Learner Participation and Satisfaction in Decision–Making in School Governance within the Vhembe District of the Limpopo Province

by

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DECLARATION

I, Rebecca Ofundem Agbor Bessong, declare that the dissertation entitled '**Learner Participation and Satisfaction in Decision–Making in School Governance within the Vhembe District of the Limpopo Province'** is my own work and that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination purpose in any institution or university, and that all the works I have used and quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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DEDICATION

To Mama Margaret Ekamba Takang and Papa Philip Bessongaya Bessong

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ABSTRACT

Meaningful learner participation in school governance remains problematic despite legislation by the South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996. This prompted the investigation of learner participation and satisfaction in decision–making in school governance within the Vhembe District of the Limpopo Province. The aim of this study was to examine the extent of learner participation and satisfaction with the decision-making mechanism of the schools. The study was conducted in six secondary schools from three circuits, Dzindi, Mvudi and Sibasa circuits in the Vhembe District of the Limpopo Province. Fifty three research participants comprising principals, parent representatives, teacher liaison officers (TLO) and the executive committee members of the Representative Councils for Learners (RCL) took part in the study. The study was foregrounded in an interpretive paradigm underpinned by the theory of deliberative democracy. Semi-structured interview schedules were used to explore the extent of learner participation and the degree of the participants' satisfaction with decision-making.

Data were manually transcribed and coded, and responses were grouped according to the questions that were posed. During analysis, references were made to relevant documents of the Department of Education, as well as to other related literature.

The findings of this study revealed that, on the one hand, there is some significant learner participation in decision-making and a moderate degree of satisfaction in relation to learner welfare issues. On the other hand, the findings also revealed that there is limited learners' participation and a low degree of satisfaction in decision-making in administrative and curricula issues. The reasons are that adult SGB members are still intolerant and disrespectful of learners, and that they consider them as minors, who are untrustworthy, inexperienced and lacking in knowledge.

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The objective of the study was to examine the degree of learners' satisfaction with regards to their participation. This is unlike previous studies which have mostly focused on the extent and/or nature of learner participation in school governance decision-making. The findings are meant to inform Vhembe Distict officials to revise training of SGB members, and to enable policy makers to determine whether or not to revisit existing policies on learner participation in school governance.

Keywords: Deliberative decision-making; Learner participation; Satisfaction; School governance

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	-	African National Congress
CAO	-	Chief Administrative Officer
DoE	-	Department of Education
IT	-	Information Technology
LEA	-	Local Education Agency
LSC	-	Local School Council
NGO	-	Non-Governmental Organisation
PAF	-	People's Action Forum
PDM	-	Participatory Decision Making
PTA	-	Parent-Teacher Association
RCL	-	Representative Councils for Learners
SASA	-	South African Schools Act
SASM	-	South African Student Movement
SASO	-	South African Student Organisation
SGB	-	School Governing Body
SMT	-	School Management Team
SRC	-	Student Representative Councils
TLO	-	Teacher Liaison Officer
UNCROC	-	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNESCO	-	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC, 1989) provides an international human rights context for promoting the participation of children and young people in decision-making (New Zealand Education Review, 2003:2).

> *Article 12 of this convention protects the right of children to express their views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.*
>
> *Article 13 protects the right of children to freedom of expression including freedom to seek, receive and impact information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.*

This means that children under the age of 18 must have their rights recognised and protected. The best way of doing this is to allow children to participate in the decision-making processes on school issues that affect them.

The notion of stakeholder participation in the running of schools has taken on greater currency, emerging as a fundamental tenet in the promotion of good school governance. This follows the increase in the decentralisation of power and responsibilities to school governing bodies in which learners are members (Lewis & Naidoo, 2004:100). It can be argued that, through such participation, learners are offered an opportunity to make contributions to decisions which affect them.

The research lives just some 300 meters away from a high school in the Soutpansberg East Circuit. One day, there was a minor demonstration by the grade ten learners. This was due to the fact that most of their Mathematics lessons were scheduled in the later part of the day. The learners' argument was that the timing was inappropriate, as by the scheduled time, they are tired and cannot fully concentrate. They preferred to have such subjects in the morning when they were still fresh and alert. The matter was taken to the

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school authorities through the Representative Council of Learners (RCL). The authorities promised to look into the matter, but nothing was done until the third school term. In the said morning, the affected group of learners assembled in front of the school gate and refused to have any lessons until their problem was resolved. The learners had placards with messages like **'It is our future not yours', 'We have a right to education', 'RCL help us!'** and **'Let us help you with the timetable'.**

This raised a number of questions in my mind about what the RCL was able to mediate on behalf of the learners. I pondered over questions such as:

- Is the RCL in the said institution inactive?
- Do the governing authorities of the said institution consider the RCL as partners in the governance of the institution?
- Do RCLs in schools understand their role and are they satisfied with their role in the governance of the school?

The UNCROC of 1989 can be viewed as a wakeup call for some parts of the globe where children's voices on issues which impact on them are non-existent. Studies by Phaswana (2010:117), Jeruto *et al.* (2011:18) and Nowak and Mager (2012:44), just to name a few have shown that there are enormous benefits if children have a say in decision-making on issues which affect them.

For many years, South African secondary school learners have been dissatisfied with the fact that decisions affecting them were being taken without their input. From the 1970s through to the 1980s and even after 1996, many different student organisations, such as the South African Student Organisation (SASO), South African Student Movement (SASM), Student Representative Councils (SRC), Prefect Bodies, and RCLs, have been struggling to make their voices heard. The climax of their action was the Soweto uprising of 16 June 1976 (Kallaway cited in Nongubo, 2004:3).

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With the onset of democracy in South Africa in 1994, there have been overwhelming changes in several aspects of the socio-economic and political life in the country. The education system, like many other social institutions, had prior to 1994 suffered from a top-down form of management and governance. Therefore, with the dawn of democracy in 1994, the South African education system embarked on a democratisation process (Noleen, 2004:49).

The concept of decentralisation originates from the belief that the state alone cannot control schools, but should share its power with other stakeholders, particularly those closer to the school, on a partnership basis (Marishane, 1999:87). From such devolution of power, a stronger and healthier relationship is likely to be built between schools and communities, and this would provide an alternative form of accountability to bureaucratic surveillance. This is based on the premise that, when all concerned collaborate in making important decisions about educational alternatives, a true mutual responsibility grows.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996 is the supreme law of the land. The country is one sovereign democratic state founded on the values of human dignity, equality, human rights and freedom. Chapter two of the constitution, which is the Bill of Rights, is the cornerstone of democracy in the country, as it affirms these democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom (The Constitution of RSA, 1996:7).

With the adoption of a new constitution and the launching of new education legislation, a novel system of education and training was born in South Africa. This new system of education and training was based on the fundamental principles of democracy, unity, non-discrimination, equity and equality (Squelch, 2000: 137). This signifies the government's commitment to developing a democratic system of school governance, which allows for the participation of all stakeholders with a vested interest in education. In this regard, the South African policy on education embraces the 1989 UNCROC provisions on the right of children to participate in decision-making on matters that affect them.

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Learner participation in decision-making in South Africa was legislated in 1996 through the South African Schools Act (SASA) No. 84. This Act mandates the establishment of school governing bodies (SGBs) that comprise of parents, educators, non-educators and learners from the eighth grade or higher (DoE,1996). It was because of this Act that the Representative Councils for Learners (RCL) as part of the SGBs in secondary schools, were established and recognised. Thus, through this representation, SASA allows learners, as stakeholders, to participate in the governance of their schools.

In line with the above, Badat (1997:20) reiterates that the African National Congress (ANC) has consistently committed itself to the involvement of civil societies in the process of educational change. He quotes the ANC's 1992 Policy Guidelines which states that:

> *the state together with trade unions, employers and organs of other civil society will play a central role in planning, monitoring training, and commits the ANC to democratic participation not only in the development of policy in education but in the administration and management of institutions in these fields by teachers, students, parents and workers.* (Policy guidelines for a democratic South Africa, ANC 2011).

This same stance is maintained in the 2011 revised version of this document. Section K2 on the control of education states that:

> *the administration and management of education and the development of educational policy will be governed by the principle of democracy, within a unified national education and training system. The active participation of organs of civil society in both formal and non-formal education should include teachers, students, parents and workers. Gender balances at all levels will also be redressed.*

Through the above statement, it can be argued that the ANC Policy Guidelines advocate partnership by all involved and concerned in education. This partnership has to be established on the basis of equality, transparency, trust and respect for one another irrespective of age, class or social status, race, religion or culture.

When the RCL was established and recognised as part of SGBs in secondary schools, the Department of Education formulated Guidelines to assist the RCLs function properly. The Guidelines (DoE 1999:14) spells out the following as the main functions of the RCL:

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- *An RCL acts as an important instrument for liaison and communication.*
- *An RCL meets at fairly regular intervals, as determined by its constitution, to consider ideas, suggestions, comments and even complaints from its constituencies.*
- *After every meeting the RCL gives feedback to the learners.*
- *If an idea is turned down, an RCL must try to explain why an approval was not granted.*
- *If an idea is approved, it must be conveyed to the professional management and the SGB, where applicable.*
- *If they approve the idea, it becomes part of the school policy, if applicable; if they do not approve the idea, the principal must explain the reason for this decision to the council, who in turn must inform its constituency.*

An analysis of these main functions of the RCL as stipulated in the Guidelines, immediately revealed some problems associated with it. Although it is stated in SASA that learners must be members of SGBs, the decision-making machinery of schools, there is no provision for RCLs to participate in decision-making procedures. Its first function is that it acts as an instrument of communication or a go-between or a messenger between the SGB and the learners. In carrying out the function of giving feedback to the learners, in the case where an idea from the RCL is not accepted by the SGB, 'the principal must explain the reason for this decision to the RCL, who in turn must inform its members'.

With this understanding, therefore, crucial questions, such as the following arise: (i) Why is the RCL absent when the SGB is taking decisions on learner issues? (ii) Are the Guidelines for RCLs explicit enough for the learners to understand their role in school governance? (iii) Do the roles in the Guides really make provision for democratic participation as pronounced by the ANC Policy Guidelines? (iv) Are children's rights to make an input in decision-making which impacts on them being respected as stipulated

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by UNCROC 1989? (v) Do the Guidelines give room for other school governing authorities to treat learner representatives as equal partners?

Previous learner organisations did not advocate simply because they did not want to play a messenger role. Learner organisations have been canvassing to have a say in decisions that affect them.

The role of learners in school governance in South Africa has been widely debated because of the mis-match between policy and practice (Nongubo, 2004:31; Mncube, 2008: 77; Mabovula, 2009:219). The debates point to the fact that adult governors consider learner representatives as 'troublemakers', minors, immature, inexperienced and lacking in knowledge. Hence learners have not been considered as equals when it comes to decision-making. This begs the question: How then will the trumpet sound of democratic participation in education management by the ANC 1992 Policy Guidelines be heeded?

South Africans expect that, after the struggle for democratisation and loss of learners' lives in some instances in the past, the UNCROC 1989 provision and SASA 1996, RCLs in schools, today, would play a very substantial role in decision-making. The incident described above regarding learners' disagreement with the school authorities concerning the Mathematics time schedule, made me wonder about the extent to which learners actually have a say in decision-making in their schools, and, if they do, whether they are satisfied with the extent of their participation.

It is against this background that this study was conceived and my interest in finding out more about the extent of learner participation and satisfaction in decision-making in school governance born.

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1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The intention of this research was to examine the extent of learner participation and satisfaction with decision-making in school governance. Research had shown that, for different reasons, learner participation in school governance is relegated to the background by other governing authorities like educators, school management teams (SMTs) and parents (Nongubo, 2004:111, Mncube, 2008:78; Jeruto *et al.* 2011:98). In my opinion, the building of a future society lies in the manner in which children are trained. If children are exposed to the democratic values of equality, equity, tolerance and respect, they will grow up embracing these values. The old adage that 'experience is the best teacher' captures it all.

There is no better place, nor way of teaching and inculcating good values in children than in schools through allowing them to participate meaningfully in governance. This participation should not be tokenistic or minimal, but maximal, as Mathebula (2005:189) avers. The benefits of these will be seen in the way learners carry themselves, interact, relate and co-operate with other people later in life.

There are a number of studies in which researchers advocate for maximum learner participation in school governance. Nongubo (2004:2) is concerned with the incidents of violence and unrest in spite of the fact that the new and democratic South Africa allows learners, through representation, to participate in the governance of their schools. Carr and Williams (2009:71) focus is on what goes wrong from central government to institutional level (from policy to practice). Mabovula (2009:230) refering to learners as 'the voiceless', advocates that they should be given a chance to speak and their voices should be heard. The statement of the problem is to establish the extent of learner participation and satisfaction with decision-making in school governance.

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1.3 PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research is to establish the extent of learner participation and satisfaction with decision-making in school governance. The objectives of this study are to find out:

(i) the extent of learners participation in decision-making in schools; and

(ii) the degree to which learners are satisfied with the extent of their participation in decision-making in schools.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The questions posed for this study are;

(i) To which extent do learners participate in decision-making in schools?

(ii) What is the degree of learner satisfaction with the extent of participation in decision-making in schools?

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Many countries in the world acknowledge and uphold learners' rights to participate in decision-making on issues which affect them. For this reason, learners in such countries, are members of the school governing authorities. Studies by Moos and Dempster (1998:103); Welton and Rashid (1996:125); Baron (1981:25); Jeruto and Kiprop (2011:93); testify to the existence of such participation. But countries such as Sweden, and England and Wales, still do not make any provision for learner representation and participation in school governance. Aspects of learners' rights in school governance and the views of deliberative democrats' on learners' position are discussed below.

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1.5.1 Learners' Rights in School Governance

In the South African context, there is a general conviction that secondary school learners have earned a right to be heard through their participation in the liberation of the country (Sothole, cited in Mncube, 2008:78; Phaswana, 2010:105). It is, therefore, puzzling why some school governing authories stifle the opportunities open to the learners to exercise these rights. Much has been written on various aspects of South African school governance for example, the school governance policy and practice, the rights and roles of parents in the SGB, the role of the learner in the SGB, giving voices to the voiceless, issues of social justice and the voice of the learner, and perceptions on learner participation (Lewis and Naidoo, 2004:100; Noleen 2007:132; Magadla, 2007:10; Mabovula, 2009:219; Mncube, 2008:77; Nongubo, 2004:5). These studies address different issues that are aimed at the attainment of effective democratic learner participation in school governance as prescribed by policy in the SASA. Almost all these studies express disapproval at the type of recognition accorded to learners in school governance. This same disapproval is echoed in the words of a former Danish minister of education, Ole Vig Jensen. He warns his people that, if an education must prepare its pupils for democracy, it must be democratically organised and a connection between democracy and education should not be postulated, but must be insisted upon (Moos & Dempster, 1998:103). In alluding to meaningful learner participation in school governance in South Africa, it is befitting to state that for the hard-earned democratic values of equality, human dignity, human rights and freedom, which policy insists should be sustained from generation to generation, the policy must begin in schools, with learners as tomorrow's leaders.

Meaningful learner participation in decision-making on school on matters which concern them is a long standing problem faced by many RCLs in South African schools (Sithole, 1995; Mathebula, 2008; Carr, 2005). Schools in the Limpopo Province are no exception to this problem. For example, Phaswana's 2009 report on youth participation experiences in the school, municipality and youth organisations in the Limpopo Province, reveal that youth participation in these settings is fraught with practical

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difficulties (Phaswana, 2009:19). In line with earlier studies, the present study sets out to investigate the extent of learner participation and their degree of satisfaction in decision-making in six secondary schools in the Vhembe District of the Limpopo Province.

An analysis of relevant literature on learner participation in decision-making in school is discussed below, in order to enhance the theoretical framework of the study. A review of existing literature shows empirical evidence which supports the notion that learner participation in decision-making in schools is problematic.

Mabovula investigated the perception of school principals on the role of learners in the governance of five secondary schools in the Mthatha area of the Eastern Cape. Mabovula (2009:230) pionted out that learners should not only have a structure on the SGB, but that they should be able to argue deliberatively. Her findings revealed that generally, there is limited democratic participation of learners in decision-making, improper communication, lack of deliberative democratic practice and lack of trust among SGB members in the schools she investigated. One, therefore, is left to wonder if these problems arise because learners do not understand their role in school governance or if learners do understand their role but accept and are satisfied with the manner in which adult governors treat them (learners).

Similarly, Jeruto and Kiprop embarked on a study of the extent of student participation in decision-making in Kenyan secondary schools. This study was carried out in the Central Rift Valley Province of Kenya in 2011. The researchers analysed the perceptions of 300 students and 30 teachers from 15 secondary schools. They averred that student participation in decision-making in Kenya is tokenistic. Students participate mainly in student welfare issues like cleanliness and some types of co-curricular activities. Student participation in administration (finance, school rules, staff interview, physical facilities, descipline, planning, development) and curricular matters (textbooks, number of examinations, nature of assessment, teaching, grading system and teacher

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performance) is constrained by the national or regional requirements, prescriptions, and other external expectations (Jeruto & Kiprop, 2011:98).

Contrary to the prevailing situation in South Africa and Kenya where there is limited room for student participation in school governance, England and Wales give no such room. England has a long history of stakeholder participation in school governance, but without student involvement.

Wellton and Rashid (1996:125) argue that the England and Wales Education Act of 1992 devolved power from the Local Education Authority (LEA) to governing bodies (school councils) in an attempt to empower parents. This was meant to enable strategic and operational decisions to be taken as close as possible to where they must be implemented. Thus, this Act placed emphasis on consumers (parents) rather than on producers (LEA). According to Wellton and Rashid (1996:125), the majority of educators saw such councils as essential in giving a voice to the learners. The schools realised that the success of school councils depends on establishing a high level of trust between teachers and learners.

Davies (cited in Carr, 2005:29) advises that school council agendas should include both learners' immediate concerns and school policy issues. Davies' suggestion points to the idea that learners should be included in school councils, because no one but the learners can best articulate learners' immediate concerns.

Most of the countries that uphold democratic values acknowledge that schools can be the most systematic of institutions that can directly be responsible for imparting citizenship and democratic norms. They are said to be best equipped to assess the cognitive aspects of good citizenship, critical thinking, deliberation and the ability to enter into dialogue with others who have different perspectives.

The democratic government of South Africa is equally aware of this unique capability of schools. This is the reason why its education system, through SASA, makes provision

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for a formal learner body – the RCL. SASA mandates learner participation on decision-making on issues which concern them. Through this participation, learners can become engaged in critical thinking, deliberations, as well as in dialogue with those who have different perspectives (adult governors).

The extent to which such a wonderful opportunity is actually accorded to learners in practice in Limpopo, during the critical period in their lives when they can be easily moulded to acquire the right qualities, is discussed in chapter four of this study.

1.5.2 Deliberative Democrats' Views on Learner Participation in School Governance

According to deliberative democrats, such as Habermas, Rawls, Benhabib and Young, the theory of deliberative democracy is the capacity of those affected by a collective decision to deliberate in the production of that decision (Mabovula 2008:87). For these democrats, deliberation is not static, discussions result in participants' willful change of mind and decision after a careful evaluation of different opinions. In support of this notion, Mabovula (2008:88) affirms as follows:

> *... actual deliberation consists of the give and take of argument that is respectful of reasonable difference... the participants involved in the argument regard one another as formally and substantively equal. They are formally equal in that the rules regulating the ideal procedure do not single out individuals for special advantage or disadvantage. Instead, everyone with deliberative capacities is recognised as having equal standing at each stage of the deliberative process (Mabovula 2008:88).*

The above view implies that participants indulge in reasonable conversation. Although they may have divergent views, they must see each other as equals bound by the same regulations and capable of reasonable contributions at any given time, irrespective of age, class or educational standing.

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Notwithstanding the affirmation of deliberative democracy as a model of democratic decision-making, Miller (cited in Mabovula; 2008:89) cautions that, not all participants may consent to a final decision. Consequently, care must be taken to incorporate the different views so that a balance is struck to legitimise the decision.

With regards to this study, therefore, the extent to which learners in the SGB deliberate in decision-making is investigated. RCLs should not be dummy structures, because policy demands their existence in schools. Learners in RCLs are supposed to actually actively participate in decision-making, and the arena for this must be set by adult governors of schools.

Mncube (2008:79) explains that the theories of democracy and social justice cannot be separated, especially when issues of representation and participation are deliberated. Theories of social justice propose that adequate mechanisms should be used to regulate social arrangements in the fairest way for the benefit of all. These mechanisms, in the present study refer to the manner of participation of all stakeholders in school governance as mandated by the SASA. Such participation takes issues of power relations between adult and learner governors into consideration.

Gwewirtz, Ball and Bowe (1995:49) hold that social justice has two social dimensions - distributional and rational dimensions. They cite Rawls (1972) who explains the distributional dimension as follows:

> *The subject matter of justice is the basic structure of the society that is, the way in which the major institutions ...distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the distribution of advantages from social co-operation (Rawls cited in Gwewirtz et al. 1995:49).*

In relation to this study, the South African constitution stipulates the fundamental rights of human dignity, equality and freedom to all citizens. The SASA mandates that these rights be exercised by school governors in carrying out their duties of governing schools. Thus, each individual governor is expected to uphold the others' rights of

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human dignity, equality and freedom. By so doing the entire society, eventually, benefits from interacting and co-operating with each other.

The relational aspect of social justice has to do with procedural rights and is concerned with ordering social relations, according to formal and informal rules that govern the way in which members of the society treat each other at both micro and macro levels. This dimension is holistic and focuses on the interconnection among individuals (Mncube, 2008:79).

In the present study, this involves arriving at decisions in school governance, following the procedures in the SASA, be it from the election of the various governors to decisions taken and implemented. Thus, the culture of functioning according to procedure, respecting each governor's rights and treating each one as equal partners in the governance of a particular school (micro level) will filtrate through the communities in which these individuals live and interact and, eventually, into the society as a whole.

1.6 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

In this section, the researcher defines key concepts used in the study for the benefit of the readers.

1.6.1 Learner participation

According to Jeruto and Kiprop (2011:92), learner participation in decision-making refers to the work of student representative bodies (in this work the RCLs). They further explain that it is also a term used to encompass all aspects of school life and decision-making where students may make a contribution, either informally through individual negotiation or formally through purposely-created structures and mechanisms. Learner participation also refers to the participation of learners in collective decision-making at school or class level and to dialogue between students and other decision-makers, consultation or a survey among students.

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In this study, learner participation in decision-making refers to the work of the RCLs in every aspect of school governance. This includes issues of learner welfare, administration and the curriculum.

1.6.2 Satisfaction

Black and Gregersen (1997:859) see satisfaction as the level of approval when comparing an outcome with one's expectations. In support of participatory decision-making, Black and Gregersen (1997:859) explain that the degree of involvement in generating alternatives, planning and evaluating results are significantly related to satisfaction.

Satisfaction, in this study, is considered as the desired fulfillment learners attain from the degree of involvement they enjoy in school governance decision-making. The degree of involvement they enjoy is looked at in relation to when decisions in learner welfare, administration and curriculum matters are arrived at are arrived at.

1.6.3 Decision-making

Haridimos (2010:379) defines decision-making as the commitment to action, and that it consists of locating, articulating and ratifying an earlier choice, bringing it forward to the present and claiming it as the choice that has just been made. Haridimos adds that, whenever people are involved in decision-making, what really happens is that they are working retrospectively. When one feels compelled to declare that a decision has been made, the gist of that feeling is some outcome at hand that must have been occasioned by some earlier choice.

In this study, decision-making is considered to be the act of (all school governors) jointly making a choice from other available alternatives on issues of education at the level of the school.

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1.6.4 School governance

Governance, according to Hanson (2003:64), is control over the decision making process. Maile (2002:326) regards school governance as an act of determining policy and rules by which a school is to be organised and controlled. It includes ensuring that such rules and policies are carried out effectively in terms of the law and budget of the school.

According to McLennan (2000: 24), school governance in South Africa, is primarily about the distribution of authority and voice. Authority, he says, includes explicit authority such as financial and policy decisions, as well as implicit authority involving the cultures and values that determine the ethos (characteristic spirit of a culture) of a school. The underlying principle, he explains, is that of ensuring that educators, parents, learners and non-teaching staff actively participate in the governance and management of schools, with a view to providing a better teaching and learning environment.

In this study, school governance, in relation to learner participation in decision-making in the SGB, means participation in exercising distributed authority and voice. The authority (legislative mandate) to give and take in an argument that is respectful of different points of view. Learner authority to partake in the process of the formation of the will (what the SGB unanimously wants), the particular moment that preceeds choice, in which individuals or structures of the governing body ponder different solutions before agreeing on one. Thus, exercising the power (capacity) bestowed upon them by the SASA no. 84 of 1996 to make rules and policies, and ensure that such rules and policies are implemented effectively.

1.6.5 School governors

School governors are people who have an interest in the role of schools in their communities and want to make a positive contribution to the success of local schools, by improving the educational standards and achievements of their pupils. In other

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words, school governors refers to all the members of a school governing body (elected parents of learners, learner representatives, teaching and non-teaching staff of a school and any co-opted community member).

In this study, the school governors to be used are principals, teachers, parents and RCL members in the SGB.

1.7 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the research design and methodology for this study.

