The perceptions of principals regarding their working relationship with school board members in the Zambezi region, Namibia

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Abstract
The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of principals regarding their working relationship with school board members (SBMs) in the Zambezi region of Namibia. The study was located in the interpretive paradigm, where a qualitative case study approach to the research problem was employed. The researcher selected five schools, as sites to explore the research problem. It is important to mention that the findings of the study cannot be generalized to all schools in Namibia, since the research was limited to five schools in the Zambezi region only. The findings revealed that the majority of principals perceived their working relationship with SBMs as collegial. In order for principals to work in harmony with SBMs, it is essential to have well-defined roles, as well as to treat everyone fairly and respectfully. This relationship can be fruitful if principals and SBMs understand their roles and responsibilities well so that they can perform to the best of their abilities. To ensure that a sustainable working relationship exists between the principal and SBMs, consultative engagement is recommended. Principals should learn to trust SBMs to regain trust and positive feelings that can improve relations and teamwork.

Keywords: *school board members, parents, principals, teachers, learners' representative council, Namibia*

Introduction

The development of trusting working relationships is a critical leadership factor in the improvement of a school and can facilitate its enhancement (Wise, Bradshaw & Cartwright, 2013). Walkley (2012) defines 'relationship' as the interaction between key groups and individuals who contribute to the governance of a school. Relationships are good when they are respectful, harmonious, trusting and productive. Kladifko (2013) reiterates that a school board should build a relationship of trust and effective interpersonal communication with the principal.

This study focused on the perceptions of principals regarding their working relationships with SBMs in the Zambezi region, of Namibia. Modisaotsile (2012, p. 4) points out that the school board (SB) "must ensure that the school is governed in the best interests of all the stakeholders and should put the interests of the school before any personal interests". Bagarette (2012) points out that, although emphasis is placed on the school board by legislation to be in a good working relationship with the principal, in practice, trust is also expected from the principals for the effective functioning of the school. Botha (2012) acknowledges that principals must ensure that they render all the necessary assistance to SBMs to enable them to perform their duties effectively. The Namibian principal must promote the best interests of the school as mandated by the Education Act, Act 16 of 2001 of Namibia.

Statement of the problem

The researcher observed that most of the challenges experienced in schools in the Zambezi region of Namibia seemed to be due to the lack of a trusting working relationship between the principals and SBMs. This situation observed in schools prompted the researcher to embark on this study; furthermore, it appears that very little research has been conducted on the perceptions of principals regarding their working relationship with SBMs in the Zambezi region and Namibia at large. The lack of a trusting working relationship may have far-reaching consequences, not only for principals and SBMs, but also for the teaching and learning process. By embarking on this study, the researcher aimed to find out the perceptions of school principals regarding their working relationship with SBMs in the Zambezi region. The researcher believes that this study might

change the perceptions of principals, who do not seem to have a trusting working relationship with SBMs when executing their functions as mandated by the Education Act, Act 16 of 2001 (Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture, 2001) of Namibia in the Zambezi region.

Research question
The following research question was addressed in this study:

1. What are the perceptions of principals regarding their working relationships with SBMs in the Zambezi region?

Literature review
Working relationships between principals and SBMs
Bagarette (2012) questions whether the cooperation between principals and SBMs is successful or not, since there are numerous reports on power struggles attributed to the principal's privileged position of having more knowledge of policies and regulations when compared to the SBMs. It is important to note that principals in public schools are responsible for professional management (Xaba & Nhlapo, 2014). This means that the principal represents, and must protect, the interests of the employer. They affirm that the principal should assist the school board with the performance of its functions and responsibilities in terms of policy and legislation. However, Mncube and Mafora (2013) and Mohapi and Netshitangani (2018) point out that there is some uncertainty regarding the roles, as the legislated functions do not provide a clear distinction between principals and SBMs. This means that there are some overlaps between some roles where some SBMs tend to insist on being involved in the professional management of the school. In addition, such unclear boundaries and resultant encroachment on the roles of others engender conflict and tension that impact the relationship between principals and SBMs. This observation is supported by Onderi and Makori (2012) who state that tensions and conflicts are likely to occur when roles and responsibilities are either not clearly defined or overlapping, or when a certain group go beyond their mandate. When there are uncertainties in the role definitions in a school or unclear boundaries of responsibilities, the

stage is set for interpersonal friction between the principal and SBMs.

The studies of both Doty (2012) and Mohapi and Netshitangani (2018) indicate that both the principals and SBMs have not been working in an ideal situation, leading to the tension between them to have intensified the pressure of the two leadership roles and have resulted in their strained relationship. This is supported by Bayat, Louw and Rena (2014, p. 354) who argue that "some SBMs are not working properly because they do not have the necessary skills and they are not sure regarding their roles and responsibilities". This happens mostly in rural communities where resources are few and SBMs cannot read and write.

