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## Collaboration between school management teams and governing bodies in effectively managing public primary school finances

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The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 requires school governing bodies (SGBs) to take responsibility for the management of school finances. However, research in this field of study revealed that many SGB members lack the necessary knowledge and financial skills to effectively and efficiently manage schools' finances. This has resulted in more financial responsibilities assigned to principals, who in turn solicit the assistance of other members of school management teams (SMTs), which include heads of departments (HoDs) and deputy principals. Given that principals and SGBs grapple with the demands of managing financial resources effectively, this study explores the necessity for SMTs to collaborate with principals and SGBs. Qualitative research was used to determine the factors that drive or hinder authentic collaboration among SMT members and SGB governors in the Gauteng West and Johannesburg West education districts. This research followed an interpretivist approach, focusing on the descriptive, contextual and exploratory nature of the inquiry. Findings revealed that collaboration between members of the SGBs and SMTs on school finances are usually non-existent. It is recommended that more structures and opportunities should be created to enable effective communication and teamwork among various role-players. Cultivating and sustaining collaborative relationships between members of SGBs and SMTs will certainly contribute to effective financial management.

**Keywords:** budgeting; collaboration; financial management; professional management; school management teams; teamwork

### Introduction and Background to the Study

This paper has significance for many scholars and governments of developing countries who make substantial investment in education with the expectation that the rate of unemployment will be reduced. It has been established that despite considerable state funding, many public schools are not functioning at their optimum, and learner performance is generally of a low standard (Makgato & Mji, 2006; Spaul, 2013; Taylor, S, Van der Berg & Burger, 2011). For example, in the 2014 South African Annual National Assessment (ANA) results, slight increases were recorded across all provinces in the overall scores of Languages and Mathematics compared to the 2011 ANA results (Department of Basic Education, Republic of South Africa, 2014). Masuabi (2017) avers that the literacy and numeracy levels of primary school learners are pitched at two grades lower than normal. Researchers have cited reasons for this state of affairs: poor infrastructure in schools; inadequate resources (human and physical); lack of financial knowledge and skills; overcrowded classrooms; and the socio-economic status of parents. However, it is our firm belief that developing countries such as South Africa have the capacity to provide quality education and improve learner performance through collaboration among all stakeholders (parents, teachers, education authorities) in schools (Fleisch, 2008; Taylor, N, Muller & Vinjevold, 2003).

The South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996), the Education Laws Amendment Act (The Presidency, Republic of South Africa, 2007) and the Basic Education Laws Amendment Act (The Presidency, Republic of South Africa, 2011) clearly stipulate the financial functions and responsibilities of principals and school governing bodies (SGBs), but current policies and legislation are silent on the role of school management teams (SMTs) regarding school financial management. The South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996), (hereafter Schools Act) stipulates that the SMT is mainly accountable for the professional management while the SGB has the responsibility of governance. Principals, by virtue of their positions, play dual roles: they serve on the SGB and *ex-officio* act on behalf of provincial heads of education in managing the day-to-day operations of the school. The principal is also a member of the SMT. Although the SMT (which consists of the principal,<sup>1</sup> deputy principal and HoDs) is responsible for the advancement of teaching and learning, the researchers in this study contend that their functions should be extended to include financial school management. Heystek (2006) points out that parents serving on SGBs of many public schools have limited financial knowledge and skills, and low levels of literacy. These governors usually find it difficult to make sound financial decisions. Thus, many financial functions are progressively delegated to principals, who in turn, use the distributive style of management to delegate some of the important financial functions to SMT members.

Mestry and Bisschoff (2009) and Van Rooyen (2013) aver that financial management should be all-inclusive and transparent. Although SMT members may serve on the SGB as teacher representatives, the SMT as structure is not represented on the SGB. As professional managers, SMTs play a leading role by offering guidance, advice, support, assistance and leadership mainly on curriculum matters (Mathipa, Magano, Mapotse, Matlabe & Mohapi, 2014). However, we argue that SMTs can play a prominent role to assist SGBs on various governance issues such

