for all learners at the school.
- ❖ Supports the principal, educators and the staff in carrying out their professional functions.
- ❖ Decides on textbooks, educational materials and equipment to be bought.

- ❖ Section 21 (1) states that they control and maintain school's property, buildings and grounds.
- ❖ Decides on the extra-mural curriculum that is after school hours.
- ❖ Decides on choice of subjects according to the provincial curriculum.
- ❖ Add to the funds supplied by the state to improve the quality of education in the school.
- ❖ Section 37 (1) states the school governing body also opens and maintains school bank account, starts and administer school funds.
- ❖ Section 38 (1) states that the SGB prepares an annual budget, manages personnel and finances.
- ❖ Decides on the intra-mural curriculum that is all activities to assist with teaching and learning during school hours.
- ❖ Recommends and advises the HOD on the appointment of educators and non-teaching staff.

Looking at these functions the study will investigate how easy is it for learners to participate in the school governing body.

## **2.6 How learners are elected to the school governing body**

All learners from grade eight onwards are allowed to vote learners who will serve in the Representative Council for learners (RCL). The RCL is the body that represents learners on the matters that concern them. It is the link between the learners of the school and the school management as well as the school governing body. The RCL then elect two learners who will serve on the governing body. Their term of office is only one year, whereas other stakeholders can serve up to three years. This implies that the term of office may come to an end before the learners adapt or familiarise themselves with the acts, procedures as well as the role that they are suppose to play in the school governing body. Learners in the school governing body are regarded by law as minors, so because of their legal status, section 32 (1) of the South African Schools Act puts some limitations with regards to learner participation in the school governing body.

A member of the school governing body who is a minor cannot sign contracts on behalf of the public school. A member of the school governing body who is a minor incurs no personal liability in the governing body. Learners do not decide the school's budget and expenditure nor participate in activities such as selection and appointment of educators and non-educators, strategic planning and staff development programmes.

This may suggest that even where learners are to be involved adults may not involve them.

According to Sayed and Carrim (1997) however policies pertaining to school governance are fraught with tensions and contradictions especially regarding the different notions of participation by stakeholders. This suggests that the issue of learners being unable to participate fully in the school governing body can be one of the causes of tensions.

## **2.7 Contesting views regarding learner participation in school governing body**

According to Christie (1998) the participation of learners in the school governing body is replete with tension and controversy. She argues that for the purpose of transformation and democracy learners constitute a large number of stakeholders, but how learners are going to participate in school governance is still unresolved. The Department of Education (1999) concurs with Christie (1998) when it states that there must be a development of concrete policies on the participation of secondary school learners in the school governance. This suggest that there is a possibility that what the policies contain is not the actual practice taking place in the ground

Sithole (1998, p. 97) discusses four contending viewpoints on how different and political interest groups in South Africa perceive and articulate the participation of learners in the school governing body. The first viewpoint suggests that students must passively receive instructions and behave in accordance with instructions from parents and teachers. This view will mean that policies must be designed by adults yet learners are part of the school governing body.



The second viewpoint accepts that students played a role in the liberation of this country, but now they should be encouraged to concentrate on their studies not on school governance. This suggests that learners could be deprived of their democratic right to participate in school governance.

The third viewpoint suggests that learners can participate to a certain degree. This viewpoint argues that there are matters on which learner participation is undesirable example cited is disciplinary matters of professional issues. The third viewpoint by Sithole is also supported by Squelch (1999) who argues that being a stakeholder does not mean that you participate in every decision. Some decisions are best left in the hands of parents and professionals. Contrary to that Karlsson et al (2001) believe that when parents, educators and learners engage in co-operative decision-making, decisions will be ones that all stakeholders agree to, the exclusion of learners in some of the decisions taken by the governing body cannot be considered as cooperative decision making. Phekoa (1999) agrees with Naidoo and argues that although learners have a stake in the governance of schools; their participation is limited because they are regarded by law as minors, which means that there are duties that they cannot perform owing to their status.

The fourth viewpoint argues that students are one of the most indispensable components of democratic school governance in secondary school. This viewpoint is informed by the notion that democracy came as a result of student engagement in the liberation struggle. This viewpoint suggests that learners are capable of participating since they did take part in bringing a new dispensation. This viewpoint suggests that learners must be fully involved in decision making. This suggest that recognition and representation of school governing bodies are attributed to the fact that learners played a major role in insuring that South Africa becomes a democratic country.

This further concurs with the fourth viewpoint that emphasizes the full participation of learners in the school governing body. Njozela (1998) claims that principals and parent governors should not underestimate the contributions of learners, especially if they are given opportunity to develop their skills and their level of maturity. Lock (1999) agrees with Njozela when he claims that the importance of learners in the school governing body

must be seen against the background of the learner involvement since 1976 in the government struggle to improve the conditions in black schools.

Over the past years, learner contributions to positive school governance have been limited and have been excluded from certain meetings however Mashele (1998, p. 53) warns that it is important to include students in the governing bodies of schools but not as political organizations, such as the South African Students Congress (SASCO) Pan African Students Organisation (PASO) or the Azanian Student Movement (AZASM). He bases his view on the notion that learners are involved in governing bodies with the sole purpose of representing learners not political parties and their primary goal is to serve the educational needs of learners and not to promote the political goals of the organizations they are part of.

Dean (1993) claims that in schools where learners are involved in decision-making, vandalism is less prevalent because learners feel that they are part of the decision-making process. Learners can be very useful in decision making because when given the opportunity to air their views violence can be prevented because learners are an important source of information.

Ngcobo ( 2002) found that there is a greater incident of vandalism at schools due to educators' negative and authoritarian attitudes towards learners. Harber and Trafford (1999) concur with Nkomo (1992) when he argues that learners must be treated with dignity and be encouraged to participate in the organization of school culture, including many of the core values associated with democracy such as directing others, participating and expressing views, sharing and disseminating knowledge, valuing equity and equality and the opportunity for learners to make judgments and choices. This suggests that learner involvement in decision making can bring about harmony and positive human relations in school. Hence there is a need to take seriously the significance of learner involvement in school governance. However we may need to be sensitive to the limitation of certain stakeholder participation.