1.7.1 Research design

This study was conducted within the interpretive paradigm in particular the qualitative research design. This approach was prompted by the fact that researchers draw meanings from the findings of data they analyse.

1.7.2 Research methodology

The researcher collected the qualitative primary data using individual and focus group interviews. The population, sampling method, sample, instrumentation, data collection procedure and data analysis are explained below.

1.7.2.1 Population

The population of the study comprised learners in the senior and further education and training (FET) phases in the Vhembe District of the Limpopo Province; and school governors.

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1.7.2.2 Sampling procedures

A total of six secondary schools were purposively selected from three circuits, namely Dzindi, Mvudi and Sibasa. These schools were chosen on the basis that each had an existing Representative Council for Learners. According to Creswell (2007:125); purposive sampling means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for the study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study.

1.7.2.3 Sample

The sample size was made up of 53 school governors (6 principals, 6 TLOs, 6 parent representatives, 6 teacher representatives, 6 RCL presidents, 5 deputy presidents, 6 secretaries and 6 treasurers).

1.7.2.4 Instrumentation

The researcher used a constructed semi-structured interview schedule with open-ended, non-cued questions to get first hand information from school governors.

1.7.2.5 Data collection procedures

The researcher obtained permission from the Vhembe District Education Manager, the three circuit managers and principals of participating schools. Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher sought informed consent and permission to use an audio tape recorder from each participant from each participant. The researcher also took down field notes during interviews.

1.7.2.6 Data analysis

Data were transcribed and coded and the responses grouped according to questions posed. The participants' responses to each question were studied, against the views of the majority. Data were analysed manually, and during analysis, references were made to relevant documents and literature.

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1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The benefits of this study to the educational community are many. School principals, teachers, students, parents and other education stakeholders would now be conscious of the extent to which learners participate in decision-making in their schools.The study would also inform all concerned about the degree of learner satisfaction with the extent of their participation in decision-making in schools. This will result in, all concerned doing whatever is acceptable, possible and necessary to maintain, reduce or maximise the opportunities of learner participation in decision-making in schools. Doing whatever is acceptable would depend on the extent of learner participation and satisfaction as informed by this study. For example, policies that guide learner participation in decision-making in school governance may have to be re-visited, school governors may have to adopt governing styles that would be acceptable and in line with policy provisions.

This study is also significant because it examines the degree of learner satisfaction with their participation. This is unlike previous studies which focused mostly on the extent and/or nature of learner participation in school governance decision-making. The findings would inform policy makers, whether or not, to revisit existing policies on learner participation in school governance.

1.9 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted within three circuits of the Vhembe District in the Limpopo Province, namely Dzindi, Mvudi and Sibasa.

1.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study protocol was approved by the University of Venda Health, Safety and Research Ethics Committee (Project No:SEDU/13/CSEM/01/1018).

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The researcher sought informants' consent and ensured confidentiality. Neither the names of the participants nor those of their institutions were mentioned in the study. The institutions were coded from A-F and pseudonyms were used to refer to participants.

1.11 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

This study is divided into five chapters. In chapter one, the study was introduced. The background, research problem, purpose, research questions, definition of concepts, significance, preliminary review of literature, delimitation and an outline of the study were discussed.

Chapter two focuses on the review of related literature. What other researchers have said about the extent of learner participation and satisfaction in school governance.

Chapter three deals with the research design and methodology used.This includes the population, sampling techniques, sample size, data instrument, and elicitation procedures. In chapter four, the reseacher analysed and interpreted data. Finally chapter five discussed the findings and made recommendations.

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CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Concern about the tokenistic participation of learners in decision-making in schools is gaining more impertus. This can be attributed to the recognition of the fact that, in the long run, society suffers more from the lack of citizenship values, abilities and skills, which may not have been nurtured during learners' school days. If schools are considered as potential "laboratories for democracy", then the absence of good democratic school governance implies that the destruction of future democratic societies begins from the very place (the school) where it is supposed to be conceived. The violation of learners' rights by adult SGB members to meaningfully participate in decision-making in school will most likely destroy whatever strategy countries employ in future, to inculcate democratic values in their citizens. In my opinion, there is no better avenue for imparting these values and making citizens practice good citizenship and democratic principles than in schools.

This chapter presents issues on learner participation and satisfaction in decision-making in school governance. The theoretical perspective underpinned by the theory of of deliberative democracy deliberative democrats, criticism of deliberative democracy, relevance of theoretical ideas for South African school governance, effects of learner participation, school governance structure, examination of the guides and exploration of learner participation and satisfaction.

2.2 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The theoretical position that underpins this study is that of deliberative democracy. This theory, according to deliberative democrats refers to the capacity of those affected by a collective decision to deliberate in the production of that decision. Deliberative democrats affirm that deliberative democracy involves a discussion in which individual preferences are amendable if reasons put forward by other participants are convincing

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enough. Deliberative democracy however is shunned when force or deceit is employed (Mabovula 2008:87).

Baiocchi (1999:2) posits that deliberative democracy theory refers to a body of political theory that seeks to develop a substantive version of democracy based on public justification through deliberation. It calls for the deliberation of citizens as reasonable equals as a prerequisite for the legitimate exercise of authority and as a way of transforming the preferences and intentions of the citizens.

According to Dryzek and List (2002:2), deliberative democrats define deliberation as, the process of will formation, that instant where an individual or a group evaluates alternatives prior to decision making.

Young (2000:22) defines deliberative democracy as a model of governance in which participants aim to persuade one another of the rightness of their positions. The deliberative public should, therefore, be able to reject or refine a proposal. Thus, this model of governance is a means of collective problem-solving which depends, for its legitimacy, on wisdom, as well as on the expression and criticism of the diverse opinions of all members.

Young further contends that, deliberative democracy is a means through which citizens can promote their interests and hold the power of rulers in check. Therefore, participants, in a deliberative democratic governance, should arrive at a decision not by determining what preferences have the greatest numerical support, but by determining which proposals the collective agrees are supported by the best reasons. This model of democracy, she affirms, entails normative ideals such as inclusion, equality, reasonableness and publicity for the relationships and dispositions of the parties.

Young (2000:22) describes inclusion as the cornerstone of democracies and emphasises that the prevention of exclusion is paramount. The norm of inclusion for her, therefore, is also a powerful means for criticising the legitimacy of nominally

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democratic processes and decisions. Inclusion as an element of deliberative democracy, requires that a democratic decision be normatively legitimate only if all those affected by it are included in the process of discussion and decision-making. Inclusion allows for maximum and effective expression of interest, opinions and perspectives relevant to the problems or issues for which a group seeks solutions. If those affected are expected to abide by the rules or adjust their actions according to decisions from which they were excluded, then they are being used to justify the 'democratic' decisions taken (Young 2000:23).

In this study, therefore, adult SGB members must, at all times include learners in the process of discussion and decision-making as legislated by SASA no. 84,1996. If they (learners) are expected to abide by the rules or adjust their actions according to decisions arrived at by the SGB of their school they must be included in the governance of the their schools.

The ideal model of deliberative democracy promotes the free and equal opportunity to speak, question, respond to and or criticise one another. Young (2000:24) avers that this can only be met when all groups are free from coercion or threats to accept certain proposals or outcomes. Adult school governors should, therefore, create tension free decision-making atmospheres where learners are not intimidated or looked down upon as minors. During decision-making, learners should feel at ease and as full-fledged members of the decision-making body. They should fully participate by questioning, responding or criticising as required by the issue without any reservations.

In addition, reasoning another element of deliberative democracy, is a set of dispositions that the participants have.This disposition is the willingness of one group of participants to listen and respect the opinion of another group. According to Young (2000:25), a reasonable and respectful process of discussion exhibits deliberative uptake when some speak, others acknowledge the expression in ways that continue the engagement. Miller (2002:10) affirms this by acknowledging that deliberation relies upon a person's capacity to be swayed by rational arguments and to lay aside personal

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interests and opinions in deference to overall fairness and common interest of the collectivity.

In the context of this study, one can argue that, as reasonable people, adult governors in the SBG should, in the absence of agreements on issues, have open minds to register dissents from learners. This produces insights and gives room for dissent to agreements. Thus, if participants believe that some kind of agreement among them is possible, they can then in good faith, trust one another. Therefore, reasonableness in this model of governance, requires participants not to go into a discussion with commitments that bind them to the authority of prior norms or unquestionable beliefs. For example, beliefs such as minors in the African culture should not engage in discussion or dispute with their elders or seniors. According to Miller (2000:4), exhibition of such rationality results in mutually acceptable reasons to justify the laws they adopt.

Mabovula (2008:101) concours with Young that inclusion, equality and reasonableness create a comfortable arena in decision-making in which participants freely interact with each other. As a result, all hold one another in check for the implementation of decisions collectively arrived at. The public should discuss collective problems under a common set of procedures as legislated in SASA. As a structure, the SGB should know it is answerable to the plurality of others , that is RCL to learners, parents to parents, educators to educators and non-educators to non-educators.

2.2.1 Deliberative Democrats

Deliberative democrats such as Rawls, Benhabib, Habermas and Young contend that, if participants bear in mind certain concepts during decision-making, then decisions reached would be legitimate. The employment of deliberative democratic concepts such as Rawls's reflective equilibrium and principles of justice, Benhabib's democratic reflexivity, Habermas's consensus, communicative action and rationality, and Young's inclusion, asymmetrical reciprocity, rhetoric and narratives would result in satisfactory participation in decision-making by all those affected.

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According to Rawl (cited in Mabovula (2008:113) a reflective equilibrium is the end – point of a deliberative process in which participants reflect on and revise beliefs about an area of enquiry whether moral or non-moral. Rawls explains that conditions, such as adequate information and a norm of political equality (equality in which the power of engagement superceeds power and authority) enhance the principle of justice. Cohen (cited in Mabovula 2008:113) contends that, with reflective equilibrium, participants' preferences are checked and developed in arenas of "public deliberation focused on the common goal". Discussions among participants, in these arenas, must be free and open such that participants are ble to question any premise in search of reflective equilibrium.

If adult SGB members could defrock themselves of their self-imposed power and authority over learners, then they (adult governors) would be able to reflect on and revise their beliefs that learner governors cannot be considered as equals in decision-making processes. A revision of such beliefs would accord learner governors the justice which is being denied them presently as shown in literature.

Benhabib (1996:70) posits that the concept of democratic reflexivity could enhance democratic participation and satisfaction in decision-making. To Benhabib, the basic idea behind this concept is that participation in such deliberation is governed by the norms of equality and symmetry. This implies that all participants have the same chances to initiate speech acts, question assigned topics of conversation, initiate reflexive arguments about the very rules of the discourse procedure and the way in which they are applied or carried out. Benhabib further explains that such a deliberative model ensures some degree of practical rationality. One such practical rationality is that new information is imparted as no individual can possess all information deemed relevant to a certain decision affecting all in an organization. Neither can an individual anticipate and foresee all the variety of perspectives through which matters would be perceived by different individuals.

Mabovula (2008:111) in agreement with Benhabib's notion of democratic reflexivity, explains that this notion emphasises the recognition of all beings capable of speech and

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action in a given polity. This recognition implies respect for each other as beings with a capacity to express their standpoint, and whose standpoint is worthy of equal consideration. Participants, therefore, must eventually come to a reasonable agreement under conditions that correspond to the idea of a fair debate.

With regard to this study, if all SGB members think of each other in the light of themselves and practice the principle of universal respect, everyone would be given a fair opportunity in debates. No individual's point of view would be considered a product of immaturity or irrelevancy. Learners' voices would be heard and violent demonstrations would not be an alternative solution to any problem that arises. Learner participation would not be minimal nor would learners be dissatisfied with decisions that they actively take part in.

Habermas (1996:24) asserts that a ceremonially fixed pattern of communication restrict challenges to the authoritative validity of undemocratic decisions. Such mixed patterns result in an authority that imperiously confronts its public and arouses ambivalent feelings. Habermas advocates for achieving a consensus on decision-making.

Habermas avers that consensus reached through deliberation and reasoning, should be the result of democratic participation in decision-making. The decision on an issue at stake cannot be arrived at if those affected by the said decision have not had an opportunity to freely indulge in such a decision. Mabovula (2009:4) reiterates Habermas' caution that consensus should not be a prior condition for discussion; rather it should reflect the democratic discourse of informed deliberation and reflection responsive to the demands of an active populace. Drawing from Habermas's view of the rights of individuals to be included and heard, if deliberative democratic processes are employed in decision-making by SGB members, then the communicative route of violent demonstrations employed by learners who want to be heard would have no place in the school.

Furthermore, Habermas advocates for the use of communicative action. Mabovula (2009:26) explains Habermas' concept of communicative action as the act of coming

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together and employing all human ways of thinking and language to achieve mutual understanding. For Hebermas (1996:24), the social integration of collectives could originally be secured through communicative action when the concomitant risk of disagreement is brought under control. This can only be attained where there is effective communication involving active listening and where each individual's rights to participate in decision-making are legally institutionalised. Benhabib (1996:726) argues that, for Habermas, citizens can talk of freedom only if there is participation, legislation, deliberation and contestation before decisions are taken and laws enacted.

With regard to rationality, Habermas (1996:24) holds his stance on a change from simple majority vote to that of a better and reasonable argumentation through communicative power. According to Habermas (1996:149), communicative power requires the discursive formation of a common will which must be kept free of illegitimate interventions of social power. Mabovula (2008:28) explains that for Habermas (1996:147) the rights of people to participate in decisions are legally institutionalised without an individual being excluded. Benhabib (1996:726) posits that Habermas sees these rights (rights of deliberation, equal individual liberty to participate in the process of opinion and will formation) as the very norms that regulate the interaction of consociates. Rational decisions should therefore be based on the most sensible opinion (s) even if this is upheld by a minority rather than on a less sensible one upheld by the majority.

In the structure of school governance, interests or preferences can be transformed through the active exchange of ideas, voicing of opinions and listening. This is so because through the act of engaging and listening, stakeholders can be persuaded and their thinking can be transformed. This would enable them to understand and agree with one another and to make plans for a common action for the benefit of their school.

In addition to Young's main concept of inclusion as an element of deliberative democracy, there is the concept of asymmetrical reciprocity. Young sees the concept of asymmetrical reciprocity (being accountable to one another with reasons that should be

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acceptable to free and equal persons seeking fair terms of cooperation) as a principle of democratic theory. In support of her view are Gutmann and Thompson (1999:33) who aver that reciprocity requires that citizens owe one another justification for the mutually binding laws and policies they collectively enact (in this case, school rules, regulations and codes of conduct).

Gutmann and Thompson (1999:31), refer to the principle of reciprocity as a substantive principle which develops fair opportunities, individual liberties, and mutual respect. They posit that reciprocity in its moral variations-liberal, constitutional, procedural and deliberative is widely recognised as a core principle of democracy.

Gutmann and Thompson (1999:31) disagree with some theorists who believe that democratic principles should refer only to the process of making political decisions, and caution as follow:

> *A democratic theory that shuns substantive principles for the sake of remaining purely procedural sacrifices an essential value of democracy itself: its principles cannot claim to treat citizens in the way that free and equal persons should be treated – whether fairly, reciprocally, or with mutual respect – in a democratic society in which laws bind all equally (Gutmann &Thompson 1999:31).*

In the structure of school governance, democratic procedures should not only be on paper (the SGB constitution) but should be seen in practice. The moral variations of reciprocity should be observed. Discussions should proceed in a manner that exhibits fairness and mutual respect during probing for better understanding and justification. SGB members should be accountable to each other on decisions which are mutually binding. Members must accept responsibility and render accountability for their actions. Thus, if the goals of reciprocity and reasonableness are embraced, SGB members will engage in public discussions in which participants give their viewpoints, listen and learn from others for the collective good.

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2.2.2 Criticisms of deliberative democracy

Despite the unfathomable benefits of deliberative democratic processes in decision-making as opposed to a voting process, its sceptics affirm that it all boils down to allowing participants to reveal their desired preferences.

Wolff (1996:7) argues that democracy means rule by 'the mob'. In Wolff's opinion, making crucial decisions should be left to the experts, not the rabble, vulgar, unwashed or the unfit. Burken (cited in Wolff (1996:74) argues that "Your representative owes you not his industry only, but his judgment, and he betrays instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion". According to Plato (cited in Mathebula (2005:2), strict equality in which everyone has equal rights and capacity to rule, is likely to lead to instability since it entrusts the affairs of the state to people with no knowledge and skills. These critics imply that there should be no place for learners in decision-making in school governance. Learners might not be as experienced as adult SGB members when it comes to decision-making on crucial matters that affect many. Based on this, these critics advocate a continuation of the marginalisation of learner governors, a situation which currently prevails in South African schools.

According to Schumpter (cited in Mathebula (2005:192), in deliberative democracy, the central participation and decision-making role of the people rests on empirical unrealistic foundations. For Schumpeter, participation has no special or central role because the classical participatory theory is quite unrealistic. It demands a level of rationality from ordinary people, which is just not possible.

In deliberative decision-making, discussion should be based on a generally accepted conceptual and normative framework for framing issues (Young 2000:37). However, detractors of this model argue that the effort to shape arguments according to shared premises within shared discursive frameworks sometimes exclude the expression of some needs, interests and suffering of injustice. This is because these needs cannot be

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voiced with the operative premises and frameworks, given the heterogeneity of human life and the complexity of social structures and interaction.

Young (2000:37) acknowledges that silencing some problems or experiences is an ever present danger in communication because articulateness privileges the mode of expression typical of highly educated people. The norms of deliberation value expression that proceeds from premise to conclusion in an orderly fashion. Expectations about norms of articulateness and dispassionateness sometimes serve to devalue or dismiss the efforts of some participants to make their claims and arguments. In addition, she accepts that many people feel intimidated by the implicit requirements of public speaking. Yet Young (2000:40) warns that, while all admire clarity, subtlety and other excellences of expression, none should be excluded or marginalised in situations of discussion because of failure to express themselves according to culturally specific norms of tone, grammar and diction. Wide gestures, movements of nervousness or bodily expression of emotion should not be taken as signs of weakness that cancel out one's assertions or reveal a person's lack of objectivity and control.

2.2.3 Relevance of theoretical ideas for South African school governance

According to Mabovula (2008:122), the economic inequalities attendant in capitalism always threaten the gains of democratic equality. Mabovula further argues that, unless citizens embrace the forms and institutions of constitutional democracy in a spirit of rational participation, these citizens become passive, and the result is that the forms and institutions will be drained of all vitality. By implication, if SGB members in South African schools could consider one another as equal partners in school governance, then adults' basic distrust of learners and insistence of being in control of education will then be wiped out.

Miller (2000:9) points out that, deliberative ideals start from the premise that the preferences of a polity will always conflict and that the purpose of democratic institutions is to resolve this conflict. In line with this, Mabovula (2008:122) explains that if SGBs

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operate on democratic grounds as expected of them, they should resolve their differences and achieve democratic participation by all.

Mabovula (2008:70) echoes Rawl's "difference" principle which insists that justice should maximise the position of the worst-off members of a polity; in this study learner governors. Mabovula argues that unless there is freedom of choice, equality and liberty as advocated for by liberals, learners cannot be decision-makers in school governance.

The extent of learner participation in school governance decision making in South Africa has been curtailed because adult governors consider learner representatives as 'troublemakers', minors, immature, inexperienced and lacking in knowledge (Nongubo, 2005:31; Mncube, 2008:77; Mabovula, 2009:219). Budge (1993:150) contests the idea of being inexperienced and lacking in knowledge by explaining that, direct democracy is self-improving and has educational value through the effects of debates and decision-making. Budge believes that there is no insurmountable knowledge barrier looming between the population and the elite (in this study, between learner and adult governors), which inevitably debars the former from participation. Budge argues that the more citizens are exposed to debates, the better they will be in absorbing specialised knowledge, which is not static but subject to expansion and change. Therefore, knowledge cannot be the monopoly of specialists. What expert knowledge does for the expert or experienced, it also does for the average citizen. By implication, Budge avers that learners would become experienced in school governance issues if they are given increased access to decision-making discussions.

Webber (cited in Kaba (2000:22) concurs with Budge. Webber clearly argues that learners have something to offer that cannot be offered by any other group in the educational system. They offer knowledge, perceptions and opinions that can only be held by someone who is the recipient, the consumer and the purpose of the educational process. If this desired situation prevails in South African schools, then the anti-apartheid struggle concept of "people's education for people's power" will be upheld more so, because at the heart of the South African Schools Act lies the idea of

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democratic governance and partnership. According to Sayed and Carrim (1997:91), "central to the notion of educational democracy in South Africa is the idea that democracy entails, and should enhance greater participation".

The practice of deliberative democracy is also of utmost importance in the governance of South African schools because of their cultural diversity. Valuing diversity emphasises the awareness, recognition, understanding, and appreciation of human differences and revolves around creating an inclusive environment in which everyone feels esteemed. This is only possible if certain aspects such as the principles of democracy and values are upheld. These aspects are discussed below.

2.2.3.1 Should democracy be taught?

Vogt (1997:xxv) avers that tolerance should be taught. Like Vogt, Gandal and Finn admit that democracy should be taught. Gandal and Finn (1995:2) are of the opinion that, although the desire for freedom may be innate, knowledge of how democracy functions must be taught and learned.

Democracy does not teach itself. If the strengths, benefits, and responsibilities of democracy are not made clear to the citizens, they will be ill-equipped to defend it. Any society that wishes to remain free needs to ensure that its citizens are well-educated in the theory and practice of democracy. I agree with this stance, because of South Africa's position as an emerging democracy. As newly formed democratic societies attempt to rebuild their countries politically, economically, and socially, and to extend to their citizens the rights and freedoms they deserve, one thing is apparent; their long-term success will depend in large measure, on how quickly and deeply the principles and institutions of democracy take root in the hearts and minds of their citizens.

Part of the responsibility for such education lies with the schools, which should teach children not only through the formal curriculum, but also through the conduct of their institutional affairs and through various extracurricula activities. Hence learner participation in school governance offers them their maiden voyage into the expedition

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of democratic leadership. In its purest form, democracy affords citizens an opportunity to participate directly in the decision-making process. This is the vision behind the existence of the RCL. Genuine learner participation in decision making in school governance concurs with the notion that democratic governance derives its authority from the consent of the governed. Education for democracy, therefore, must be approached in a conscious and serious manner.

If the ideals that fueled the popular struggles against oppression in education are to be realised and remain secure over time, people must understand and appreciate what democracy is and what life in a free society means. This understanding and appreciation create institutional arrangements and personal behaviours that are necessary for a society to endure and prosper. People must develop the habits, attitudes, and values that make democracy possible, and the commitment and enthusiasm necessary to nurture and sustain it. The school is the driver of these habits, attitudes, and values. Tshabangu (2006:56) contends that schools have a moral responsibility to practise democratic values. At best, the school life should seek to foster tolerance, right to participation, empowerment and respect for human dignity. Values as aspects of democracy, are examined next.

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2.2.3.2 Values

According to French and Bell (cited in Nongubo, 2004:17) values are intrinsically desirable principles of life. These include among others, aspects such as trustworthiness, tolerance, respectability, fairness, openness, helpfulness, loyalty, competence and honesty.

In order for people to understand and appreciate their opportunities and responsibilities as democratic citizens, they must receive a sound education. Such an education according to Gandal and Finn (1995:4) should seek not only to familiarise people with the precepts and practices of democracy, but also to produce citizens who are principled, independent, inquisitive, and analytic in their outlook and commitment to democracy. Imbued with and guided by desirable habits, attitudes and values, school

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governors will experience limited barriers in carrying out their responsibilities. The values of trustworthiness, tolerance and respectability are discussed in greater detail below.

- **Trust**

Cook-Sather (2002:4) purports that, although it is rarely articulated, the most basic premise upon which different approaches to educational policy and practice rest, is trust. Similarly, Yuen and Lueng (2010:71) aver that trust is the lubricant for the functioning of democratic governance. The official recognition of the RCL, as a structure in school governance, is a call on adult governors to have trust in the learners' ability to make meaningful contributions during decision-making.

Unfortunately, the practices that prevail today reflect a basic lack of trust, and they have arisen to keep learners under control and place them as largely passive recipients of what others determine is education. Cook-Sather's (2002:4) lamentation is that adults' basic distrust of young people and insistence on being in control of education means that not only are learners not authorized as knowers (competent), but they are also dehumanized and reduced to products, and thus, certainly made devoid of those qualities that would make them authorities. In support of Cook-Sather, Wilson and Corbett (2001:119) advise that the efficacy of educational reform efforts ought to be reflected in what learners say about school.

Trust in learners implies empowering and giving them some degree of independence. Power, as Heilbrun (1988:18) contends, that the ability to take one's place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one's opinion discussed. This being the case, then, learners have very little influence on the system that is supposed to give them the best service.

These power dynamics in the educational system persist because learning from the learners' voices requires major shifts in ways of thinking on the part of adults. These major shifts in thinking demand an evaluation of the traditional notion that learners are

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minors, lacking in knowledge and experience. Oldfather (1995:87) asserts that, a first step toward including learner perspectives on schooling is counting them in practice among those who belong on the list of stakeholders with a voice in school governance and decision making.

- **Tolerance**

According to a Turkish Islamic scholar, philosopher and educational activist, Fethullah Gulen, tolerance is compassionate and love (Aydin 2013:9). Gulen argues that, tolerance means more than simply abiding by ideas with which one agrees, it means accepting others with whom one disagrees, genuinely embracing their viewpoints.