as formulating the school's vision and mission and developing specific institutional goals. The SMTs are also responsible for implementing the school development plan, selecting, procuring and managing learning and teaching support materials (LTSMs), and determining the physical resource needs of their departments (Ali & Botha, 2006; Bush & Glover, 2013). Ali and Botha (2006) and Hoadley, Christie and Ward (2009) emphasise the instructional role of HoDs and affirm that managing resources such as LTSMs effectively is an important function of HoDs. Bush and Glover (2013) evaluated leadership and management practices in South African schools and confirm the important role that SMTs (deputy principals and HoDs) play in managing school resources. Most of these functions are closely aligned to school finances. In fact, SMTs are called upon to submit budgets for their departments and are directly involved in most fundraising initiatives. Mestry and Bisschoff (2009) affirm that the goals of the school and the annual budget should be directly linked. The budget is an integral part of financial management, therefore, collaboration between the SGBs and SMTs can be extended to financial functions. By virtue of their positions, SMTs are ultimately responsible for monitoring LTSM allocations, which form part of the overall financial management of schools. It thus becomes imperative that SMTs as middle managers should be involved in the budgeting process and some aspects of financial management. It is also important for schools to initiate and maintain a collaborative relationship between members of SMTs and SGBs, based on mutual trust, teamwork, joint decision-making, open communication and cooperation to achieve school goals.

Thus, for schools' goals to be realised, it is our contention that principals, SMTs and SGBs should collaborate with one another to ensure that schools' resources are effectively and efficiently managed. The principal, SMT members and SGB governors should share financial responsibilities for the effective and efficient financial management of schools (Van Rooyen, 2013). In theory, this should lead to collaboration between the SGB, the principal and the SMT to ensure collective responsibility. However, does collaboration between SMT members and SGB governors exist in practice? Based on anecdotal evidence, the researchers were of the view that in most schools, collaboration between the SMT and the SGB was non-existent. This situation therefore needed to be empirically investigated.

The problem statement for this study was formulated as follows: Why is it important for SMT members and SGB governors to collaborate with each other to effectively and efficiently manage school finances in public primary schools?

The problem was encapsulated in the following research questions:

- Why is it important for SMT members to collaborate with SGB governors in managing public primary school finances?
- What is the nature and essence of collaboration?
- What factors drive or hinder collaboration between SMT members and SGB governors to effectively manage public primary school finances?
- How can collaboration among principals, SMT members and SGB governors be strengthened to manage school finances effectively and efficiently?

#### Aims of the Research

The general aim of this study was to explore how collaboration between principals, SMTs and SGBs could lead to the effective financial management of public primary schools. To achieve this aim, we investigated whether collaboration existed between members of SMTs and SGBs, and determined the factors that drove and hindered collaboration between principals, SMTs and SGBs in managing the finances of public primary schools. Based on our research findings, suggestions are offered on how to strengthen the collaboration between the principal and members of the SMT and SGB that will enhance the effective and efficient management of school funds.

#### Literature Review

The Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996) provides for decentralised education giving local communities the authority to govern or self-manage schools (Joubert & Bray, 2007). Hargreaves (1994, cited in Govindasamy, 2009), posits that self-managed schools imply greater collective responsibility of stakeholders in schools to implement centrally defined governance mandates. Self-management thus places greater reliance on authentic collaboration among key role-players. Collaboration is an essential ingredient for effective management structures, and principals alone cannot effectively manage their schools. Using distributive leadership to achieve school goals, school leaders delegate various duties and responsibilities to individuals (teachers), teams or committees.

Mestry and Bisschoff (2009) define financial management as the performance of management actions (regulatory tasks) connected to the finance of schools with the main aim of achieving effective education. Financial responsibilities include, among others, the collection of school (user) fees, fundraising initiatives, securing sponsorships, disbursements for the procurement of textbooks, stationery and educational resources to service providers. Clarke (2007) suggests that principals and SGBs should have the necessary knowledge and understanding of basic processes involved in managing the school's accounts, the budgeting process and the systems, as well as necessary controls to ensure that the school's monies are effectively managed. Assessing the functions of SGBs, Vandeyar (2002) found that the biggest

problem that SGBs faced was the enormous baggage of policies and directives that they were required to be acquainted with. She argues that, because many SGBs do not have the time or the inclination to empower themselves, it becomes the responsibility of the principal to provide the necessary support to the SGB. Naidu, Joubert, Mestry, Mosoge and Ngcobo (2008) aver that it is thus essential for SGBs to delegate various financial functions, either to committees specially set up to manage aspects of the school's finances, or to individuals who have the necessary expertise or skills in school finances, as many SGB members lack the necessary financial management skills and expertise. Delegation is driven by aims of managerial efficiency, as delegating decisions to the lowest level increases accountability and allows flexibility in responding to needs at that level. Clarke (2007) states that although the governing body has ultimate responsibility for the financial management of the school, it is normal practice for them to delegate the daily operational financial management functions to the principal. Since principals have other important responsibilities such as instructional or curriculum matters (Hoadley et al., 2009), managing learner discipline, attending to parents, and responding to educational authorities' deadlines, they use the distributive leadership style of delegating financial matters to HoDs and deputy principals (Brauckmann & Schwarz, 2014). These SMT members usually collect excursion fees and purchase textbooks, library books and educational resources (Clarke, 2007). We contend that SMTs, through collaboration with SGBs, can play a crucial role in managing the schools' finances effectively and efficiently.

