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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Perceptions of inclusion among parent members of school governing bodies in South Africa

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Abstract

School governing bodies (SGBs) are expected to be channels for democracy, equity and equality. The literature, however, suggests that SGBs in South Africa perpetuate apartheid-era practices by excluding learners from schools. While a large volume of literature describes the important role parents play in implementing inclusion at schools, there is a dearth of literature regarding the role of parents as SGB members. This qualitative study ascertained the perceptions of parent members of SGBs towards inclusion and how these perceptions impact the parents' role in the implementation of inclusion within the context of South African mainstream primary schools. This was achieved using nine semi-structured interviews and 40 surveys. Five core themes emerged from Braun and Clark's content analysis. The study revealed that parent members of SGBs do not fully understand the concept of inclusion, focusing instead on tangible elements to the exclusion of more abstract elements of inclusion. This narrow focus may impede parents' ability to promote inclusion within their role as SGB members.

KEYWORDS
inclusion, parents, school governing body, South Africa

Key points

- Parent members of SGBs, while mandated to implement government policies, only focus on who needs to be included and where, thereby demonstrating a lack of understanding of inclusion.
- There needs to be a greater focus on training parent members of the SGB about their mandate so that the social and psychological aspects of inclusion can be better understood and parents more equipped to implement policy effectively.
- Parent members of the SGBs tend to value inclusion less than other educational priorities, leading them to make decisions that limit the admission of children with learning barriers.

INTRODUCTION

The legal cases in South Africa between the Gauteng Department of Education and the Federation of School Governing Bodies highlighted the role of school governing bodies (SGBs) in creating exclusion in schools. In 2016, the court found that the final say on admissions policies was had by the Department of Education (DoE) and that some policies implemented by SGBs 'may constitute indirect discrimination' (Kubheka, 2016). Some of these policies have seen schools in the spotlight for withholding reports and denying admission for non-payment of fees, the return of damaged textbooks and the non-return of textbooks (Githahu, 2019; Maako, 2019;

Mamacos, 2019). Thus, while SGBs are tasked with developing policies, these policies have the potential to hinder or foster inclusion.

Inclusion, however, is a multifaceted term, reflecting more than 'where' a child is placed or even 'who' is placed. According to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), 'inclusion involves a process of systemic reform embodying changes and modifications in content, teaching methods, approaches, structures and strategies in education to overcome barriers' (CRPD, 2016, p. 4). Inclusion is also a political ideal; the 2020 Global Education Monitoring Report on Inclusion (GEMR, 2018, p. 4) states that inclusive education is a 'statement of political aspiration, an essential ingredient to the creation of inclusive societies'. This echoes the Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001), which states that inclusion may promote inclusive and non-discriminatory societies.

The GEMR identifies arenas, dimensions, degrees and elements of inclusion. The elements of inclusion are most relevant when thinking about SGBs, given that elements of inclusion refer to 'national legal frameworks and education policies, governance and finance, curricula and learning materials, facilities and infrastructure, and involvement of communities' (GEMR, 2018, p. 5). These elements of inclusion align with SGB responsibilities, which include managing a school fund, maintaining the school grounds, buying learning materials (including textbooks and equipment) and determining subjects taught (Corruption Watch, 2013; Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1996).

The South African Schools Act (SASA), a policy promoting inclusion among other things, affords SGBs a significant say regarding decision-making in the school. The development of inclusion in schools is assisted by school governance structures, which aim to build a democratic South Africa (Lewis & Naidoo, 2004; Mncube, 2007). The individuals who make up this group – learners' parents or guardians, teachers, students elected to the Representative Council of Learners, and non-teaching members of staff, principals and members who have been co-opted into the SGB (RSA, 1996) – have a part to play in the inclusion and exclusion of learners, both in terms of access as well as in internal exclusion, which involves the inclusion of an individual in a group, while simultaneously excluding that individual from interaction within the group (Mncube, 2007).

As members of the SGB, parents are responsible for forming and implementing school policies regarding, for example, fees, uniforms and extracurricular activities (RSA, 1996). Given this influence, parent members of SGBs have a role to play in the inclusion and exclusion of children at school, particularly regarding access. However, parents are often not the focal point of research; in her literature review, Seedat (2018) identified only two studies with a parental focus. Additional published studies exploring South African parents' perceptions of inclusion include Belknap et al. (1999), Engelbrecht et al. (2005), Swart et al. (2004) and Yssel et al. (2007). Despite the dearth of literature, Engelbrecht et al. (2005) and Sosu and Rydzewska (2017) highlight the importance of parents' role in implementing inclusion in schools.