According to Bergen and Bandow (2010:2), the origin of the word tolerance is the Latin term *tolerate,* which means to bear, or endure suffering without action in response. Tolerance is a core human virtue which is essential for democracy and civilized life. Its absence is at the root of all evil such as peer cruelties, unjust discrimination, hate crimes, religious and political persecution, and terrorism. Tolerance incorporates grudging forbearance and indifference towards others and their beliefs. Bennett (2001:138) views tolerance as a means of treating people with respect and without malice; it does not require people to dissolve social norms or to weaken their commitment to ancient and honourable beliefs.

The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared 1995 as "The Year of Tolerance". It considers tolerance as rejection of dogmatism and absolutism, and an acceptance of respect and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and our ways of being human (UNESCO, 1995).

The relevance of this in the context of the present study is that, since SGB members are of diverse nationalities, cultures, age, maturity, experience or exposure to knowledge and beliefs, tolerance should enable them to function in unity for the good of the school. This will only be possible if these individuals tolerate each other's differences; as well as

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accept and respect the inputs of one another. Tolerance will enable them to deliberate and arrive at a consensus.

- **Respect**

Learners should be respected as human beings with rights to voice their opinions. The guiding Gulenian philosophy tells people that the absence of tolerance is the lack of respect (Aydin, 2013:9). In order for democracy to prevail in all spheres of human interaction, people must have respect for one another. Cook-Sather (2002:8) holds that, listening to someone means showing respect for that person's views. It does not always mean doing exactly what we are told, but it does mean being open to the possibility of revision, both of thought and action.

Hill (1994:3) contends that, one important way to demonstrate respect is to grant another person (willingly and for the right reasons) what he or she is owed in justice. Hill adds that respect is a fundamental moral principle, and that it is a categorical imperative that we should treat humanity, in every person, as an end in itself, never as a means only. Therefore, respect for persons as human beings must not be grounded in (and so should not vary with) heredity and social rank nor extended or withheld according to individual talents and accomplishments. Hill (1994:10) maintains that this value sets firm limits to what one human being may do to another, even in a good cause.

According to Mabovula (2008:141), respect for humanity is an essential quality for good communication, teamwork and productivity for people working together for a common cause, as in school governance. Respect, as a value of human dignity is embedded in the way the Bill of Rights governs the state's relationship with its citizens, as well as citizens' relationships with one another. Self respect must be the point of departure of respect for humanity. When a person respects himself or herself, that respect can be easily extended to others, as well as expected from others.

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Mutual respect among education stakeholders, especially among school governors, is indispensible for the optimal functioning of schools. Adult governors must respect learner governors, first as individuals with rights to be respected, and, secondly as partners in the governance of schools irrespective of their age, experience or knowledge. Conversely, learner governors must also duly respect all other components of the SGB.

The Republic of South Africa is among countries of the world that have ratified international conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. South Africa accepts the stipulations of the former to promote learner participation in decision making on matters that affect them. It also accepts the latter's provision to ensure that education is directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for Human Rights (including the right to be respected) and fundamental freedoms.

Mabovula (2008:141) holds that school governance must, therefore, direct itself to the preparation of the governed for a responsible life in a society in which freedom, equality, tolerance, peace and respect reign. These values cannot be transmitted in a repressive environment in which young people, themselves are not respected. It is only by experiencing respect for their views and discovering the importance of respecting others' views that learners acquire the capacity and willingness to listen and understand the processes and value of democracy.

2.2.3.3 The power of communication

The success of a school is largely dependent on the quality of relationships which exist within and between the school and its external partners. School management and governors need to establish effective communication channels and make use of these to promote proper communication among all stakeholders. All people's ideas and opinions are valuable and must be heard. Fletcher (2010:4) advises that an honest and open exchange of ideas is crucial for the survival of any organisation. Schools benefit,

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for example, when information for decision making is systematically collected, varied, and widely available to most school governors.

Phaswana (2010:109) contends that communication has the potential to trigger or inhibit learning. It is through communication that the theory and practice of democracy can be taught and learned. Thus, during school governance discussions, diversity of input should be sought from both experts (adults governors) and novices (learners governors). The ability of learners to properly articulate their views should not trigger impatience and exclusion from adult SGB members. Rather, it should invoke tolerance and enable learners to express themselves in whatever way they can. Jeruto *et al.* (2011:189) report that the lack of communication and dialogue, especially between learners and adult governors, is squarely to blame for most learner unrest in Kenya.

Communication is meaningful only if there is a listener. Both adult and learner governors must talk and listen to one another. Informatiom should move both from top-down and bottom-up. It is important for all views to be heard, whether or not they are to be heeded to at the end. This makes partners feel valued and creates transparency in a school where access to decisions on the part of all governors is a priority.The absence of listening leads to a break-down of communication.

Cook-Sather (2002:8) laments that most power relationships have no place for listening and actively do not tolerate it because it is very inconvenient; to really listen means to have to respond. Kae Van Engen (2012:1) avers that leaders must create an opportunity to develop relationships based on listening. Information flow through proper communication cannot be separated from the decision making process.

It is, therefore, crucial for schools, which are striving to build a democratic ethos, to commit to sharing as much information as possible. Information and communication channels, such as suggestion boxes, newsletters, notice boards, short message services (sms), school magazines, circular letters, formal and informal discussion forums, should be used to send and receive inputs from those concerned. The practice

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of democratic values in schools has various effects on the role players and on the school as an organisation. Some of these effects are discussed below.

2.3 EFFECTS OF LEARNER PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

The purpose of learner participation in school governance is to provide opportunities for young people to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable them to take an informed and active role in a democratic society. Ideally, as a democratic learning community, the school creates a model for democracy, which learners can experience by engaging in decision making (Nowak & Mager, 2012:39). Research has shown that there are enormous and different types of effects experienced as a result of learner participation in decisions which affect them at school. These include personal effects on students, personal effects on teachers, effects on interaction and effects on the school as an organisation. These effects are discussed next.

2.3.1 Personal effects on learners

By participating in decisions which affect them at school, learners experience the development of invaluable life skills such as developing a sense of responsibility or learning to take responsibility, developing or increasing communication skills (listening, speaking, negotiating and debating skills), gaining organisational skills and knowledge (learning to organise events or gaining increased understanding of school operations), learning teamwork, improving collaboration skills or learning to respect different opinions, developing decision-making or problem-solving skills, and cultivating an awareness of reality and of the need for compromise (Nowak & Mager, 2012:44; Yuen & Lueng 2010:60).

In addition, Benhabib (1996:71) contends that deliberative democratic processes impact information as no single individual can possess all the information deemed relevant to a certain decision affecting all. The process, he says, also promotes articulation of good reasons, as it forces individuals to think of what will count as a good reason for their co-

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deliberators. Benhabib's norms of universal moral respect and reciprocal recognition teach citizens to put themselves in the place of others when making moral judgements.

There is also the personal effect of developing or improving self-esteem and social status. These learner governors, Dobozy (2005:19) indicates, are respected by other learners as a result of their participation. The educational implications of these democratic experiences and non-traditional practices generally lead to the development of social and political empowerment of students (Dobozy 2005:19; Phaswana, 2010:114). This view is also endorsed by Cook-Sather (2002:3) who contends that, when learners are taken seriously and attended to as knowledgeable participants in important conversations, they feel empowered and motivated to participate constructively in their education.

Mill (cited in Mathebula 2005:191), acknowledges the educative function of participation. Mill affirms that it is only within a context of participatory institutions that one sees an active type of character being fostered. Individuals are forced to widen their horizons and take the public interest into account. Participatory governance promotes a better and higher form of moral character. Democracy and education of citizens are inseparable, as participation develops an active character (intellectual, practical and moral excellences) and promotes the good management of the affairs of society as a whole.

Furthermore, Koller and Schugurensky (2010:358) argue that political arenas provide opportunities for critical reflection and a developing sense of community that creates the condition for social transformation and future action. Koller and Schugurensky (2010:359) contend that good processes of participatory democracy can foster the development of more informed, critical and engaged citizens who are eager to learn more and take on new civic challenges. They also aver that the act of participating in decision- making serves as a form of deliberative democracy, which allows individuals to engage in a collaborative forum that heightens their awareness of community needs, while diminishing personal interest. They affirm that participation also introduces youths

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to forms of political discourse and role taking that appears to promote a high level of acceptance and understanding among people with alternative perspectives.

Nowak and Mager (2012:44) report on the effects of improvements in learning and academic achievement, evident in better learning, improved examination results, better academic performance or higher grades and greater learner progress. Leithood and Jantzi (2000:118) add that such performance is also influenced by learners' perceptions of the quality of instruction and their own abilities (academic self-efficacy).

Some negative effects reported by Nowak and Mager (2012:44) include learner disillusionment, disappointment or frustration on the limited or nonexistent influence of learners on policies, or requests not granted. There are also reports of stress and victimisation experienced by learner leaders as a result of their positions. Leithood and Jantzi (2000:117) view dropping out of school as a possible effect of limited learner participation in having a say on matters which affect them. They further report that, for many learners, dropping out of school is the final step to a long process of gradual disengagement and reduced participation in the formal curriculum of the school, as well as in the school's co-curriculum. Leithood and Jantzi (2000:117) advised that positive change in a learner's participation and identification is a reliable symptom of problems which should be redressed as early as possible.

2.3.2 Personal effects on teachers

Research shows recorded effects of learner participation in school governance on teachers. Nowak and Mager (2012:47), report better morale among staff and increased authority. Cook-Sather (2002:3) concur that authorising learner perspective can directly improve educational practice because when teachers listen to and learn from learners, they can begin to see the world from the learners' perspectives. This is more than simply an interesting experience as it can help teachers make what they teach more accessible to learners, as well as contribute to the conceptualisation of teaching and learning. Moreover, by virtue of their saturation in information technology (IT), youth

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culture media, and political currents like those set on motion by globalisation, learners are differently knowledgeable about the range of new modes of communication and uses for education than the teachers and educational researchers who work with them. As a result, teachers sometimes benefit from learners' IT knowledge (Cook-Sather, 2002:4).

Effects on interaction such as improvements on cooperation between learners and adults, better communication or information flow, increased learner understanding of teacher points of view or perspectives and vice versa, and improve the instances in which learners provide valuable insights to teachers or administrators.

There are also positive effects reported on teacher-teacher relationships, for example, cooperation among staff or a collegiate ethos among staff. However, it is reported that teachers find it difficult to be challenged and questioned by learner leaders.

2.3.3 Effects on a school as an organization

Changes to or improvements in facilities and influence on rules, policies and procedures are reported. Nowak and Mager (2012:47) studied 32 schools and reported that changes to toilet facilities and playground equipment, food and uniforms took place in 14 of the sample schools; school policies, rules or codes of conduct took place in 10 schools. Learner influence on lesson content, teaching strategies, time schedules, extended library access, use of computers or other curricula issues were also reported in eight schools and, in two schools, learners influenced staffing decisions or had some control over how the school budget was spent.

Nowak and Mager (2012:47) also explained the improved school ethos as an effect on the school as an organisation. These include improvements in school engagement (better attitudes towards the school, a greater sense of learner ownership over the school, greater learner enjoyment at school). Three cases reported better learner attendance, while more than half of the schools reported improvements in school

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climate, a better atmosphere in class, improved discipline among learners, and less bullying or racism. From 21 schools, there were reports of a democratic school ethos (learners feel that they are heard and listened to) and better learner acceptance of decisions or compliance with rules.

Leithood and Jantzi (2000:116) contend that schools whose governors practice deliberative democracy to arrive at decisions, benefit as information for decision making is systematically collected, varied and widely available to most school members for decisions.

In addition, Finn (1989:123) avers that in schools where some degree of deliberative democratic practice in decision making is implemented, learners have an internalised conception of belongingness that they are discernibly part of the school environment and that school constitutes an important part of their own experience. Such learners also value success in school-relevant goals.

Rousseau (cited in Mathebula, 2005:191), views participation, especially in decision-making as a way of ensuring good governance. During this process, an individual learns that private and public interests are linked.

2.4 SCHOOL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The structure of school governance in South African schools was set out in the government White Paper on Organisation and Funding of Schools. This aim was to foster democratic institutional management, thereby introducing a school governance structure that involves all the stakeholder groups (parents, educators, non-teaching staff, and learners in the eighth grade or higher at the school) in active and responsible roles, in order to encourage tolerance, rational discussion and collective decision-making (DoE 1996:16). This idea conceives of stakeholders as permanently engaged in dialogue, a system that encourages the formation of personal opinions and provides channels for participation by all concerned.

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The South African Schools Act (SASA) emanated from this White Paper. The SASA mandates that a school governance structure must establish a Representative Council of Learners (RCL), elected by the learners (RSA, 1996:56). The learner representatives in school governing bodies provide learners with a legitimate role to play in school governance.

The functions of the SGB of which learners are a part, are clearly stated in the SASA. These functions include, among others, the appointment of teaching and non-teaching staff, deciding on the language policy of the school, control and maintenance of the school property, and determining school fees (DoE, 1996:58). As members of the SGB, the RCL is expected to actively take part in the execution of these functions which, in most cases, has resulted in more exclusion than inclusion. The root cause of this exclusion may be attributed to the limitations the same SASA placed on the rights and duties of the learner as a minor.

The above functions, notwithstanding, SASA cautions that a minor (anyone under the age of 18) may not conclude contracts on behalf of the school and cannot vote on decisions that force a legal obligation on a third party or the school (DoE, 1996:28). Thus, the same SASA may be held responsible for the disrespect, intolerance and unequal treatment the RCL is subjected to during SGB proceedings. Research has shown that the learner is also excluded from decisions on issues not stipulated in school fees, school uniforms, and the length of the school day (Carr & Williams, 2009:75).

2.5 EXAMINATION OF THE GUIDELINES FOR REPRESENTATIVE COUNCILS OF LEARNERS

The prefect system and the Student Representative Councils (now Learner Representative Councils) were the forms of learner representation of the past. These organs had the task of representing learners in the running of their school. The guidelines for representative council of learners stipulate that an RCL is an official body

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representing all learners in secondary schools, and that it should become the most prestigious official representative structure of learners in the entire school, as well as the only body which represents every learner and in which every learner can participate (DoE, 1999:11). This document, therefore, gives learners the recognition stipulated by SASA of 1996. The guidelines, among other things, explain the purpose, objectives and functions of learners as co-governors in schools. These are discussed below.

In summary, the purpose of the council is to provide learners with an opportunity to contribute towards the improvement of the culture of learning, teaching and service to their school. Some objectives of establishing the RCL are to create a sense of co-responsibility in learners, represent learners in the SGB, provide a voice for learner expression and, in appropriate cases, provide learners with an opportunity to participate in decision-making regarding the school (DoE, 1999: 11-12). However, there is some vagueness created with the use of words such as "in appropriate cases" in relation to decision-making issues by learners. This is because the decision to determine whether or not something is appropriate for the RCL to participate in deciding on an issue lies in the hands of adult governing body members of individual schools. Under these circumstances, research has shown that learner participation in decision-making is always minimised (Ngcobo, 2003: 91-92).

The guidelines stipulate that the RCL acts as an instrument for liaison and communication, considers ideas, suggestions, comments and even complaints from its members, and channels these to the appropriate quarters, for example SMT or SGB. A more detailed exploration of the functions of the RCL was discussed earlier (see section 1 of this study).

The guidelines caution learners in the use of powers vested in them. It warns them to be mindful of the fact that the main purpose of being at school is to learn. In addition, an RCL must understand that the principal cannot morally or legally hand over the management of the school to anyone, including learners. It must also remember that it has no direct influence on labour processes and matters, as the relationship between

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educators and their employer (Provincial Departments of Education) is governed by labour law (DoE, 1999:12). This clause points an imaginary accusing finger at learners as potential threats to peace and order in schools.

In conclusion, the guidelines fall short of addressing learners' quest for full recognition and equal participatory powers in decision-making. This is amplified by the provision of a maximum term of office of one year for RCL office bearers (DoE, 1999:16) as opposed to three years for other SGB office bearers.

There are many effects of learner participation in decision-making in school governance, and these depend, largely, on the extent and degree of satisfaction in participation. The discussions that follow throw more light on the experiences of learner participation in some developing and developed nations of the world.

2.6 LEARNER PARTICIPATION AND SATISFACTION EXPLORED

In this section, the researcher reviewed literature on the extent of learner participation and satisfaction with the decision making mechanism of schools. Literature review includes learner governors' experiences from developing and developed countries.

2.6.1 Experiences of learner participation and satisfaction of developing countries

The relative unavailability of literature on the extent of learner participation and satisfaction in decision-making in school governance in many African countries is, by itself, worrisome. This is an indication that research has to be done, in order to provide more insight into and to re-evaluate approaches to learner involvement in school governance in developing countries. This discussion includes learner participation and satisfaction in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Kenya.

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2.6.1.1 South Africa

Ngcobo carried out an empirical quantitative study in 2003 in the Port Shepstone district area on the KwaZulu-Natal South Coast. He studied the perceptions of 100 randomly selected secondary school educators on learner representatives in school governing bodies. His findings revealed that, the majority of the educators, in the study, support the participation of RCLs in school governance.

However, there are a number of obstacles which result in minimal participation of learners in SGB decision-making. These include the minor status of learner governors which prohibits them from entering into official contracts on behalf of the school with a third party. The lack of knowledge of governance matters, insufficient skills to make a meaningful contribution, limited duration of service, the fact that some meetings are held at awkward times for learners, domination by adult governors, adults' lack of trust that learner governors will keep sensitive matters confidential, and the lack of confidence by learners to participate actively in meetings because they feel underrated (Ngcobo, 2003:91-92).

In 2005, Nongubo embarked on a mixed method examination of the perceptions of learners and senior management teams (SMTs) on learner participation in secondary school governance. Nongubo carried out a study in the Grahamstown townships (Rini) of South Africa. He studied the perceptions of thirty participants, including learners, principals, deputy principals, and heads of departments. Nongubo's findings reveal that, the extent of the RCL's participation in school governance is very limited. He explains that the RCL, in the most part, only existed on paper as part of the SGB. Nongubo (2005:112) laments that the RCLs are as good as not existing when it comes to decision-making in all the schools he studied. He reports that adult governors acknowledge that the RCLs are part of school governance, but they (adult governors) are not too sure how to involve the RCL in decision making, especially since by law learners in the RCL are minors.

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The learners acknowledge their stakeholder status and want to go a step further and make their inputs in decisions arrived at. This conflicting situation, Nongobu explain, creates scenes that get out of hand, sometimes. In his opinion, such a tense atmosphere is in contrast to the democratic climate envisaged by SASA.

Nongobu (2005:118) also reports a gross lack of trust among school governors. He explains that the SMTs are not at ease because they fear the RCLs may want to take over the running of schools. As a result, RCL participation in school governance is conditional and vague, and learners are still seen as potential hostile partners who want to see schools run on their terms.

Nongubo concludes that both the RCLs and SMTs have not yet made sense of what it means to share responsibilities in a collegial way to the benefit of the school. He blames this lack of agreement between the RCLs and adult governors on the vagueness of the guidelines for the RCLs in explaining the roles and responsibilities of the RCLs.

Similarly Mncube carried out another empirical qualitative study in four secondary schools in Kwazulu-Natal in 2008. He set out to examine the nature and extent of learner involvement in the democratisation of education through school governance. He collected his data from documents, observation and face-face interviews with 32 participants. From each of the four schools, he interviewed the chair of governors, the principal, two teaching staff, governors, one non-teaching staff governor, two parent governors and two learner governors. His work involved all those concerned with school governance.

His findings were that former Model C and urban schools were more democratic in school governance issues than rural schools. He explained that learners in former Model C and urban schools participated in all decision-making on issues of descipline, finance and staff selection, although they do not form part of the interview panel for staff selection (Mncube, 2008:84). This, unfortunately, is not the case with rural and township schools.

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This positive trend in former Model C and urban schools, notwithstanding, Mncube argues that learners involvement is not complete. He blames this lack of complete involvement on learners who do not consider themselves as full fledged governors of the school, learners' inability to effectively communicate, parent governors' view of learners as unequal partners, and as inexperienced minors.

In 2009, Carr and Williams quantitatively studied the Mediation of the RCL policy in some Western Cape schools from 1997-2003. Their sample comprised of 1005 respondents, comprising 182 TLOs, 50 principals, 46 SGB chairpersons, 600 learners and 227 RCL members. These were from 52 schools (from three rural areas, and a metro pole area, and they represented 11% of the schools with RCLs in the Western Cape). RCL and TLO workshops were organised by the Western Cape Department of Education in 2003.

Their findings revealed that RCL participation and satisfaction in school governance, decision –making has been very minimal. They aver that technical challenges, such as lack of "know how" about new strategies, cultural challenges which comprise traditional beliefs, expectations, norms habits and "ingrained patterns of behavior, and political challenges which refer to passive or overt resistance due to a perceived loss of power, have resulted in an uneven implementation of RCL policy in schools (Carr & Williams, 2009:78).

The tokenistic participative opportunities offered to learner governors in the above studies are also identified in Phaswana's 2010 study. Phaswana advances similar reasons as those of Carr and Williams (2009), and Ngcobo (2003) as to why adult governors continue to sideline learner governors. Phaswana (2010:117) concludes by saying that the RCLs are far from being satisfied with their role and experience in school governance.

Duma's (2011) findings showed no improvement in the position of the RCL in school governance. Duma studied educators' perceptions of the role of student leadership in

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the governance of rural secondary schools. Using a quantitative design, he analysed the perceptions of two hundred educators from the Sisonke and Ugu districts in the Midlands cluster of Kwazulu-Natal.

His findings reveal that educators do not want RCLs to be compulsory in schools. The educators advocated that they and the principals should be allowed to nominate RCL members in schools. Duma avers that these yearnings of the educators are against the precepts of SASA.

In addition, he reports that educators, in the study, assert that schools should have the liberty to decide on what form of learner leadership (the prefect system or RCL) they want. With reference to the Amendment Act No. 57 of 2001, Duma (2011:77) explains that such freedom will be tantamount to breaking the law.

His findings also reveal that, in the schools he studied, the RCLs are not consulted before decisions affecting them are taken. Some educators feel that they lose control over their work because of the RCL. The RCLs, on their part, do not support the principals, educators or non-teaching staff in the performance of their duties. Duma (2011:78) concludes that, in order for RCLs to be effective and to perform well, schools should build the necessary frameworks and communication avenues for developing learner leadership, modifying educator attitudes, and encouraging collaborative work.

2.6.1.2 Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwean Ministry of Education Sports and Culture, in 2005, declared that parents and teachers must consider striking a proper balance between protecting the child and allowing each secondary school child the full right to participate in school decision-making, as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child, Article 12.1 to which Zimbabwe is signatory (Tshabangu, 2006:57).

Like his colleagues in South Africa, Tshabangu studied learner participation and responsible citizenship in Zimbabwe's secondary schools. Tshabangu's study

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qualitatively evaluated the micro-politics of five secondary schools (three rural and two urban) against a contextual macro-politics. Data were obtained from written poetry, other written comments and cartoons by learners, interviews with teachers and head teachers, as well as from newspapers.

Tshabangu explains that, the country's curriculum at the secondary school level includes subjects like Education for Living, Guidance and Counselling and Aids Education. Unfortunately, in the majority of schools, these subjects are not taught and in the few where they are taught, numerous inhibiting factors abound (Tshabangu, 2006:56).

Tshabangu's study reveals that there is very limited learner participation and interaction between learners and management authorities. Tshabangu laments that learners are talking about and not talked with, and also that they are not consulted on wide ranging issues such as learning and management processes or on their social activities (Tshabangu, 2006:59). Tshabangu alludes to the fact that, the tone of most learners in the poetry, is one of despair and disillusionment. He adds that, because learners are not active participants in the micro-politics of their school, they do not have a sense of ownership and responsibility to find or assist in reaching solutions.

Tshabangu concludes that complete learner participation and satisfaction in Zimbabwe's secondary schools is flawed by intolerance, authoritarianism, inequality, hypocricy and prejudice by those who are supposed to nurture the community spirit and meet global demands (Tshabangu, 2006:61).

2.6.1.3 Zambia

Chiwela relates the experiences of learners from a case study of three schools in Zambia. These experiences were gathered during a project run by the People's Action Forum (PAF), an indigenous Zambian non-profit, non-governmental organisation (NGO). During this project, PAF studied the benefits of participatory school governance

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and how learners' voices and decisions have been incorporated in the process of school governance.

PAF found that participation in school governance and stakeholders' expectations varied across different communities. From seeing the learner as doing their part by simply making sure they go to school, to declaring that learners do have a significant part to play in decision-making (Chiwela, 2010:61).

Chiwela (2010:67) reports that Zambia ratified the UNCROC in 1991. In 2006, it revised its National Child Policy, which provides guidance on all matters related to child welfare. The participatory policy in educational provision and school improvement, in Zambia, gives space for encouraging and enhancing greater participation of learners in school governance decision-making. However, the struggle around power sharing with learners, along with the fear of 'anarchy' should this be allowed, is a common challenge in Zambian schools as elsewhere. These common attitudes towards learners help to illuminate the gap between policy and practice in Zambian schools.