Richards, Elliot, Woloshyn and Mitchell (2001) suggest that collaborative partnerships are joint efforts that involve pooling and sharing of expertise for the attainment of common goals. For Lacey (2001), working collaboratively in a school means that staff and parents agree to pursue shared goals in a coordinated manner, applying joint decision-making and problem-solving methods. Tsuari (2011) states that to create synergy in schools, positive interaction with colleagues, parents and other stakeholders is essential. Collaboration should be deliberate but voluntarily in situations where all role-players identify and agree on mutual goals. They should be willing to share in responsibilities and resources and be accountable for all their actions. This view is shared by Mashego (2000) who defines collaboration as a process of exchanging information, altering activities, sharing resources and enhancing others' capacity for their mutual benefit and achieving common goals. In collaboration, worldviews can be shared, deepened and expanded and collaborators can be professionally and personally enriched (Richards et al., 2001). For many collaborative endeavours,

caring human relationships have been perceived as central for success (Elliott & Woloshyn, 1997). Building rapport among partners has been identified as an essential element for creating mutual understanding and sensitivity to the diverse cultures prevailing in schools. Without building rapport, there is a distinct risk that some role-players may feel marginalised and remain silent and uninvolved. Richards et al. (2001) state that commitment is central to a collaborative process. Firstly, partners must be committed to the idea and value of working with others. This commitment assumes a certain humility as partners acknowledge that they cannot effectively complete the project alone. Secondly, after initial stages of negotiation, they must be committed to the project goals and to their collaborative partners. Collaboration creates opportunities for working together and contributing to the partnership among all role-players.

In the context of the South African education system, it can be argued that collaboration among the various role-players such as SMTs and SGBs is a prerequisite for the achievement of long and short-term goals. The SGB may lack the necessary skills and knowledge that are needed for the effective management of school finances, and therefore, members of the SMT may contribute, to a large extent, in fulfilling these limitations. Squelch and Lemmer (1994) contend that principals, parents and teachers need to form a relationship of mutual trust and understanding so that they can work together as partners for the benefit of the school and learners. Govindasamy (2009) states that collaboration improves efficiency in the use of resources in educational services. Self-managed schools foster collaboration and facilitate sound financial decision-making.

#### Theoretical Framework

The Collegial Model, as an aspect of collaboration, was appropriately selected as the theoretical framework to underpin this study (Bush, 2011). Collegial models emphasise that power and decision-making should be shared among some or all members of the organisation. Collegial models assume that organisations determine policy and make decisions through a process of discussion leading to consensus. Power is shared among some or all members of the organisation who are thought to have a mutual understanding about the objects of the institution (Mestry & Govindasamy, 2013). Coleman and Anderson (2000) assert that the Collegial Model supports the principle of participatory, consultative and collaborative leadership, and joint decision-making, thus encouraging collaboration among various role-players. Bush (2011) states that collegial models assume that organisations determine policy and make decisions through a process of discussion leading to consensus. Through a collegial

relationship power is shared among some or all members of the organisation who have a shared understanding of the goals of the institution. Little (1990, in Bush, 2011:73) claims that “much is gained when teachers work together.” This is true in the case of the collaborative relationship between the SGB and the SMT. Anderson and Lumby (2005) assert that the management of resources is an important dimension of collaborative decision-making. This implies that the SMT and SGB must engage in collaborative decision-making to ensure that financial resources are managed effectively.

In schools of today, the implementation of such collegial models and the success of collaboration is influenced by various factors. Hargreaves (1994:244) identifies several principles of collaboration:

- Eliminates duplication of tasks: Activities are coordinated and responsibilities shared by all role-players resulting in increased efficiency. Authentic collaboration improves the quality of work and, therefore, significantly improves the management of financial resources.
- Reduces work overload: Sharing and integrating the expertise of role-players reduces heavy workloads. It also pools the collective knowledge of principals, SMTs and SGBs and therefore, all members learn from one another and grow.
- Collaboration reduces uncertainty among the principal, SMT and SGB and it creates collective professional confidence. It enables principals to interact more confidently with the SMT and SGB, thus enhancing political assertiveness.