As evidenced, despite the role and influence parent members of SGBs have as members of schools' decision-making bodies, there is a stark lack of literature regarding parent SGB members. While SGBs are expected to be channels for 'democracy, equity and equality' (Bush & Heystek, 2003, p. 137), a growing body of literature suggests that SGBs are in fact not functioning democratically but, instead, as gatekeepers to schools. Exploring parent SGB members' perceptions of inclusion will thus provide insight into how physical and epistemological access is enacted at schools.

This article investigated how parent members of the SGB, who comprise at least 51% of SGBs thus making them the majority (RSA, 1996), perceive inclusion and exclusion to understand how value and choice – as conceptualised within the capability approach (CA) – affect their support for inclusion and, by extension, their actions within the SGB. To this end, the study sought to answer the following questions:

- How is inclusion conceptualised by parent members of the SGB?
- How does this conceptualisation affect their support for inclusion?

The following section presents an overview and critique of SGBs followed by the notion of value and choice as found in the CA. I suggest that it is not enough to understand attitudes towards inclusion and exclusion but that an understanding of what is valued and how value influences choices and impacts behaviour and, in this case, the development of policies, may aid or hinder inclusion.

History of SGBs

In South Africa, the notion of a democratic governing body arose in the aftermath of the 1976 Soweto school uprising and the development of a People's Education discourse in the 1980s (Karlsson, 2002). This, along with other developments, saw the national government gradually move away from its divisive and segregated past towards democracy, which led to the decentralisation of power through the 1996 South African Schools Act (SASA) (RSA, 1996). This move was driven by the idea that democratic schools would produce democratic societies, with the SASA stating that governance structures are intended to

'advance the democratic transformation of society' (RSA, 1996). The belief grounding the decentralisation of power is that the state should share power with school stakeholders, resulting in 'healthier and stronger relationships between schools and communities' (Van Wyk, 2007, p. 132).

Section 5(1) of the SASA abolished compulsory exclusion, stating that public schools are required to register learners and serve their educational needs without unfair discrimination (RSA, 1996). While addressing inequalities and promoting quality education through the democratic transformation of schools (Dervin & Zajda, 2015), the decentralisation of power also resulted in greater autonomy regarding school governance, funding, language policies and admissions policies through the establishment of SGBs that should be grounded in the democratic values of the 'representation of all stakeholder groups, active participation, tolerance, rational discussion and collective decision-making' (Mafora, 2013, p. 101).

In post-apartheid South Africa, the challenge is to ensure that 'South Africans have the knowledge, values, skills, creativity and critical capacities required to build democracy, development, equity, cultural pride and social justice' (Ministry of Education [Canada], 2000, p. 9). While these skills are in abundance in urban areas with many parents being educated, township schools are characterised by parents who have low levels of education (Mafora, 2013). They may, therefore, not necessarily have the skills, knowledge and critical thinking to develop and implement policies that are for the good of all (Heystek, 2011; Mncube, 2007). Educated parents in townships – the 'township elite' (Mafora, 2013, pp. 101–102) – opt to send their children to schools in the suburbs (Heystek, 2011). This brings into question the functionings and capabilities (to be discussed later) of the parent members of the SGB in township schools, particularly as they relate to inclusion.

Critique of SGBs

While SGBs have been tasked with developing democracy in schools, reports of policies promoting exclusion as well as exclusionary practices based on class, gender and race are embedded in some SGBs themselves, resulting in continued discrimination albeit under a different guise (Brown & Duku, 2008). The finding by Brown and Duku (2008) is, however, in contrast to Mncube and Mafora's (2013) findings. Mncube and Mafora (2013) found conflicting results regarding SGBs and the development of democracy. In their study, some parents felt that the SGBs were making strides towards the development of democracy, while other respondents felt that the SGBs were undemocratic, silencing the voices of members who are seen to oppose the set agenda (Mafora, 2013). Thus, while parents are victims of intolerance and undemocratic practices, they also behave in a manner that is indicative of intolerance and undemocratic practices. These same parents are entrusted with promoting democracy and the rights enshrined in the constitution, including the inclusion of students experiencing barriers to learning in schools.