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

The Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture (2001) and Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (2016) prescribe that a school board must elect office bearers among its members to serve as chairperson, secretary and treasurer. They stress that a principal, teacher

or learner of the school must not serve as chairperson of the school board. In addition, the principal becomes a school board member by virtue of her or his position in the school. However, it is stated that a school board chairperson is elected for a period of three years and only one of the parents is elected as the chairperson.

The responsibilities of the school board in Namibia

The Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture (2001) and Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (2016) in Namibia provide seven main responsibilities of the school board. The first responsibility of the school board is the development of the school development plan (SDP), vision and policies of the school. A school development plan is a school strategy of the way that the school board and the school think they will maintain good standards and improve the quality of teaching and learning over a period of 1 to 3 years. Thus, a school development plan starts with a vision of where the school wants to be in a certain period of time and in respect of the role it plays.

The second responsibility of the school board is to recommend the appointment, transfer and promotion of teachers and other staff members at the school (Dibete, 2015; Onderi & Makori, 2012). It is the responsibility of the school board to see to it that the recruitment, transfer and promotion of staff members are conducted openly, fairly and procedurally. Therefore, in order to appoint a teacher or other staff members, the school board takes the following actions:
- Ensure that all the vacant posts at the school are widely advertised in the appropriate media (radio, newspaper).
- Establish the strengths and weaknesses of the applicants.
- Interview short-listed candidates.
- Recommend or reject the appointment of a teacher on the grounds of qualifications and/or experience.

If the correct procedures have not been followed in the appointment of a teacher and other staff members at the school, or the school board was not consulted, the board can raise an objection.

The third responsibility is to develop the school infrastructure (Onderi & Makori, 2012). It is important to note that government funding is limited to develop enough of the school's infrastructure, which requires community involvement. Thus, the school board needs to work together with the community to help the development of the school's infrastructure. The school board can organize community members to carry out building projects, such as building a school library and school hall. Other infrastructure development that the school board can partake in could be erecting a fence around the school, building toilets and buying equipment, such as a photocopier, duplicator, TV-set and computer. In addition, the school board can engage in extending classrooms or adding additional classrooms and setting up sports fields. It is also important to acknowledge that, subject to the restrictions endorsed by the Permanent Secretary and upon conditions as the school board may determine, the reasonable use of the school facilities for community purposes can be permitted (Ministry of Basic Education, Soprt and Culture, 2001).

The fourth responsibility is to promote school welfare, which has to do with order and discipline. It is important to note that promoting school welfare means that the school board should ensure a favorable environment for effective teaching and learning. This may be attained when the principal, teachers and learners are friendly towards one another and visitors. In addition, the principal should be able to exercise discipline, study hard, use school resources well, be time-conscious and use time effectively. There should also be clear pointers that the school management is sound and teaching and learning are effective so that everyone at the school is proud. Other social welfare matters that can be promoted by the school board at school include programmes on HIV and AIDS, one of the leading causes of death in Namibia and have caused enormous challenges to the education sector (Libuku, 2014).

The fifth responsibility of the school board is to communicate with parents and the community (Ehren, Honingh, Hooge & O'Hara, 2016; Lorentzen, 2013; Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2016). It is worth noting that parent members are voted on to the school board to represent parents and the community at large. Therefore, they should arrange regular meetings with parents to inform them about their school by means of

letters to parents, parent meetings and through the media. Other opportunities that SBMs can utilize to share information with community members or update the traditional leaders on education matters for their support are at regular meetings hosted by local traditional leaders. An example of information communicated to parents and the community can include a report on progress made and new plans of the school (updating parents or the community on school development plans), as well as ascertain people's needs and their perceptions of the performance of the school board and the school as such:

- Mobilizing support for school developmental activities;
- Convincing people to take an active role in school activities;
- Highlighting the performance of their school;
- Providing information on HIV and AIDS;
- Securing the support of traditional leaders and the community for school issues.

The sixth responsibility of the school board is to establish committees (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2016). School boards can hardly execute their functions alone, without making use of the expertise, time and energy of others. It is, therefore, imperative for SBMs to draw from the expertise of other community members or parents. For example, they can call in a medical doctor to talk to the teachers and learners about school health. They can request a social worker to talk about the abuse and neglect of children or they can call in an accountant to provide training in managing the school's financial resources.