In summary, for schools to successfully achieve their goals, SMTs need to collaborate with SGBs and be part of the financial decision-making process. Collaboration also implies the ability of SMTs and SGBs to work together in a relationship based on trust, understanding, cooperation and shared goals (Mestry & Govindasamy, 2013). Collaboration enhances the relationship between the SGB and the SMT and helps to realise the goals by involving all stakeholders in the management of school finances.

### Methodology

This study employed qualitative research to determine how collaboration between SMT members and SGB governors can contribute to effectively managing school finances. Qualitative research is concerned with undertaking a subjective exploration of reality from the insiders’ perspective as opposed to the predominant outside perspective in the quantitative paradigm (Caelli, Ray & Mill, 2003; Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, 2004; Merriam, 1998). To gain better insight into the participants’ realities and experiences of instructional leadership, this study was located within the interpretivist paradigm (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006).

For this research, a sample of five primary schools from a population of 218 primary schools in the Gauteng West and Johannesburg West districts

was selected. Convenience sampling, as a type of nonprobability or non-random sampling, was preferred because the participants met certain practical criteria such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, and the willingness to participate (Creswell, 2009; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). The selected principals managed the schools’ finances effectively and efficiently and cordial relationships existed between members of the SGBs and SMTs. The Institutional Development and Support Officials (IDSOs) of the two education districts acknowledged our selection of principals.

The researchers used open-ended questionnaires, follow-up interviews, and document analysis to collect rich data. Merriam (2009) maintains that interviews provide insight into the thinking of participants, something which cannot be directly observed or measured. The participants were required to first complete an open-ended questionnaire which aimed at exploring their perceptions and experiences of school managers and of the collaboration that prevailed between SMT members and SGB governors. The questionnaire was checked by the Statistical Consulting Department of the University of Johannesburg to ensure that the questions covered the field of study and that the wording was clear and unambiguous. The follow-up interviews assisted the researchers to clarify, supplement and delve deeper into the views reflected by participants in the completed questionnaires. Interviews with the five principals took place in their offices at the respective primary schools and were recorded with the participants’ permission. The principals were encouraged to express their perceptions and opinions regarding collaboration between the SMT and SGB in the financial management of the school.

An analysis of documents such as financial and related policies, minutes of SGB and SMT meetings, and financial statements, including the schools’ budgets, was also used to collect appropriate data. The Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996), the Education Laws Amendment Act of 2007 (The Presidency, Republic of South Africa, 2007) and the Basic Education Laws Amendment Act (The Presidency, Republic of South Africa, 2011) were used as terms of reference to determine whether schools were correctly interpreting and implementing various legislation, regulations and policies related to school financial management.

To ensure trustworthiness of the study, the researchers ensured that the interviews for each participant were conducted using the same format and sequence of words and questions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). This safeguarded being biased or prejudiced by the way in which questions were framed and asked during the interviews. The interviews were conducted at mutually agreed times in the participants’ offices as considerable

information was obtained by observing the participants in their physical settings (Lichtman, 2010). A digital recorder was used to record the interviews and the interviews were subsequently transcribed. After the interviews, participants were required to validate whether the transcriptions had in fact represented a true account of their views and experiences expressed. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state that the use of triangulation reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. Triangulation was achieved by using multiple sources for data collection: semi-structured interviews with principals and SMT members, completed open-ended questionnaires and document analysis.

Data were analysed using Tesch's method of coding (Creswell, 2009). Attention was given to patterns and commonalities in search for themes and categories that uncovered the meanings of participants' particular perceptions and experiences. Ethical considerations to conduct the study were observed. The participants were assured that the aim of the research was not to judge or evaluate their leadership and management skills, but rather to determine their perceptions in respect of collaboration among the principal, SMTs and SGBs regarding the management of school finances. Consent was obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education and the principals of selected schools. Principals were made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time. To ensure confidentiality, no personal information would be revealed without the participants' consent.

### Findings and Discussion

Four important themes emerged from the analysis of data obtained from the open-ended questionnaires, personal interviews and document analysis: Principals and SMT members fulfil SGB functions of managing school finances; Drivers of authentic collaboration; Obstacles hampering collaboration; and Enhancing authentic collaboration between SMTs and SGBs to effectively manage school finances.

Participants' comments are coded as follows: Principal A is indicated as PA, Principal B as PB and so on. A member of the SMT of School A is named SMTA, a member of the SMT of School B as SMTB, and so forth.

