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About the Journal

JOURNAL PURPOSE

The purpose of the *Ngenani - Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University Journal of Community Engagement and Societal Transformation Review and Advancement is* to provide a forum for community engagement and outreach.

CONTRIBUTION AND READERSHIP

Sociologists, demographers, psychologists, development experts, planners, social workers, social engineers and economists, among others whose focus is on community development.

JOURNAL SPECIFICATIONS

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SCOPE AND FOCUS

The journal is a forum for the discussion of ideas, scholarly opinions and case studies of community outreach and engagement. Communities are both defined in terms of people found in a given locale as well as defined cohorts, like the children, the youth, the elderly, and those living with a disability. The strongest view is that getting to know each community or subcommunity is a function of their deliberate participation in matters affecting them by the community itself. The journal is produced bi-annually.

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VOICES OF SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE MEMBERS ON SCHOOL GOVERNANCE AND DIGITALISATION OF EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

The outbreak of COVID-19 in 2019 and the subsequent travel restrictions instituted by the World Health Organisation to curtail the spread of the virus saw the disruption of educational activities and the management thereof, affecting the role of the School Development Committees (SDCs). The number of SDC meetings to approve procurement and purchase of educational materials was decimated, henceforth school heads made sole decisions in contrast to the requirements of fiscal policies. This qualitative case study investigates how the work of SDCs in eight Zimbabwean schools is affected during COVID-19 and the transition to the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), and then establishes tenable alternatives to the conditions. To gather information, document analysis and semi-structured interviews were used. Schools are far from embracing the 4IR despite that SDCs must conduct all school governance online, just like any other business. The study suggests that educational institutions should spend money on developing digital infrastructures and educating SDC members on digital capabilities. This study adds conversation to scholarship on the use of the Internet of Things {IoT) in school governance.

Keywords: fourth industrial revolution, COVID-19

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INTRODUCTION

The disruption of educational activities and their administration caused by the COVID19 outbreak in 2019 and the World Health Organisation's ensuing travel bans to stop the spread of the virus' had an impact on the role of School Development Committee (SDCs). By implementing online educational techniques, the education system has been redesigned and reconfigured to embrace the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). Additionally, school administrators had done a remarkable job of digitising and digitalising student registration, revenue collection, and daily operations. Even though SDCs represent the parent body with the authority to approve the spending of school funds, not much has been done to train committee members on the digitalisation of the school management system. Neither reports on how COVID-19 affects the school governing body's work nor training sessions for SDC members on the digitisation of the school administration system are accessible as scholarships.

Given that the 4IR is currently gaining popularity across the globe, this study is timely. It adds to the body of knowledge on 4IR, advances the discussion on the digitalisation of education, and offers insights into how the work of SDCs was impacted by COVID19 and intervention strategies that can be implemented to help them become effective members of the school team as specified in the statutory instruments that defined them, thus enhancing school governance.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE SDCS

There is a model of school governance that progressively gains acceptance in various nations, where parents are seen as partners in the education process (Wing Ng, 2013). A majority of countries require direct parental involvement in school governance through the use of statutory instruments. In Hong Kong, for instance, the government has, since 2000, advocated several steps to increase parental participation in school governance (*ibid.*). The South African Schools Act stipulates that the governance of public schools is entrusted to the governing body that holds a position of responsibility towards the school (Mestry, 2018; Aina and Bipath, 2020) and it also provides instructions on how SDCs should be run. Mafa and Nyathi (2013) note that in Zimbabwe, the 1991 Education Act of contains provisions that encourage the establishment

of SDCs in non-governmental schools and School Development Associations (SDAs) in government schools to manage the affairs of these establishments (GoZ, 1996). Acts were taken in several nations to make schools democratic while also addressing two very important issues: inclusion and decentralisation in education. Decentralisation suggests that choices should be made by those who are closest to the situation, whereas inclusivity refers to the engagement of parents, educators, non-teaching staff, students, and other persons who are willing and able to contribute to the school (Motimele, 2005). In the case of this study, parents are in charge of making decisions regarding school governance that are appropriate for the circumstances of their schools rather than obtaining guidance from the federal government. In other words, the SDC/SDA is the body of the school that is in charge of formulating, enforcing, monitoring and assessing the laws and regulations that direct and control the conduct of the school and its constituents.