In its governance, the parent-teacher association (PTA) represents the parental and community input in the running of the school. Despite this, the school manager and the teachers are the primary decision makers in school matters. The school also works through a prefecture headed by a head boy and head girl who have several prefects under their supervision. Chiwela (2010:64) explains that their role is to maintain discipline and order, and to ensure that decisions that directly affect them are carried out.

Chiwela (2010:64) indicates that, what is understood and applauded as learner participation is at its best actively involving learners in implementing decisions made by adults. Chiwela reports that, at one of the schools, the learners expressed ignorance at being represented on the planning committee or PTA. While the adults emphatically pointed out that they had learners' full participation, this was actually found to mean that once parents and teachers have made decisions, the learners then implemented them.

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Parents were emphatic that learners' opinions and suggestions are given consideration, a claim authenticated by the learners in some schools, but denied by those in others.

Chiwela (2010:67) concluded that, while all learners, some teachers and parents in the schools that were investigated advocate for meaningful learner participation, other teachers and parents do not support learner involvement. Chiwela blames this lack of support for learner participation on prevailing cultural attitudes and scarcity of management information. With regard to cultural attitudes, Chiwela explains that learners are brought up to believe they should remain silent in the presence of adults. Thus, learners may be hesitant to speak, while the adults are uncomfortable with learners who express an opinion.

In addition, a lack of knowledge of how exactly this participation can be brought about, and lack of exposure to a model that has worked greatly limits the degree to which all stakeholders can influence management and decision-making processes and make legitimate demands to improve the quality of education.

Save the Children organisation (in 2012) embarked on a Southern African regional study on learners' participation in decision making. Three countries, South Africa, Swaziland and Zambia were involved in the study. Their findings suggest that, generally, learners are neglected when it comes to decision-making. The explanation for this is that the way children are perceived in society is a major factor impacting on the willingness, within a country, to promote and facilitate child participation within governance. In addition, even where one can clarify the rationale for and benefits of child participation, the dilemmas and contradictions regarding certain aspects of policy and cultural beliefs are not easy to address (http://saf.savethechildren/2012/10/11 p:9).

2.6.1.4 Kenya

The Kenyan Secondary School Council was instituted by the Ministry of Education in 2009. This put in place a structure for student inclusion, which mandated that students should be part and parcel of decision-making to ensure that their interests are adopted

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in the administration of the school (Jeruto & Kiprop, 2011:93). By all understanding, this is meant to be an unconditional inclusion.

In 2011, Jeruto, Kiprop and Bomett also studied the nature of learner participation in decision-making in Kenyan secondary schools. Employing a quantitative approach, they analysed the views of 150 learners and 30 teachers from 15 secondary schools. From this study, they discovered a complete lack of learner representation in the school governing bodies. The findings indicated that the most frequent means of learner participation in decision-making are class meetings, prefect body suggestion boxes, assemblies and notice boards (Jeruto, Kiprop & Bomett, 2011:192). These are the only means of communication through which the administration obtains the views of learners and considers them for inclusion when making school policies. Jeruto *et al.* (2011:192) lament that important channels of communication that foster discussion and open dialogue in schools, for example, "barazas", school working parties, research clubs and learner councils are not frequently utilised. Jeruto *et al.* (2011:192) concluded that the nature of learner participation in decision-making is very minimal and unsatisfactory.

2.6.1.5 Brazil

McCowen (2010:16) noted that Brazil has a history of authoritarianism and extreme socioeconomic inequalities. After the military dictatorship which spanned the years 1964 to 1985, a wave of democratisation and a number of inspiring civil society organisations and movements emerged, particularly in the area of education. The Prefigurative approaches to participatory schooling were employed to restructure education.

Prefiguration is the embodiment of the forms of social relations, decision-making, culture and human experiences that are the ultimate goal. Prefiguration forms are not only instrumental to the transformation of society, but they are also meant for personal liberation.

From 2005 to 2006, McCowen collected qualitative data for an in-depth case study research on Plural schools in Belo Horizonte. These are municipal government initiative

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schools founded on a framework of policy and practice based around the principle of inclusion. Interviews for this study were conducted with three officials of the Municipal Secretariat of Education, the head teachers, three classroom teachers and three groups of learners aged 13 to 17 in the focus schools. Classroom observations, document analysis involving official curriculum guidance and pedagogical materials were also carried out at school level.

The democratic culture prefigured in the schools is that, there are a number of bodies in which learners participate. There is the school Assembly, in which the whole school community participates. Its function is to make decisions on key issues such as arrangements during a teachers' strike. There is also a smaller school council comprising learners, teachers and community representatives. This has a more executive role, with responsibilities including the managing of the budget (McCowen, 2010:18).

The Gremios are another key seat for learner participation. These are learner associations elected by them. They organise cultural, sporting and political activities in the school and act as a mouthpiece for learners' views. McCowen (2010:19) indicates that the Gremios, were the most prominent in the data. However, it was difficult to extend participation to all within the school. While many learners spoke positively about the Gremios and its impact on the learner community, some learners expressed scepticism about their efficacy in giving a voice to learners' views.

McCowen (2010:19) also reported on divergent views between schools. At one school, the Gremios were almost non-existent because of their ineffectiveness. At this school, learner action was often restricted to deciding relatively trivial elements of school rules such as not wearing uniforms and being able to leave the school at lunch time.
According to McCowen (2010:20), the Gremios are allowed to criticise and evaluate teachers to the extent that some teachers are being a little nervous about the growing learner influence in some schools.

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McCowen (2010:20) concluded that, there is evidence of a general increase in learner participation in decision-making, wide spread democratizations of the schools in question, with learners becoming more aware of their rights and being able to articulate them. McCowen indicates a significant shift in power relations in the schools and empowerment of learners. This notwithstanding, McCowen (2010:22) expressed concern on how well-equipped the learners from the Plural schools were to face the largely anti-democratic and exclusionary wider society.

2.6.2 Experiences of learner participation and satisfaction in developed countries

Below is an exploration of learner participation and satisfaction in the United States of America, England and Wales, Scotland, Canada, Brazil and Hong Kong.

2.6.2.1 United States of America

School governance in the United States of America (USA) is decentralised and made the responsibility of each state. The state's legislature only makes the laws pertaining to education (Carr, 2005:43). Each state is divided into school districts with its board of education and a chief administrative officer (CAO). The CAO appoints the superintendent who reports to the CAO. A principal heads each school and is answerable to the superintendent. There are no managing and governing bodies for schools, but civic education programmes are generally promoted. Baron (1981:25) argues that the goals of civic education are to help young people acquire knowledge, attitudes and learn to use skills, that will prepare them for life. Furthermore, Baron (1981:25) reiterates that civic education programmes are generally promoted because individuals do not automatically become free and responsible citizens but must be educated for citizenship.

The United States of America has no legal obligations for schools to invite students to participate in administrative decision-making. However, most district schools, like the

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Delaware City school, do this in areas appropriate to students' ages and competence (Carr, 2005:44).

In 2000, Kaba studied how Local School Council (LSC) representatives in Chicago experienced and made sense of the special position which they inhabited as school governors. Although the dominant paradigm of her work was qualitative, she also attended various events and meetings where LSC student representatives were present and spent many hours observing their interactions. Using open-ended and a semi-structured interview schedule, she conducted in-depth interviews with twenty LSC student representatives.

Her findings show that all student representatives supported the notion of learner participation and, in this way, are buying into the "ideology of participationism" being promoted by schools (Kaba, 2000:32). Kaba explained that, at this level, learners focus on the subjective effects of their participation. They cared about whether or not they are being "listened to" and "feel equal." Many of the learners reported that they felt as though their opinions were valued and respected by adult members, and also that they were treated as equals.

However, she explained the existence of the stratification and unequal power relations. For instance, learners are not full voting members; there is only one learner versus eleven adults on the council, and, as youths, students are a "minority" in society. Confronted with these two realities, learner representatives often find their task frustrating and difficult.

In addition, her research revealed that it is unclear if participatory decision-making (PDM) arrangements between learners and adults will, in and of themselves, lead to more meaningful learner involvement in the schools. Her results showed that learners still seem to occupy the subordinate positions in these arrangements. Consequently, they are severely constrained in their ability to effect any substantial change. Kaba

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explains that the scope of their influence, however, still seems to be limited, and confined mostly to issues having to do with "learner needs" (Kaba, 2000:32).

2.6.2.2 England and Wales

Since 2000, the Department of Education has advocated for School Councils in schools. Learner voice is now a more prominent feature of the education policy agenda in England and Wales. Wyness (2003:223) explains that the introduction of citizenship education and the demands on schools to become more socially inclusive, have forced educationists to look more critically at the most popular expression of learner voice.

Wyness (2003:223) carried out an empirical study of four secondary schools in England and Wales. The study explores the strategies adopted by learners and staff in establishing the position of the school council both as a mechanism for the expression of learners' interests and as a possible forum within a broader decision-making process in school.

Data for this study were collected between January and November 2002. Data were obtained from observation of council meetings, consultation of policy and school documents, as well as a mixture of individual and group interviews with 11 relevant teaching staff and 504 learner councillors.

The study revealed that there is some learner participation in the governance of the schools under investigation. In all four schools, learners and staff were involved in setting council agendas. The presence of senior staff at council meetings gives learners more direct access to information on school policy and the views of those who exercise power in the school.

Notwithstanding this, Wyness (2003:230) explains that the broadening of a network of accountability in schools has not incorporated learners as an interest group. Learner councillors are still dissatisfied with the marginal position of their council within the school hierarchy. Learners complain that they do not have enough power as they do not

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really negotiate with school authorities. They are just told what to do. Some of the staff members interviewed were unhappy with the limited nature of learner agenda. Other staff members admitted that the items learners discussed are important to them, but that they do not always seem to be issues of major concern (more chips on their plates, non-uniform days and less homework) (Wyness 2003:230).

Wyness also pointed out that one of the deputy heads admitted that learners' role is to look at teaching and learning, as well as issues pertaining to the whole school curriculum. Another deputy head confirmed that he saw the school council as a vehicle for encouraging the responsibilities of young citizens rather than their rights. Wyness (2003:230) reports that this deputy head admits to pushing his own interest rather than the learners'.

Research produced in 2010 by the University of Edinburgh found that, while school councils were popular and common in schools, there were problems with their design, execution and support that could undermine the whole point of the project. According to the Council of Schools (2014), researchers found that, most councils had small or no budgets; only half of all members received any formal training to perform their roles. (http://www.schoolcouncils.org 2014/07/18).

2.6.2.3 Scotland

Stafford, Laybourn, Hill, and Walker (2003:361) report that the Scottish Parliament showed a growth in interest in children's participation in decision making on issues that affect them. Built into the foundation documents of the Scottish Parliament were the principles of accessibility, openness and responsiveness. Keen to extend these principles to children and young people, the Parliament commissioned the research 'Having a Say': Children and Young People Talk about Consultation.

Stafford *et al.* in 2003, selected four Scottish local authority areas and studied the views of 200 Scottish learners from diverse backgrounds. They aimed at finding out the nature

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and extent of consultation from learners' perspective prior to decision making affecting them. Using the qualitative design, 18 focus group interviews were conducted.

Participants were asked about what they wanted to be consulted on, how they would like to be consulted and the advice they would like to give to governments and policy makers about consulting learners (Stafford *et al.* 2003:363). During the study, the researchers asked the learners about their opinion in having more say in education, conditions in schools, good leisure provision, transportation and health education.

Stafford *et al.* (2003:363) report that learners expressed concerns of exclusion from important debates on education. Learners complained that only parents and teachers are consulted. The researchers indicate that the learners want a say in the content of the curriculum and curriculum development, about examinations, financial decisions, about school priorities and the way the school is organised (for example the length of the school day).

With regard to conditions in the school, learners asked for more recognition to be given to what they wanted from the school. This included relaxing uniform policies, improving toilets, lunchtime facilities, school transport, safety at school, smaller class sizes, better playground supervision, better anti-bullying and truancy investigation strategies. Stafford *et al.* (2003:365) concluded that the learners are dissatisfied with the nature and extent of consultation made with them prior to decision-making affecting them. By implication, the learners are offered very minimal opportunities to participate in decision-making on matters affecting them.

2.6.2.4 Canada

Similarly, Koller and Schugurensky, in 2010, examined the developmental impact of youth participation in education governance. Employing a mixed approach, they studied the views of 55 learner trustees from four different school board types in the Ontario district of Canada. Koller and Schugurensky (2010:350) argued that the main role of

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learner trustees is to represent their fellow learners at the board table, and, as such, they are required to "speak as a learner, keeping the interests of the learners in mind". In their study, they found that, despite being learner representatives, these trustees are not elected by learners, but rather they are nominated by their teachers and principals. Their results also show that learner trustees have limited contact with the learners they purport to represent. In addition, learner trustees are unable to vote on decisions, however, in some schools, learner trustees are given the opportunity to make "recorded votes." These votes are recorded in the minutes of the meeting, but are not considered part of the deliberations and, therefore have little bearing on decision outcomes. They concluded that learner participation in school decision-making is still undermined despite the benefits enjoyed by the learners, school and society as a whole.

2.6.2.5 Hong Kong

Yuen and Lueng carried out a study on a Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) school in Hong Kong. A DSS school is publicly funded and can collect a limited amount as tuition from learners. Such schools are expected to develop their own niche area, but a majority of their learners should study the local curriculum and sit for the local public examinations.

The study was done at a time when devolution of powers from the government to schools was initiated. A mixed method approach (qualitative and quantitative) was employed and data were collected in two phases between 2007 and 2009. During the first phase, in 2007, 14 adults, comprising supervisors, principals, vice principals and teachers, were individually interviewed and a survey by questionnaire was administered to all 170 learners who were also interviewed in groups. The second phase in 2009 comprised nine focus group interviews with 50 learners in total.

Yuen and Lueng (2010:61) purport that the process of democratizations demands a great deal from school managers, particularly heads, to the extent that democratizations could disappear with the resignation of a devoted principal. The findings of this study indicated maximum learner participation in school decision-making to the satisfaction of both adult and learner governors. For instance, summits were held with learners on

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controversial issues so that management would know learners' views and, consequently, a decision agreeable to both could be reached. No formal rules were set during summits, which allowed for a more comfortable exchange of ideas between learners and adults. Learners in this school were allowed to make rules governing classroom behaviours, uniform design and to take part in the admission of new learners.

Yuen and Lueng (2010:63) made the following findings about the learners' views; 85.6% agreed that they were allowed to participate in school matters, 84.8% agreed that the school was willing to accept different views, 85.6% agreed that they understood the school rules well, 74.2% agreed they were involved in making the school rules, 71.2 % agreed the school rules could protect learners' rights and 87.2% agreed they liked the school uniform.

Yuen and Lueng (2010:65) indicated that this ideal situation worked well only during the first phase of the study because of its small size at the time. The school was just three months old with a learner population of 170. During the second phase and in the third year of existence, the learner population had grown to about 400.Thorny issues which the school needed to face and handle were identified. Summits were no longer used to get learners' perspectives; the communal life style of the "small" school disappeared with the growth of the school. There was increasing tension between learners and administrators, particularly when the latter put up regulations due to changing circumstances. Learners now perceived school administrators as an obstacle to freedom already granted to them.

The above discussions illustrate that learners from both the developing and developed regions of the world are given opportunities to participate in decision-making in the governance of schools. The governments of all the regions discussed above are among 193 others who have signed and ratified the 1989 UNCROC with the exception of the USA, which signed on February 1995, but to date is still to ratify it.

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There are certainly some similarities and differences in the extent of learner participation and degree of satisfaction in decision-making between developing and developed countries.

2.6.3 Analogy of learner participation and satisfaction of developing and developed countries

Many countries in the world ratified the 1989 UNCROC which provides an international human rights context for promoting the participation of children and young people in decision-making. The education of a child is a fundamental right and, as such, learners should take part in decisions arrived at on this matter. Although some learners do participate in decision-making pertaining to their education, the nature and extent of participation, as well as the degree of satisfaction varies.

2.6.3.1 Similarities of learner participation and satisfaction between developing and developed

Although both regions are different as a result of the disparity in the level of advancement or development, there are a number of similarities between them on the issue of learner participation and satisfaction in school governance issues.

In both regions, learners are represented through an organised structure. For example, there is a Representative Councils of Learners in South Africa (DoE, 1996); Kenya (Jeruto & Kirop, 2011:93), USA (Kaba, 2000:21), UK (Alderson, 2000:121), Student Trustees in Canada (Koller & Schugurensky, 2010:350), New Zealand (New Zealand Education Act, 1989), and the Gremios in Brazil (McCowen 2010:19).

To a large extent, learners in both the developing and developed countries are allowed limited participation in decision-making in the governance of schools. In both regions, learners are excluded from financial matters, curriculum issues, and some administrative and management issues, the reasons being that they are considered

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immature, minors, with no skills and experience in school governance (Kaba, 2000:32; Wyness, 2003: 230 and Mncube, 2008:84).

Learner representation in school governance in some less developing and more developing countries is just a window dressing as research shows (Nongubo, 2005:112; Tshabangu, 2006:59; Jeruto *et al.* 2011:192). In South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya, for instance, learner councils are part of the SGB because it is an obligation by policy. There is much adult domination, as well as distrust, disrespect and intolerance of learners. Learners are talked to not talked with, nor are they consulted on many issues (Ngcobo, 2003:79; Nongubo, 2005:118; Tshabangu, 2006:61).

In both developing and developed countries, the number of learner representatives in governance committees is far less than that of the adults. In Kaba's study, in Chicago, the ratio was 1:11 (Kaba, 2000:32); the New Zealand Education Act of 1989, Section 97, makes provision for only two learner representatives in the Board of Trustees (Carr 2005:42). In South Africa, like in New Zealand, two learners, the RCL president and secretary, represent the rest of the learners in the SGB. This always places learners at a disadvantage because, should a deadlock occur on an issue between adult and learner governors, and the committee decides to resolve it by voting, then the adults will carry the day.

Learner involvement in school governance decision-making is not obligatory in all countries in both the developing and developed regions. In the developing counties, it is obligatory in some countries like South Africa (SASA No. 84. 1996), Zambia (Chiwela, 2010:63), Tanzania (Carr, 2005:51) and Kenya (Jeruto & Kirop, 2011:93) but not obligatory in Zimbabwe (Tshabangu, 2006:57). In the developed countries, learner involvement in school governance decision-making is not obligatory in countries like the USA and UK (Carr, 2005:48 & 30), while it is obligatory in New Zealand and Canada (New Zealand Education Act of 1989, Section 97; Koller & Schugurensky 2010:350 respectively).

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Despite the evidence of the benefits of learner involvement in decision making, genuine learner participation in school governance is still a comparatively rare phenomenon internationally (Harber, 2010:35). Harber purports that this is because, throughout the history of schooling, there has always been a conflict between education for control, in order to produce citizens and workers who are conformists, passive and docile, on the one hand, and those who wanted to educate for critical consciousness, individual liberation and participatory democracy, on the other. Harber reiterates that the former has dominated the real world of schooling, as opposed to educational debates and theory (Harber, 2010:41).

The degree of satisfaction these learners derive from participation is very little. Alderson (2000:133) summarises learners' degree of satisfaction by stating that simply starting a council without ensuring that other aspects of the school improves, does not necessarily improve a school. It could increase disaffection about the tensions between rhetoric democracy and reality in school life and about the school generally. Setting up a democratic council with the learners, thus involves related changes in routines and relationships throughout the school.

In addition, Stafford *et al.* (2003:363) report that learners want to have a say about the content of the curriculum and curriculum development, about examinations, financial decisions and the way the schools are organised (for example the length of the school day). Furthermore, the learners insist that, if they are to be consulted, this consultation should be a genuine attempt to listen seriously to their views and act on them, not just a window dressing exercise conducted for the benefit of adults about issues already decided upon (Stafford *et al.,* 2003:365).

Similarly, continuous learner unrest reported in Nongubo's study is indicative of the fact that learners are not satisfied with their participation (Nongubo, 2005:2).

Research has shown that, for most learners, schooling does not presently provide many opportunities to participate in decision making on significant school issues, especially in

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relation to curriculum, teaching and learning (Jeruto *et al.* 2011:192; Ngcobo 2003: 91; Kaba, 2001:32). However, there are researched and documented exceptions to this, and, where they exist, there have been benefits to both schools and learners (Nowak & Mager, 2012:44; Koller & Schugurensky, 2010:358; Finn, 1989:123).

2.6.3.2 Differences of learner participation and satisfaction between developing and developed countries

By virtue of the fact that the rate of development in both regions differs, it is obvious that there will be some differences in the extent to which learners participate and the degree of satisfaction in decision-making in school governance.

In most developing countries, learner representatives and adults have equal voting rights. Where there is a deadlock in arriving at a decision and governors vote for a decision, each governor's vote carries equal weight. In most developed countries, however, learners do not have full voting rights. In Canada, for example, learners' votes are just recorded votes. These are not are not considered when the final decision is taken (Kaba, 2001:32). In New Zealand, all members are equal; although only two learners represent the learners in the Board of Trustees, both have only one vote (Carr, 2005: 42).

Learner in most developing countries have no say on issues such as staff appointments and the curriculum (Jeruto *et al.*, 2011:192; Ngcobo, 2003: 91). However, in some developed countries, like New Zealand, a report by the Education Review Office in 2003, reveals that learners have some influence over what they are studying, and that the level of influence varied according to the teaching philosophy, subject and class. Learners' inputs were also sought on the implementation of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (New Zealand Education Review, 2003:11-12).

All in all, no country reviewed in this study fully observes the provisions of the declaration of UNCROC. However, countries with best practices, to some extent, are in

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line with the current trend on learner participation and satisfaction in school governance, and these include Brazil, Hong Kong and UK.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the theory of deliberative democracy which informs this study. According to this theory, all those affected by a certain decision must take part in arriving at that decision. Deliberative democrats are of the view that employment of deliberative democratic concepts (such as Rawls's reflective equilibrium and principles of justice, Benhabib's democratic reflexivity, Habermas's consensus, communicative action and rationality, and Young's inclusion, asymmetrical reciprocity, rhetoric and narratives) would result in satisfactory participation in decision-making by all those affected. Despite the enormous benefits of deliberative democratic processes in decision-making, as opposed to a voting process, its skeptics argue that it just allows participants to reveal their desired preferences.

Relevance of the theoretical idea of deliberative democracy for South African school governance is that if SGBs operate on democratic grounds as expected of them, they could resolve their differences and achieve democratic participation by all.

A review of some existing literature from both developing and developed countries revealed that some countries, in both regions, have accepted learner inclusion in the governance of their schools. Despite this acceptance, the extent of learner participation is very minimal and the degree of satisfaction very low in most countries, in both regions.

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CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research was to establish the extent of learner participation and satisfaction with decision-making in school governance. This chapter outlines the research design and methodology of this study.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study was conducted within the interpretive paradigm; that is a qualitative research design. The paradigm is underpinned by observation and interpretation. According to Creswell (2009:230), interpretation in qualitative research means that the researcher draws meanings from the findings of data analysis. According to Babbie and Mouton (2001:645), a paradigm is a model or framework for observation and understanding which shapes both what is seen and how it is understood.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007:21) aver that the interpretive paradigm centres on the way human beings make sense of their subjective reality and attach meaning to it. The researcher's understanding of these subjective meanings, in studied domains, is essential in the interpretive paradigm. In agreement with Cohen *et al.,* Creswell (2007:20) posits that, with the interpretive paradigm, individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. The interpretive paradigm approaches people not as individual entities who exist in a vacuum, but as collectives and explores their world within the whole of their life context. People develop subjective meanings of their experiences. These meanings are varied and multiple, leading to the researcher looking for the complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings into a few categories or ideas. The goal of research, then, is to rely, as much as possible, on the participants' views of the situation.

This approach ensured an adequate dialogue between the researcher and the participants with whom the researcher interacted, in order to collaboratively construct a

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meaningful reality. It is from the meanings of participants' experiences that the findings were derived. This approach enabled the researcher to understand better the extent of learner participation and their degree of satisfaction in decision-making in school governance.

3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Cohen *et al.* (2007:47) define methodology as an approach to collect data which are to be used as a basis for inference and interpretation.The researcher collected qualitative primary data by means of a narrative inquiry which falls within the interpretive paradigm. The researcher conducted individual and focus group interviews. Individual interviews were used because it would have been impossible for the researcher to conduct focus group interviews with some participants such as principals, SGB chairpersons, teachers and Teacher Laison Officers (TLOs). Focus group interviews were conducted with learners because it is a lot easy to meet all memebers of an RCL at school. The population, sampling method, sample, instrumentation, data collection procedures and data analysis are explained below.

3.3.1 Population

The population of the study consisted of principals, parents representatives, TLOs, Teacher representatives, RCL from six secondary schools in the senior and further education and training (FET) phases in the Vhembe District of the Limpopo Province.

3.3.2 Sampling Procedures

A total of six secondary schools were purposively selected from three circuits, namely Dzindi, Mvudi and Sibasa. These schools were chosen on the basis that each has an existing RCL. According to Creswell (2007:125) purposive sampling means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for the study because they can purposively inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study.

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Non-probability sampling method was preferred because it offered the researcher "information rich" participants for the study. The schools were selected in such a way that they represented semi-urban and rural public school settings. Because of this, a broader scope is represented to permit generalization of findings.