The seventh responsibility of the school board is to manage finances (Lorentzen, 2013; Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2016). This is also one of the key responsibilities of the school board. Managing money is not an easy matter; it requires someone who oversees whether the money is being spent wisely according to specified procedures. The school board should play the role of an overseer, and the finance committee of the school board can play a key role in managing the school's finances by preparing the budget, which the school board can approve or reject. In addition, the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (2016) stresses that a school requires finances to run its affairs effectively and meet its obligations to the community.

Characteristics of an effective school board
Ehren, Honingh, Hooge and O'Hara (2016) provide five characteristics of an effective school board:

- Commitment to a clear and shared vision and goals for student achievement and quality instruction that trickle down to the classroom. The school board should ensure that goals for student achievement include specific targets and standards and are the highest priority in all schools without the distraction of other goals and initiatives.
- Effective use of data. Rhim (2013) states that data use is the foundation of meaningful planning and holding principals accountable. High quality school boards are, therefore, data savvy. Thus, effective school boards monitor and utilize data to drive continuous improvement even when the information is negative. In addition, they analyse and discuss trends of dropout rates, test scores and student needs on a monthly basis to identify specific student needs and justify decisions based on those data without ascribing blame or drawing emotional responses.
- Strong accountability and transparent evaluation. Effective school boards evaluate and hold their principals accountable for shared goals, mutually agreed upon procedures and the progress of students. In addition, they support decisions that develop the improvement of student achievement rather than the daily management of the school.
- Collaborative relationships and mutual trust with staff and the community. It is important to note that school boards should have a trusting and collaborative relationship with their principals and engage in a collegial policy-making process that emphasizes the need to find solutions and develop consensus among SBMs and other leaders on the identification and implementation of improvement strategies.
- Political and organizational stability. The choices regarding goals and resources remain stable over longer periods of time, and effective school boards and principals have long-term service records, meeting goals and aligning resources to these goals

and showing stability in the governance of schools.

In its induction and training manual, the governance manual (GM) South Africa Foundation (Department of Education, 2012) sets out other characteristics that make an effective school board. The characteristics are applicable to school boards in Namibia. They include:

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

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

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

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

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

6. Training and development
School boards need to take their own development seriously in order to help their schools. According to the South Africa Department of Education (2012), school boards should consider their training and support needs carefully and be prepared to attend training programmes organized by the Department of Education. In addition, SBMs should visit other schools to discuss their activities and allocate funds for the training of the whole school board. This is supported by the Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (2016) which affirms that it is important to train new and current SBMs in school governance on a continuous basis in order to enhance their capacity to support schools. It, furthermore, asserts that training of SBMs is particularly due to the changing nature of issues affecting our society, in general, and our schools, in particular. Similarly, Rhim (2013) and Nwosu and Chukwuere (2017) stress that training provides SBMs with opportunities to learn about their key roles and responsibilities, as well as more substantive content related to education policy and practice.

Furthermore, the governance manual for primary schools (Department of Education and Skills, 2015) outlines some modules that are covered in the training of SBMs as follows: the school board as a corporate entity – its functions, roles and the school board in action. Other modules in the training manual of SBMs are; procedures governing the appointment of staff in schools; school board finances and the role of treasurer. It is also, worth noting that legal issues, policies and procedures arising from legislation, guidelines and circulars are some of the modules covered during school board training. Moreover, the child protection and anti-bullying procedures, as well as data protection are among the modules covered by the school board in their training. It is,

however, important for SBMs to avail themselves for such training when it is made available.

The role of the principal in relation to the school board
The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (2016) states that every principal must show leadership and be able to manage a school. The school leadership requires a principal to give direction to the school so that the function and purpose of the school can be fulfilled. It is, however, important to note that the principal's relationship with the school board is influenced by the school's values and mission, as well as by the school board's constitution. As a key institution for effective governance and support of the school, the school board is at the disposal of the principal. In addition, the principal is morally and legally obliged to cooperate with the school board in the best interest of the school.

Furthermore, the principal is an important person in the school community and is accountable to parents, learners, the committees and the school community at large. The principal is a representative of the Ministry of Education and, therefore, must lead by example and set high standards for him-/herself (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2016). Xaba and Nhlapo (2014) affirm that the principal is responsible for the professional management of the school. In matters of school governance, the principal is answerable to his/her employer by assisting the school board with the performance of its functions and responsibilities in terms of policy and legislation.