#### Theme 1: Principals and SMT Members Fulfil SGB Functions of Managing School Finances

Most participants had a clear understanding of the functions of SGBs as stipulated in the Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Although the SGB is responsible for the management of school finances, this is not always the case in many public schools. The analysis of documents revealed that principals and some SMT members at all five schools played a key role in the day-to-day

management of finances, while the parent component of the SGB played a subservient role. Principal E indicated that the implementation of legislation and regulations were mainly the principal's responsibility:

*The governing body is here to manage the school finances such as the purchasing of books, maintaining school grounds, and so on. They are responsible for the school finances according to legislation but in practice the principal takes charge of the finances.*

Principals B and C also emphasised that the principal and some SMT members fulfilled the financial obligations of SGBs by taking on the responsibility of attending to the day-to-day financial operations:

*I think they (SGB) are more in an oversight position. At the end of the day it is my head that gets chopped (PB).*

*The Schools Act states that SGBs must manage the school finances. But we find that it does not work that way in practice. Some selected SMT members assist me to manage the school's finances. In fact, I had to include one of the SMT members in the Finance Committee. (PC)*

It is evident that participants of each of the selected schools are aware that the SGB is responsible for the school's finances, but in practice, the principal and SMT members take charge of the funds, especially where SGB members lack the expertise to make sound financial decisions. Also, parents cannot be at the school every day to ensure that they undertake financial responsibilities assigned to them, and therefore most of the financial functions are delegated to the principal and SMT.

Ntsele (2014) warns of the effects of overlapping responsibilities that often lead to confrontation between principals and parent members of the SGB. Mestry and Bisschoff (2009) emphasise that all aspects of school finances need to be clearly defined in a finance policy. The policy should explicitly state the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders including the treasurer, principal, chairperson, finance officer and external auditor. Thus, the lines of authority should be clearly reflected in the finance policy, so that everyone has a sense of who is responsible for specific aspects of the school's finances.

Principal B asserts:

*I am the middleman. On the one side, the Department tell [sic] me that the finances are totally the responsibility of the SGB, but the parent component is not always present in the school. On a day-to-day basis I am responsible for the finances and I am also responsible for the management of everyone who works with the finances, from the cashier to the accounts, to whatever. I am forced to delegate some financial functions to my SMT. In fact, I leave the entire management of LTSM to the HoDs.*

Maile (2002) and Mestry (2006) concur that the governing body is responsible and accountable for the schools' funds. The principal and SMT must

facilitate, support and assist the SGB in the execution of its statutory functions relating to assets, liabilities, property and financial management of the school. The analysis of at least three of the sampled schools' financial policies and minutes of SGB and SMT meetings disclosed that most of the financial functions prescribed in the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996), were undertaken by the principals or their delegates (deputy principals, HoDs or teachers). Since the parent components of SGBs lack the necessary financial expertise to make sound financial decisions, they inevitably allow principals and teacher representatives on SGBs to make major financial decisions. School governing bodies' duties can thus be formally delegated to the SMTs. Mestry (2004), in his study on financial accountability in schools, maintains that the principal cannot be solely held liable for mismanagement of funds, since it is the SGB that has the statutory obligation to manage the funds of the school. However, the Education Laws Amendment Act (The Presidency, Republic of South Africa, 2007) gives more powers to the principal. By implication, the Department of Education can hold the principal accountable for the school's finances. Although legislation empowers SGBs to govern schools, the critical question that continually haunts the public is that of the principal's dual role of simultaneously managing and governing the school. Conflicts between the principal and the parent governors is more likely to result if these parties do not work collaboratively. Principals are advised to delegate some of the important financial functions to the SMTs.

In triangulating the data from documents and interviews, the analysis of the financial policies of the selected schools revealed that although the policy for each school was well-formulated, the financial responsibilities of various role-players were not clearly defined, and financial duties not clearly assigned to individuals, teams or committees. From the interviews it emerged that although the procedures of handling cash or the procurement of resources were outlined and the functions of the finance committee well-stated, the SGBs had neglected to include the roles of SMTs in the finance committee in the policies. The Act merely requires that the principal must be a member of the finance committee. Also, no clear delegation of authority and responsibilities or collaboration between the principal/SMT and SGB was noted in the documents studied.