Participants from each school included a principal, parent representative, teacher representative, teacher liaison officer (TLO), the RCL president, deputy president, secretary, treasurer, as well as an RCL additional member. These participants were targeted because their membership in the SGB avails them a good opportunity to comment on the extent of learner participation in decision-making in the school and on learner satisfaction in the role they actually play in school governance. Furthermore, it was easy to contact most of the participants because of their daily presence at school.

3.3.3 Sample

The sample size of this study consisted of 53 school governors (6 principals, 6 TLOs, 6 parent representatives, 6 teacher representatives, 6 RCL presidents, 5 deputy presidents, 6 secretaries, 6 treasurers and 6 RCL additional members).

3.3.4 Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (cited in Shenton, 2004:71) posit that trustworthiness of a research study is important in evaluating its worth. It demonstrates that the evidence for the results reported is sound and that the argument made, based on the results is strong. Therefore, trustworthiness of interpretations and findings is dependent on the researchers ability to demonstrate how they were reached. According to Lincoln and Guba (cited in Shenton, 2004:71), trustworthiness involves establishing credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability.

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According to Merriam (cited in Shenton, 2004:71), credibility is the qualitative investigator's equivalent concept of internal validity. To Merriam, credibility deals with how congruent the findings are with reality. In this study, the researcher piloted the interview schedule. During the analysis of the piloted data, the researcher checked participants' responses against the research questions and objectives. Participants' responses spoke to the research questions.

Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher visited each participant or group of participants for the purpose of creating rapport and eventually building trust. In order to achieve triangulation which is an aspect of credibility, the researcher used two interview methods, namely individual and focus group interviews. Merriam (cited in Shenton, 2004:66), argues that although both are interviews of a kind, their distinct characteristics also result in individual strengths. Dervin (cited in Shenton, 2004:66), sees this as a variety of perspectives, in order to get a better, more stable view of reality.

In addition, to ensuring honesty in participants, prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher explained, to participants, that their participation must be voluntary and that they were free to quit at any stage during the interview and that no reason will be demanded from them. The researcher pledged to respect confidentiality and anonimity and assured participants that there were no wrong or right responses to questions.

The researcher also performed member checks on the spot by asking probing questions, where necessary, during each interview session. At the end of the interview, participants also listened to the recorded data and confirmed whether or not it is what they intended to say. This is recognised by Van Maanen who writes that:

> *analysis and verification … is something one brings forth with them from the field, not something which can be attended to later when the data have been collected. When making sense of field data, one cannot simply accumulate information without regard to what each bit of information represents in terms of its possible contextual meanings.* Van Maanen (cited in Shenton, 2004:68).

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To a greater extent, the results of this study are congruent with results obtained from the review of existing literature such as those of Mabovula (2009:219), Mncube (2008:77) and Nongubo (2005:118).

Merriam (cited in Shenton, 2004:69), avers that transferability (external validity) is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations. This is possible if the researcher, from the onset, provides information on the number of institutions taking part and where they are located, any restrictions in the type of people who contributed to the data, number of participants involved in the fieldwork, data collection methods employed, number and length of data collection sessions, and the time period over which data were collected.

The researcher ensured transferability, as an aspect of trustworthiness, by providing information such as six secondary schools being purposefully selected from three circuits, namely Dzindi, Mvudi and Sibasa in the Vhembe District . The researcher was the only fieldworker and she conducted a total of thirty interview sessions lasting between seventeen to thirty minutes, over a period of six months.

Involving more than one school from three different circuits, and interviewing up to fifty-three participants is a transferability measure. The researcher constantly compared the responses with policy stipulations and literature.

Furthermore, trustworthiness was ensured by catering for dependability. Lincoln and Guba (cited in Shenton, 2004:71), stress the closeness between credibility and dependability. They argue that in practice, a demonstration of the former goes some distance in ensuring the latter. Lincoln and Guba explain that this may be achieved through the use of "overlapping methods" such as focus group and individual interviews. In this study, data were collected using focus group and individual interviews, thus ensuring dependability.

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Shenton (2004:72) avers that conformability is the qualitative investigator's comparable concern to objectivity. Shenton cautions that steps must be taken to help ensure, as far as possible, that the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the research participants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher. This researcher adhered to this as evident in chapter four where the analysis of each question was backed up by an extract from the responses of participants.

3.3.5 Data collection procedures

A semi-structured interview schedule with open-ended, non-cued questions (see appendix) was used in this study. These questions were based and linked to varoius aspects of the reviewed literature.The interview schedule questions were used to get first hand information from school governors. The questions were such that the responses explained the extent to which learner governors are given an opportunity to contribute to decisions arrived at by the school governing body and the degree of satisfaction these learners get from the contributions they make.

The researcher obtained permission to carry out this study from the Vhembe District Education Manager, the three circuit managers and principals of participating schools. In addition, the researcher sought informed consent and permission to use either a video or audio tape recorder (whichever the participant was comfortable with) from each participant prior to conducting the interviews. The researcher conducted pilot interviews with six school governors who were not part of the final study, to test the quality of the interview schedule. The transcribed responses revealed the need to rephrase some of the questions with inadequate responses.

The researcher was the sole fieldworker. The researcher interviewed the principals, as well as parents and teacher representatives individually. However, learners were interviewed in groups. There were twenty-four individual interview sessions and six focus group sessions. Each session lasted between seventeen and thirty minutes. The researcher took down field notes during interviews, as well as performed member

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checks during and after each interview session. As a verifying measure, the researcher expanded the field notes immediately after completing each interview. The entire data collection period lasted six months.

3.3.6 Data analysis

Data were transcribed and coded, and responses were grouped according to questions posed. The participants' (principals, teachers, parents, RCL presidents, deputy presidents, secretaries, treasurers and additional members of RCL) responses to each question were studied, gauging the views of the majority. The data were analysed manually and, during analysis, references were made to relevant documents and literature.

3.4 Ethical considerations

The ethics committee of the University of Venda granted ethical approval for this study to be conducted (Project No:SEDU/13/CSEM/01/1018).

The researcher sought informants' consent and ensured confidentiality. Neither the names of participants nor those of their institutions were mentioned in the study. The institutions were coded A to F and pseudonyms were used to refer to participants.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher discussed the research design (qualitative) and methodology (interpretive paradigm) used in the study.

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CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyses and interprets collected data. Data are drawn solely from the interview responses of the participants. Codes are used to distinguish the participants. The schools are coded from **A** to **F** and participants are coded as follows; **P** for principals, **PC** for parent components, **TC** for teacher components, **TLO** for the teacher liaison officers and **RCL** for a representative council of learners. Each of these codes is followed by the letter of the participant's school. For example: **PC-A** represents the parent component of school **A**.

The analysis opens with the interpretation of participants' biographical information. Thereafter, a question by question analysis of the interview responses.

4.2 BIOGRAPHICAL FINDINGS

Section A of the interview schedule contained biographical information. A total of 53 participants were interviewed.

Out of 53 participants, comprising learners, teachers, teacher liaison officers, principals and parents, 39 were males and 14 females. Over half of the participants were younger than 20 years of age. Eighteen of the participants (comprising teachers and principals) have work experience ranging from 6-31 years, giving an average duration of work experience of 17 years. The average number of years of involvement in School Governance was 9 years (ranging from 2-24 years). Thirty-five participants had a grade 12 qualification or lower, 14 had a degree and 4 had a postgraduate qualification.

The bar chart below shows the age distribution of the 53 participants involved in this study.

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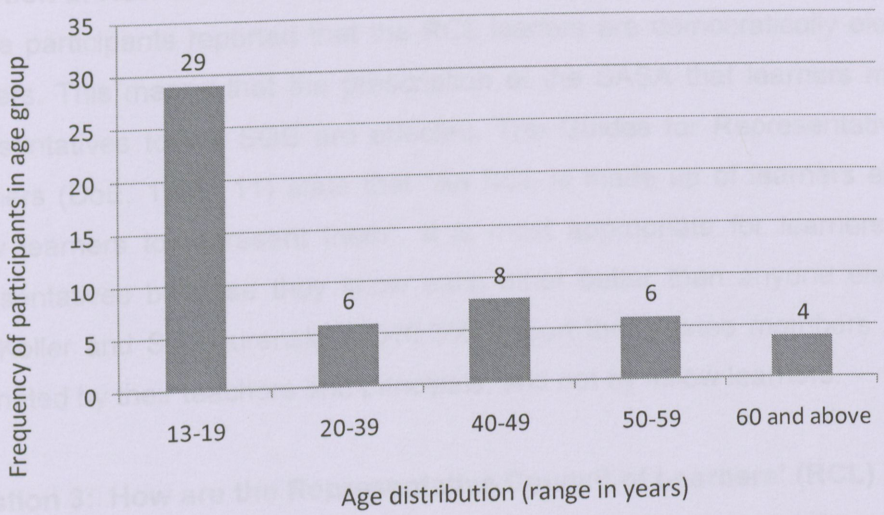


Figure 4.1: Age distribution of the 53 participants involved in School Governing Body activities used in the study

4.3 Data analysis

The following questions are in sections B and C of the interview schedule. Questions in section B are on general information and capacity building, while those in section C looked at the extent of learner participation and satisfaction in decision-making in schools.

Section B

Question 1: Which system of learner leadership exists in your school?

All participants viewed the RCL system as the only existant system. This is in line with the requirements of SASA No.84 of 1996, which recognises the RCL as the only authorised learner representative structure in schools.This recognition is further echoed in The Guides for Representative Councils of Learners (DoE, 1999: 11), which stipulates that an RCL is an official body representing all learners in secondary schools.

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Question 2: How are the leaders selected?

All the participants reported that the RCL leaders are democratically elected by fellow learners. This means that the prescription of the SASA that learners must elect their representatives to the SGB are effected. The Guides for Representative Councils of Learners (DoE, 1999: 11) state that "An RCL is made up of learners elected by their fellow learners to represent them". It is most appropriate for learners to elect their representatives because they know each other better than anyone else. Contrary to this, Koller and Schugurensky (2010:350) report that trustee members in Canada are nominated by their teachers and principals, and not by fellow learners.

Question 3: How are the Representative Council of Learners' (RCL) office bearers made aware of their role within the governance of the school?

The majority of the participants stated that the RCL is trained at the circuit level by the DoE once during its term of office. Some participants hold the view that the RCL is trained by the TLO and yet others (some parents) say the RCL is trained by the SGB. The fact that some top members of the SGB do not know how the RCL is trained is an indication of the limited interest they have in the proper functioning of the structure, and whether or not the RCL know their roles. One chairperson responded to the above question as follows:

> **PC-D:** "*I don't know, the person who usually liaise with them is the TLO, I just come here and conduct the meeting. I use to ask them if they are well taught on how to do their work with the SGB, they say they taught them. Am not aware whether they are right or wrong. You know sometimes they avoid teaching the RCL the right things because when they know, they do cause problems in the schools*".

Such a response is worrisome. If the correct information is hidden from the person one claims to be training RCL, then the whole mission of building tomorrow's leaders is ruined. Hiding information on the role of the RCL from learners is tantamount to ursuping their bargaining power in the decision-making process.

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Most participants also reported, in dismay, that the RCL is given only a once off training by the DoE. The general opinion is that the training is insufficient and leaves much to be desired. It is not surprising, therefore, that the limited knowledge gained from this once off training correlates with the complaints about lack in knowledge and experience in Nongubo findings (2004:31), as well as those of Mncube (2008:77) and Phaswana, (2010:110). In the words of a teacher:

> ***TC-E:*** *"They are trained once per year by the department about their roles and responsibilities. I think this one time workshop is not enough training. This does not capacitate them enough because they only go once and only for a day. They still run short of a lot of information. I don't know if the department does not want to train them more than once looking at the time frame, because most of the members are in grade 11 and 12. But I think training them at least twice a year will be better".*

Question 4: How are the SGB members of your school trained for their office?

This question was posed only to principals and SGB chairpersons. Participants responded that shortly after they are elected, they are trained by some officials of the DoE. Like the RCL who are trained once, SGB members are also trained once a year for their three year service period. Some participants express disapproval with the manner of training. In some cases, members receive no further training for the other two remaining years. Some participants explain:

> ***PB****: "Immediately after the inauguration they get training, but is just a crash course, I feel they are doing injustice, because some two or three hours training for people who have never worked as SGB members, they have to learn bit by bit."*
> ***PD****: "They get an induction workshop for a few days after they have been elected. But from there they are only called when there are meetings where some changes are occurring." This can never be enough, especially because there are some who are still illiterates."*
> ***PC-D:*** *"After elections all those elected in the circuit are invited and work shopped. I think the workshop is effective, they give hand outs which we consult if we forget something".*

This training notwithstanding, SGB members are not capacitated enough to perform their duties with others as expected of them with other members of the SGB. This

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insufficient training may impact on the manner in which the members perform their duties.

Question 5: What is your opinion on the fact that learners should be included as members of the SGB of a school?

This is the one question that all participants answered in the affirmative, without blinking. The move to include learners in the governance of their schools is highly welcomed by all. This question was intended to evaluate SGB members' knowledge on the main purpose or reason for the existence of the RCL in school governance. Participants gave different reasons why they consider the RCL as an important component of the SGB. It is quite interesting that the majority of the participants (parents and SMTs inclusive) gave as a reason the fact that the RCL is the learners' mouth piece.

Some participants agreed that it is learners right to participate in their own issues, and also to be part of the leadership of what belongs to them because they understand their needs more than anyone else and are in the best position to make others understand them. This reason is at the heart of the theory of deliberative democracy which informs this study, that is, the capacity of those affected by a collective decision to deliberate in the production of that decision (Mabovula, 2008:87). This view of the participants reflects Young's (2000:22) emphasis that inclusion, as an element of deliberative democracy, requires that a democratic decision is normatively legitimate only if all those affected by it are included in the process of discussion and decision-making.

Some participants explain the importance of the RCL in school governance as follows:

> ***PC-C:*** *"Yes, they make us know many things about other learners and the school."*
>
> ***TC-B:*** *"They are being regarded as the eyes of the learners, they do play an important role in that they can control their learners, talk to them to follow what the SGB is looking for."*

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RCLB-D: *"The RCL is the mouth of the students so through it the school can know the learners' problems'.*

RCLC-T: *"To make teachers and learners unite so that we can make a grand goal for the school."*

The puzzle that needs unraveling is; if the SMT and parents in the SGB acknowledge that the RCL is learners' mouth piece, why then do they stifle the free flow of communication between themselves and the RCL? Interaction among these entities is one way in nature; it is mostly top-down. Even though the main function of the RCL, as stated in the guidelines (DoE, 1999:14), is to act as an important instrument for liaison and communication between learners and the SGB, there is hardly any communication. Information is almost always handed down to the RCL to take to its constituent. RCL members are hardly ever given an opportunity to deliver information from the learners to the rest of the SGB members.

It is common knowledge that communication, especially in a deliberative democratic society, is a two way process, which should be both top-down and bottom-up. Phaswana (2010:109) posits that communication is the pivot on which the theory and practice of democracy is learnt and taught.

Furthermore, some participants reported that an RCL is important in the SGB because it unites learners and teachers for a common goal, namely teaching and learning. Literature shows that the effects of the existence of an RCL on learners, teachers and the schools as an organisation are enormous. These, among others, include Nowak and Mager (2012:47), who talk of improved school ethos; Finn (1989:123) on learners having an internalised conception of belongingness; and Leithood and Jantzi (2000:116) who aver that schools systematically collect varied information.

Question 6: What do you think about the one year term of office for the RCL? Is it too long, too short, or just enough? Give reasons for your answer.

In response to the above question, some participants said one year is enough. Some backed up this by saying there are many learners, so others should be given a chance

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to also lead. In addition, if a learner is in grade 12, he or she might move to a tertiary institution the following year, or a leader decide might decide to move to another school. Others believe that, if they are given more than a year, they may abuse their authority. One principal's perception was as follows:

> **PB:** *"I don't think it is short because if you over stay at times, you abuse. We have to choose learners every year so as to give others a chance to lead."*

Many participants are of a contrary view on the length of service of the RCL. They argue that one year is too short a time for any reasonable eposure to leadership skills and to effect any change where necessary. The example below depicts this picture:

> **RCLF-AM:** "*I think is short because at the middle of the year we are getting to know the learners more, we learn something at the end of the year and the next year we want to take decision, we want to make a change but we won't have that opportunity to make that change as we cannot be members of the RCL again".*

The yearning of some participants for a longer duration of service concurs with Ngcobo's findings (2003:91-92), that the limited duration of the RCL service, among others, contributes to their minimal participation in SGB decision-making.

Question 7: How can you explain the idea that learners are actors with skills and capacities to bring about constructive resolutions to their own problems?

Almost all the participants responded to this in the affirmative. The majority of the participants were of the opinion that learners are the ones involved in matters concering learners, and that they understand the root causes of their problems best. A principal had this to say:

> **PF:** "*Ya, ya, they do bring critical contributions. They are exposed to quite a number of things and therefore they know their friends well. Therefore if you give them space to make contributions, we always find them coming with good contributions for the development of their own education."*

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This idea is supported by Kaba (2000:22) who avers that learners offer knowledge, perceptions and opinions that can only be held by someone who is the recipient, the consumer and the purpose of the educational process.

A few principals were of a contrary view. They hold that learners have no skills and need help from adults. In one principal's words:

> **PC:** *"Yes, but they also need guidance. Sometimes they are ashamed to open up so as long as we engage the services of the liaison teacher who guides them then they prove to have that potential to think and act appropriately which is commendable in a school system."*

Such denial of learners' potentials contribute to limiting their freedom for input in decision-making. The adage "he who wears the shoes knows where it pinches" says it all. Thus, the learners should be given their due opportunities to participate in decision-making on issues that affect them.

Section C

Question 8: How does your SGB inform its members of a meeting?

While all the other participants aver that SGB members are informed by various means including letters, cell phone messages, telephone calls and even loud speakers, in some situations, the RCLs report differently. The RCLs, in half of the schools in the study, said that they are never invited. One group said, sometimes, they are invited, sometimes they are not. Another said if they are invited, that is done about thirty minutes before the meeting starts. Yet another indicated that, sometimes, they are imformed by teachers or the principal, but sometimes no one informs them. Some direct responses from the RCL throw more light on their situation.

> ***RCLF-P****: "Most of the time they inform and call us about 30 minutes before the meeting starts. They come and say, hey president please you have to call your members to come and be present at the meeting so it is not good enough, because if we have a meeting we have to be informed before 7 days so they just come at my class, there was maybe a teacher there and they just say am looking for the president then I go out. I think they do not care more about us, that is what I can say, if they do care about us, they will inform us in time, they will tell us everything in time. (After probing) there*

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have been 4 SGB meetings since we were voted and I have attended all the meetings. But every time they just come and call like that."

RCLE-D: *"As I said, we know nothing about the SGB of this institution. We are now so frustrated to ask the TLO because she never responded to the questions that we have been asking her."*

RCLC-P: *"They don't call us for meetings so we don't know why they are not supporting us. I went to the principal and said at the workshop we were told we have to attend all SGB meetings so why are they not informing us? He said I should go to the SGB secretary and he said he forgot us."*

Carr and Williams (2009:77) also reported that learners are not given notices to attend meetings. The lack of information about upcoming SGB meetings prevents them from attending. If they attend, despite the short notice (as is mostly done), the lack of preparedness denies them the power of engament, a necessity upheld by deliberative democrats. As a result, their participation is limited as their input is silenced, causing low levels of satisfaction in the RCL. Young (2000:22) describes inclusion as the cornerstone of democracies and emphasises that the prevention of exclusion is paramount.

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Question 9: How does the chair person ensure that everyone present has the freedom to contribute to the final decision to be taken during meetings?

All adult participants report that everyone is given an opportunity to contribute and that the idea held by the majority is taken. In case the board decides to vote in order to arrive at a decision, the idea with the most votes is taken. Some participants had this to say:

PC-C: *"We discuss until everybody should be satisfaction. Even if your reason is not good enough we listen and answer your questions. We make sure that everybody present say what is in his heart."*

T C-B: *"The chairperson or whoever is chairing in the absence of the chairperson often gives a chance to discuss their ideas and at the end of the day we agree and the chairperson takes the solution from the matters discussed. Sometimes it gets to a point where we have to vote and then the majority rules from then."*

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Only one out of the six groups of RCLs expressed a similar view as the adult participants. The others lamented that they are hardly ever invited to meetings, and when they are, decisions are mostly taken without their input.

> ***RCLF-AM:*** *"Most times at the meeting they just tell us that they have taken a decision to do this and that. They don't explain to us why they have taken the decision and we as the RCL at times we are confused and will have like to take our own decision on that matter."*
>
> ***RCLE-P:*** *"We don't know because we never attend their meetings."*

These RCLs, like those of Tshabangu's study (2006:59), are talked to rather than talked with. They are given instructions to implement decisions taken by adult governors. Kae Van Engen's (2012:1) stance that information flow through proper communication cannot be separated from the decision-making process, is ignored in the running of most SGBs in this study. These findings corrolate with those of Nongubo (2005:112) who laments that the RCLs are as good as not in existence when it comes to decision-making in all the schools he studied. Similarly, Jeruto *et al. (*2011:192) reported that the most frequent means of learner participation in decision making are class meetings, prefect body suggestion boxes, assemblies and notice boards.

This trend of events sidelines the prescripts of deliberative democracy which argues that those affected by a collective decision, must deliberate in the production of that decision (Mabovula, 2008:87). In addition, participants should arrive at a decission, not by determining which preferences have the greatest numerical support, but by determining which proposals are supported by the best reasons (Young, 2000:22).

Question 10: How are decisions of SGB meetings given out to other stakeholders who are not members?

Most participants, including one group of RCL, explained that other stakeholders receive feedback either through their representatives, letters or quarterly mass meetings for parents. The rest of the RCLs hold that they receive feedback either through their parents, teachers, or an SMT member during assembly. The practice of information dissemination as reported by the majority of the RCLs confirms earlier reports of lack of

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invitations to meetings to most RCLs. If the RCLs are informed of SGB meetings and if they attend these meetings, they should be the ones to inform the rest of the learners of whatever decisions were arrived at. But because they are not informed about meetings to be held and, consequently, do not attend, they get feedback on SGB meetings either from their parents, teachers or an SMT member during assembly. The following views show this:

> ***RCLA-P:*** *"We don't know, we don't attend meetings because they don't tell us."*
> ***RCLB-P:*** *"Since we attend meetings, we hear the decisions then we also call our own meeting to tell the learners or we circulate in the classes and inform them."*
>
> ***RCLC-P****: "The TLO give us the report."*
>
> ***RCLD-D:****"They inform us at the assembly."*
>
> ***RCLD-S:*** *"Our parents just inform us when they arrive at home."*
>
> ***RCLE-D:*** *"They just tell the teachers to tell learners that they have decided to do certain things and at this point we feel unsatisfied. (After probing) Not the TLO, they just tell all the teachers."*
>
> ***RCLF-AM:*** *"The principal announces the decision at the assembly. Sometimes the SMT and the RCL go around the classes tell the learners that we have taken this and that decision."*

RCLs responses show that improper communication channels are used. The RCLs get SGB meeting feedbacks either from parents, the principal, teachers or an SMT member during assembly. The exclusion leaves them with no other means of getting information other than through the channels reported above. Consequently, the extent of their participation is limited and the degree of satisfaction very low. Learners in the study by Stafford *et al.* (2003:363) expressed the same concerns of exclusion from important debates and complained that only parents and teachers are consulted. Jeruto *et al.* (2011:189), reported that the lack of communication and dialogue, especially between learners and adult governors, is to blame for most learner unrest in Kenya. By implication, learners like those in this study, are informed of decisions by their parents and teachers.

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Question 11: How often does the RCL participate in SGB meetings of your school?

There were two camps in the responses to this question. On one hand, the responses from principals, TLO, parent and teacher representatives paint a picture of everything being fine with the RCL in the SGB. On the other hand, the RCLs responses show a contrary view. In response to the above question on the frequency of learner participation in SGB meetings, most adult respondents replied that the RCLs often attend SGB meetings except in cases of an emergency or when the issue to be discussed is sensitive or does not concern them. However, most of the RCL responses reveal that they rarely or never attend SGB meetings. These opposing revelations are seen in some of the responses cited below.

> ***PA:*** *"Whenever we have a meeting of development, or even when a learner has done something wrong we call them. But sometimes there are some critical things we tell them to go outside. Like when we discuss teachers' problems, like for example if a teacher is in love with another learner say a girl then we don't need them, we tell them these issues don't belong to you. We know that they can contribute, but in our culture learners are children and when we talk parents' things, we don't need learners around."*
>
> ***RCLA-P:*** *"Never, they don't call us."*
>
> ***RCLC-P:*** *"We have attended only one meeting."*
>
> ***RCLE-P****: "We have never participated in any meeting."*

Such exclusion is against the stipulation of SASA. The only condition under which SASA excludes learners is when the school has to sign a legal agreement with a third party because learners, as minors, cannot enter into any legal bindings. SASA cautions that a minor (anyone under the age of 18) may not conclude contracts on behalf of the school and cannot vote on decisions that force a legal obligation on a third party or the school (DoE, 1997:28).