SDCs IN ZIMBABWE

In the past, immediately after attaining independence in 1980, the Government of Zimbabwe (Goz) adopted a centralised strategy for financing education, subsidising education from pre-primary to adult education (Dzimiri, 2018). During the period, Government money went toward building new schools, paying teachers' salaries and benefits, and providing per-person grants for the purchase of instructional materials (Nyandoro, Mapfumo and Makoni, 2013). But by the end of the first decade of independence, the massive government investment in education was no longer viable (Chikoko, 2008). Using the Education Amendment Act of 1991, the government created the idea of SDCs to decrease and share the cost (GoZ, 1992). Governmentfunded schools are allowed to create SDCs under that regulation. The Goz established Statutory Instrument Number 87 of 1992 for non-government schools and Statutory Instrument Number 378 of 1998 for government schools to make community involvement in education through SDCs necessary (Dzvimbo, Zimhondi, Masimba & Zhanda, 2020). An SDC must be made up of five chosen parents of students registered in the school, the head and deputy head of that school, one teacher and a representative of the responsible authority (GoZ, 1992). In essence, SDCs have opened the door for community participation in school management and funding. To guide the growth of the schools, this group of parents was then formed.

As a result, the government, schools, parents, neighbourhoods, and other interested parties would work together as a community.

SDCs are intended to support government initiatives to develop schools (Mafa and Nyathi, 2013). The idea behind involving parents in school governance is to decentralise decision-making regarding the sourcing and use of resources to empower SDCs to create school-based policies that more effectively fulfil the requirements of students (Chikoko, 2008). Education decentralisation is anticipated to increase the quality of instruction and hold schools accountable for educational achievements by delegating decision-making to local stakeholders who are presumptively more familiar with their children's educational needs and local education system than the central government is (UNESCO, 2015; Sakamoto, 2021). The SDC is in charge of billing parents for contributions, collecting those funds, building and maintaining the school's physical plant, supplying educational materials and looking after the welfare of students (GoZ, 1992; MoESAC, 2010). The work of Nyandoro *et al*. (2013) shows that the SDC's responsibility is to raise money for the school and use it wisely. Taken together, the SDC operates and supports the growth of public schools; advances the moral, cultural, physical, and intellectual welfare of students; and promotes the well-being of the school for the benefit of its current and future students, and those of their parents and teachers. According to Duma, Kapueja and Khanyile (2011), additional explanations of what SDC participation entails include: organising, leading, supervising, formulating policies, making decisions, controlling, and coordinating, which are some of the management responsibilities of the school governance structures. The SDCs' duty implicitly includes mobilising and overseeing the management of the resources required for the development of schools in the best interests of students, parents, and teachers.

Notably, the creation of SDCs is not new in school governance around the globe because parental involvement in school administration is widely hailed as a way to enhance the calibre and scope of education in both developing and developed states (Chung, 2008). As a result, a committee of parents and educators is established at each school to supervise the growth of that institution by approving plans and sanctioning the acquisition of educational resources and other costs related to the well-being of the students. Therefore, the committee's

primary responsibilities include resource mobilisation, decision-making and management of school-related activities. The SDCs' responsibilities include developing the school's infrastructure, maintaining its assets, keeping track of money collected for the school and investing any spare monies there. Additional duties of SDCs include organising community festivals, raising money, generating cash for the school and informing parents about school programmes (Dzvimbo *et al*., 2020).

According to Statutory Instrument 70 of 1993, the SDC must hold two meetings per academic term to carry out its duties, which include planning, budgeting, conducting reviews and evaluating its programmes and operations (Mafa and Nyathi, 2013). As a result, SDC members gather to decide the destiny of the proposed project or perceived spending before any money is made. That was the standard up until December 2019, when COVID-19 restricted SDC members' movements and meetings. SDC operations were thus disrupted, which contrasted with the provisions of the statutory instruments that first created the committee. The only viable alternative was to stop holding inperson meetings and switch to virtual ones, just like other educational activities. That action was in line with the present global trend of governments accepting the digitalisation of the education sector (Langthaler and Bazafkan, 2020). Even though it has been a work in progress for some time, it is remarkable that the adoption of the 4IR in education was accelerated by the COVID-19 outbreak in 2019 (Fullan *et al*., 2020; Langthaler and Bazafkan, 2020; Ndung'u and Signé, 2020). As a result, the study was worried about whether switching from physical to online SDC meetings would be feasible.

THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND THE SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

The 4IR, also known as Industry 4.0, is the transition to novel systems that integrate physical and digital technology for a community of active users that are more networked (Tripathi and Gupta, 2021). This definition allows us to succinctly define 4IR as the crucial interaction between humans and machines, characterised by the blending of digital, biological and physical worlds, and the growing use of new technologies like artificial intelligence, cloud computing, robotics, 3D printing, the Internet of Things (IoT), advanced wireless technologies, big data, cybersecurity, blockchain and robots. As a result, the 4IR is frequently

used to conceptualise digitalisation, which includes automation, advanced digital technologies and artificial intelligence. It might also be seen as a universal tale that holds out many opportunities for every industry, including education. This because technological change calls for new accomplishments and managerial skills that were not necessary (Dzvimbo *et al*., 2020). The ability to alter and be flexible in the job are a requirement in every area as a result of technological advancement. SDC members' fields of work in education must also embrace technological change, not just other industries. Globally, the education sector is undergoing significant change as a result of factors including new technological advancements and the steadily rising usage of mobile devices, which present both potential and serious difficulties for the sector. Internet banking and ecommerce are recent phenomena that are unavoidable for schools, even as they struggle to incorporate technology. Schools gain from internet banking in that they can transfer money, pay bills, check balances, monitor their accounts, print account statements and download them all without physically visiting the banks.

Numerous studies have highlighted the significance of adopting the 4IR in education, and Fullan, Quinn, Drummy, and Gardner (2020:1-2) justify technology use in the classroom by claiming that it can hasten the transition "to a more interactive, flexible, student-centred educational model". This perspective demonstrates that the 4IR's engrained use of technologies in education focuses primarily on areas that are specifically linked to learning and teaching, notably: curricula, pedagogy and assessment, leaving the work of the SDC in school governance still restricted to the conventional face-to-face fashion. However, Dzvimbo *et al*. (2020) contend that because technology is now the norm, the issue of accepting it now affects all parties involved in the education system, not only students and teachers. According to that idea, SDCs ought to possess digital literacy as well to meet the needs of the modern world. They are significant stakeholders because they participated in school governance. However, very little was written about the difficulties the committees had in the face of global technological transformation taking place, even though numerous studies (Fullan, 1991; Dzvimbo *et al*., 2020) recognise SDCs as necessary component of the educational system because they increase transparency and accountability in schools. The SDC's traditional methods of educational governance and practice are being fundamentally challenged by the numerous changes

and re-alignments in the use of cyberspace in education, particularly the institutionalised methods of face-toface meetings when they want to approve school projects, goods, and services.

Much research on school governance (Dzimiri, 2018; Mes-try, 2018;; Aina and Bipath, 2020; Dzvimbo *et al*., 2020) focused on the duties of SDCs in financial management, neglecting the concerns related to the digital difficulties and opportunities that either hinder or enhance school governance and management. Although it is acknowledged here that there is a body of research (Fullan *et al*., 2020; Langthaler and Bazafkan, 2020; Ndung'u and Signé, 2020) that aids in our understanding of the efforts to digitalise and enhance the curriculum, teaching, and learning process. Very few research studies, if any, have focused on either the deficiencies or efficacy of SDC members in school governance during the digitalisation and digitisation of the education sector.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The framework for this study comes from van Dijk's Resources and Appropriation Theory (RAT), which focuses on a person's access to digital technology. According to van Dijk (2005), the term "access" refers to the entire process of implementing and using digital technology in school administration. The three successive types of access to digital technology identified by Van Dijk (*ibid.*) are physical, digital skills,and consumer access. SDCs can appropriate and use school management tools due to these progressive forms of digital access.

Dijk (*ibid.*) asserts tha physical access to digital technology refers to either having access to or ownership of it, and this is contingent upon the availability of financial resources. As a result, it appears that SDC members must possess or have access to digital devices to accept and use technology in school management. Examples of digital gadgets that SDCs must have are computers, tablets and/or smartphones, along with ancillary devices like printers and scanners, software, ink, paper, subscriptions, power sources and internet access (van Dijk, 2012). Once people have physical access, the next form of access is through their ability to control and use digital technology, known as having digital skills (van Dijk, 2017). Operational and significant talents are further separated into these. Operating and navigating digital devices are operational skills (van Dijk, 2005), but information retrieval, content creation, and conveyance of digital information are substantial skills.