Balyer (2012) states that the functions of the principal include issues, such as organizational development, managing decision making, systemic planning, designing a safe atmosphere and environment, managing the curriculum, preparing the school schedule, supporting teachers' professional development and financial school activities. The Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (2016) and Mestry (2017) posit that the work of the principal involves overseeing the day-to-day administration and supervision of all the aspects of the school. He/she has to implement the school curriculum and the Ministry's policies. In addition, the principal is responsible for delegating responsibility to ensure effective administration and

management. Equally, the principal should encourage the professional and personal development of teaching and non-teaching staff. Similarly, the principal is responsible for finding solutions to problems experienced, as well as ensuring the overall welfare of all at the school. Furthermore, the principal is responsible for creating an atmosphere conducive to the learners' personal development, a sense of responsibility and self-discipline. Besides this, principals can improve the teaching and learning environment by creating conditions conducive to improved curriculum management. They are responsible for creating a positive school climate, motivating teachers and learners, as well as to manage resources effectively to enhance best instructional practices. They play an important role in the development and maintenance of academic standards, which include the knowledge and skills that learners are expected to learn in a subject and in each Grade. Important to mention is that the principal is responsible for reporting to parents through the school board and parent meetings and inviting parents to meetings. Moreover, the principal deals with disciplinary matters involving learners and teachers. Lastly, the principal is responsible for attending meetings and seeking support for his school from various people and authorities.

Nzoka and Orodho (2014) affirm that the role of the principal should be that of an advisor to students, teachers and the community. They state that the principal should be in a position to identify possible threats against retention rates and reverse the situation. In addition, the principal needs to act as a counsellor to not only the students but also parents and teachers because this could assist all parties interested in the educational life of the learners in order for them to appreciate the need to be educated. The principal should endeavour to provide the best school climate to entice students to complete their schooling by making school free from violence, threats, intimidation, hatred and witch-hunting. He/she should develop a rich co-curriculum and remedial interventions for slow learners in order to avoid repetition, frustration and dropout. Naidoo, Mncube and Potokri (2015) point out that the principal should be seen as a fundamental agent of transformation, creating space for deliberation and dialogue so that all stakeholders are actively involved in the school

governing body. They stress that training or capacity building for all representatives of stakeholders on the SGB is recommended.

Partnership theory
The partnership theory was employed as a framework in this study. According to Bloomfield and Nguyen (2015), the term, partnership, commonly means notions of sustained relationship and equal exchange, as well as reciprocity and mutuality achieved through a process of negotiation of a relationship in terms of a common purpose, forms and practice. Bagarette (2012) defines a partnership as a number of people who have a common goal and co-operate with one another by contributing something of value to the relationship, with the aim of making a profit. The success of a partnership depends on mutual trust, as well as respect, among the partners. Therefore, partners have joint control and authority over the business and are jointly liable for the partnership debts.

Gross, Haines, Hill, Francis, Blue-Banning, and Turnbull (2015) acknowledge that business partnerships are developed with a wide range of local and national for-profit businesses. In Namibia, public schools are managed along business principles, except that the aim is not profit, but rather quality teaching and learning outcomes displayed by the teachers and learners. Just like in a business, the Education Act, Act 16 of 2001 of Namibia anticipates a partnership based on trust between the school board and the principal to serve the best interests of the school. The Education Act, Act 16 of 2001 of Namibia and Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture (2016) envisage a partnership based on a trust relationship between the school board and the principal to serve the best interests of the school. Bagarette (2012) emphasizes that a partnership is a vehicle for engagement. He, furthermore, notes that through a partnership, one is confronted with the different realities and forms of knowledge each partner brings to the relationship. New realities and forms of knowledge may consequently emerge. Thus, the mutual trust and respect between the partners are essential for the success of principal and school board partnerships. Additionally, in the partnership between principals and SBMs there should be openness, cooperation, participation and accountability in order for the partners to work together in all

spheres of management and governance, as well as to promote the best interest of the school. Furthermore, for this partnership to succeed, specific knowledge and skills are required from the SBMs, which will enable them to perform their roles and responsibilities effectively.

Munje and Mncube (2018) argue that the South African School Act (SASA), 84 of 1996 is cognizant of the importance of parental involvement to put in place systems aimed at facilitating meaningful school-parent relationships. They continue that such partnerships require that role players work together to achieve every learner's right to education. They, furthermore, state that these provisions mandate the inclusion and participation of parents in school governing bodies. In spite of this, Sibanda (2017) asserts that in a partnership, the principal allows SBMs to make decisions and partners with them so that policy and vision are followed according to plan. SBMs are able to take control and work as a team and the principal works with them in a collegial fashion.

Success factors of the partnership theory in schools
Hushie (2016) outlines the many factors contributing to the success of a partnership in other low and middle-income countries (LMICs). These success factors are explained from a health perspective. However, they are applicable in the education context and especially in the partnership between principals and SBMs in Namibia.