Naidoo (2004) argues that the notion of stakeholder suggest that certain people have more of a 'stake' than others in particular contexts. This delimits who in fact may be claimed to be legitimate participants in making particular decisions in particular situations. This suggests that learners have a lesser stake than adults. There is an implicit suggestion in that not all things are open to all people all of the time. For example when it comes to decisions to do with finances and appointment of educators, learners cannot participate.

My experience as a principal suggest that most of the problems faced by school governing bodies emanate from the lack of knowledge and information on the part of the parents as well as learners. Lack of knowledge results in principal's dominance as well as manipulation of power.

Karlsson et al (2001) further argue that the policy has a fairly complex technical language. Its bureaucratic listing of school governing body roles and responsibilities required that school governing body be adequately trained to understand these legalese. The school governing bodies are not familiar with South African Schools Act; various provincial education acts as well as departmental regulations and circulars. This argument further stimulates the desire to investigate how do learners cope in understanding all the above since they are also expected to pay more attention to their studies.

Davis (2002) also argues that less sophisticated members of the school governing body lack the skills to follow the correct procedures laid down in the Schools Act. This suggests that parents are not likely to seriously involve learners in the governing body. According to Chetty (1998, p. 8) learners are incapacitated, ill informed of their rights and non-participative, while schools are still autocratically run.

Sayed and Carrim (1998) state that school governing bodies are not representative enough as participation is limited to those who have expertise. They believe that only when participation is more inclusive will the gap between disadvantaged and advantaged schools be close. The inclusion of learners in school governing councils fulfils the

objective of the education department to expose learners to the responsibilities associated with self-government and management however this may not be what is really taking place in schools

Thwala (2001) attributes the inefficiency of learner constituency in school governance among other things to the following: Due to limitations imposed by SASA learners are not given opportunity to play an active role in school governance. Furthermore some schools still rely in the old prefect system rather than the representative council of learners. Learners lack adequate knowledge to perform their duties. As a result these minors are manipulated by adults and their views are not taken into consideration.

## **2.8 Previous studies related to learner participation in the school governance**

According to Heystek (2001, p. 217) the involvement of learners in school governing body and co-operation in decision making can result into school improvement. However the limitations on learner participation stipulated in the SASA no 84 of 1996 make it very difficult to have learners participating fully in the school governing body

Heystek (2001) raised a number of advantages of learner representation in school governing body. The first one is that there is a link between learners and school governing body therefore contribution by learners can influence decisions. Secondly it contributes to the improvement and maintenance of discipline. Learners can offer their opinions regarding school governance as a result adults are made aware of learner thinking regarding school governance. This suggests that if given the opportunity to serve on committees and exercise their right to vote consequently learners and educators get a chance to solve problems together.

Sallis (1998) raises inter alia the following problems experienced with learner representatives in school governing bodies;

The first one is that learners have insufficient knowledge to make contribution concerning certain matters especially finances. The second one is that trust concerning discussions at meetings is not as desired, especially when it comes to sensitive matters. The third one is that learners seldom make any comments and ask questions. The fourth one is that there is no active participation, they are inhibited by adult. The fifth one is that they are not interested in daily governance of the school. Owing to full academic programmes, they can seldom attend meetings. Late night meetings are problematic, especially during test and examination and transport can also be a problem. The one-year term of duty seems to be very short. Looking at these problems it becomes clear that there is a need to review the acts related to learner participation in school governance.

In the study on educator perception regarding learner participation in school governance Ngcobo (2002) found that the majority of educators are in favour of learner involvement in the school governing body. Ngcobo (2002) findings showed that 86% of educators agreed that learners should be represented in school governance. They perceived learner participation in school governance as a possibility to improve and maintain effective discipline in schools; however educators did raise the fact that lack of knowledge in governance matters is an obstacle to effective learner participation in school governing bodies.

Bischoff (1998) conducted a study on whether learners understand the South African Schools Act no 84 of 1996 and their interpretation of Section 32 of the Act. The findings showed that the learners were aware of the schools act and Section 32 of the Act disallowed learners from participating in financial decisions. Learners found the act lacking in logic, because they thought it improper to include people in structures they will never be allowed to fully participate in. Learners based their verdict on the view that almost all learners in their schools were minors, with the result that they automatically lost out in terms of being involved in the management of the finances of their schools. Learners were of the opinion that there was lack of consultation when the act was formulated, as they were neither informed there of nor consulted for views there on. To them the act, therefore does fail to reflect the needs and interests of learners in their area.

Furthermore they were dissatisfied because they felt that the act paves the way for certain discussions to be imposed on them. They were also not satisfied with being called 'minors'. They expressed the need collectively to be called 'learners' because during the years of the struggle, they were referred to as 'comrades' but now the struggle had been waged and won, they were being pushed 'aside' by being referred to as 'minors'. Apart from section 32 learners were also dissatisfied with the number of parents enjoying representation in the governing bodies of public secondary schools, too many parents in the governing body could be no equal representation for all stakeholders in education. This suggests that concerns raised by learners in school governing body meetings cannot be heard since they form the minority. Studies have been conducted on learner participation however the studies conducted do not give the views or perceptions of principals, parents, educators and learners who serve in the governing body. For example the study conducted by Ngcobo (2002) only focused on the perceptions of educators with regards to learner participation, whereas parents and learners were not involved in the study. Phakoa (1999) only focused his study on learner perceptions and interpretation of the South African schools Act.

The studies reviewed in this chapter do not focus on the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders who have served with learners in the school governing body. This study investigates even learners themselves on how they are treated by other stakeholders in the school governing body, what problems do they experience in school governing body if any and whether they do understand their role in the school governing body or not. These gaps triggered the significance of this study which will come out with the perception of all stakeholders in the school governing body. Furthermore the developments and dynamics that have taken place in the education system after such studies were conducted makes me feel that more useful data can be found with regards to learner participation.