Everything about the school impacts on learners, both directly and indirectly. Therefore, to exclude learners from meetings on the ground that certain issues do not concern them is puzzling. The example cited by a principal above may be termed ridiculous. This

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is a situation involving a fellow learner and yet, the learner representative is excluded from the discussions and decision-making.

The decision by most SGB adult governors to exclude learners from participating in the "so call sensitive issues" may be based on the porous clause in the Guides for the RCLs which states that "in appropriate cases the RCL provides learners with an opportunity to participate in decision-making regarding the school" (DoE 1999: 11-12). The principal's reasons for learner exclusion in the above stated issue (confidential issues, issues prohibited by culture) correlates with the findings in some earlier works like (Nongubo, 2004:31; Mncube, 2008: 77; Mabovula, 2009:219), who blame such happenings on adult distrust and domination of learners.

Question 12: Administrative issues

What input does the RCL make in deciding on the following:

a) the language policy of the school
b) the school budget and school fees
c) staff selection and staff discipline
d) the code of conduct for learners and learner discipline
e) classroom administration and management
f) planning and developing physical facilities

a) The language policy of the school

Responses from all the participants reveal that learners make no contribution on administrative issues such as the language policy of the school, the school budget and school fees, staff selection and staff discipline. Respondents' reasons for the lack of learner input include claims that learners are minors and that they lack knowledge and experience. Some participants explained that, with the language policy in particular, it is not an issue that should be changed as different batches of RCLs come and go. If this were the case, the situation would be chaotic.

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However, in all the schools involved in the study, the language of teaching and learning is English. Most of the participants are satisfied with the existing situation because they hold that English is the language that the learners will need most as they study further. The words below express the views of an RCL deputy president:

> ***RCLD-D:*** *"We didn't decide but I think it is a better idea if we use English because we are learning and maybe we will go to the universities and we won't be able to use Venda there so we have to be taught in English."*

b) The school budget and school fees

Concern school fees and the budget, participants had divergent views. Some argued that learners must not make any input because they are not the ones who earn the money to be paid. They strongly hold that the issue of fees and the budget must be strictly a parents' issue. One parent commented as follows:

> ***PC-D:*** *"Learners are not working so we have to decide with the person who is going to pay the money. We can inform them that we have given you so much for the RCL. They know nothing about the finance; even at home we just give them money".*

Another group of participants were of the opinion that, by virtue of their membership in the SGB, learners have a right to make an input on the issues pertaining to school fees and the budget. A teacher and another parent explained as follows:

> ***TC-A:*** *"Eh! They decide, they have got a very sensitive decision they make here. Why just because you must know it is in the policy of the RCL that the RCL has a budget there. So we do not just decide on how we should budget our money alone as the SGB together with the management, just because there is a policy which indicates that the RCL should have 10% of the school's budget. The RCL should decide about the 10% and they should see the whole amount that has been given by the department, the Norms and Standards money".*
>
> ***PC-C:*** *"Yes because they have to know and understand what is going on because if we can't do that, they will think that maybe we are misusing money in all other things. We give them the letter which shows that this is our budget and how are we going to use it because we must work as a team."*

The above divergent views notwithstanding, all the RCL members (including those who indicated they have attended a few SGB meetings) reported that they never take part in

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discussions on monetary issues. Their only involvememt is when they have to raise funds for the school. This finding correlates with many others such as Jeruto and Kirop's (2011:98), who reported that no learner participates in administration and curricula issues. The view however differs from that of Mncube (2008:84), who reported that learners in former Model C and urban schools participated in all decision-making including financial issues.

All learners, in the study, expressed a desire to participate in discussions on school fees and the budget. Stafford *et al.* (2003:363) also argued that learners expressed concern at the exclusion from important debates on education such as financial debates and the way school is organised. An RCL treasurer had this to say:

> **RCLD-T:** *"No we know nothing about the school budget. I think is bad because every Friday we pay R1.00 for casual but we don't even know how it works. Our parents came here and they decided that we will be wearing casuals on Friday"*

Once more the guide lines for the RCL fail to give the RCL the authority to participate in decisions on school finances. DoE (1999:25) states that:

> *An RCL must negotiate with its SMT and SGB about funds that may possibly be available to it. Policies, rules, procedures and responsibilities regarding the finances of an RCL must be clarified and set out clearly.*

It is evident that the adult members of SGBs would rather have their personal views prevail than allowing RCL to express their views. Adults find it really hard to let go of old practices (where adults dictate to children) and embrace the modern approach of inclusivity and deliberation.This is a true reflection of the occurences which Carr wrote in his Ph.D thesis in 2005 as "From policy to praxis". Wyness (2003:230) reports that a deputy head confirmed he saw the school council as a vehicle for encouraging the responsibilities of young citizens rather than their rights. This deputy head admits to pushing his interests rather than the learners'.

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c) Staff selection and staff discipline

All adult participants objected to having learners make any input on matters of staff selection and staff discipline. Participants' comments on learner input on these issues received as much objection from adult participants as those on school fees and the budget. The question "how dare you ask if learners should contribute in staff selection and discipline?" was implied in their responses. They could not comprehend how a person to be taught could be knowledgeable enough to decide on the fate of the one who has to disseminate that knowledge.

Their view contradicts Mncube's (2008:84) findings that learners in former Model C and urban schools participated in all decision-making, including on issues of staff selection and decipline, eventhough they do not form part of the interview panel for staff selection. Budge (1993:150) contends that democracy is self-improving and has educational value gotten through the effects of debates and decision-making. Thus, the idea of learners being inexperienced and lacking in knowledge should be done away with.

Similarly, adult governors consider direct learner involvement in staff discipline almost a taboo. They claim that the African culture can never permit a child to discipline his/her parent. Carr and Williams (2009:78) reported this same stance by the SGB members, in their study. They pointed out that adult governors see maximum learner participation as a threat to cultural practices, traditional beliefs, expectations, norms, habits and "ingrained patterns of behaviour. To Carr and Williams, this passive or overt resistance, due to the fear of a perceived loss of power has resulted in an uneven implementation of the RCL policy in schools.

These kinds of reports continue to limit learner participation in decision-making and heighten their degree of dissatisfaction. Consequently, unless there is freedom of choice, equality and liberty as advocated by liberals, one cannot argue that learners are decision-makers in school governance.

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With regards to learner input on staff selection and staff discipline, some participants argue that this may be permitted in so far as complaints are concerned. A TLO and a parent explain this as follows:

> ***TLOC:*** *"Not directly. Indirectly in the sense that if an educator may be has harassed or punished a learner in a cruel manner, they will just go and report to the TLO and the TLO will then go to the management. Learners can come up as witnesses when decision is taken against that educator but not like influencing the type of punishment emitted to the teacher".*

> ***PC-C:*** *"No the learners are not allowed to be there so that they do not look down on that educator. The children should not hear while we fight each other. This is the biggest part of us; they mustn't know what is going on there because we understand that the teacher is an adult. We talk with that teacher but if he continues after 1, 2, 3 times then we ask him 'are you allowing us to give you a remove from here to the circuit?"*

All learners expressed their desire to be involved in learners' issues for varying reasons, including skills acquisition, making an input on teaching methods and just being informed about events in their school. Below are a few responses expressions of some RCL members:

> ***RCLA-D:*** *"No, no contribution. But I will like to be in the interview because I will tell the new teacher how we like to be taught and treated."*

> ***RCLD-AM:*** *"I will like to be part of the interview so that I can learn how interviews are done."*

> ***RCLE-AM:*** *"No we are not concerned. Earlier this year, two new educators have been appointed but we were not involved in anything. If the teachers come for an interview, we just have to be the last people to know anything. We don't like such things because we as the RCL we have to know first so that we can inform other learners."*

> ***RCLF-P:*** *"No, we had a clerk, he was deciding to leave, maybe he got a position somewhere. Then we just see that applications coming without being informed that somebody is wanted for this type of a job. So if they are looking for a new teacher they won't inform us, how they can forget to inform us when a clerk is leaving the job. I feel pain, is just like we are not enough to do this type of job of RCL of the school, they take us otherwise and this gives us low strength, we really want to know all things that is happening in this school."*

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d) The code of conduct for learners and leaner discipline

There is some learner input with regards to the code of conduct for learners and learner discipline. Rules are drawn up by learners in their classrooms. The RCL combines these and comes up with proposals for school rules. Class prefects and RCL representatives also administer minor corrective punishment on fellow learners, such as picking up litter within the school premises. Some participants had this to say:

> ***TC-A***: *"Ya, they draft the code of conduct, as it starts from the classroom rules, the RCL puts these rules together and comes to the SGB. You know most of the SGB members are not educators and not all educators are in the SGB. So from the classroom rules put together, we analyse and come up with the code of conduct for the school."*
>
> ***RCLA-D:****"Yes we say how it should be."*
>
> ***PD:*** *"They are not involved with teacher discipline but are involved with learner discipline through their representatives."*
>
> ***PF:*** *"Not with teachers. But with learner discipline, they make contributions, take decisions and also oversee the corrective measures that are implemented."*
>
> ***RCLD-D:*** *"Sometimes the RCL is invited for disciplining a learner."*

However, in cases where graver punishment is required, for instance, for breaking boundaries or using drugs, the SMT steps in. Instances of learner inclusion, such as these, give them a feeling of belongingness and ownership, and heighten learners' degree of satisfaction in school governance.

The above reports are in line with the ideas of Gutmann and Thompson. Learner participation in formulating their code of conduct inspires them to implement the principle of reciprocity. To Gutmann and Thompson (2003:33), this principle requires that citizens owe one another justification for the mutually binding laws and policies they collectively enact.

Nowak and Mager (2012:44) posit that, by participating in decisions which affect them at school, learners experience the development of invaluable life skills such as developing

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a sense of responsibility or learning to take responsibility, developing or increasing communication skills (listening, speaking, negotiating and debating skills), gaining organisational skills and knowledge (learning to organise events or gaining increased understanding of school operations), learning teamwork, improving collaboration skills or learning to respect different opinions, developing decision-making or problem-solving skills and cultivating an awareness of reality and of the need for compromise.

e) Classroom administration and management

All participants agreed that there is some learner input in classroom administration and management. This is demonstrated when class prefects maintain order in the absence of a class teacher. In the words of a TLO:

> **TLOA:** *"Isn't it that the RCLs elected started from the classroom prefects? So they are involved in classroom management because they keep order in the absence of educators."*

Nowak and Mager (2012:39), aver that this learner involvement provides opportunities for young people to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable them to take an informed and active role in a democratic society. Ideally, as a democratic learning community, the school creates a model for democracy, which learners can experience by engaging in decision-making.

f) Planning and developing physical facilities

With regards to planning and developing of physical facilities, some learner input is reported. In one of the schools, learners make suggestions on what type of sporting facilities they would like to have. In another a requsest for new toilets was made. Demands from some RCLs for things like a new coat of paint on classroom walls, cementing of dusty classroom floors were not welcomed by the SGBs. Similarly, another complained that their clear glass windows were painted without consulting the learners. This resulted in the classrooms becoming dark, even in bright day light. The principal explained that this was meant to stop learners from looking outside during

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lessons. Learners reported that they protested against this, boycotted classes until an agreement was reached. An RCL member comments on this:

> ***RCLF-S:*** *"In the second term before we came back to school, they had painted the lower parts of our classroom windows. When we asked why they said they want us to concentrate during lessons, not to be looking outside. We are not children; we know why we are here. If we want to see things happening outside we will not even come to school, what things happen in the school that we will not concentrate in the lesson? What is really hurting is that now our classrooms are no longer bright, our classrooms do not have lights, so is not fair. We refuse going to class until the principal called us to a meeting."*

Happenings such as the one above are a complete contrast to the democratic institutional management situation envisaged in South Africa with the establishment and recognition of the Representative Councils for Learners which allow learners, as stakeholders, to participate in the governance of their schools (DoE, 1996).

What the findings reveal is that learners are undermined, disrepected and, in some schools, not recognised. Some adults also had this to say on planning and developing physical facilities:

> ***PD:*** *"The teachers decide on everything, you see this thing (RCL in school governance) has not yet evolved in such a way that learners are really involve in decision–making."*
>
> ***PC-C:*** *"Not really because we adults we are the ones who know that this is a major problem. We can't call them because they know nothing; we are the ones who produce donors, so we have to talk with parents and the staff of this school."*
>
> ***PC-D:*** *"No we don't include the learners because we don't think it is necessary. We plan for them and only tell them what will happen. We can ask them things concerning sports on where and what to build because those ones they know. But when it comes to the building itself, we don't, we just inform them."*
>
> ***TC-F:*** *"Yes they bring some ideas and they also participated in some of the things like there were some of the learners who even wrote the name of the school there at the entrance. They participate in taking decisions in some of the things."*

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Even where learners are allowed to make some input, they do so through the TLO, class teacher or SMT. This confirms the RCLs' reports that they rarely attend SGB meetings because they are hardly ever informed of upcoming meetings. Phaswana (2010:109) warns that such lack of open communication and exclusion inhibits learning; it is through communication and inclusivity that the theory and practice of democracy are taught and learnt. Gandal and Finn (1995:2) also reiterate that, although the desire for freedom may be innate, knowledge of how democracy functions must be taught and learned as democracy does not teach itself. If the strengths, benefits, and responsibilities of democracy are not made clear to the citizens, they will be ill-equipped to defend it.

Question 13: Curriculum issues

What input does the RCL make in deciding on the following:

a) Choice of textbooks
b) Number of examinations and setting of achievement targets
c) Teaching method and content
d) Appraising teacher performance

In relation to curriculum issues, all participants reported that learners make no contributions. All such decisions come from the Department of Education; not even the teachers have any input on these matters.

a) Choice of textbooks

On textbook choices, many teachers, learners and principals contend that this should be left in the hands of teachers and learners. All parents are of the opinion that learner input will be chaotic, and some learners agree with the parents'. These opposing views are seen in the words of a parent, TLO and an RCL as follows:

> ***PC-B:*** *"They cannot make a choice, if the Department says they should use this book, they must use that one, they cannot choose, because they know nothing and will only make confusion everywhere."*

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TLOA: *"Sometimes, If you photocopy something, those who are brilliant will ask you where you got it or when they see a good textbook with their friends from other schools they ask you if you have seen such a book and explain to you how good the book is. Am teaching Mathematics and I remember last year they told me 'Sir you must order such and such a book for us'. I talked to management and the book was bought for them by the school. I do get their input but I don't know with other learning areas. This will only be an addition to what comes from the department, because we must use the department's textbooks."*

RCLE-AM: *"I can say is not a good idea for us to choose because if we have to choose, we gona have many opponents. Maybe this one will come with his own opinion and that one will come with his own and the school won't afford to buy all those different books."*

b) Number of examinations and setting of achievement targets

Regarding the number of examinations to be taken per year, and the setting of achievement targets, there are also divergent opinions among all the different groups of participants. Some principals, teachers, learners and all parent representatives are in denial of the learner's ability to make any informed input. These argue that most learners are lazy and will rather reduce the number of examinations to be written and the achievement target in their favour. However, considering examinations and the targets the DoE has taken all learners' abilities (weak, average and strong) into consideration before making a decision. Some of them had these to say:

PC: *"No I don't think that will be in their competence because that one has been prepared by the Department itself, taking into account that learners do have different learning abilities."*

PC-D: *"Ah they never decide that. They like what the Department has put."*

Contrary to these, those in support of learner input are of the opinion that the standards of the DoE are too low. Learners are already contributing in setting these targets at the school level. It is argued that if they were given the opportunity to contribute at national level, they would be motivated to study even harder, knowing very well that they were involved in bench-marking the standards that prevail. These parents, principal and RCL members put forth the following arguements:

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PC-A: *"They don't choose but they should choose on that one so that they should be productive."*

PF: *"No, even though there is a need of making the standards high. As you can see with our education system the standard is going lower and lower every day. If a learner who achieves 30% and that is considered as a pass then that should be a concern that the bench mark is too low. Unfortunately the learners are not given the space; neither do we have at our level. These things are determined at the national level and are cast down to us."*

RCLA-P: *"We don't because in the beginning of the year when we were chosen we were told to write a plan on how things should go. We decided that with the number of exams that we get let's just say is just the formal ones that we get from the Department March, June, Trial and the last exam. That's all we get but we had asked for them to give us let's say many tests in between to prepare us, for the exam that we will write may be in June and trial, but we never get such things which makes us not to be very prepared to write every quarter exam. We do only class work and one test in between."*

RCLE-S: *"We are not involved in this. We would have loved to be because those 30 and 40% taken as pass is too low. Some children will just relax saying that no matter what I will get at least 30% which will be a pass. If we had to say something am sure many children will go for 45 or 50% as the minimum pass. This will encourage us to study and score better grades to get a place at tertiary."*

The opinion of learners who desire to make contributions on examination issues concurs with those of learners who were studied by Stafford and Laybourn *et al.* (2003:363) who desired to be included in important debates on education, such as the content of the curriculum and curriculum development and examinations. Generally, there is more commitment, determination and ownership when some one contributes to decision-making. Benhabib (1996:71) contends that deliberative democratic processes render information as no single individual can possess all the information deemed relevant to a certain decision affecting all. The process, he says, also promotes articulation of good reasons as it forces individuals to think of what will count as a good reason to their co-deliberators.

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c) Teaching method and content

Different views on learner contribution in the teaching method and content are also held. Learners make no meaningful input in this. Most participants, including some RCLs, are of the view that learners are not professionals. They argue that only teachers who are trained should make such decisions. Some participants say learners are allowed to only ask the teacher to repeat a lesson if it was not understood. The few participants who advocate for learner input argue that they should be given an opportunity to make contributions, depending on their level of manturity. These responses below demonstrate this:

> ***RCLE-S:*** *"That we don't decide either. We come and they come with the curriculum and say 'this is as much that we have to teach you' and that is what they stick upon. We need not to make any contributions on what we have to be taught. That which they have on the Pacesetter is what they teach us, we don't make any contributions. But I think is of best interest that we don't make any decisions because we may decide on what is not on the syllabus."*

> ***TLO-E:*** *"They don't have a say here and I don't think they should because what do they know? They want to learn, how then they must choose what to learn when they know nothing?"*

> ***RCLA-AM:*** *"I think if they ask us what method we understand it will help us because some teachers use the method that we don't understand. You find a teacher reading from a book, and then you are also having that book and what we need is to be explain for so I think it will be better if teachers ask us the way we can understand things. Example like presenting at the front, at least each and every learner will participate in every work and understand something."*

> ***PC-A:*** *"No but they should. Say for example if they are teaching them in a wrong or good way then they should have to say, it is their right. So that we know whether educators are doing the good thing or not."*

These learners' responses demonstrate their dissatisfaction and frustration with the system. These findings contrast with those of Nowak and Mager (2012:47) who argued that learner participation resulted in learner influence on lesson content, teaching strategies, time schedules and extended library access. All these are indications that learners make meaningful contributions if given an opportunity.

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d) Appraising teacher performance

Surprisingly, most participants, teachers included are of the opinion that learners must be given an opportunity to contribute in teacher appraisal. This confirms that, learners to whom the teacher performs his job can make valuable contributions. Presently, learner appraisal of teachers is informal, and is done at class and school levels with no impact on official outcomes. Some participants express their views in the following responses:

> ***PF:*** *"No, they don't have an input. The only input will be their performance, because we also look at the manner in which learners are performing in a particular subject when we do the appraising of educator." I think learners should because they are the recipients of what the educator brings to class. So they can make a proper determination of whether the educator is playing his role as he should or whether there are shortcoming that must be attended to."*

> ***TLOA:*** *"Where are they going to do that?" Certainly not in a formal way. But in class you know when you are teaching sometimes they will say 'ah Mam, today you are good'. They should be consulted because they are the one on whom the teachers perform."*

> ***RCLB-AM:*** *"Sometimes we do, but we can only take it to our principal. Sometimes we write a letter to the principal and tell him that we have such problem. May be one teacher is not attending and the principal will contact the teacher."*

> ***RCLF-AM:*** *"No, they don't give us such opportunity. We should because we are the ones who they teach. Everybody likes to be appreciated and if you are given that opportunity to appreciate a teacher, it will make them to teach us even better. Teachers may even get into a competition, but now they just teach."*

The oposing group, on the contrary, hold that learners can only make complaint if a teacher fails to turn up for lessons. They argue that learners are ignorant, incompetent and inexperienced as seen in the following observations from a parent and a teacher:

> ***PC-B:*** *"No, they cannot but if the educator is teaching and learners cannot understand, the learner can go to the principal and say, 'I cannot understand that educator' but he cannot choose that I don't want him in the class."*

> ***TC-C:*** *"No, teachers cannot be appraised by learners, they don't have that capability. How can you expect a junior to appraise a senior? Is not normal*

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just as a teacher who is not a deputy principal cannot go and interview someone for the post of a deputy principal."

The researcher is in agreement with the former group. If some form of guided instrument is designed for their use, learners will definitely make valuable contributions. This view is in line with McCowen's (2010:18) Gremios in Brazil, who are allowed to criticise and evaluate teachers to the extent that some teachers in some school are nervous about the growing learner influence.

Generally, information from participants and previous studies on learner input on curriculum issues, reveals that learners make no meaningful contributions. Learners are, generally, considered as inexperienced and lacking in knowledge (Kaba, 2001:32; Mncube, 2008:77; Mabovula, 2009:219; Phaswana, 2010:110). Jeruto and Kipro (2011:98) reported the same lack of learner participation in curricula matters (textbooks, number of examinations, nature of assessment, teaching, grading system and teacher performance) in Kenya.

Budge (1993:150) rejects such views, arguing that there is no insurmountable knowledge barrier looming between learners and teachers, parents and SMT. Therefore, knowledge cannot be the monopoly of adults or specialists because what expert knowledge does for the expert or experienced, it does also for the average citizen. Consequently, learners would become experienced in curriculum issues if they were given increased and equal access to decision-making discussions.

Question 14: Welfare issues

What input does the RCL make in deciding on the following welfare issues of:

a) Level of sanitation?
b) Nature of extra curricular activities?
c) Choice of food ?

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Reponses from participants reveal that there is some considerable learner participation in decision-making on some welfare issues.

a) Level of sanitation

Sanitation suggestions, mostly come from learners and are promptly looked into only if there are no expenses to be incurred. In some schools, learners are given the liberty to decide on how their school surroundings should look. For example, RCLs make plans on issues such as grass cutting around the school premises and toilet usage in cases where there is a water shortage. The following quotes highlight this:

> ***PB:*** *"They do, because at first we had shortages of toilets here and then the learners suggested that the lower classes should go to the toilet during a certain period of time and the upper classes during their own time. This was a long time ago, before we erected many toilets."*

> ***TC-A:*** *"They have got an input, like if you could just have a look around here, you could see that our school is bushy, it needs some cleaning. They suggest days that they would like to cut the grass and they organise cleaning committees."*

> ***TC-C:*** *"Yes, they make lots of contribution. I still remember last of last week, those members of the RCL, they were getting in each and every class and informing the learners that 'from Monday next week they make it a point that if you use the toilet you must do it like this."*

> ***RCLB-AM:*** *"Sometimes they allow us to talk, even though we like to talk all the time because we are the one who are living in this environment. So anything that happens around involve us, it means that we as the people living under such environment we are the ones who know the advantages and the disadvantage of that particular environment. So we are the ones who have to decide how many times our toilets should be clean because some of our health is not good enough for dirt because some have got asthma, some have got any other disease that may be. So we want to decide on that maters yes."*

b) Nature of extra curricula activities

In some schools learners decide on the type of sporting activities to engage in among those that the school offers. Others complained of the absence of any sporting activities or facilities in their schools, and argued that any demands in this regard are not taken

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kindly. In some schools, with existing facilities, learners complain of a lack of seriousness on the part of the authorities to give them any training. Some participants had this to say:

> ***T C-B:*** *"Yes, like especially as far as sports is concern. Actually now we want to make a combo court, we did involve the learners to suggest on how they want it."*

> ***PC-A:*** *"Yes they are involved in the planning just so that they should have to know what kind of facility is to be developed because is for their use."*

> ***RCLC-AM:*** *"There is nothing happening. At least if we had some extracurricular activities going on it will help us to exercise. It can also help others to see their careers because not all of us will use school to eat. We spend more time at school and if the school does not offer us opportunities we may never have them from some other place."*

> ***RCLF-S:*** *"Yes I have made these suggestions because some of the learners say that they want a place where they can play cricket. I passed the message to the principal and he said there is no such thing that is going to happen, and that I should tell them to stop watching too much TV. The learners were disappointed but what can we do?"*

> ***RCLE-D:*** *"It is not that we don't have the sporting events, but we are not involved, we don't compete with other schools. When we ask why they do not give us answers."*

c) Choice of food

Unlike other welfare issues like sanitation and extra-curricula activities which show with moderate learner input, there is absolutely no learner input in the type of food provided to learners under the nutrition scheme in some public schools. There is, however, some input in the things sold in a school's tuck shop. Five of the six schools, in this study, are involved in the nutrition scheme. All reported that learners have no say in the type of food they are served. Not even the SMT can decide on what is provided. The following responses confirm this.