The success factors of partnership include:
● The development of new relationships by adopting, implementing education needs-based approaches and evidence-based interventions at the school;
● The commitment of principals and SBMs to mobilize internal and external resources and support for effective teaching and learning;
● The utilization of a memorandum of understanding to formalize expectations for collaborative relationship;
● The task of making school development planning and implementation a collaborative process by involving principals and SBMs, as well as other key stakeholders of the school, from start up to the end and ensuring that monitoring and evaluation are continuous processes in

order to identify school needs and issues, as well as to engage in continuous school improvement;

- The sharing of accurate and timely information between the principals and SBMs, as well as stakeholders, donors and the public, to ensure more effective school outcomes.

In addition, Muijs (2015) delineates four factors that facilitate successful partnership at schools between principals and SBMs, namely:

1. Strong focus on a limited number of goals
In order to make the relationship between principals and SBMs work, these partners need to agree on clear, shared goals and should have a common focus. The goals and focus of the school have to be shared with other partners and not just be the views of one partner.

2. Trust and personal relationships
Trust is seen as important, not just in creating the conditions that allow schools to accept support and work together effectively, but also in creating a culture of openness towards mistakes and weaknesses. In addition, trust is about personal relationships between principals and SBMs.

3. Mutual benefits
Muijs (2015) notes that partnerships benefit from the perception that each partner gains from the relationship. Principals and SBMs can benefit from the ability to learn from good practice in the school, as well as from the professional development emerging from the school.

4. A phased approach
A phased approach is followed in most effective partnerships. Support needs to be intensive in the early phases of the partnership, but can often become increasingly hands-off over time as capacity in the school develops.

Mavuso and Duku (2014) state that partnership in education has been regarded as a great phenomenon internationally. Partnership is seen as a relationship between principals and SBMs and as a means for promoting learners' achievements. It has also been viewed as a means by which the principals and SBMs are in constant interaction with each other in an endeavour to improve the academic achievement of learners. This theory might help principals and SBMs to create support that might enable learners to succeed. It might bring together principals and SBMs, as well as create a forum in which diverse ideas can be concretized into solid, effective educational programmes. According to the partnership theory, there will be open dialogue between principals and SBMs, during which conversation, discussion and deep listening will take place. In addition, principals and SBMs will foster social creativity, which is necessary for the establishment of novel ways of interacting with each other. Furthermore, this theory will also foster the communication and cooperation that is essential for principals and SBMs.

Research paradigm
This research is located within the interpretive paradigm. In this study, the participants in the research were principals in the Zambezi region. The way in which principals responded in this study depended largely on their experiences and circumstances, as well as their contexts. According to an interpretive paradigm, principals in this study constructed and merged their own subjective and intersubjective meanings as they interacted with the world around them (Okeke & van Wyk, 2015). This paradigm was applied successfully in this study to explore the perceptions of principals regarding their working relationships with SBMs in the Zambezi region.

Research approach
A qualitative research approach was employed. Mills and Gay (2016, p. 25) define a qualitative research approach as "the collection, analysis and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual (i.e. non-numerical) data to gain insights into a particular phenomenon of interest". An effort to understand the principals' perceptions regarding their working relationships with SBMs was made by entering the research participants' setting to interview them and give meaning. This process included continuous engagement with principals to the point of data saturation.

Research design
A qualitative case study approach was employed. According to Yin (2014), a case study is an empirical inquiry that examines a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within

its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between the case and the context may not be clearly evident. Best and Kahn (2014) posit that a case study examines a social unit as a whole. Given the nature of the study, the researcher employed a case study approach to explore the perceptions of principals regarding their working relationships with SBMs in the Zambezi region. A case study approach was appropriate in this study because it answered descriptive and explanatory questions (Mills & Gay, 2016).

Data collection strategies
Population
To solve the problem in this study, the researcher narrowed the population so that only principals from the Zambezi region formed part of the study. To be more specific, the researcher worked with principals of primary, combined and secondary schools in the Zambezi region.

Sample
Okeke and van Wyk (2015) define a sample as a set of respondents or participants carefully chosen from a larger population for the purpose of conducting research. Bertram and Christiansen (2014) affirm that sampling involves making decisions regarding which people, settings, events or behaviors to include in the study.

The researcher decided on how many principals would participate in the study. Purposive sampling was employed in this study to select five school principals to explore their perceptions regarding their working relationships with SBMs in the Zambezi region. The five principals were selected because they represented the Ministry of Education at the school, as ex-officio members of the school board (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture, 2016). Xaba and Nhlapo (2014) affirm that the principal is responsible for the professional management of the school. This entails that, in matters of school governance, the principal is answerable to his/her employer by assisting the school board on the performance of its functions and responsibilities in terms of policy and legislation.