The roles and responsibilities assigned to the SGBs through the SASA could be viewed as an indication of the high regard they are held in by the state. This is supported by Sayed (2002), who contends that the degree to which power and authority are delegated to SGBs is a sign of their importance within political spheres. However, the gap between policy intention and its practice and implementation is evidenced in research (Mncube & Mafora, 2013), with some research suggesting that SGBs exacerbate apartheid-era inequalities, as opposed to being vehicles of social justice and democracy (Mncube, 2007; Mncube & Mafora, 2013).

Equity or inequity emerges from the decentralisation of power. This results from the school's source of funding. Inequity is likely to arise between schools that are affluent and able to provide for themselves and poorer schools that are expected to supplement the funds provided by the Department of Education (Van Wyk, 2007). In addition, wealthy parents are more likely to advocate for and receive better access to state resources. This was also found in the USA; Brantlinger (2003) noted the power and effectiveness of affluent parents regarding information, resources and advocacy.

Parent members of the SGB are not trained prior to commencing their roles and responsibilities. This implies that parents may be unfamiliar with meeting procedures and appropriate legislation and may struggle to manage large volumes of documents (Nwosu & Chukwuere, 2017). Their skill level, therefore, affects the ability of the parent members of the SGB to fulfil their mandate, resulting in greater reliance on the principal and teacher component of the SGB with regard to decision-making. Research suggests that these challenges may be further exacerbated by the South African middle class sending their children to private or former white schools (Heystek, 2011), and therefore, not forming part of SGBs for township schools.

Additionally, the three-year term of SGB governors is criticised by Heystek (2011) and Mncube and Mafora (2013). This criticism is linked to the idea that the three-year period is not sufficient for parents to develop their governance skills. In cases where parents do acquire the requisite skills, their term ends after three years and the next SGB is elected. Additionally, given that parents must have a child in the school to serve as a governor, they are likely to serve only one term, implying that parent governors do not have the opportunity to apply the skills and knowledge acquired over their term (Heystek, 2011).

An understanding of parent members of the SGB using the capability approach

This research is grounded in the capability approach (CA), a human rights-based approach developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. The CA offers an understanding of education as an opportunity to 'expand young people's capabilities and develop opportunities for them to pursue the life they have reason to value' (Hart, 2009, p. 401). This is achieved through developing programmes and policies with the entire school population in mind, including those who may, at times, be excluded and/or marginalised. Given that SGB members are pivotal in both the development and implementation of these policies, the CA is used to understand the functionings and capabilities of the SGB members in their ability to execute their functions.

The functionings of parent SGB members refers to the 'beings and doings' that individuals value (Sen, 1999, p. 75). Their capabilities are the ability to pursue and participate in activities they consider important (Claassen, 2014; Deneulin & McGregor, 2010). These concepts have implications for inclusion in schools, given that a particular level of education is required to develop policy documents. Training on the functionings and capabilities of parents in their role as SGB members is provided by the Department of Education (Heystek, 2011; Xaba, 2011); however, research has shown that the training is either ineffectual or non-existent (Xaba, 2011). This, together with the tri-annual election of SGB members, means that the parents' opportunity to develop through being active SGB members is further compromised.

Research suggests that educating their children may be a higher priority for parents in South Africa than inclusion (Kern, 2020). Decisions are therefore taken to promote education at the expense of inclusion. The CA argues that individuals who see the value in inclusion will be willing to implement the inclusive education policy, while those who see little or no value in inclusion will be reluctant to implement the policy. Thus, the value that parent members of the SGB assign to inclusive education will correlate with their willingness to implement the policies.

Value is tied to choice, which emerges in two concepts in the CA, namely, freedom – which is what an individual will do given the opportunity and choice (Reindal, 2016) – and agency – which is the individual's ability to choose the functionings that they value (Sen, 1992). Parents who are part of an SGB, therefore, have a choice whether to apply the skills that make inclusion possible or reject them.