Adopting digitalisation in school administration is challenging due to a lack of operational and substantive capabilities. This is in line with van Dijk's (2012) assertion that one is better able to utilise digital technologies when they have more in-depth abilities. Here, it is implied that members of SDCs may find it challenging to use digital technology productively due to a lack of operational and significant abilities. The next step is usage access after gaining physical and digital access. Usage access includes one's level of digital technology use, the variety of digital devices, and the applications one employs (van Dijk, 2005; 2012). Digital gaps in school management are a result of the difficulties SDCs have using digital tools and platforms. RAT was used in this study because it was thought to be the most suitable theoretical framework for constructing a comprehensive picture of SDCs‘ digital needs.

METHODOLOGY

The 24 participants in this case study, which used a qualitative methodology, were chosen from eight high schools in the Zimbabwean capital city, Harare, and included SDC chairpersons, school heads, and deputy heads. The participants were chosen for the study because they were situated close to the location where policies are created and then spread out to surrounding areas, providing rich data. It was possible to see how far the schools had progressed in adopting the Internet of Things from their location in the urban core. A true picture of the topics under research was presented by the participants as a result of their proximity to the education head office, which also means that information about the digitalisation of education in schools was received first in those schools with little or little distortion from the centre.

A case study was used because it offered several viewpoints from different participants (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The study relied on school records since they are passive data sources that may be read and reviewed numerous times without changing as a result of the researcher's influence (Cohen, Morison and Manion, 2018). To gather data for the study, semi-structured interviews and school records were used. Semi-structured interviews supplemented the data that the study's document analysis produced, improving the triangulation of data generation techniques (Cohen *et al*., 2018). The thematic analysis technique created by Braun and Clarke in 2006 was used to analyze the

data that was obtained via semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

RESULTS

SDC MEETINGS AND THEIR IMPACT ON SCHOOL PROJECTS

It was clear from the school records provided by the school heads that SDC meetings had been completely decimated. The inability of SDC members to travel from their homes to their schools may have been caused by COVID-19 travel restrictions enforced by the Zimbabwean government. COVID-19 regulations forbade any physical meetings, hence most members could not make it. Several school heads indicated that SDCs were unable to attend meetings as frequently as they once did, which had an impact on the execution of specific initiatives. The sentiments demonstrate that due to SDCs' limited authorisation given, schools were unable to carry out significant undertakings and had to postpone some educational plans. Additionally, it reaffirms SDCs crucial roles in school governance as infrastructure builders and consultants to schools. It is also conceivable that the school heads made independent decisions in defiance of the requirements of the finance policies when the number of SDC meetings to approve the procurement and purchase of educational supplies were drastically reduced.

Interviews with school heads and deputy heads revealed that after the COVID-19 outbreak, schools gave significant thought to moving their operations online, but SDC members were not included. This demonstrates that despite being on the agenda for a while, online education was underutilised before the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, it appears COVID-19 increased schools' motivation to adopt the 4IR, which demanded the digitalisation and digitalisation of education. School Head C provided evidence for that claim by stating,

> We embraced the fourth industrial revolution by embracing online education. The SDC's lacking digital abilities were not taken into account during that change, nevertheless.‖ School Head G continued, "... due to the switch to online, SDC meetings were significantly decreased. We worked without the full complement of the entire house.

Due to SDC members' lack of digital proficiency, no decisions, therefore, were made, which impeded the progress of the school and other obligations. School Head C bemoaned that, *"our projects' progress was*

stopped. I could not decide on my own without the blessing of the SDC". In this study, a case is made that SDCs might use tools like cell phones, emails, newsletters and school websites to manage schools in the 4IR era (Mafa and Nyathi, 2013). The resources appropriation theory, which contends that access to digital technology dictates the usage of that technology (van Dijk, 2005), confirms that such use is dependent on the accessibility of digital tools and digital infrastructure.

DIGITAL ACCESS AND SDC AMID THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Regarding the availability of smartphones, SDC members who were interviewed expressed conflicting opinions. SDC Member 5 reported,"*I have an outdated, broken smartphone*", while SDC Member 3 remarked, *—I don't have a smartphone at all*." According to sentiments gathered, SDCs at various schools have varying degrees of physical access to digital technology. It isinferred from these sentiments that SDC members have different privileges and that, despite the 4IR's revolutionary advancements, information and technology communication (ICT) penetration is quite low in some schools. This supports Kapurubandara's (2009) finding that the adoption of online commerce was hindered by a lack of digital infrastructure, a lack of consumer expertise, a delayed uptake of ICT, and a paucity of the legal and regulatory framework. According to UNESCO (2015), many schools are not equipped for the age of digitalisation in terms of their infrastructure, structural underfunding lack of skills, and educators' level of readiness. Physical access, according to RAT, relates to using or possessing digital technology (van Dijk, 2005), and that depends on the availability of financial resources. As a result, for SDC members to access and/or own digital tools that enable them to embrace and use technology in school management, they must have the financial resources to build digital infrastructure and buy digital tools.