Data collection technique
The researcher utilized interviews as data collecting technique in this study.

Interviews
For the purpose of this study, the researcher interviewed five principals in order to explore their perceptions regarding their working relationship with SBMs in the Zambezi region. Interviews with principals were conducted at their respective schools. All interviews with the five principals were conducted in their offices. The interviews were appropriate to explore the perceptions of principals regarding their working relationships with SBMs in the Zambezi region of Namibia. Specifically, semi-structured interviews were employed as this type of interview is commonly utilized in research projects to corroborate data emerging from other data sources (Maree, 2016). The researcher prepared the semi-structured interview questions for principals beforehand, and included them in letters written to participants to enable them to prepare in advance for the scheduled interviews. In the letters, the researcher informed participants that the interviews were going to be recorded and that they were to last for twenty minutes. It is important to mention that, in the letters, the researcher informed participants that their identities in the study were going to be protected. The researcher later provided participants with transcribed interviews for verification.

Data analysis
A qualitative data analysis (QDA) was employed in this study to analyse the data based on an "interpretative philosophy that is aimed at examining meaningful and symbolic content of meaning of a specific phenomenon by analysing their perceptions, attitudes, understanding, knowledge, values, feelings and experiences in an attempt to approximate their construction of the phenomenon" (Maree, 2016, p. 109). QDA was the method best suited to explore the perceptions of principals regarding their working relationships with SBMs in the Zambezi region of Namibia. For the purpose of this study, the researcher analysed transcripts of interviews of the five principals.

Findings
In this section, the researcher reports on the findings derived from comments during the interviews with principals in the Zambezi region of Namibia. In the process of data presentation, the researcher ensured that the

voices of the participants were not lost. The researcher utilized verbatim and substantial quotations, as well as italics to indicate the

responses of participants throughout the data presentation.

Profiles of principals
Table 1: Profiles of principals

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

The data presented in Table 1 indicate that all five principals interviewed were male. Their ages ranged from 42 to 54 years. With the exception of one principal with experience of one year and six months, the other principals who participated in this study had much experience as ex-officio members of the school board in the Zambezi region. The principal with one year and six months' experience was the oldest of the participating principals. The researcher, employed pseudonyms for all research participants that formed part of the study.

Findings from interviews
This section provides a detailed analysis of the data that were gathered from interviews. The findings are guided by the research question of the study and are discussed under the common theme of working together.

Research question: *What are the perceptions of principals regarding their working relationships with SBMs in the Zambezi region?*

1. Perceptions of principals regarding parent SBMs
In this section, the researcher presents the findings derived from the comments of the principals regarding their perceptions of parent members of the SBMs.

● *Category 1: Collegial working relationship*
The principals described their working relationship with parent members of the SBMs as generally positive. They stated that parent SBMs were important stakeholders in the

education of the learners. They noted, further, that parent SBMs played an important role in the discipline of learners at the school. All principals concurred that parent SBMs were actively involved in a wide range of activities at the school. They particularly pointed out their involvement in attending school board meetings. This is evident from the response of Peter, during the interview:

My working relationship with parent SBMs is very fine. When we meet during school board meetings, they air their views and raise their concerns. We totally corporate with each other during the school board meetings.

In the same vein, Luke affirmed that:

So far I have not experienced any challenge with the parent SBMs, they are always positive. They are always there when we invite them for school board meetings or for whatever issue that we need from them. We are working together in a positive way. So my working relationship with them is good.

Although Samuel perceived his working relationship with parent SBMs as collegial and good, he stated that the problem arose when parent SBMs could not agree amongst themselves on a particular issue. He asserted that, as principal and ex-officio member of the school board, he would like parent SBMs to suggest some solutions to issues discussed. It was always difficult for them to come up with concrete solutions to school board issues. He

stressed that the problem was among parent SBMs and not between them and the principal.

John also described his working relationship with parent SBMs as positive. He pointed out that the school board met three times a year, if there were no other immediate problems that necessitated them to convene before the end of the term. However, he normally faced a problem with some parent SBMs who did not attend school board meetings. One principal said that, in most cases, parent SBMs gave excuses such as:

I am very far; I am not in the Zambezi region.

He stressed that especially if the parent SBMs are still young. When they are elected, they like to be SBMs. After some few months at home, they will opt to go and look for greener pasture. The principal continued to say that:

It will be difficult to get hold of them. Therefore we prefer the older parent SBMs who are retired (laughing) because I know that they won't go anywhere.

The above shows that the principals perceived their working relationships with parent SBMs as Collegial and parent SBMs were perceived as important stakeholders in the education of the learners. They played an important role in the discipline of learners at the school. Data analysed revealed that the principals did not have problems with parent SBMs. However, the problem seemed to be amongst parent SBMs in finding solutions to school board issues.