SGBs were implemented in South Africa as a way of decentralising power, with the majority being assigned to parents who were thought to have the most investment in the successful running of a school because their children were enrolled at the institution. Research has demonstrated that parents require skills and knowledge to be effective and contributing SGB members. However, parents who have this capability often opt to send their children to schools outside of their residential area, thereby making themselves ineligible to stand on the SGB in their communities (Heystek, 2011). In addition, while SGBs are meant to promote democracy, they have been found to be marred by undemocratic and exclusionary practices (Mafora, 2013).

METHODS

This article draws on data and findings from a larger mixed-method study, which generated data from a sample of parents who were members of SGBs as well as those who were not SGB members. This paper focuses on the data obtained from parent SGB members.

Employing mixed methods in the study serves a dual role. The mixed-methods approach was used to obtain a more nuanced understanding of the results (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). Additionally, the quantitative data obtained through the surveys could be elaborated on through interviews, thus explaining the initial results through triangulation and enhancing the findings' credibility.

Sample and sampling

The current article draws on qualitative data generated by the parent members of SGB from semi-structured interviews and the written responses to the open-ended questions in surveys. The parents were sampled using non-probability purposive sampling across the seven schools whose principals consented to the study. 40 parent members of an SGB ($n=27$, 67.5% female and $n=13$, 32.5% male) completed surveys, with the majority identifying as Black African ($n=27$, 67.5%) followed by Coloured ($n=5$, 12.5%) and White ($n=3$, 7.5%). Black African refers to indigenous South Africans, while coloured refers to the multiracial or mixed-race ethnic groups. Five respondents selected the 'other' category in terms of race. Respondents ranged in age from 24 to 63 years. The parents' education ranged from no schooling to bachelor's degree; the majority had obtained some high school education ($n=10$, 25%). Nine female parent SGB members responded to the invitation to be interviewed. These respondents were between the ages of 29 and 44 (Table 1).

Instrumentation

The survey comprised a demographics section and a section aimed at assessing SGB members' perspectives of inclusion and barriers to learning. The parent SGB members' perspectives on inclusion were explored through

TABLE 1 Demographics of the quantitative sample.

Demographic variable	Frequency (*N*)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	13	32.5%
Female	27	67.5%
Race		
Black African	27	67.5%
White	3	7.5%
Coloured	5	12.5%
Other	5	7.5%
Education		
No schooling	5	12.5%
Grade 1–8	4	10%
Some high school	10	25%
Matriculation Certificate	5	12.5%
Diploma	2	5%
Some college credit, no degree	4	10%
Trade/technical/vocational training	1	2.5%
Bachelor degree	4	10%

open-ended questions, while their perspectives of barriers to learning were gained through a Likert scale. In addition, participants who were willing participated in a semi-structured interview process to further explore these topics. Only the responses to the open-ended questions asking what respondents understood by the terms 'inclusion' and 'exclusion' in education are used in this article.

A more nuanced understanding of parent SGB members' perceptions of inclusion and exclusion, the exclusionary and inclusionary criteria used within their children's specific school as well as the criteria they would use when thinking about their children, were obtained through the semi-structured interview schedule. The schedule was developed based on the data analysis of the surveys and consisted of ten questions.

Data collection

The research was approved by the University of the Witwatersrand's human research ethics committee (non-medical) (protocol number: H16/08/14) as well as the Gauteng Department of Education. The principals of the seven schools that participated consented to the study via individual meetings with the author. The parent members of the SGB were informed about the study via a participant information sheet. Return of the consent forms and completed surveys were taken as consent. For respondents who agreed to participate in an interview, arrangements were made to meet at a time and place that was convenient for them. The interviews were conducted as per the semi-structured interview schedule and were recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data analysis

Thematic content analysis was conducted, following the steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), to analyse the responses to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire as well as the interview transcriptions. Codes were generated and potential themes were identified. The demographic data were analysed using descriptive statistics, frequencies and percentages.

FINDINGS

The findings, presented as core themes, summarise the views and beliefs of the respondent parent SGB members following the data analysis described above. Five themes were identified from the data:

- Inclusionary/exclusionary criteria
- Barriers to learning
- Effect of inclusion
- Lack of understanding of the scope of inclusion
- What it will take for inclusion to work

Inclusionary/exclusionary criteria

The majority of respondents referred to inclusion in terms of who needs to be included and excluded. The highest percentage of respondents (interviews: $n=9$, 100%; surveys: $n=25$, 62.5%) referred to inclusion in terms of children who needed to be included, while 100% ($n=9$) of the interviewees referred to children who needed to be excluded.