Phakoa (1999) acknowledged the need for continued research with respect to the aspect of public secondary school governance in South Africa. It is due to this that information on effectiveness; efficiency; problems and impact of governing bodies on the education of learners can be made available. Based on such information, future improvements and

developments could then be outlined. The far reaching changes being wrought in South Africa today compel both educators and researchers to persist in their search for new ways in which to govern schools

## **2.9 Emerging issues**

There are contesting viewpoints on how the role of learners in school governance should be contextualized. There are those who dismiss that students should have a role in school governance. Others share the viewpoint which is premised on the notion that students have a role to play in school governance.

Despite these contesting viewpoints that make the role of learners in school governance a fraught one, this study maintains that students are one of the most indispensable components of democratic school governance. The objection raised is that learners are young and not responsible enough in political issues on equal terms with adults however the very decision to establish representative councils for learners and their inclusion in school governing assumes the view that learners do have some capacity for participation once they reach grade eight.

In the next chapter we look the methodology of the study.

## **CHAPTER 3: Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter addresses the research methodology adopted in this study. The chapter starts with a brief description of the research design. This is followed by a brief description of the respondents participating in the study. Thereafter proceeds to data collection methods, here the data collection instruments are discussed.

### **3.2 Research design**

The study adopted the qualitative design. Denzin and Linlcon (1994) defined qualitative research as the study of things in their natural settings, trying to interpret “Phenomena” in terms of meanings people bring to them. Therefore qualitative design was most suitable to this study in the sense that it looks at the views of different stakeholders entailed talking to people with the purpose of getting in depth information regarding learner participation in school governance.

This was a multi-site case study of four secondary schools in Mpumalanga ward of Hammarsdale circuit. These schools had been selected because of certain commonalities within them. Firstly they were easily accessible. Secondly they start from grade eight to grade twelve; therefore they were bound by the law to include learners in their school governing bodies. Thirdly the school governing bodies had been elected almost the same year. Fourthly members of the school governing body were from the same community. Lastly my experience through informal discussions with colleagues suggested that these schools were experiencing common challenges regarding learner participation in the school governing body.



### **3.3 Respondents**

The respondents were principals, educators, parents and learners. There were four of each component. Respondents were those members who were currently serving in the school governing body. The study was about the perceptions and experiences of stakeholders therefore it was important to involve all categories of stakeholders in the study. These were considered to be appropriate respondents because they were involved in school governance, thus were considered to be information rich due to their direct involvement or interaction with learners in school governance.

### **3.4 Data collection methods**

This study used one data collection instrument namely semi structured interviews.

#### **Semi structured interviews**

Smith et al (1995) claims that semi structured interviews are used to gain a detailed picture of participant's beliefs about perceptions of those involved in a particular topic. Therefore the semi structured interviews were appropriate to this study because they would assist the researcher to explore the perceptions and experiences of stakeholders regarding learner participation in school governance. Cresswell (1998) explains that semi structured interviews are useful for understanding how participants view their worlds and that deeper understandings are often developed through dialogue. According to Cohen and Manion (2002) semi structured interviews make it possible to probe deeply and analyze intensely the issues that are being investigated. Respondents were given freedom to share with the researcher what they have and to be able to introduce issues which the researcher could have not thought of. This is in line with Smith et al (1995) who argues that if participants are not dictated to, they are likely to introduce issues which the researcher was not aware of. This did not mean however that the semi structured

interview would be a more casual affair, for in its own way it also had to be carefully planned.

### **3.5 Data collection procedures**

The researcher personally conducted interviews. Time and venue convenient to participants was arranged timeously. The researcher drove to respondents with a tape recorder in order to record data. Before starting the interviews the researcher asked for permission to record the interviews and the permission was granted. In addition the researcher also took field notes but to a lesser extent so as to avoid cutting or stopping the conversation, in other words the researcher only jotted down key concepts of the conversation.

The respondents were assured that data collected will only be used for study purposes and that the identity of respondents would remain anonymous. The respondents were notified that they were free to withdraw at any stage without any prejudice. They were also informed that they were free not to respond to questions they felt not comfortable with. The interviews were conducted through the language preferable to respondents for example principals and educators preferred to be interviewed in English but parents and learners were comfortable with IsiZulu. Whilst on my own, I transcribed the data collected in IsiZulu language to English language. Questions were straight forward and simple to avoid ambiguities which could confuse the respondents. Besides seeking permission from learners to partake in the research project, the researcher also requested permission from parents to allow children to be part of the interview process. The interviews took approximately forty five minutes per participant. These were one session interviews.

### **3.6 Ethical Issues**

Kvale (1996) states that interviews have an ethical dimension, they concern interpersonal interaction and produce information about the human condition. This suggested that the researcher had to take into consideration the three main areas of ethical issues, informed consent, confidentiality and consequences of the interviews. These three areas were taken

into account as they are addressed in the data collection procedures. Data would be stored in the memory sticks and computer discs then be kept safely under lock and key. After the study has been completed and approved data will be destroyed

### **3.7 Experiences during data collection process**

Although the researcher was able to conduct interviews .However there were some challenges experienced. Firstly appointments were never honoured in accordance with time fixed schedules for instance the researcher was given time but only to find that the respondent was not ready than the researcher had to exercise patience. Secondly the researcher encountered late postponements which affected his programmes. Thirdly the researcher would arrive at the respondents' place only to find that the respondent was somewhere else then the researcher would wait until he arrived. Fourthly at times it took some time for some respondents to interact freely during the interviews, some parents and learners would deviate from the asked questions thereby delaying the interviews.