Some parent SBMs did not attend school board meetings. This finding is in contrast with the characteristics of an effective school board, which advocates that building an effective team requires regular attendance to meetings and energetic commitment from all SBMs (Department of Education, 2012).

2. Perceptions of principals regarding teacher SBMs

In this section, the researcher presents the findings derived from the comments of principals regarding their perceptions of teacher SBMs. Below are the categories and findings that emerged from their responses.

● *Category 1: Collegial working relationship*

Most of the principals interviewed described their working relationship with teacher SBMs as collegial. Just as they observed their working relationships with parent SBMs, they stated that teacher SBMs were important stakeholders in the education of the learners. They asserted that, unlike some parent SBMs, teacher SBMs always attended school board meetings. This was evident from the response of Mark who stated that:

I have very good teachers who are serving on the school board. They normally attend all our school board meetings without a problem. They do participate. If there is anything that they are not happy with at the school, they always raise such issues and we attend to them and then we move as a team.

Peter supported this:

Teacher SBMs always attend school board meetings. They air their views if they have a problem that concerns the school. Sometimes I meet teacher SBMs and discuss with them issues before we present them to other SBMs. So, the working relationship with teachers' SBMs is fine.

John emphasized that it was mandatory for teacher SBMs to attend school board meetings because they were always at school and it was seen as part of their job description. He stressed that teacher SBMs understood their role on the school board.

They were the people experiencing problems with the learners. If they were given such platform to look for solutions, they were very eager to come in as SBMs and try to sort out issues. In spite of that, Samuel, indicated that he had a good working relationship with the teacher SBMs. He stated that they would want to listen to the principal speaking during school board meetings, instead of them sharing the information with him.

Luke stated that there was one teacher SBM who did not seem to understand his role as a teacher representative on the school board. He said that:

For him it was like he was elected on the school board to entirely oppose or defend teachers even if the teacher is wrong. As a

SBM, representing teachers he just wanted to stand for the teachers in terms of covering their issues or misconducts, until I made it clear to him in the presence of all SBMs that as a school board we are all here for one purpose that is that of ensuring that the school functions properly. I told him that if there is a teacher who is having some shortcomings or whose work is not up-to-date it is the responsibility of the whole school board including the teacher representative on the school board to address such shortcomings. So the school board addressed that issue of the teacher representative on the school board and everyone condemned it.

The principals perceived their no working relationships with teacher SBMs as mutual. They were viewed as important stakeholders in the education of the learners and they always attended school board meetings. It was also said that some teacher SBMs did not participate in discussions during school board meetings. It was established from the principals that some teacher SBMs seemed to be opposing decisions taken by other SBMs in meetings and they tended to defend fellow teachers who were accused of misconduct at school board meeting.

3. Perceptions of principals regarding LRC's serving on the school board

In this section, the researcher presents the findings derived from the comments of the principals regarding their perceptions of LRCs serving on the school board. Below are the categories and findings that emerged from their responses.

● *Category 1: Collegial working relationship*
All five principals described their working relationships with LRCs serving on the school board as generally good. This can be seen from the response of Peter who affirmed that his working relationship with LRC's serving on the school board was good. He stated that he had told the LRCs serving on the school board that they were elected to represent the welfare of other learners and that the school board was the highest decision making body in the school and that they should always present whatever issues were affecting them during school board meetings. He mentioned also that he normally encouraged LRCs to conduct meetings with other learners, so that when the school board

held their meetings, they could present issues that were raised by learners during their meetings. This was evident from his response during the interview:

My working relationship with the LRCs on the school board is generally good. There is mutual respect, except that when you are a principal and you are dealing with learners even when you sit at the same table as collaborators on the school board meetings, they will still want to treat you as principal. They do not take away that role of being a principal so that they can contribute freely in school board discussions. They will always remember that we are learners and we are talking to the principal. That is one problem that we have, that learners do not feel very free to contribute on the school board discussions, they think that the discussions are for adult members of the school board. Otherwise, I have a good relationship with learners on the school board (Acknowledged Samuel).