Specifically, the parents identified three groups of children who should be included: everybody (interview: $n=5$, 55.5%; surveys: $n=7$, 17.75%), children with disabilities (interview: $n=3$, 33.3%; surveys: $n=9$, 22.5%) and children who lived in neighbourhoods surrounding the school (interviews: $n=3$, 33.3%; surveys: $n=4$, 10%). Including 'everybody' was given expression in the following comment: '*inclusive education is an educational system that is accessible to all; it does not discriminate against any*' (BB1:65). Including children with disabilities was expressed as '*inclusion secures opportunities for students with disabilities to learn alongside their non-disabled peers*' (BB1:40).

While some parents thought about including children with disabilities, disability was also considered by 44.4% ($n=4$) of the interview respondents when thinking about excluding children. Exclusion was further considered in the context of living within the community in four of

the interviews (44.4%), with parents commenting '*space needs to be prioritised to children living in the boundaries first before accepting children outside the boundary*' (CC2:121) and '*I think one thing is considered is children living in the community*' (SGB3). This finding implies that parents preferred to include children from within the community while excluding children from outside of the community.

Barriers to learning

Parents identified that particular factors acted as barriers to learning (interviews: $n=9$, 100%; surveys: $n=6$, 15%), with socioeconomic status (interviews: $n=8$, 88.8%; surveys: $n=5$, 12.5%), teachers (interviews $n=7$, 77.7%; surveys: $n=6$, 15%) and language (interviews: $n=5$, 55.5%; surveys: $n=2$, 5%) being identified most often.

The issue of language as a barrier to learning is twofold. First, parents referred to the inability to understand the language of instruction. Second, language emerged as a barrier in terms of children's use of language and the impact that technology and social media have on children's language usage, expressed in their reading and writing:

> *'Because of social media, so when they come into the classroom, they think that I can speak anyhow … they ignore spelling rules and also types of things, punctuations … You would know how to speak … you would know how to punctuate, you would know how to read and write, but these days, learners don't know how to, even in their own mother tongue, communicate fluently.*
>
> (SGB1)

Socioeconomic status as a barrier to learning emerged as a finding, with respondents noting 'children should be treated the same regardless of the financial status' (CC1:160) and 'parents complain about not affording their school transport'

(SGB5).

Effects of inclusion

Some study respondents felt that inclusion both negatively and positively impacted the well-being of children with and without barriers to learning. Pro-social outcomes of inclusion for children with barriers to learning were stated as '*it helps children to understand each other and to help each other'* (AA4:15) and '*education that is inclusive forges a friendship between children'* (AA4:65).The academic impact of inclusion on children with barriers to learning, linked to improved school performance, was also noted: '*it will help children go further with their studies'* (AA2:15) and '*inclusion in education gives one the opportunity to excel in their studies and to be more involved'* (AA1:47). In addition, an improvement in self-confidence was noted by participant AA2:72: '*It makes kids to be confident at school*.'

The negative effects of inclusion for children with barriers to learning were identified as low self-esteem and low confidence in 55.5% ($n=5$) of the interviews and 15% ($n=6$) of the open-ended questions. Comments included '*exclusion brings about low self-esteem*' (SGB6), '*leading to bullying of vulnerable children, ultimately causing school dropout*' (AA1:51). Further concern regarding the impact of inclusion on learners without barriers to learning was expressed by participant SGB6, who said that it '*may also disrupt other learners' education … So that is why we exclude these problematic children*' and participant SGB3, who stated:

> '*Slow learners, I don't think they should necessary take them to the school because they take time and slow things down a lot. In a way, they waste other kids' time.'*

Lack of understanding of the scope of inclusion

Two-thirds ($n=6$, 66.6%) of the parent SGB members interviewed and 17.5% ($n=7$) of the survey respondents referred to the legal frameworks and policy element of inclusion. The policies, systems and procedures were expanded to include the procedures used to place children within specific schools and how children are accepted into school. Respondents referred to policy and procedures as follows:

> '*Inclusion may be a policy, most probably from government down to schools, that tells each school who can be taken into their schools and on what basis*'
>
> (SGB5).