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

According to Merriam (1998) data collection and analysis should be a simultaneous process in qualitative research, therefore for this study data analysis was an ongoing process. Data was analyzed during and after collection. Field notes were taken during interviews. After transcriptions data was categorized according to themes. Key themes were identified and these were then transformed into categories into which subsequent responses were sorted

## **CHAPTER 4 : Data presentation and discussion**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents and discusses data collected from four secondary schools in Mpumalanga circuit. A total of sixteen participants, four from each school comprising of four of each of principals, educators, parents and learners were interviewed. All participants were members serving in the school governing body. Data are presented and discussed through five themes. The first theme relates to the election of learners to the school governing body. The second theme addresses learners understanding of their role in school governance. The third theme discusses the extent to which learners can participate in school governance. The fourth theme relates to the challenges arising as a result of learner participation in school governance. The fifth theme addresses the respondents' recommendations towards enhancing learner participation in school governance. Each of the four respondent groups was allocated a code A, B, C and D for identification purposes.

### **4.2 Election of learners to the school governing body**

Section 2 (1) (5) of the South African Schools Act no. 84 of 1996 stipulates that Representative Council of learners must be established at every public school enrolling learners in the eighth grade and higher. The council elects from amongst its members two learners to represent it on the school governing body. The electoral officer and the assistant electoral officer monitor the election process therefore every secondary school governing body is expected to have two learners in their committee.

Principals, educators and learners were interviewed on how learners were elected to the school governing body. Parents were not asked this question because the Act is silent with regard to parent participation during the election of learners to

the school governing body. All four principals interviewed indicated that the legal procedure was followed in of learners. Principal A said:

What happened was that every class elected two learners to represent them in the Representative Council for learners. Two learners from the RCL were elected members of the RCL to represent the student body in the school governing body. The Teacher Liaison Officer (TLO) gave guidance and assistance during this process.

Educator responses also confirmed that learners were elected to the school governing body as per the stipulations of the Act. For instance educator B reported:

Usually it starts with the student body electing members of the RCL. All classes were represented in the RCL, from the RCL two members were elected to represent learners in the school governing body. In our case it was a boy and a girl.

Learners echoed the same sentiments confirming that the correct procedure was followed regarding the election of learners to school governing body.

Learner D had this to say:

In the morning assembly the principal announced that the department of education required us to vote for learners who will represent us in the RCL and from the RCL two learners must be voted by members of the RCL to the school governing body. After two days we met as learners and elected learners to form the RCL. Members of the RCL then elected two learners to represent the council on the SGB.

The responses suggest that the schools conformed to the requirements of the Act. This implies that learners were constitutionally elected to the school governing body. Thus, they were part and parcel of the school governance structure.

#### **4.3 Learners' understanding and coping with their roles in school governance.**

All the respondents were asked whether they thought learners understood their role in school governance. Principals gave varied responses. Two of the four (A and B) principals indicated that learners understood their role in school governance. However as to whether they coped in decision making processes one principal indicated that it depended on the issues at hand. The other two (C and D) said learners neither understood their role nor coped with the decision making process.

This is what principal B had to say:

Learners do understand their role in school governance however, the issue of whether they cope or not depends on the complexity of the issues under discussion. There are issues where they participate actively for instance, during the drawing of code of conduct for learners. Also there are some issues where you can see that they are experiencing problems like in the meetings where constitutions of the SGB and vision and mission statements of the school are drawn. On sensitive issues you can see that they are not comfortable because of the presence of parents, principals as well as their educators

Thus from this principal's perspective learners understood their role however participation in decision making was determined by gravity of issues of the day. This concurs with Naidoo's (2004, p.16) position when he argues that the notion of stakeholder suggests that certain people have more 'stake' than others in particular contexts. This determines who in fact may be claimed to be legitimate participants in making particular decisions in particular situations.

The remaining two principals reported that learners did not understand their role and as a result did not cope with decision making. This is what principal D reported:

They do not understand their role at all. They are lost; they do not know where to start or to go and that could be due to lack of capacity building. In school governing body meetings they keep quite and my opinion is that they are not supposed to be there.

This response concurs with Sithole's (1998, p. 97) first viewpoint that learners must positively receive instructions from adults and be excluded from governance. Principal's responses may suggest that in some schools learners actively participate in the SGB while in others they are just adding numbers. They may also suggest that principals interpret learners' participation differently. Findings also imply that as much as the policy requires learner involvement in school governance, their participation in the SGB is still a contested issue.

Educators' responses to the same question also varied. Two educators felt that learners did understand their role in school governance. Educator A reported:

Yes, I think they do understand their role because they attended workshops organized by the department of education where they got capacitated. Further more myself as TLO I also give guidance. They are able to present learner concerns to SGB meetings and they are also able to give detailed feedback to their constituency.

According to this educator learners in this school were involved in school governance and they understood their role. It also indicates that they got support from other stakeholders in school governance. Contrary to the above were responses from educators

C and D. Their responses indicated that learners did not understand their role in school governance thus could not cope with decision making. Educator C reported:

According to what I have observed in the past years, learners do not understand their role in school governance. This was evidenced by their passiveness in school governing body meetings. They make no input, they agree with everything said by adults, to me their presence is just for window dressing.

This view concurs with Sallis (1998) who argues inter alia that learners seldom make any comments or ask questions. There is no participation. Lack of participation suggests that although learners are part of the school governing body but in some schools they do not participate. Their involvement has no impact in school governance. Therefore their non participation does not serve the purpose of the Act.

Regarding the same matter all four parents reported that learners did not understand their role in school governance and could not cope with decision making hence they made no contribution to school governance.

Parent C had this to say:

You know even with some adults you find that school governance is not easy. They confuse management with governance issues, how much more with children who only sit in governance for a period of one year. The government is just pushing learners to school governance without equipping them sufficiently.

In agreement to the above report, another parent from the same school reported:



I have heard learners talking about trips, metric farewell functions, educator and learner absenteeism in the SGB meetings and those are not governance issues, so that tells that they don't understand what governance is all about.