Although Mark and Luke mentioned that they had a good working relationship with LRCs on the school board, it was found that at their schools learners had not elected the LRC members. This implied that the two schools did not have LRC representatives on their respective school boards. The reason given by Mark, namely that the Ministry of Education advised that schools offering Grade 0 to Grade 10 should not elect LRCs, did not seem valid. The school where Peter was a principal had the same grades as where Mark was the principal but Peter's school had elected LRCs. Nonetheless, the two schools did not have LRCs representatives. Mark stated that:

Normally I don't always have problems with LRCs. our current SBMs that we have here were supposed to have a learner serving on the school board but because of their programmes, we normally exclude them. We only organize sessions whatever we discuss on the school board, we go out to the learners to explain to them. LRCs will always find it very difficult to be pulled out from classes to sit in school board meetings while they were supposed to be learning or while they were supposed to be on lunch. They normally advise that LRC's representatives on the school board should be elected in schools having Grade 11 and 12 (senior secondary schools) and not schools

that are having Grades 0 up to 10. Regardless of this challenge, the working relationship is always positive when it comes to learners.

On the other hand, Luke stated that:

Even though currently we do not have learners represented on the school board but in the coming days we are going to include learners on the school board. Those learners who were representing learners on the school board in the past before I came here, after they had left or completed their Grade 12 they were not replaced. We are working on that issue so that we can replace them. I do not think it will be a problem to include learners on the school board. It will just be a benefit on their side because they will be taking information or matters discussed on the school board to other learners whom they are representing.

This section presented the findings regarding the perceptions of principals about LRC's serving on the school board. It was found that the principals perceived their working relationships with LRCs serving on the school board as good. The learners were perceived as important stakeholders who presented the concerns of other learners during school board meetings. The findings revealed that LRCs serving on the school board did not feel free to participate during school board discussions, thinking that such discussions were only for adult members on the school board. This concurs with the findings by Mncube and Harber (2013) who found that learners tend to be shy and find it difficult to express themselves on issues because they feel that they might insult their elders who are members of the school board.

The majority of principals perceived that they had a good working relationship with SBMs. They described their working relationship as generally collegial. SBMs were perceived as important stakeholders in the education of the learners. The school board should ensure that goals regarding student achievement include specific targets and standards, and are the highest priority in all schools.

Discussion of findings
This section presents and discusses the findings of the perceptions of principals regarding their working relationships with SBMs in the Zambezi region of Namibia.

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of principals regarding their working relationships with SBMs in the Zambezi region. The findings from interviews revealed that the majority of principals perceived their working relationships with SBMs as generally collegial. Further, SBMs were perceived as important stakeholders when it came to the education of the learners as they played an important role in the discipline of learners. These findings are in line with the characteristics of an effective school board as stated by Ehren et al (2016), namely that school boards should have a trusting and collaborative relationship with their principals, engage in a collegial policy making process that emphasizes the need to find solutions, as well as develop consensus among SBMs and other leaders on the identification and implementation of improvement strategies. The school board should ensure that goals for student achievement include specific targets and standards, and are the highest priority in all schools, without the distraction of other goals and initiatives. The findings also corroborate the partnership theory by Sibanda (2017), namely that in a partnership, the principal allows SBMs to make decisions and partners with them so that the policies and vision are followed according to plan. SBMs are able to take control and work as a team, and the principal works with them in a collegial manner.

This study revealed that the principals in this study perceived themselves as working together with SBMs in ensuring that schools achieved the targeted goals and objectives. This finding supports the finding by Ament (2013) who posits that working together is especially important for those who serve in public schools. The primary example of cooperation must come from the principal and the SBMs. Thus, those who govern schools must share a vision and clear expectations, as well as have the ability and courage to lead. Therefore, since education is a dynamic system and a collaborative process, principals and SBMs will have to work as a team to engage the public and to nurture a climate conducive to change. Bagarette (2012) reiterates that the partnership between principals and SBMs should be based on openness, cooperation, participation and accountability in order for the

partners to work together in all spheres of management and governance to promote the best interest of the school. The finding of this study is in line with the partnership theory as stated by Muijs (2015) who argues that, in order to make the relationship between principals and SBMs work, these partners need to agree on clear, shared goals and should have a common focus.

Recommendations

In order for principals to work in harmony with SBMs, it is essential to have well-defined roles and treat everyone fairly and respectfully. Moreover, principals should always act professionally and share critical and accurate information at the right time with everyone. This helps to avoid information asymmetry and can help prevent unnecessary conflicts. To ensure that a sustainable working relationship exists between the principal and SBMs, consultative engagement is recommended. In the case of a conflict, feuding parties are advised to prioritize compromise, accommodation, collaboration and put the organization above individual interests. Principals should learn to trust SBMs to regain trust and positive feelings that can improve relations and teamwork.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explore the perceptions of principals regarding their working relationships with SBMs in the Zambezi region of Namibia. This relationship can be fruitful if principals and SBMs understand their roles and responsibilities well so that they can perform to the best of their abilities. The findings of the study indicate that there is a collegial working relationship between principals and SBMs that is punctuated by a good flow of information.

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