Analyses of the interviews and questionnaires revealed that no formal collaboration between SMTs and SGBs regarding school finances existed. From the responses, it was evident that the current collaboration and co-operation was a result of past practices that were built on structures for collaboration. In the selected schools, the structures did not emphasise collaboration among the various

role-players. The relationships existed through informal initiatives by the principal. The principal plays a key role in the development of healthy working relationships between principal, staff and parents, which is usually based on trust and openness. However, no formal efforts or actions from SGB parent members with regard to collaboration with the SMTs existed.

#### Theme 2: Opportunities to Enhance Collaboration between SGBs and SMTs

School governing body members are currently elected every three years. The SGB comprises of the principal, parents, teaching and non-teaching staff. The Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996) makes no provision for SMTs to be represented on the SGB. Findings revealed that many members elected to serve on the SGB usually had limited working knowledge of school finances and that it takes some time to orientate and provide an understanding of the schools' finances to new members. During this time, there is very little interaction and collaboration between SMT and SGB members.

Principal B remarked:

*We now sit with the problem that the governing bodies change every three years. Just when you have someone who understands the finances of the school well, his/her term of office terminates, and you have to start all over with someone new. There is no continuity, nothing. We have a different person every time and every time you need to explain how the school operates. They have to lengthen the term for a person to serve on the governing body to at least five years. Also, there is very little collaboration between SMTs and SGBs.*

In many of the selected schools it was found that SGB members (especially the parent component) were not available when unexpected urgent financial matters arose. This had serious implications for principals who were required to take immediate action on financial matters. They had no other option but to consult SMT members. Principal D asserted:

*Your governing body members are not always available. So, I think that is one of the problems and time definitely plays a role. Also, the working conditions of the parents that hinders the parent members to attend urgent meetings, and they are therefore not always available. It is easier said than done. People are just too involved in other things as well.*

*My SMT members play an important part in the school's finances. They are readily available and always willing to assist when it comes to school finances.*

From all participant responses it was clear that SMT members were involved in major financial decisions including the budget process. Respondent SMTB remarked: "I am responsible for budgets and purchasing of stationery, physical resources, books, etc." while SMTC mentioned that "The SMT drives the budget on micro level which was approved by the SGB."

Principal C explained:

*The SMT are responsible for the day-to-day professional management of the school. Because everyone has a department or division to manage and take the lead should anything have to be purchased or acquired, regarding the procedure, where it goes, is there money and then it goes up to the top eventually, for approval. The SMTs therefore play an important role in managing the school's finances.*

For SGBs to be effective, they need to develop good relationships with SMT members. Tsuari (2011:55) argues that schools can become effective if SGBs take the necessary steps to develop healthy relationships with SMT members. On the question, "How often do the SGB meet with the SMT?", all the participants agreed that the structures of the SGB and the SMT seldom met. No formal or regular, or even informal meetings between the SMT and SGB were scheduled or took place. Most communication was relayed through the principal or in some cases through SMT members that served on the SGB as teacher representatives. What emerged from the responses was that the principal as the head of the school was regarded as the link between the SMT and the SGB.

It was evident that no platforms for sharing information between the SGB and SMT existed, except through the principals. The lack of contact between the SGB and SMT was confirmed by the following comments made by one of the principals:

*To be honest, never. No, they do not get together. Very seldom. I want to say that it may be once a year when we do strategic planning. No, I do not think with the full management team. I do not believe such meetings take place. At this stage they (SMT) believe the principal communicates with the governing body. They communicate with the principal and the principal will inform them if there is anything. (PE)*

### Theme 3: Drivers and Obstacles in Collaboration between SMTs and SGBs

The analysis revealed that principals played an important role in initiating and sustaining authentic collaboration between SMTs and SGBs. Participants were of the view that good relationships between SMTs and SGBs were regarded as a driving force for actual collaboration. The researchers found that although healthy relationships were essential ingredients to drive collaboration, it did not necessarily mean that this existed in most of the selected schools. SMTC revealed the following:

*Good relationship and good communication are key factors for success. A good working relationship, mutual trust and respect between SGB and SMT also promotes close collaboration. The principal as well as the teacher representatives play an important role in communications. They keep the SGB informed of staff issues as well as keeping the staff informed of SGB issues/needs.*

SMTA added some dimensions that were essential for authentic collaboration among the various role-players. They emphasised that a "trusting relation is

necessary and this can only be achieved if transparency prevailed." This view was also shared by SMTD:

*We feel that the principal and SGB should be open about all matters related to school finances and that there should be no secret agendas between parent members and the principal. They should trust each other.*

It is evident that collegiality, cooperation, trust, transparency and communication are key factors in promoting authentic collaboration. However, in most of the selected schools it would appear that the principals drove the agenda of collaboration and not the SGBs.