The given responses suggest that school governance is still a problematic issue in the sense that in most cases parent governors have low levels of education. This concurs with Davis (2002, p. 22) argument that less sophisticated members of the school governing body lack skills to follow the correct procedures laid down in the South African Schools Act no 84 of 1996. This suggests that if some adults are still battling with the act, they are not likely to seriously involve learners in decision making.

Responding to the very same question the four learners had varied responses. Learner A said she understood her role in school governance. This was her response:

I do understand my role in school governance, I attended a workshop and we were given material to read on our own. Our TLO is always there to give assistance. In that way I am able to make some contribution in school governing body meetings for example when we meet as the SGB to choose extra and co curricular activities as well as learning areas to taught in school. I also participated actively in the formulation of policy on safety and security in school. In the school governing body I represent the student body and I take decisions on their behalf. I represent their interest.

This response confirms what was said by educator A regarding learners understanding in school governance. She reported that learners did understand their role and she is there to give support. This suggests that in school A learners do understand their role in school governance. Moreover they got support from stakeholders such as TLO hence they were able to participate in school governance.

Two learners reported that they did not understand their role in school governance. They reported that most of the time issues are beyond their level of understanding.

In this regard learner B reported:

I feel that I am not clear about the role of learners in school governance. What I understand is my role in the RLC but when it comes to school governance I am confused. School governance is dominated by adults and it's not easy to participate in their midst.

This claim concurs with Chetty (1998, p. 8) who argues that learners are ill informed and capacitated about their role and right to participate in the school governing body.

These responses suggest that some learners did not understand their role hence they did not participate in school governance. Reasons cited included lack of preparation with regard to their duties in governance, power relations between adults and minors etc. Learners could not participate freely in the presence of their principals, educators as well as parents.

Looking at the responses from all participants interviewed in school A. All respondents with the exception of parents reported that learners understood their role in school governance and they participated in decision making. The responses suggest that where learners show some understanding of their roles in school governance TLOs were very supportive, whereas where learners show a lack of understanding of their roles in school governance TLOs' were not supportive enough thus learners are ill informed and inadequately capacitated.

#### **4.4 The extent of learner participation in school governance**

Section 32 (1) of SASA no 84 of 1996 states that a member of the school governing body who is a minor can not contract on behalf of the public school. Minors in school governance incur no personal liability in the school governing body. Learners cannot decide on the schools budget and expenditure nor participate in activities such as selection and appointment of educators and non-educators, strategic planning and staff development programmes.

Principals, educators, parents and learners were asked to give their views regarding these limitations. Principals and educators revealed that they were happy about the law. Principal A reported:

Yes learners are minors you cannot expect them to have equal participation with teachers and parents because other issues are beyond their level of understanding.

In agreement with the principal educator B had this to say:

By putting these limitations the law is protecting these minors. Other decisions taken by the school governing body can take members of the school governing body to court, therefore by virtue of being minors learners had to be protected.

This confirms Naidoo (2004) when he argues that the notion of stakeholder suggests that certain people have more stake than others in particular context. In this case adult enjoys more stake than learners. Contrary to the above is fourth view point that claims that recognition and representation of school governing bodies are attributed to the fact that learners played a major role in ensuring that South Africa becomes a democratic country therefore learners must participate fully in school governance.

The responses of participants suggest that in all four schools learner participation in school governance is within the confines of the law. Principals and educators are clear about the law and they observe it.

Four parents were interviewed regarding the same issue. Their responses varied. One parent was in favor of full participation of learners in school governance. This is how he responded:

The law deprives the learners their democratic right. Learners must participate fully in school governance however they must be given proper guidance and training so that they participate effectively.

This view agrees with Sithole's fourth viewpoint (1998, p. 97) that learners must be fully involved in school governance. The other three parents were of the view that learners must not participate at all in school governance.

Parent D responded:

Even if you give learners a certain extent of participation they do not participate at all, I see their involvement as a waste of time. Educators and parents can handle governance without learner participation.

This view seems to concur with Fullan's (1991, p. 14) argument that parents rarely think of students as participants in the process of change and organizational life. This suggests that some parents are not in support of the Act. Their view is that learners must not be given any degree of participation in school governance. This indicates that learner voices can be hardly heard or accepted by parents in school governance.

The four learners interviewed were dissatisfied regarding the limitation stipulated by the Act. They complained that the Act is too restrictive for them to participate in other governance issues such as school budget.

Learner A said:

The law is not promoting transparency, why should we be left out, when budget issues are discussed. We believe as learners that we can make some contribution. We are often told that money has been exhausted yet we were not involved in budget discussions.

This view concurs with Ngcobo's (2002) findings on the study about the role of learners in school governance. The findings revealed that learners were not happy about the Act. They felt that it paved the way for certain decisions to be imposed on them.

Learner B reported:

Although I am not clear about governance but I do not see the reason why we should not be involved in the selection of educators, because we are the ones who interact with educators on daily basis.

These responses suggest that the learners interviewed are against the limitation stipulated in section 32 (2) of the SASA no 84 of 1996. It emerged during the interviews that learners want to participate fully in school governance, however according to Squelch (1999) being a stakeholder does not mean that you participate in every decision. Some decisions are best left in the hands of parents and professionals. There is a contradiction that on one hand learners seem to be failing to cope with what they are allowed to do, but on the other they want more.

#### **4.5 Responses regarding challenges facing learners in school governance**

According to Christie (1998) participation of learners in school governance is replete with tension and controversy. Principals, educators as well as learners were asked about any challenges that arise as a result of learner involvement in school governance.

It transpired during the interviews that learners face lot of challenges in school governance. All principals and educators shared almost the same sentiments regarding the challenges. The involvement of grade 12 and the one year term of office seemed to be common challenges raised by all principals.

Principal B reported:

Although it is important to give learners an opportunity to participate in school governance but the involvement of grade twelve learners is a serious challenge since these learners have a lot of academic work to focus on, in my school I discourage the involvement of these learners. Even the law is silent on this issue.