> ***PA:*** *"Ha! they don't have, because even me as the principal we don't have because we just receive these menu from the government, we don't have a choice. But I think they should have a choice because the sort of things which are cooked there, they don't eat."*

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PC-C: *"No, it was chosen by the doctor because they have to bring only the right food with vitamins. Even us the SGB we were not involved in it. We can't allow the learners to make a choice because we follow our menu if not we gonna get problems, confusion. Yes, in the case of a tuck shop they can make a choice in agreement with the one who runs that tuck shop."*

TLOD: *"No they are not involved in that because the department itself has got its own menu. We were only given the menu. They supply everything. The duty of the school is only to prepare the food. They should be involved because at times you find that the food just remains not eaten, if learners don't want it then is just a waste."*

RCLB-P: *"No contribution, we would have loved to decide because this food it has disadvantages like learners getting asleep in class when the teacher is teaching and this makes the learners' percentage to go down even though they say this food was nutritionally chosen."*

RCLF-P: *"They type of food that they give us, we just eat because we are hungry. More especially when we eat stamp, you find there are those things that fly, the insects. I will really like to say we want this or that kind of food."*

It is, indeed, very disappointing to note that the very government which has enacted laws, enacted laws such as SASA of 1996 and the Guides for the RCLs 1999, to instill democratic practices in the schools is being undemocratic on the same institution or organisation, and future leaders whom it wants to train on democratic principles. At the least, a person should be able to enjoy what he or she eats. Some schools, at least, allow learners room to choose what should be sold in the tuck shops. Although there is still some resistance on learner participation in decision-making regarding some welfare issues, one can conclude that the welfare issues looked into, in this study, are relatively the strong areas of learners compared to all other issues. This is the only area where the SGB fully involves the RCLs in decision-making (with the exception of food choices in the nutrition scheme).

Although welfare issues are not trivial, but compared to other aspects of schooling they are. Allowing learners to make inputs on welfare issues correlates with the findings of Kaba (2010:32) and Jeruto and Kipro (2011:98) who found out that learner input is

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confined mostly to their welfare needs. The limitation on food choices, notwithstanding, the RCL is pleased with this extent of participation and is relatively satisfied.

Question 15: How would you describe the level of support the RCL receives from other partners of the school and what are the reasons for this kind of support?

The level of support received by the RCLs from other partners of the school is described as none existent, very little, partial, and absolute in some cases. The overall impression given by participants is that the RCLs receive good support from other school partners. The comments below from different schools explain this.

> ***PC-A**: "Yes really everyone is supporting them."*
>
> ***PC-D:** "I don't know whether they are supporting them or not."*
>
> ***PB:** "They do receive support because whatever they ask for, we listen to them. For example, they once came to us that they want to change the uniform, and we agreed."*
>
> ***PC:** "I think is a hundred percent support."*
>
> ***TC-D:** "To tell the honest truth they don't have support. They are being criticised. The TLO does a lot to encourage them and makes sure they are invited for meetings. Only the grade 12s supports them as such."*
>
> ***TLO-E:** "They are fully supported because we always listen to their complains. The other learners support them because they are the ones who send them to do things."*
>
> ***PF:**"I think they are partially supported. At the SMT level we try to support them as much as we can when they raise those issues which are of concern to them. "*

The reason for such support varies. Those who claim the RCLs receive support argue that it is because they are leaders within the school and future leaders, and that their contributions help in the running of the school. Kaba (2000:22) advocates RCL support when she posits that learners offer knowledge, perceptions and opinions that can only be held by someone who is the recipient, the consumer and the purpose of the

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educational process. This concretises the numerous benefits of learner participation in school governance discussed earlier in chapter two of this study.

A teacher and a TLO report that learners are given very minimal support just to prevent them from striking. The RCLs themselves think they are undermined and just accommodated because policy gives provision for their existence in schools. The views of some respondents illustrate this.

> ***RCLE-AM:*** *"I think trust and belief is the thing that builds leadership. I don't think the cause they saw adults see us as the leaders of the school. The learners chose us because they believed in us and saw the potentials in us that we could be the real leaders in this school. But management look down upon us, they don't want to trust us and that's why when they make decisions they make it on their own without including us. So if we could get them and just turn their minds around and just see things from our perspective and just be on our side and be able to trust us things would be better on us."*
>
> ***RCLF-S:*** *"I will also say is very low because we can make some suggestions to them, maybe they will not tell us while we are still there. But am sure they will stay behind and say 'those children what do they know? They never take us seriously."*
>
> ***RCLC-P:*** *"I think sometimes they are undermining us. Sometimes we just find something done, knowing nothing about it but there are some teachers who are very supportive. Learners support us but the parents don't.*
>
> ***TC-E:*** *"The reasons are for the smooth running of the school. The other reason is that we don't want them to go on strike. Remember they are so democratic and if they are no satisfied with something, they embark on strike. So we are trying to avoid that so that the time for learning is not disturbed."*

After analysing the data on the level of support the RCL receive and the reason, thereof, the researcher concludes that the support is very minimal. If a chairperson of an SGB says he does not know whether or not the RCL of his school is supported, it is obvious indication that the SGB does not care about the RCL's existence, and has neither trust nor respect for it. Such an SGB discards the very values and attitudes (respect, tolerance and trust) upon which the ideals of democracy are based. Such treatment of

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RCLs challenges Tshabangu's (2006:56) idea that schools have a moral responsibility not just to teach, but above all, to practice democratic values.

Furthermore, failure of the RCL to get absolute support from learners whom it represents is an indication that there may be dissatisfaction in services the RCL renders to the learners, poor communication, lack of trust and lack of accountability Carr (2005:178) reported the same lack of support from fellow learners. An RCL member laments:

> ***RCLF-AM:*** *"I will say the reason why the learners don't support us is coming from above. The teachers, they are not respecting us, any decision that they are taking we are not included so I don't understand the reason why the learners should appreciate us or support us."*

Question 16: How often does the RCL in your school meet?

This question was intended to assess the frequency of RCL meetings in order to determine whether it meets regularly enough to properly carry out its functions. Most of the RCLs, in this study, meet monthly, which is above the average quarterly ordinary meetings stipulated in the guidelines (DoE, 1999:24). This report correlates with Carr's findings (2005:167) that RCLs meet regularly. Only one group of RCL reports that they have never met because there is no motivation to meet. Some participants reported that:

> ***TC-A:*** *"They meet every month."*
>
> ***PB:*** *"Once a month."*
>
> ***RCLC-P:*** *"Every month."*
>
> ***RCLF-AM:*** *"We don't have any motivation to meet if there is nothing we can do. We get orders from above, the principal or the SGB can come to us and say we should do this and that and we do everything. Our own things that we come up with are never taken serious so why should we meet."*

These regular meetings are an indication that, if given an opportunity the RCLs are organised enough to make meaningful contributions during SGB deliberation. It may be

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because of this that they are able to make some inputs even when they are invited to the meeting thirty minutes before commencement, of the meeting.

Question 17: In your opinion and experience, how do other members of the SGB listen when the RCL speaks?

Information gathered in response to this question reveals that partial attention is given to learners when they speak. Most respondents point an accusing finger at the parents in the SGB. The reason for this partial attention is that parents consider the RCL as comprising of children with nothing important to offer during SGB deliberations. Yet, these same parents argue that they give their undivided attention when the RCL speaks. Some participants had this to say:

> ***PA:*** *"You know as I said this is a typical rural area, teachers perhaps they do listen and those parents who have gone to school. But the majority of the parents, they don't, they think a child is a child."*

> ***PC-C:*** *"They are listening very carefully, what the RCL say, if is right is right, if is wrong they will show him which way to say those words. We give them good chance and relax, he talk the way he wants, as long as he talks reasons. They help us solve problems, like some learners they start smoking, doing something wrong, they tell us that those other learners do such things."*

> ***TC-B:*** *"We do give them the attention. We do listen to their queries, problems and try to solve them."*

> ***TLO-F:*** *"They listen, but you know, parents are parents. Sometimes they say once a child, always a child. Some ideas of the RCL sound too radical and some parents will resist on that because we have some people here who still belief in the conservative way of applying things so if a child says something they won't even understand. I remember an example of when learners suggested to go and have Matric dance in a certain area near Musina and that they will come back late and one of the parents said 'no child of mine will come back at his or her own time."*

> ***RCLB-AM****: "Some gives us attention because we are the ones who know the school better. As school children, we can communicate better with other learners."*

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> ***RCLF-P:*** *"I cannot say they listen, they pretend, for example if I tell them there are learners who smoke, I know them. Why don't we get them and disable them and they will say 'OK, we will do it like that but it ends there, no further action. That's what I can say they pretend."*

An RCL member rightly said SGB members actually pretend to listen when the RCL speaks. They call this pretence because whatever issues the RCL puts forward, they are hardly ever acted upon. In fact, the issue lapses with the last word of the speaker. By not listening to the RCL, adults portray gross intolerance and disrespect and this eventually results in a high degree of dissatisfaction. This does not seem to be a strange phenomenon between learner representatives and adult governors. The title of Kaba's 2002 article says it all "They listen to me...but they don't act on it". However, some of Kaba's learners reported they felt their opinions were valued and respected when they realised they were being listened to Kaba (2001:32).

Cook-Sather (2002:4) laments about the kind of listening that exists in most power relationships. Cook-Sather (2002:8) holds that, communication is meaningful only if there is a listener, and listening to someone means showing respect for that person's views. She contends that parents failed to understand that active listening does not always mean doing what the speaker demands, but it means being open to the possibility of revision, both of thought and action. Kae Van Engen (2012:1) avers that leaders must create the opportunity to develop relationships based on listening.

Question 18: What are some examples of when you believe input by the RCL has been valued by other members of the SGB?

Numerous interesting inputs by the RCLs in different schools are reported. These contributions included protesting against the dismissal of their principal whom parents did not want and initiating honorarium awards to outstanding learners by RCL of school A, implementing uniform change and additional sports grounds by RCL of school B, initiating Saturday lessons in Mathematics and Science, putting an end to late coming and fence jumping and suggesting an invitation of a motivational speaker for the grade 12s when many of their teachers not coming to classes by RCL of school C, cleaning of

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school premises by RCL of school D and the erection of additional toilets by the RCLs of schools D, E and F. All the RCLs have at least one thing they had initiated and implemented at their school. Some, as many as three, as is the case with school C. Some participants' views are presented below:

> ***PB:*** *"Like I indicated the uniform issue, they complained that they were bored by the type of uniforms they were using. They suggested changes, and what to wear on which days, we found that it was ok and we supported them."*
>
> ***PD:*** *"Last year the RCL suggested we erect pit toilets because of water shortage, and this was done."*
>
> ***TLOA:*** *"Last year we did have a very bad situation in the school where the community wanted the principal to go. But the RCL made a contribution, stood for the principal saying he teaches and does his work well according to them. Myself when I see them doing like this, I said really this RCL know what they are doing, because what they said and did, made the principal came back."*
>
> ***RCLC-P:*** *"The grade 12s was very worried because of problems of teachers not attending. So I suggested they go and talk to the grade 12s for encouragement and they do it."*

From the diverse nature of these inputs, one may conclude that the RCL is gaining some ground although at an annoyingly slow pace. These examples do not consist of only welfare or trivial things, but are inclusive of issues as important as retaining a principal, an additional school day and a motivational speaker for the psychological stability of a batch of grade 12s. This is at least in contrast to what is reported by Kaba (2010:32) and Jeruto and Kipro (2011:98) who argue that learner input is confined mostly to their welfare needs. There is some degree of trust and independence bestowed on the RCLs in this study, though it is still very minimal. It nonetheless increases the extent of participation, as well as the degree of satisfaction.

Question 19: In what ways do RCL members face challenges when participating in the governance of your school?

The responses from the different participants shed much light on the varying forms of challenges faced by the RCL in the execution of their functions. These challenges,

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among others include the presence of illiterate parents with divergent views in the SGB, parents' non-recognition, distrust, disrespect and intolerance of learners, inappropriate timing of SGB meetings and the lack of transportation for learners, learner shyness as a result of not being adequately informed of their roles in school governance, confrontation, contempt, loss of confidence from other learners and limited duration of service. Their challenges are revealed in the following responses:

> ***PF:*** *"As I indicated parents will always view learners with suspicion and as children. The learners do raise concerns but most often their concerns are dismissed. The fact that they don't get complete support from their fellow learners and sometimes even from their own teachers. This is quite a challenge for them."*

> ***PE:*** *"It is time constrains, most of our learners are staying away from school. Meetings are held very late. So because of transport some of them will not attend, although we have two learners who attend. They turn to be bored learners when they listen. You may find that the business of the day is too long. They may find it very difficult to make their own input. Even when they do, they may think that those parents are not listening to them so they usually keep quiet only to take information back to their students."*

> ***TC-A:*** *"The challenges they have like I indicated, as we are in the rural area, we still have got some parents who are not literate. Then sometimes when we are just talking, when the RCL see that this idea can develop the school, you see that some parents will be differing with the ideas of those learners because of these parents not having a foresight. Sometimes, the way the learners see things, it match with that of the educators. But with this other parent components, sometimes they have got problems."*

> ***TLO-F:*** *"Those in governance find it hard to accept radical changes from the RCL. I think they still need some induction. Learners are learners they have their own ideas but when you reject their ideas, you show them why you say something cannot be done. But when you are just ridged the children too become mentally stubborn. What I have noticed is that when the parents reject an idea by the RCL, they do not give them reason for rejection. This is quite challenging to the RCL."*

> ***RCLE-D:*** *"Challenges we face because learners are pushing us to do certain things, but when we go to the management of the school, they do not support us or listen to us. So we are being challenged by the learners on how is our leadership or how are we going to lead them if we do not do things the way they want. So they think we were better out of the RCL."*

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> ***RCLF-AM:*** *"They may be talking about a certain topic and we will like to raise something that the decision can be like this. They will just take it for granted. At times a parent will stand and talk for about an hour and they come into a conclusion and we didn't say anything and we have something we want to say."*

The RCLs, in this study, are not in isolation with regard to the type of challenges they face as school governors. Chiwela (2010:67) explains that learners are brought up to believe they should remain silent in the presence of adults that they should be involved only at the level of implementing decisions taken by others because their input is hardly considered. Reports by Kaba (2010:32) and Jeruto and Kipro (2011:98) reveal that learner input is confined mostly on their welfare needs.

The once off training the DoE provides to RCLs, TLOs and SGB members, by itself is a huge challenge for any SGB structure to function as expected. This short training for a few hours, (in some cases with no hand outs or documents for more information or reminder) leaves the trainees with very little knowledge. This may cause shyness and a reduction in the RCL's deliberative bargaining power as they may be unsure of certain facts, hence, their limited participation and dissatisfaction in school governance. The situation of the RCLs is worse than that of other SGB members because they have one year in office. Some schools conduct their RCL elections as late as March, instead of January, as SASA stipulates. This leaves the novice school governors with less than nine months to make any contributions to the school. It is a huge challenge by all means for the RCL alongside some adults with seasoned SGB experience. The DoE, therefore, reconsider its RCL training strategy and RCL term of office in a bid to assist the RCL to function maximally.

Furthermore, the illiteracy of some parents, especially in the semi-urban and rural schools, continue to pose challenges. Someone's level of education has a huge impact on their reasoning. If illiterate parents continue to be in control of the SGBs, the expecting parents to accept the RCLs as equal partners in governance and will not be possible. It is only a change of this status that will make parents to tolerate, trust,

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respect and recognise the RCLs as full fledge SGB members. As a result, the RCLs will secure the SMT and parents' cooperation in dealing with learners.

The challenge posed by inappropriate timing seems the most difficult to overcome. Most SGB meetings are scheduled to begin after 17H, after working parents have knocked off from work. Learners who are not able to make transportation arrangements are forced to go home and not attend the meeting. If this is always the case, such learners may never attend SGB meetings in their schools, thus, leaving their membership only on paper. Consequently, the extent of learner participation in this case will be nil and their satisfaction zero.

Question 20: How can the RCL's participation be sustained despite the existing challenges?

Taking into account the participants' responses, it is not possible to sustain the RCL's peaceful participation in the midst of such challenges. Having been mandated by policy to exist, learners cannot give up their hard-earned rights no matter what obstacles they encounter. The learners would rather resort to violence than let their rights be trampled upon by uncompromising SMTs and SGBs. A principal reports this:

> **PA:** "*You know here in the rural area when parents elect, they just choose those people whom they are afraid of. There was a time when there was a crisis here and parents barred the school entrance saying this school will no longer function unless the principal is removed. After two days of no lessons, the RCL said to their parents, whatever comes, we are going back to school, we want to learn and there was a violent clash. Some of the illiterate parents even threatened the RCL and said they will go and burn their parents' houses.*"

The legalization and recognition of the RCL as a fully-fledged structure in school governance is to put an end to the long standing history of using violence to achieve whatever RCL want.

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Unless the challenges encountered by the RCL, such as those mentioned above, are seriously looked into, the extent of learner participation and satisfaction in school governance will continue to be at its lowest. Participants suggest that the following would help sustain RCL's participation in the governance of their schools: Adequate training for all SGB members before the commencement of their duty; having literate parents in the SGB; giving motivational talks to parents to accept change; and parents developing trust, respect and tolerance for the learners. These responses report participants' views:

> **PF:** "*I think all of us-parents, teachers and management must accept that these children are playing their democratic rights to represent their interest at those levels. Also to motivate them to continue to play their role despite the challenges when their interests clash with those of the parents. I do understand them.*"
>
> ***PA:*** **"***It can be sustained if they are listened to not only by the teachers, even by their parents. Also if learners are work shopped so as to know what to say and how to contribute not only in the school, even in the society.*
>
> ***PC-D:*** *"The RCL/TLO must do their job to make sure that they educate those learners to know their activities. The workshops must be there at the school level even though they are there at the District or circuit level once a year, but they need a lot of workshops, once a year is not enough."*
>
> ***RCLE-D:*** *"I think we just need the support from the school management, not that they should agree with whatever thing we want to do. But they should look at us and value our opinions and check them, that is when we can think of going on with this thing of the RCL."*

Gandal and Finn (1995:2) are of the opinion that, although the desire for freedom may be innate, knowledge of how democracy functions must be taught and learned. Democracy does not teach itself. If the strengths, benefits, and responsibilities of democracy are not made clear to the citizens, they will be ill-equipped to defend it. Furthermore, Tshabangu (2006:56) contends that schools have a moral responsibility to practice democratic values. Therefore, all SGB members must be taught how democracy functions, in order to sustain active RCLs as structures in the SGB.

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Question 21: How are the RCL activities in your school supervised or coordinated?

With the exception of some parents, all participants reported that the RCL activities are coordinated by the TLO. One parent said the SMT, while another said the disciplinary committee coordinated RCL activities and the most shocking response was the one in which the participant said he did not know.

PE: *"We have the TLO."*
RCLB-P: *"The TLO."*
PC-D: *"Ah, I don't know."*
PC-B: *"The management of the school."*

Such responses are good indicators of the level of interest parents have in the existence, let alone activities of the RCL. Parents have such little interest in the existence and activities of the RCL that they do not bother to know who supervises it. Parents know that they have not given RCL any important tasks that merit supervision and feedback. Consequently, they need not bother about who oversees such trivialities. This does not help to foster the bond between the RCL and adults. Such a weak bond may contribute to limited participation and, eventually dissatisfaction of the RCL.

Question 22: How does the RCL of your school interact with those of neighbouring schools?

There is very little or no interaction between RCLs of different schools. Carr (2005:177) in his study also observed that there was no interaction between RCLs of different schools. The only opportunity mentioned by all participants is during the once off departmental workshop. A few mentioned sporting activities or debates which are very rare or Matriculation farewell functions which comes once a year. They reported the following:

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PD: *"As a matter of fact, I don't see that networking among schools. They only meet when the Dept convenes the once a year leadership workshop. From then they never meet again"*

PC-A: *"They usually meet with the others once the department calls them for a meeting. That is the only time that I know they meet other RCLs. They never arrange by themselves."*

RCLB-P: *"No interaction with others."*

All participants, the RCLs included, do not see the importance of such interactions. In the researcher's opinion, such interactions should be encouraged because they are a means by which learners can share ideas and get to widen their horizons. This can create a forum for them to discuss their challenges and take common decisions to better run their organisation. In the case of a challenge, the RCL-A, for example, would respond in an agreed upon manner as RCL-B. This notwithstanding, RCLs should bear in mind that no two schools are the same. As such, any agreed upon decisions should only be used as guidelines.

Question 23: **After so many years of RCL existence as a structure in the SGB, what, in your opinion, are the perceptions of parents, and the school management team (SMT) on having the RCL as part of the SGB?**

In response to the above question, most participants reported that they believe parents and SMTs should accommodate the RCL because policy mandates their existence. As a result, the RCL still faces a lot of distrust, suppression and resistance from them. Data collected from questions 9-13 confirmed the view that the RCL indeed exist because of policy mandates. Nongubo (2004:58) reported the lack of learner recognition as fully fledged members of the SGB. Adult members of the SGB consider the RCL as troublemakers, immature and lacking in knowledge and experience (Mncube, 2008:77; Phaswana, 2010:110). A few participants still argue that these adult members (parents and SMT) respect and support the RCL because of the services it renders to the school. In actual fact these services include implementing the decisions taken by parents and the SMT and fundraising for the school, just to mention a few. It is this same attitude

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which Chiwela (2010:64) argues widens the gap between policy and practice in Zambian schools. These responses give the perception of some participants:

> ***PB:*** *"Some people mistrust the RCL, some feel that they don't discuss major issues which don't concern learners with the learners, and it becomes problematic when you see that learners are being suppressed not to talk about certain things. Which according to other members may divide the school; even if it divides the school, things have to be spoken. Learners must not be restricted from saying whatever they feel they want to say."*
> ***PC-A:*** *"Not all people believe that the learners can do something. They only just accept them because the rules and regulations say so."*
>
> ***TC-E:*** *"They just accept them as per policy, especially the male SGB members. Sometimes you find them saying 'ah these are kids; we can't just listen to kids'. They lack tolerance towards those learners."*
>
> ***TLOD:*** *"According to my experience they are there because the policy says they must be there. They are elected every year but not invited for meetings; it means they are not wanted."*
>
> ***RCLF-AM:*** *"I think they should take us sericusly, they should learn to give us the opportunity to say something, because as RCL members we know better about our learners. We know that the learners want this to happen but they don't want us to say something. They just say 'ah these are kids, they don't have anything to say."*
>
> ***RCLE-D:*** *"Members of the SGB look down on us because they never asked 'where is the RCL?' If they see us as members, they will ask 'where are the RCLs in the meetings?' But because they look down on us and they don't want us that is why they don't bother if we are absent from the meetings."*

It is quite disturbing to note that the same undesirable occurrences are reported by a principal, parent, teacher, TLO and RCL representative, from the different schools, in this study. The tenets of democratic governance are none existent in most SGBs. By implication, the same gloomy treatment is received by most RCLs in the Districts under study. These results in limited participation in decision-making, which leaves the RCL very dissatisfied.

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Question 24: How satisfied is the RCL with its participation in decision-making in your school?

The majority of the participants are of the opinion that the RCL is highly dissatisfied with its participation in decision-making in school governance. It is quite interesting to learn that even the people who are regarded as the root cause of learner dissatisfaction (parents and SMT) also report that learners are very dissatisfied with their participation. The degree of learner dissatisfaction is expressed in the words of these participants:

> ***PE:*** *"I don't think they are totally satisfied, they are just there to get information, I don't think they are satisfied."*
>
> ***PC-D:*** *"Ah, they never make decisions so I don't know if they are happy or not. I can say the RCL is there because the government wants them to be there. They don't know what they are doing there – the role of the RCL."*
>
> ***TC-C:*** *"Usually you find the RCLs are not satisfied because some of the decisions you can find them saying 'no, that was not our decision; it has just been imposed on us. You always hear them say what we must do if they say we must do it like this."*
>
> ***RCLA-AM:*** *"We are not satisfied, we don't go to SGB meetings, how can we make decisions?"*
>
> ***RCLF-P:*** *"I am not satisfied. When it comes to the people who are being selected as the SGB, they are not educated. I think next time when they elect SGB members; they also have to look at the intelligence of the person. May be things will be better. But now they only discourage us."*
>
> ***RCLE-T:*** *"Even in the way that they tell us of the decisions they came up with. They don't tell us in a way that we should tell them of our own opinion. They just tell us in a way of just informing us of what is going to happen."*

What the researcher deduced from participants' responses is an acute feeling of learner frustration and dissatisfaction. If a school principal can say learners are just in the SGB to get information, and a parent (chairperson) says they are just in the SGB because the government wants them to be there and he does not know whether or not they are happy, then all has virtually been said about the appalling state of learners in the SGB.

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The parents, in this study are chairpersons of the SGBs in the schools under investigation. It is the chairperson of an organisation who is supposed to ensure that members are satisfied with decisions arrived at during deliberation. Consequently, for a chairperson to say he does not know whether or not some members are satisfied with the manner in which decisions are arrived at, shows a lack of concern such a chairperson has towards that sub-group of members. Such minimal learner participation and gross dissatisfaction is reported in many countries in the world, for example, South Africa (Ngcobo, 2003:91-92; Nongubo, 2005:112), Zimbabwe (Tshabangu, 2006:61), Kenya (Jeruto *et al.,* 2011:196), USA (Kaba, 2001:32) and England and Wales (Wyness 2003:230).