The analysis of the responses to the question: "What obstacles hindered collaboration between SMTs and SGBs in effectively managing school finances?" revealed that the availability of SGB members to attend extraordinary meetings other than formal scheduled SGB meetings was a major concern in maintaining a collaborative relationship between the SGB and SMT. Even if communication was identified as a key factor in promoting collaboration, the absence of the SGB parent component at special meetings hindered collaboration. Clear understanding of the financial management responsibilities of each body was also highlighted.

Principal B remarked:

*Well, I think we are working on it (communication) but often one gets the feeling that some people on the governing body side are not 100% informed about what is really going on at the school. Sometimes parents work on hearsay and gossip and they get it all wrong – they do not know the background of a particular matter but pass judgement on the school.*

SMTC elaborated:

*SGB members are not always available during school hours. Time can be a problem. Most parents work on the mines and in private sector. So, to get them together can sometimes be a big challenge. Sometimes parents find it difficult to find time to attend to financial matters of the school as they all have full-time jobs and other careers.*

Principals interviewed also revealed that the SGBs didn't always fully understood the boundaries between governance and professional management of the school.

Principal C remarked:

*They do not know where to draw the line and want to take over completely. Things like "governance" and "professional management" – some people do not know where the one starts and the other one ends. They do not know where one's responsibility stops and where the other one starts.*

Principal E explained:

*Because I do not think that the people completely understand the two separate functions of the two bodies. Let me tell you that, here the management team see the governing body only acting when something goes wrong, like a type of police force if you know what I mean.*

With regard to problems or obstacles that hinder collaboration between SMTs and SGBs in effectively managing school finances, most participants mentioned the unavailability of the SGB for meetings and understanding their responsibilities as factors that hindered collaboration.

#### Theme 4: Enrichment of Collaboration between SMTs and SGBs

Numerous positive responses emanated from the question: "What suggestions/measures can be put forward to ensure that the SMT and SGB work collaboratively in managing financial resources?"

Most participants felt that communication through modern technology and social media were the main means of enriching communication and collaboration between SMTs and SGBs. However, most parent members of SGBs experienced problems accessing emails, Skype or responding to short message services (SMS) sent by schools. Some parents were reluctant to be on Facebook or Twitter or were simply not interested in reading or responding to communication sent by schools.

School governing bodies (parent members) were also contacted telephonically or in some cases, they would briefly chat with the principal in the car park when they dropped their children off at school. Principal C remarked:

*He (the SGB chairperson) comes every morning and if I need him to sign a cheque for petty cash or whatever, then my financial officer will prepare it and I will meet him in the car park. Sometimes, if time permits, I will come to the office to sign documents.*

Principal D responded as follows:

*We plan our dates of meetings well in advance. We allow parent governing body members also to give their inputs in some cases by phone or letter. We communicate with SGB members by e-mail or telephone if needed. We deal with the barriers by implementing electronic communication like e-mails [electronic mails], etc. Sometimes we have to send reminders to these parents or we would send one of the teachers after school hours to go personally to their homes to get them to respond.*

The analysis of the data revealed that it seemed as though uncertainty existed among parent governors in terms of their functions in school governance. Some principals emphasised that SMT and SGB members should understand their responsibilities regarding school finances. Mestry (2006:31) argues that a common misconception exists among various stakeholders regarding the function of SGBs in managing school funds. Furthermore, Van Wyk (2007:134) found that the role of the SGB was often not clearly understood and that some members tended to get involved in the management of the school without any knowledge of their role-functions.

SMTB indicated:

*To overcome any barriers the SMT and SGB should put their differences aside and strive to set and*

*achieve goals that is [sic] best for the school and its learners. There must always be open communication.*

Another SMT member from School E added:

*"Every member of SMT and SGB should understand their responsibility when finances are raised."*

Principal D confirmed the views of the above participants:

*People need to know what their responsibilities are and commit to do their task to the best of their abilities and in so doing it will make the task of the other person on another level easier. So, I think training and good communication.*

Principal C commented:

*One member of the governing body said I drove him mad. So, it is sometimes difficult because the minute you give them more of a free hand to do things and get involved, you find they want to take over and that can become a problem.*

Principal A commented on communication:

*Any communication between the management team and the governing body, whether it is one hour in a month or two, three, whatever, can only be to the benefit of the managing of school finances. As soon as you have the governing body and the management team informed about each other's plans, you will create a better platform for the school.*

Communication and clear responsibilities play a major role in the enhancement of collaboration between the SMT and SGB to ensure that school finances are effectively managed.