Therefore what this implies is that, grade 12 learners may be deprived of their democratic right to participate in school governance. Moreover grade 12 learners are the ones that are matured enough to take decisions in the SGB on behalf of all learners. In as much as they are busy with their studies they should also participate. The challenge in this regard is how to reconcile grade 12 academic work and school governance.

Educators raised the issue of inferiority complex or power relations as well as unbalanced representation as major challenges.

This is how educator D responded:

Learners are minors, they always feel inferior when they have to participate in the midst of adults over and above learner's form a minority in the school governing body structure, in most cases there are 7 adults and 2 learners. They won't cope easily in decision making obviously they are always disadvantaged when there is a need to vote.

Educators further raised that they are overloaded with school work; eventually they are unable to assist learners with school governance matters.

This is what educator C reported:

I have so many classes to teach and I am also involved in many committees and this leaves me with no time to prepare learners for governance issues.

These responses suggest that learners in school governance face series of challenges. This implies that learners do not receive necessary support from other stakeholders in the SGB.

All parents also indicated that there are serious challenges arising as a result of learner involvement in school governing body. Parents cited different examples of challenges but culture and power relations were the most common challenges that emerged from their responses.

Parent C reported:

Our culture does not allow children to argue with adults. They are expected to receive instructions from adults. If children disagree with parents views, that could be perceived as a sign of disrespect.

In agreement, Parent D had this to say:

I belong to an old school of thought. I do not see the need of discussing issues with school kids. I believe that the adult's word is final.

This statement confirms Harber and Trafford (1999) argument when they argue that the traditional exclusion of young people from consultative process and bracketing out of their views is founded upon an outdated view. Such a view which fails to acknowledge children's capacity to reflect on issues affecting their lives and education.

The responses of parents interviewed suggest that according to African culture children cannot argue against adults. Furthermore in communities where culture is strongly observed children cannot be part of any decision making process. In as much as the law wants learners to be involved in school governance, culture is taking another route and that conflict is much challenged.

All four learners interviewed revealed that their participation or involvement in school governance is crowded by series of challenges. These challenges differ from school to school. School A learner raised concern about the time which school governing body meetings are held. This is what he reported:

I am not comfortable about school governing body meetings, meetings are held late afternoon. I don't have transport; I have duties to perform at home as well as home work to do.



The issue of power relations was again raised by learners.

Learner D said:

How can learners raise views which are in disagreement with the views of the principal, educator or parent, it is very difficult. That is why in most case we remain passive because at the end of the day the adult views are final.

Data presented by all participants regarding the challenges reveals that learner participation is characterized by a number of common challenges. This concurs with Christie (1998) when she argues that for the purpose of transformation and democracy learners constitute a large number of stakeholders, but how learners are going to participate in school governance is still unresolved. Christie (1998) further suggests that there must be clear policies on the participation of secondary school learners in school governance.

#### **4.6 Responses on recommendations to enhance learner participation in school governance**

All sixteen respondents were asked to make recommendations on how learner participation in school governance could be enhanced. Varied recommendations emerged in the process.

Principal A recommended that:

The Department of Education should extend the learner term of office. One year is too short. We start projects together than the following year they are no longer part of the project.

Educator B reported:

The term of office comes to an end while learners are trying to adapt and understand to the new environment.

Parent B recommended:

Learners should be given enough time at least a period of two years so that they can learn and understand then be able to participate effectively.

This suggests that the one year term of office may not be enough for learners to participate effectively in school governance. This means that there is a possibility that in some schools the term of office expires whilst learners are still struggling to find their role in school governing body. It emerged that principals and educators do not have time to capacitate learners regarding their role in school governance. Educators are overloaded with their teaching responsibilities. Principals are responsible for governance, management and administrative roles. Principal B reported:

I have so many administrative and management duties to perform and educators are expected to adapt themselves to the new curriculum changes, therefore, there is little time to capacitate learners on issues of school governance.

Principal C recommended that learners be given specific responsibilities in the school governance and he cited some examples:

I recommend that learners be given the role of ensuring that learner code of conduct is implemented in all schools. In my school I have seen them participating actively when it comes to learner discipline and maintaining order like reporting late coming, absenteeism and reporting issues to do with vandalism.

This recommendation is consistent with Ngcobo (2002) argument that in schools where learners are involved in decision making, there is less incidence of vandalism.

Contrary to the above recommendations was a response from principal D who reported:

Personally I recommend that learners must participate only in the RCL structure but be excluded in school governance. My experience taught me that they have nothing to offer to school governance. I haven't seen them participating or making any contribution.

Findings suggest that while some principals are in favor of learner participation in school governance others recommended that the department of education need to review learner participation in school governance.

Out of the four parents interviewed only one parent supported learner participation in school governance. This is how he argued:

Learners are future leaders. They must be allowed to participate in school governance. This will help to instill leadership skills while they are young. I recommend continuous training and support of learners in order to equip them with necessary skills.

This concurs with Njozele's (1998) claim that educators and parents should not underestimate the contribution of learners, especially if they are given an opportunity to develop their skills and their level of maturity. This further supports Lock's (1998) argument that the inclusion of learners in school governance fulfils the objective of the education department, on the other hand three parents recommended that learners must not participate in school governance. This is evidenced by parent D who reported:

We send learners to school for one reason, they are there to learn. The government must not crowd learners with governance. We are there as adults to deal with governance issue.

This recommendation is consistent with Sithole's (1998) viewpoint that argues that learners must passively receive instructions and behave in accordance with instructions from parents and teachers.

This view suggests that learners are not considered by parents as part of the school governing body. These parents do not value the importance of learners in school governing body. Contrary to the above is Kalsson et al (2001) who claim that when parents, educators and learners in co-operative decision making, decisions will be ones that all stakeholders agree to.

All four learners were also given the opportunity to make their own recommendations regarding their participation in school governance. Some of their recommendations are similar to those raised by principals and educators. Learner C reported:

I think it is unfair for learners to participate for a period of one year in school governance. I recommend that the term of office be extended to three years like other stakeholders in most cases the one year is characterized by lot of confusion.