Those who acknowledged using smartphones were asked a follow-up question to find out if they used any online platforms for doing routine tasks for schools. The results demonstrate that SDCs lacked significant expertise in the use of online platforms. As SDC Member 6 said: "*I have a smartphone, but I'm not familiar with how to use its applications."* Interviews with the majority of SDC members revealed that the only online platform they were familiar with was WhatsApp. They also admitted that they had no prior experience with using email and the

internet for administrative purposes in schools. SDC Member 8 affirms that "*despite the introduction of e-banking and the request for virtual meetings amid COVID-19, we lack digital capabilities to use the internet for school governance*". Therefore, it became clear from interviews with SDC members that SDCs lacked advanced knowledge and abilities regarding how to employ digital technology in school governance. The COVID-19 outbreak and the rapid shift to the 4IR, exposed this digital gap. Inferentially, the results demonstrate that the SDCs had to deal with difficulties brought on by global and emerging technological trends that required a paradigm shift in the way they could manage their school business.

The study claims, using the RAT lens, that the three sequential categories of access to digital technology — physical, digital skills and usage access — are present in schools as evidenced by the opinions of some of the study's participants. Additionally, it is contended that the lack of internet access hinders SDCs‘ ability to use online platforms for school governance. Therefore, the 4IR has created digital technology access gaps that must be rectified for efficient school governance due to deficiencies in one or more of these forms of access. Dzvimbo *et al*. (2020), who contend that there is need to adjust to the change brought about by technological advancement since it always brings with it new dimensions that need to be upheld, lend weight to the thesis. The 4IR is going to be a game-changing mark for the education industry in general and school governance in particular because of its enormous potential and the boundless opportunities it would provide. For instance, the SDCs must be skilled in the use of technology since schools benefit from being able to transfer money, pay bills, check balances, monitor their accounts, print and download account statements without being constrained by the physical restrictions of the actual world. This is true even though some of the investigated schools have not adopted technology or online banking.

TRAINING FOR SDCS

After the difficulties SDC members faced in switching to the 4IR were revealed, the study looked for suggestions to ameliorate those challenges. The analysis of educational records and data generated from semi-structured interviews revealed that SDC members never received digital skills training. SDC Member 2 notes that:

> *We did not receive any digital skills training to help us with online school management tasks. We lack digital literacy. We are unfamiliar with the internet systems used for doing school business.*

SDC Member 5 stated that "*we need to be trained on how to transact business online, how to do virtual meetings and how to use the school website".* The findings are in line with Dzvimbo *et al*. (2020)'s report, which contends that to safely put SDC in charge, the government must make sure that all their members are trained in ICT use and internet banking. When considered collectively, the findings demonstrate that training for SDC members is required throughout the transition to the 4IR if digital usage is to be realised as suggested by the resource appropriation theory, which contends that once people have obtained physical access, the second mode of access becomes the digital skills required to command and utilise digital technology (van Dijk, 2017). The internet of things will enable school governance to take place whenever, anywhere, and at any pace with the help of such training in digital skills. Using RAT, it is contended that the difficulties SDCs had in using digital tools and platforms, resulted in digital gaps in school management, necessitating the necessity to equip SDC members. The study concurs with some literature that emphasize the need for fundamental digital skills to include analytical abilities like coding, in addition to user and informational skills to enhance school governance practises (Chryssou, 2017).

CONCLUSION

The study shows that the COVID-19 outbreak in 2019 has shown the complexities schools have in implementing the digitalisation of school governance and are far from embracing the 4IR given the lack of digital proficiency visible in SDCs. It has been shown that, rather than depending on conventional approaches, the education sector is creating and disseminating ideas on re-imagining school governance based on corporate educational technology solutions during the present 4IR. The report advocates replacing the old methods of remote governance for schools that depend on physical presence and interpersonal connection with new ones that depend on digital technologies.

Schools must make investments in developing digital infrastructures and in the education of SDC members for this to take place. The 4IR aims at modifying how schools are governed in many settings, and heads of

schools must accept the changes that come along with it. To enable SDC members to function successfully in school governance, they must be retrained in digital skills. If this is not done, money will be mismanaged in schools, which would undermine the decentralisation and devolution objective in the educational system.

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