In developing countries such as Zimbabwe, Nigeria and Ghana that struggle with financial constraints, governments find it problematic to fund public schools adequately. It becomes imperative for public schools to manage the limited funds provided by the state effectively and efficiently. Policy makers and scholars in emerging economies outside of South Africa will take cognisance of the fact that authentic collaboration among various stakeholders in education, especially the SGBs and SMTs, is a prerequisite for effective and efficient school financial management.

#### Conclusion and Recommendations

Several studies on school governance have been undertaken (Marishane & Botha, 2004; Xaba & Ngubane, 2010). The study by Bisschoff and Thurlow (2005) delved into challenges faced by SGBs in the management of school finances. Their findings revealed that many members serving on SGBs had limited financial knowledge and skills. Botha (2012) and Bush and Heystek (2003) highlighted problems experienced between principals and parent members of SGBs. Although the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996), clearly defines professional management and governance, interpretation of the Act creates serious conflict between parent members and principals resulting in many schools becoming dysfunctional. Van Wyk (2007) and Xaba (2011) accentuate the challenges experienced by SGBs to

effectively manage school finances and argue that SGB members should be given the required professional training and development on financial matters. However, limited research has been conducted on SMT and SGB collaboration on financial matters. Although SMTs are directly involved in financial matters of the school, the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996), does not make provision for SMTs as structures to manage school finances. This research thus builds on previous research by emphasising the importance of collaborating on school finances with members of the SGB.

Based on the literature review and findings of this empirical study, it is evident that collaboration is essential for effective school management. Principals cannot manage their schools in isolation but require the efforts of all role-players. Furthermore, the application of the distributive leadership style is vital. Findings revealed that very little collaboration between the SMT and SGB on financial matters existed, and where a strong collaborative culture prevailed, the principal acted as link to facilitate collaboration between the SMT and SGB on school finances. Although SMT members were actively involved in the budget process and the monitoring and control of finances, it was apparent that in all five schools, no evidence of formal financial delegation to the SMT was established. Evidence revealed that only in one school the SMT and SGB met on a regular basis to discuss school matters of concern. A key factor that emanated from this study entails that the principal is the person that drives a collaborative culture and not the SGB. The SGB members are required to focus on what is expected of them in executing their duties. To undertake their functions, SGBs need to form partnerships and to work collaboratively with various role-players. We thus advocate the importance of collaboration between SGBs and SMTs on all aspects of school finances. This collaboration will result in schools attaining the set goals more readily.

In all the schools included in the study, the availability of SGB members for regular meetings of the SMT and SGB was an obstacle. Even SGB members' attendance of normal SGB meetings was highlighted as a problem. In this study it became apparent that SGB members did not know their roles and responsibilities regarding the governance and management of the school, and often got involved in the professional management of the school. Collaboration must be driven from both ends. The SGB and the SMT must initiate cooperation and teamwork. In this way all members will feel that they are part of the process, and trust between members will be created.

The main factor identified to enhance a collaborative culture among all role-players was communication. Communication is an essential

function in schools and the collaborative relationship between the SGB and the SMT is defined by effective communication structures. Where SMT and SGB members did not see the need to communicate directly with each other, principals found great difficulty in managing their schools effectively. Trust and respect among these role-players were unattainable. Trust can only be built through proper communication.

The following recommendations are provided to strengthen authentic collaboration between SMTs and SGBs in managing schools' finances effectively and efficiently:

- The South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996), should be amended to provide for SMTs to become active participants in managing school finances. The SMTs should be represented on the SGB – especially on the Finance Committee. Their functions on these structures should include the management of LTSMs, the budget process, and the monitoring and control of school finances and physical resources.
- Collaboration between SMT members (specifically HoDs and deputy principals) and SGB members should be formalised by including regular meetings between SGB and SMT (at least once per term) on the school's annual calendar. At these meetings all pertinent aspects related to the financial management of the school should be discussed. This collaboration can only result in more effective and efficient management of schools' finances.

#### Authors' Contributions

PB and RM have worked jointly on the paper. All authors reviewed the final manuscript.

#### Notes

- i. In this paper, we treat the principal as separate from the SMT because of the nature of the discussion.
- ii. Published under a Creative Commons Attribution Licence.
- iii. DATES: Received: 2 May 2018; Revised: 7 January 2019; Accepted: 31 January 2019; Published: 31 May 2019.

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