All learners also shared the same sentiments that reveal that they were not satisfied about the section 32(2) of SASA no 84 of 1996, which restricts them from participating in finance issues.

Learner A said:

I recommend that the government reviews the limitations regarding learner participation in school governance. Education is about us we must participate fully in school governance.

Learner D reported:

The language used in the South African Schools Act is complicated for us as learners. I recommend that the department simplifies it for our sake.

The issue of language used in the South African schools act confirms Karlsson et al. (2001) who argue that the policy has a fairly complex technical language. Its bureaucratic listing of roles and responsibilities of the school governing body required that school governing bodies be adequately trained to understand these legalese.

The responses from learners suggested that there is a lot that learners are not satisfied with in school governance. Their recommendations suggest that the department of education review learner participation in school governance. Having so many problems in school governance, it won't be easy for learners to participate actively in school governance. In support of the above statement is the department of education (DoE) (2005) when it states that there must be a development of concrete policies on the participation of learners in school governance.

#### **4.7 Emerging issues**

It emerged that learners are part of the school governing body in all four schools, confirming conformity with the law. Regarding learner understanding situations differed from school to school. While in other school there is acknowledgement that learners did understand their role in school governance, others said they don't.

All respondents with the exception of learners were happy about the limitations stipulated in section 32 (2) of SASA no 84 of 1996, learners wanted more participation than being prescribed by the law. It emerged that in all four schools there are challenges regarding

the involvement of learners in school governance. These challenges seem to be common in all four schools. Some of the challenges raised are lack of role understanding, power relations as well as late meetings.

It also emerged that the one year term of office is too short for learners. Parents were not in favor of learner participation in school governance. They believed that governance should be left in the hands of the adults.

Scheduling of meetings in the late afternoon or evening was problematic for learners in terms of transport, homework and house chores.

The need to simplify SASA for accessibility by both parents and learners. This could take the form of a Zulu version of SASA and simple English version in the form of a hand book.

Need for sufficient training of the SGBs so that they understand their roles and responsibilities clearly. This would enhance decision making and their effectiveness.

## **Chapter five: Summary, conclusions, recommendations and limitations**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter addresses four issues .First it gives a summary of the study. Second it draws conclusions from the findings. Third it suggests recommendations in response to the conclusions. The fourth issue addresses limitations of the study

### **5.2 Summary**

The study investigated the role of learners in the school governing body as perceived and experienced by principals, educators, parents and learners.

The first chapter outlined the problem. The study was triggered by discussions with colleagues as well as literature that suggested that the involvement of learners in school governance was still a problematic issue in most schools. I then became interested in investigating how different stakeholders in school governance perceived learner participation in school governance. From the time the law was enacted to the beginning of the study, one hoped that the system has developed therefore it would be interesting to see if there were positive developments in the involvement of learners in school governance.

Chapter two reviewed literature and to achieve this, the following issues were discussed. The policy framework guiding the school governing bodies was addressed. It also discussed the importance of school governing bodies as a vehicle for transformation in the education department as well as the duties of the school governing body. The chapter also discussed studies that have been conducted around perspectives regarding learner participation in school governance.

Chapter three described the methodology of the study. The study adopted the qualitative research design. The qualitative design was the most suitable to investigate

the views of different stakeholders which entailed talking to people with the purpose of getting in depth information. In order to collect data semi-structured interviews were conducted with sixteen participants, four from each school comprised by four of each of principals, educators, parents and learners. Semi-structured interviews made it possible to probe deeply and analyse intensely the issues that were being investigated. All participants were serving in the school governing body. They were selected because they are the main stakeholders in school governance.

Chapter four presented and discussed the findings. This was done through five themes. The first theme related to the election of learners to the school governing body. The second theme addressed learners' understanding of their roles in school governance. The third theme discusses the extent to which learners can participate in school governance. The fourth theme relates to the challenges that learners face in school governance. The fifth and final theme addressed respondents' recommendations towards enhancing learner participation in school governance.

### **5.3 Conclusions**

This study commenced with the proposition that learners were not participating effectively in school governance. Three research questions guided this study. The first research question was; do learners understand their role in school governance? The second research question was: What are the stakeholders (principals, educators, parents and learners) experiences and perceptions regarding the involvement of learners in school governance? The third research question was; how can learner participation in school governance be enhanced? However the third research question is addressed by way of recommendations.

### **5.4 Do learners understand their role in school governance?**

The findings showed that out of four learners interviewed, three did not understand their role in school governance and one learner seemed to be clear about her role in school governance. Learner understanding of their roles revolved around the quality of support



they got from adults in the school system. Where the teacher liaison officer is supportive, learners seemed to be active in the school governance deliberations. In three schools where learners seemed to lack understanding there was no support. There is still a long way before we can say learners understand their role in school governance. This challenge resulted to non participation on the part of the learners.

### **5.5 What are the stakeholders (principals, parents, educators and learners) experiences and perceptions regarding the involvement of learners in school governance?**

Principals and educators were satisfied with what section 32(1) of SASA no 84 of 1996 provides about the participation of learners in the SGB, namely; learners can not participate in discussions to do with budget and expenditure. According to educators learners are regarded by law as minors therefore there are issues that did not need their involvement. They felt that the Act protects learners since some SGB decisions can take the SGB to court. Parents were uncomfortable about sitting with minors and deliberate about school governance issues and this has to do with culture regarding how decisions are made in the home. They also felt that learners are generally inactive and that is evidenced by their silence in the SGB deliberations. Despite that learners did not understand their role. They thought they can participate in everything .They also felt that the Act paved the way for certain decisions to be imposed on them. It emerged that there is a contradiction that on one hand learners seem to be failing to cope with what they are allowed to do but on the other they want full participation. According to learners there are huge stumbling blocks that make it difficult for them to participate. Some of the stumbling blocks raised were: that the timing of the SGB meetings is usually not suitable to learners. Most SGB's hold their meetings late in the afternoons. Autocratic parents who strongly felt that governance should be left in the hands of adults also hinder learner participation. There is a problem of societal culture which the Act itself can not solve. While the Act requires adults and learners to share decisions in school governance, practically that's not the case in the home. The adult who is a parent do not exercise equal participation in the home therefore culture has its bearing on learner participation.