Question 25: Under what circumstances does management meet the RCL of your school outside the SGB?

This question was posed only to school principals. Most participants reported that outside the SGB meetings, the SMT meets the RCL only in times of crisis or emergencies. This question was intended to evaluate the closeness between the RCL and the SMT. The circumstances that initiate meetings between these two, be they formal or informal also give an indication of the level of support the RCL receives from the SMT. The question above on level of support from other partners of the school revealed a generally low level of support even from the SMT, and this correlates with the responses to this question. The SMT of a school is supposed to be the closest constituent with which the RCL relates. Such closeness and support is likely to keep the RCL close to the SMT's "heart" and the RCL's invitations to SGB meetings will not be forgotten as was claimed in one of the schools. Some principals explained:

> ***PC:*** *"I don't remember just meeting them because if there is anything that they want, they bring proposals to the principal and I take them to the management. We discuss about it, if there is no problem about it, they just approve. But if management need further explanation, they request that I find out more if not they just approve."*
>
> ***PD:*** *"When there is a problem or when management want the RCL to take some information to the rest of the learners."*

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PE: *"Only when there is a crisis."*

The tighter the bond between the SMT and RCL, the better the communication flow and the more confident the RCL will be. Carr (2005:176) cautions that a good relationship between the RCL and TLO and SMT is crucial if the RCL is to work effectively. This is most likely to ensure their attendance at SGB meetings and boost their bargaining spirit during deliberations. Consequently, the extent of learner participation and degree of satisfaction in school governance will be in line with policy stipulation. This is not what prevails in the school under study, resulting to limited learner participation in decision-making and a low degree of satisfaction in school governance.

The next two questions were posed only to the RLCs.

Question 26: **What is most important to you about your involvement in school governance?**

This question was intended to elicit the main purpose or reason why these learners agreed to be members of the RCL. The researcher's feelings were elated when almost all RCL members interviewed proudly reported that their main purpose for joining the RCL was to ensure that learners' voices were heard. A few others said they wanted to acquire leadership skills and yet others said to instill discipline in the school and improve the pass rate. In the words of these learners:

RCLF-AM: *"I find it important because I looked at the situation of the school and it was my desire to join the RCL of the school I wanted to be a member of that thing –the SGB so that I can change some things around, thinking I would be given the opportunity to do something better but it didn't end up well because nobody listens to us.*

RCLE-T*: "I wanted that learners' voices to be heard, even if they were not right and that they should be told whether if what they want is wrong or right and at the end of the day we can see what to do about it. Not that they just have to follow what they are told to follow."*

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RCLB-D: *"So that I make some changes where I see things which are not good. To represent all learners who cannot come to the SGB meetings to see if they are ok with decisions the SGB take."*
RCLC-T: *"What is important to me is the encouragement I give learners to be in proper manner as well as am learning more to be a leadership."*

The responses sharply contradict the first of the main functions of the RCL as spelt out in the Guides (DoE 1999:14):

> *An RCL acts as an important instrument for liaison and communication.*

Learners' responses indicate they did not join the RCL to act as SGB messengers who merely take SGB decisions to the rest of the learners. The tone of their voices and the facial expressions were pregnant with the degree of frustration and dissatisfaction for not being able to fulfill their mission of making learners' voices heard in the SGB. This explains why among the challenges faced is the fact that learners lose confidence in the RCL as it does not seem to represent them in the SGB. The learners studied by Stafford *et al.* (2003:363) desired to be included in important debates on education (such as the content of the curriculum and curriculum development and examinations) so as to express learners' voices on these issues. Kaba (2001:24) reported that learners insisted they knew what they wanted, and must be involved in the RCL to take part in decisions, since these decisions affected learners not the authorities (principal, parents and teachers).

The manner of decision-making in the SGBs of the schools, in this study, denies the RCL the ability to practice democratic reflexivity, which mandates that all participants have the same chances to initiate speech acts, question, assign topics of conversation, initiate reflexive arguments about the very rules of the discourse procedure and the way in which they are applied or carried out (Benhabib, 1996:70-71). This denial by other SGB members to listen to learners' voice greatly minimises their participation in decision-making and leaves them very dissatisfied.

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Question 27: What personal learning experiences have you had as a result of being an RCL member?

Despite the trauma of non-recognition, exclusion, intolerance, distrust, disrespect from adult governors, unaccomplished missions and loss of confidence from fellow learners, the RCL members are still open-minded enough to acknowledge that all is not a complete loss. The RCLs reports that among other finding they gained personal learning experiences which included the difficulties to work with those who ignore and disrespect them, the importance of listening and being listened to, respect for others' opinions even your juniors, leadership skills like accepting disappointments, and staying courageous, the importance of leading by example, the virtue of patience and satisfying ones constituency. Some personal expressions include:

> ***RCLA-AM:*** *"I have learnt that it is very difficult to work with people who don't listen to what you have to say in order to make a development."*
>
> ***RCLB-D:*** *"I have learnt that you have to be very patient, whether the person is wrong, you have to listen to that person."*
>
> ***RCLB-T:*** *"I have learnt that you don't get discouraged even when those you represent are against you."*
>
> ***RCLC-P:*** *"I have gained courage to accept disappointments."*
>
> ***RCLE-T:*** *"I have found that if you are a leader and on top of you there is someone who you report to, it becomes very hard when you disagree or when the person above you never gives you a chance to voice out what you think. So I have learnt that you have to be patient, brave and don't easily back off or give up the fight."*
>
> ***RCLF-S:*** *"The elders of this SGB do not respect us but they want the younger people to respect them I really feel hurt. Before I became an RCL member, I did not use to respect my peers but now I have learnt that when you are with other people you have to respect them even when they are your juniors."*

These personal learning experiences correlate with the findings of other studies. There is improved self-esteem and social status reported by Dobozy (2005:19) and Phaswana, (2010:114), problem-solving skills and cultivating an awareness of reality and of the need for compromise (Nowak and Mager, 2012:44).

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The last three questions were posed only to TLOs. The purpose of these was to find out how often management meets the RCL outside the SGB. They were meant to assess how strong the bond between the TLO and RCL was, and how often they interact with each other.

Question 28: Under what circumstances do you as the TLO meet with the RCL in your school?

Like the SMTs, most of the TLOs said that they meet the RCL when there is an emergency or crisis, or when the RCL invites them. This is what some of them had to say:

> ***TLO-A:*** *"I meet them only when there is a crisis."*
>
> ***TLO-C:*** *"More often than not they are the ones who come to approach me then I immediately arrange so that we can meet and give them a hearing."*

The TLO's duties among others include, helping to guide the RCL, developing a sense of leadership in its members and promoting communication between TLO, the principal, staff and RCL (DoE, 1999:16).

Through these duties, the TLO is expected to reiterate to the RCL what and how the RCL is to perform its duties. It is, therefore, worrisome to learn that these TLOs, who are supposed to be "mentors" to the RCLs, meet with them only when there are problems or only when they are invited. The indication, therefore, is that, if the RCL is a dormant and gullible one, then that is also accepted by the TLO. This implies that these RCLs are not being assisted in any way. This may indirectly contribute to their minimal participation and low degree of satisfaction.

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Question 29: What is your experience working with the RCL?

The TLOs reported that their work with the RCLs is additional to their school work. However, they enjoy working with them. Some TLO said the following:

> ***TLO-A***: *"I enjoy working with them, even though is more work on the normal school work."*
>
> ***TLO-B:*** *"Even before I became the TLO, I was the secretary of the SGB. I enjoy working with them, even though is additional work."*

These responses by the questions: How then do the TLOs in this study enjoy working with people they hardly ever meet? These views contradict those expressed by the TLOs in Carr and Williams (2009:75) who reported that their responsibility with the RCL is an undesirable additional workload. The researchers observation, therefore is that "no sense of leadership is being developed in the RCL or any promotion of communication between the partners" by the TLOs as expected of them. Carr and Williams (2009:76) confirmed that the TLOs do not bring the leadership potential of RCL members to full fruition. The TLOs, thus, fail in the contribution expected of them to further capacitate the RCL to become more confident to make meaningful contributions during SGB meetings.

Question 30: How do you share your experiences of the RCL with the rest of the school?

The TLOs explain that they share their experiences of the RCLs with other staff members during staff meetings. Very few experiences are shared since the same TLOs meet with the RCLs only in times of crisis or when the RCL invites them. Furthermore, being able to share these experiences, mostly during staff meetings, means there is always very limited time allowed. Consequently, other members of staff get very limited information about the RCL.

It is, therefore not very surprising, that the RCLs in this study report poor support from other partners within the school. The TLO who is supposed to help train, guide and

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"market" the RCL for support within the school hardly ever meets with the RCL. This indicates that the TLO does very little or nothing to ensure that the RCL attends SGB meetings to be able to participate in decision-making processes. This may contribute to the limited extent and dissatisfaction of learners in so far as participating school governance is concerned. Thus, the TLO indirectly assists in excluding learners from participating in decision-making, which affects them. This contradicts the dictates of the UNCROC of 1989 and SASA 1996, which strongly advocate for learner participation.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, the researcher did a question by question analysis and interpretion of participants' responses to the different questions. The responses revealed the extent of learner participation and satisfaction in decision-making in school governance within the Vhembe District. The findings of this study revealed that, on the one hand, there is some significant learner participation in decision-making and a moderate degree of satisfaction in relation to learner welfare issues. On the other hand, the findings also revealed that there is limited learners' participation and a low degree of satisfaction in decision-making in administrative and curricula issues. A summary of the findings, conclusion and recommendations, are discussed in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The intention of this research was to examine the extent of learner participation and satisfaction with decision-making in school governance. This study was prompted by learner demonstrations in schools that continue to resurface from time to time despite the fact that learners must now be recognised as fully fledged members of the SGB. In the previous chapter the researcher analysed and interpreted data. In this chapter, the researcher summarises the main findings emerging from the analysis, and explains the limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further study.

5.2 SUMMARY

This section gives a summary of how the study responded to the research questions, the review of the literature and the empirical investigation.

5.2.1 How the Study Responded to the Research Questions

This study set out to find answers to the following questions:

(i) What is the extent to which learners participate in decision-making in schools?

(ii) What is the degree of learner satisfaction with the extent of participation in decision-making in schools?

The findings of the study revealed that,

(i) There is some significant learner participation in decision-making and a moderate degree of satisfaction in relation to learners' welfare issues.

(ii) There is limited learner participation and low degree of satisfaction in administrative and curricula issues.

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5.2.2 Summary of the Review of the literature

This study was informed by the theory of deliberative democracy. According to this theory, all those affected by a certain decision must take part in arriving at that decision. Deliberative democrats are of the view that employment of deliberative democratic concepts, such as Rawls's reflective equilibrium and principles of justice, Benhabib's democratic reflexivity, Habermas's consensus, communicative action and rationality, and Young's inclusion, asymmetrical reciprocity, rhetoric and narratives, would result in satisfactory participation in decision-making by all those to be affected. Despite the enormous benefits of deliberative democratic processes in decision-making, as opposed to a voting process, its skeptics affirm that it allows participants to reveal their desired preferences. What this theory means for South African school governance is that if SGBs operate on democratic grounds as expected of them, they would resolve their differences and achieve democratic participation by all.

A review of some existing literature from both developing and developed countries revealed that, only some countries in both regions have accepted learner inclusion in the governance of their schools. Despite this acceptance, the extent of learner participation is very minimal and the degree of satisfaction very low in most countries in both regions.

5.2.3 Summary of the empirical Investigation

The findings of this qualitative study revealed that the RCL exist in all the schools under study. All participants acknowledged that the RCL is a structure in school governance, although many still refuse to accord its members their full rights to freely participate in decision-making.

This summary of the empirical investigation is presented through an explanation of the training SGB members undergo, and how decisions on issues of welfare, administration and curriculum are arrived at.

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5.2.3.1 Capacity building

With regard to capacity building, the findings revealed that SGB members are officially trained for their office. However, much is desired from the once off crash course or training which is done for the entire duration of service. Similarly, the limited duration of one year service for the RCL does very little or nothing to imbue its members with the capacity, skills and know-how expected by adult members. The insufficient skills, knowledge and capacity are some of the main reasons why adult governors do not give the RCL the freedom to participate in every decision-making process of the school. This greatly limits the extent of their participation and lowers their degree of satisfaction.

In addition, the TLOs are not committed to mentoring the RCL. Their duty which is to guide the RCL, and help the members to develop a sense of leadership in its members, as well as to promote communication between himself, the principal, staff and RCL as policy requires of them, is not performed. This contributes in incapacitating the RCL as well as in limiting the extent of its participation in decision-making and lowering the degree of satisfaction in school governance.

5.2.3.2 Welfare issues

With regard to the extent to which learners participate in decision-making on welfare issues in schools, the findings revealed that, in most schools in the study, learners, satisfactorily, participate in decision-making on welfare issues, for example, sanitation, especially where the school does not have to spend any money. Keeping the school surroundings, toilets and classrooms clean is left in the hands of learners. In cases that involve financial expenditure such as repainting, redoing of classroom floors and renovating toilets, learners can make submissions but are not given an opportunity to contribute to decision-making.

Findings on welfare issues pertaining to extra curricula activities like those of sanitation, revealed that, in most schools in the study, learners are allowed to make decisions only where there is no expenditures in involved. Learners decide what types of sporting activities to engage in only if those sports already exist in the school. They cannot

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request anything new that will require the purchase of new equipement. This leaves the learners very dissatisfied.

Unlike the issues of sanitation and extra curricula activities, there is almost no learner input in the choice of food provided to them. The minimal learner input on food provision pertains on what is sold in the school tuckshop. There is no overt discussion on their preferrences. Almost all the schools in this study are in the DoE's nutrition scheme. The findings are that there is no consultation or discussions with learners on their preferrences. The DoE sends its supplies, and it is a "take it or leave it" scenario. Food which is meant to build healthy bodies and minds for teaching and learning in this case is unhealth and as such breeds unspeakable frustration, gross dissatisfaction and phsychological disturbances because almost all the learners disapprove of such treatment.

5.2.3.3 Administrative issues

Findings on administrative issues revealed limited learner participation in decision-making on certain aspects like the code of conduct for learners and learner discipline, classroom administration and management, and planning and developing physical facilities.

In all the schools in the study, learners democratically elect their own class leaders and, subsequently, RCL representatives. Learners in all schools in this study, submited proposals on the codes of conduct for learners which were eventually incorporated into the school rules and regulations. The RCL administers corrective measures on learners for minor offences, while the SMT takes charge of serious offences.

The findings also showed some learner participation in decision-making on classroom administration and management, especially keeping the class in order in the absence of a teacher. With the planning and developing of physical facilities, there is some learner participation in one of the six schools studied.

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Findings on the extent to which learners participate in decision-making in schools and their degree of satisfaction on administrative issues of the language policy of the school, school budget and school fees, staff selection and staff discipline are very discouraging. In all the schools in this study, the democratic, deliberative principle of inclusion is non-existent on these issues. This is no room for opinions, or deliberations accorded to learners on these issues, on the grounds that the school will be chaotic, that learners do not work or earn money to make any financial decisions, that learners are lacking in knowledge and that it is inappropriate for a child to discipline the parent (teacher).

All learners, in this study, accepted that learner input on the language policy of the school was not necessary since it is English. However, they are against their exclusion from the other aspects of administration. They strongly expressed frustration and dissatisfaction for being excluded and their desire to make contributions on these issues that affect their lives was also strongly expressed.

5.2.3.4 Curricula issues

This study identified curricula issues as a "no go" area for learner inclusion in decision-making. Almost all teacher and learner participants lamented that none but the DoE makes decisions on curricula issues. This is the only area in the study where neither the SMT nor SGB has a say. Some participants in the study accept this learner exclusion and monoploly of the DoE, while others are against it.

Curricula issues are the heart beat of schooling. Learner exclusion on decision-making on such an important aspect of schooling is tantamount to "education murder". Most learners in this study crave for a say, especially on deciding the minimum acceptable percentage per subject to be considered a pass in the Senior Certificate Examination. These learners consider the DoE's 30% pass mark as too low and not working in their favour especially when it comes to gaining admission into tertiary institutions.

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5.2.3.5 Policy issues

The findings of this study identified a number of loopholes with regards to certain policies relating to the existence and effective functioning of the RCL. The first main function of the RCL is that "an RCL acts as an important instrument for liaison and communication". This first main function by itself belittles and reduces the RCL to a messenger. In a system promoting the ideals of democracy, there is no clause in The Guides for the RCL which stipulates that the RCL must participate in all decision-making affecting learners. Thus, the guidelines for the RCL fail to emphasise the democratic principle of inclusion and deliberative decision-making.

Furthermore, this study revealed that, the one year term of office for the RCL as stipulated in the guidelines for the RCL is too short for them to plan and realise anything meaningful. This short duration of service limits the RCL's participation in decision-making, increases their frustration and, subsequently, lowers their degree of satisfaction.

In addition, the guidelines for the RCL is very vague on RCL involvement in SGB financial matters. It states that the SGB, SMT and RCL should negotiate on funds for the RCL. Such ambiguity only helps to limit RCL's deliberative powers and lowers their degree of satisfaction in school governance issues.

Generally, the findings revealed gross learner disrespect, mistrust and intolerance. These account for the constant complaints by learners that they are being undermined. The presence of disrespect, mistrust and intolerance in the SGBs, in this study, leaves no room for fairness and objectivity. These are values upheld by the practice of inclusion and deliberative decision-making. The RCL is excluded from decision-making on confidential issues like teacher discipline because of lack of trust from adult governors.

Furthermore, the disrespect adult governors have for the RCL is also manifested in the use of improper communication channels. Continual failure to invite the RCL to SGB

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meetings and feedback sent to the RCL either through the principal, teachers or parents instead of through the RCL representatives. This disrespect is as a result of adults' intolerance of the RCLs whom they view as novices who make no meaningful contributions in school governance debates. This limits the extent of RCL's participation in decision-making and lowers the degree of satisfaction the RCLs get.

Apart from the findings on welfare, administration, curricular and policy issues reported above, the findings of this study also revealed that, generally, the RCL is just accommodated in the SGB because policy mandates its existence. It was also found out that, for most RCL members, their main purpose for joining the RCL was to make learner's voices heard. Despite numerous challenges faced, the RCL managed to make learners' voices heard through some valuable contributions made in different schools such as protesting against the dismissal of a principal whom parents did not want, initiating honorarium awards to outstanding learners, implementing uniform change and putting an end to late coming and fence jumping and suggesting an invitation of a motivational speaker for the grade 12s in school C when many of their teachers were missing classes and learners were becoming discouraged.

5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The researcher acknowledges that there were some limitations associated with this study. The fact that the sample on which the findings of the study were based was small does not make it possible for any wider generalisations to be made to the bigger society. If all the schools with learners in grade eight and above in the Limpopo Province had been used, there would have been a much bigger sample size to permit a generalisation of findings.

Almost the same questions were used for each participant. It is also possible that the repeated nature of the questions might have influenced the responses over time. It is possible that if completely different sets of interview schedules had been used for the

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different groups of participants, there would not have been any repetition of questions and no possible influence on responses.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The reseacher set out to investigate the extent of learner participation and degree of satisfaction in decision-making in school governace within the Vhembe District of the Limpopo Province. The researcher used the theory of deliberative democracy as a theoretical framework for the study. Employing the interpretive paradicmatic approach, the researcher collected and analysed qualitative data. A review of related literature from both more developing and developed countries of the world revealed that most countries signed and ratified the 1989 UNCROC. However, the concept of according learners the full right to participate in all matters affecting them, including school governance, is still not fully accepted. The findings of this study revealed that on the one hand, there is some learner participation in decision-making and a moderate degree of satisfaction in relation to learner welfare issues. On the other hand, the findings also revealed a limited extent of learner's participation and a low degree of satisfaction in decision-making on administrative and curricula issues.These findings correlate with those of earlier studies.

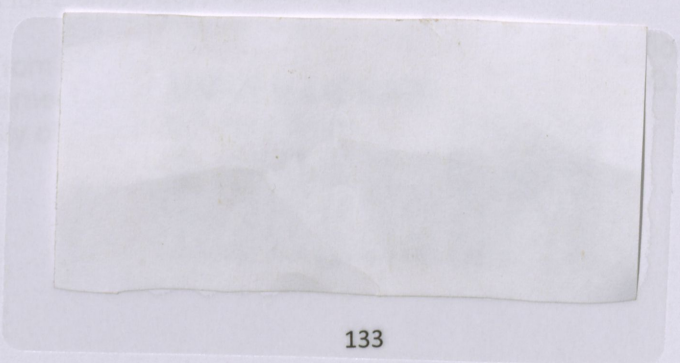
5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher recommends the following types of further research to be carried out:
Firstly, a comparative study should be carried out between the SGB of a school and a control SGB comprising other parents, teachers, learners and non-teaching staff of the same school who are not members of the real SGB. Each time the real SGB meets to discuss an issue, the control SGB should also meet to discuss the same issues. The control SGB should be supervised by the would-be researcher to ensure that learners are given the same respect and opportunities as other members to participate in all decision-making processes. The manner of operations (such as invitations to meetings,

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arriving at decisions and providing feedback) of a real SGB and the control SGB all through their duration of service should be compared.

Secondly, a study should also be carried out on adult governors in the Limpopo Province on their strategies to maximize learner participation and satisfaction in decision-making in school governance.



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INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES (SGBs)

RESEARCH TOPIC: "LEARNER PARTICIPATION AND SATISFACTION IN DECISION–MAKING IN SCHOOL GOVERNANCE WITHIN THE VHEMBE DISTRICT IN THE LIMPOPO PROVINCE"

SECTION A: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

1. School setting:
   - Semi-Urban ☐
   - Rural ☐

2. Gender:
   - Male ☐
   - Female ☐

3. Grade of RCL participants: _____

4. Position in SGB: _____

5. Highest qualifications:
   - Teacher's Certificate ☐
   - Teacher's Diploma ☐
   - BEDTEF/BEDFET (BAED) ☐
   - BED Honours ☐
   - MED ☐
   - PhD ☐

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6. Age brackets:

10 – 19 years	☐
20 – 29 years	☐
30 – 39 years	☐
40 – 49 years	☐
50 – 59 years	☐
60 and above	☐

SECTION B: GENERAL INFORMATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING

1. Which system of learner leadership exists in your school?

   _____

2. How are the leaders selected? _____
3. How is the Representative Council of Learners (RCL) office bearers made aware of their role within the governance of the school?

   _____

4. How are SGB members of your school trained for their office?

   _____

   _____

5. What is your opinion on the fact that learners should be included as members of the SGB of a school?

   _____

   _____

6. What do you think about the one year term of office for the RCL, is it too long, too short, or just enough? Give reasons for your answer.

   _____

   _____

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7. How can you explain the idea that learners are actors with skills and capacities to bring about constructive resolutions to their own problems?

_____

_____

_____

SECTION C: EXTENT OF LEARNER PARTICIPATION AND SATISFACTION

8. How does your SGB inform its members of a meeting?

_____

9. How does the chair person ensure that everyone present has the freedom to contribute to the final decision to be taken during meetings?

_____

_____

10. How are decisions of SGB meetings given out to other stakeholders who are not members?

_____

11. How often does the RCL participate in SGB meetings of your school?

_____

12. Administrative issues

What input does the RCL make in deciding on the following:

a) the language policy of the school?

_____

_____

b) the school budget and school fees?

_____

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c) staff selection and staff discipline? _____

d) the code of conduct for learners and learner discipline?

_____

_____

e) classroom administration and management?

_____

_____

f) planning and developing physical facilities?

_____

_____

13. Curriculum issues

What input does the RCL make in deciding on the following:

a) choice of textbooks? _____

b) number of examinations and setting acheivement targets? _____

c) teaching method and content? _____

d) appraising teacher performance? _____

14. Welfare issues

What input does the RCL make in deciding on the following welfare issues of:

:

a) level of sanitation? _____

b) nature of extra curricular activities? _____

c) choice of food? _____

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15. How would you describe the level of support the RCL receives from other partners of the school and what are the reasons for this kind of support?

16. How often does the RCL in your school meet?

17. In your opinion and experience, how do other members of the SGB listen when the RCL speaks?

18. What are some examples of when you believe input by the RCL has been valued by other members of the SGB?

19. In what ways do RCL members face challenges with participating in the governance of your school?

20. How can the RCL's participation be sustained despite the existing challenges?

21. How are the RCL activities in your school supervised or coordinated?

22. How does the RCL of your school interact with those of neighbouring schools?

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23. After so many years of RCL existence as a structure in the SGB, what in your opinion are the perceptions of parents, and the school management team (SMT) on having the RCL as part of the SGB?

_____

_____

24. How satisfied is the RCL with its participation in decision-making in your school?

_____

_____

SECTION C1: QUESTION FOR PRINCIPALS ONLY

25. Under what circumstances does management meet the RCL of your school outside the SGB? _____

SECTION C11: QUESTIONS FOR RCL ONLY

26. What is most important to you about your involvement in school governance?

_____

_____

27. What personal learning experiences have you had as a result of being an RCL member?

_____

_____

SECTION C111: QUESTIONS FOR TLOS ONLY

28. Under what circumstances do you as the TLO meet with the RCL in your school?

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29. What is your experience working with the RCL?

30. How do you share your experiences of the RCL with the rest of the school?

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