Democracy has not been achieved as expected this is evidenced by the silent voices of learners. Power relations suggested that school governance is still dominated by adults.

## **5.6 Recommendations**

Informed by the conclusions above, the following recommendations are suggested:

Learners need to be continuously assisted to understand their role in the SGB. This can be done through the creation of non threatening environment by schools where documents such as SASA would be discussed.

All adults participating in school governing body structures should believe that some learners have the ability to make good decisions and that better decisions could be made as a result of their involvement .The opportunity to make mistakes should also be seen as learning opportunity.

Schools should create fora for learners to network with other learners involved in school governance. This would help them to analyse failures and successes and to develop new strategies.

Schools should create fora for adult SGB members to network with other SGB's in the area. This will help to identify and discuss problems regarding learner involvement in the SGB.

Participation is an attitude matter and thus to change the mindset requires a sustained programme of changing the attitude of principals, educators, parents as well as learners towards a school governance paradigm which is grounded on democratic values.

School governing body meetings should be held at the time that is convenient to all members, so that learners will be able to attend, failing which, the chairperson as well as the principal should make it their responsibility to organize transport for learners so that

they are able to attend late meetings.

### **5.7 Limitations of the study**

This study has some limitations caused by time and budget constraints. Due to time constraints only four schools were selected. The study would be more worthy if more schools were involved. Furthermore if the project had more participants involved, more ideas would be produced thus making the study more convincing. Therefore the findings of the study cannot be generalized.

. Participants were also busy and some are full time employees in their work places, at times it was difficult to honour the set appointments. Further more the researcher was not funded and that required him to pay from his own pocket. Since the researcher is a local community member at times principals found it difficult and became very cautious when giving information and at times they would give information that they thought would please the researcher.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Guiding Questions for Semi-structure interview for principal and educators**

1. How were learners elected to the school governing body?
2. What is the role of the learners in the school governing body? Do you think learners understand their role?
3. To what extent do you think learners can participate in the school governing body?
4. What are the challenges facing learners in school governance?
5. What could be your recommendation on the enhancement of learner participation in school governance?

## **Appendix B**

### **Semi structured interview questions for parents**

1. How long have you been in the school governing body?
2. Do you think learners understand their role in the school governance, please  
Support your answer?
3. To what extent can learners participate in school governance?
4. What are the challenges that learners are faced with in school governance?
5. What could be your recommendations regarding the enhancement of learner  
Participation in school governance?



## Appendix C

### Semi-structure interview questions for learners

1. How were you elected to the school governing body?
2. Did you receive any training after being elected to the school governing body? If yes, do you find the training helpful in terms of performing your duties?
3. Do you understand your role in school governance?
4. What exactly are you doing in school governance body?
5. How do other stakeholders respond to inputs that you make during meeting or decision-making process?
6. According to the South African School's Act no 84 of 1996, as learners you are not allowed to: -
  - 6.1 Sign contracts on behalf of the school.
  - 6.2 Handle finances, and you cannot vote on resolutions of the governing body which imposes liability on the third party or on the school. What are your views on that?
7. What problems are you facing as learners in the school governance?
8. How can learner participation in school governance be enhanced?

Ingede Primary School  
P.O. Box 536  
Hammarsdale  
3700  
20 March 2006

The Superintendent of Education Management  
Mpumalanga Ward  
Hammarsdale  
3700

Dear Sir

**RE-REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE  
SELECTED SCHOOLS IN MPUMALANGA WARD.**

I am a registered M.ed student at the University of Kwazulu-Natal Edgewood campus,  
My student number is 20552185

The purpose of my study is to investigate the experiences and perception of stakeholders  
with regards to learner participation in school governance.

I will be grateful if you can allow me to conduct research in the selected schools that are  
in your ward. The research participants would be principals, educators, parents, and  
learners in the SGB.

Should you have any concerns about the project please do not hesitate to consult my  
supervisor Mr V.Chikoko on; 260 2639. Confidentiality with regards to collected data will  
be highly observed

Thanking you in advance

Yours Faithfully  
Magadla M.A.-0836278080 .

Ingede Primary School  
P.O. Box 536  
Hammarsdale  
3700  
20 March 2006

The Principal  
Phezulu High School  
Hammarsdale  
3700

Dear Sir

**RE-REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN YOUR SCHOOL**

I am a registered M.ed student at the University of Kwazulu-Natal Edgewood campus, My student number is 20552185

The purpose of my study is to investigate the experiences and perception of stakeholders with regards to learner participation in school governance.

I will be grateful if you can allow me to conduct research in your school. The research participants would be principals, educators, parents, and learners in the SGB.

Should you have any concerns about the project please do not hesitate to consult my supervisor Mr V.Chikoko on; 260 2639. Confidentiality with regards to collected data will be highly observed

Thanking you in advance

Yours Faithfully  
Magadla M.A.-0836278080 .

Ingede Primary School  
P.O. Box 536  
Hammarsdale  
3700  
20 March 2006

Dear parent

**Re-Request to involve your child as a research participant in the research project.**

I am a registered M.ed student at the University of Kwazulu-Natal Edgewood campus and my student number is 20552185.

The purpose of my study is to investigate the experiences and perception of stakeholders with regards to learner participation in school governance.

I will be grateful if you can allow me to include your child as one of the research participants in my research project. Should you have any concerns about the project please do not

hesitate to consult my supervisor Mr. V.Chikoko on; 260 2639. Confidentiality with regards to collected data and names of participants will be highly observed.

All participants will have a right to withdraw from participation at any stage should they so desire.

Thanking you in advance.

Yours Faithfully

Magadla M.A.-0836278080 .