> '*School inclusion is a government policy-influenced process that entails the way a school admits its learners … a decision-making process*'
>
> (SGB6).

What will it take for inclusion to work?

An additional element of inclusion that was discussed by parent SGB members is what is required for inclusion to work (interviews: $n=5$, 55.5%; surveys: $n=4$, 10%). Specifically, parents referred to the need for parental

support and physical resources. The need for parental support emerged as a requirement in 33.3% ($n=3$) of the interviews and 10% ($n=4$) of the surveys. Common comments included '*parental involvement is important for inclusion processes*' (SGB4) and '*parent involvement is also needed*' (CC1:114).

Reference to a lack of physical resources negatively affecting the implementation of inclusion was made by 44.4% ($n=4$) of the interview respondents and 2.5% ($n=1$) of the open-ended responses. Participant CC1:114 commented '*inclusion can only work if the necessary resources and manpower is available'*

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a nuanced understanding of inclusion among the parent SGB members, indicating a discrepancy between their perceptions of inclusion and the broader aims and definition of inclusion as outlined by the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2016). Parents' understanding reflected perceptions about who should be included or excluded, with a focus on those previously excluded from education. This perspective contrasts with the CRPD's broader aims of inclusive education as well as the Education White Paper 6 (DoE, 2001), which seeks to include all children, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds. This finding suggests a potential gap in parents' knowledge or awareness of what inclusion truly encompasses and underscores the need for more effective communication and training regarding inclusive education policies.

Interestingly, the study noted that despite existing literature reporting an association between inclusion and children with disabilities (Horsthemke, 2017), parent members of the SGB rarely mentioned disabilities in their understanding of inclusion. This contrasts with the parents in Vlachou et al.'s (2016) study who referred to including children with disabilities. This may be an indication that some training regarding inclusion has taken place.

School enrolment policies emerged as an area of concern for parents and appear to have inadvertently influenced parents' perceptions of inclusion. Changes to the school application system, which allow parents to apply to schools in their neighbourhoods, close to their places of work, where siblings attend school or a school of their choice have led to situations where some parents are unable to enrol their children in their neighbourhood schools due to capacity constraints. This emerged as a consideration in parent SGB members' understanding of inclusion, highlighting the complexities and potential conflicts that arise when balancing educational equity with practical enrolment challenges.

When examining barriers to learning, the study found that parent members of the SGB primarily identified extra-personal factors, such as socioeconomic status and language barriers, as significant challenges. This aligns with previous research (Banks et al., 2017; Batruch et al., 2017; Walker, 2014) that highlights the impact of socioeconomic status on academic performance and teacher expectations. However, it is notable that parents did not explicitly reference interpersonal characteristics, such as disabilities or learning difficulties, despite considering these factors when thinking about who should be included or excluded. This could indicate a shift away from a medical model of understanding barriers towards a more systemic view, consistent with the CRPD's (2016) guidelines.

The effects of inclusion were also explored, revealing a paradox where parents, driven by the value they placed on education, sometimes made choices that constrained inclusion by opting to exclude children perceived as detrimental to their children's educational outcomes. This behaviour challenges the principles of inclusion because it highlights a divide between personal interests and collective educational equity. These findings are supported by the literature (Lui et al., 2015; Vlachou et al., 2016); while inclusive practices can lead to positive outcomes, like increased self-confidence and improved social skills among children (De Boer et al., 2010; Ferguson, 2008; Vlachou et al., 2016), they also require a commitment to inclusivity that may conflict with individual parental preferences.

A critical issue highlighted by this study is the apparent lack of understanding among SGB members about the scope of inclusion. This finding points to insufficient or ineffective training for SGB members, a concern that has been echoed in other studies (Xaba, 2011). The triannual cycle in which SGB members serve, coupled with the limited tenure of parents on the SGB while their children are enrolled at the school, may contribute to this lack of understanding. This suggests a need for ongoing, comprehensive training that ensures all SGB members are fully informed about current education policies and the broader implications of inclusion.

Finally, the study raises important questions about what it will take for inclusion to be truly effective. The findings suggest that for inclusion to work, there must be a collective effort to bridge the gap between parents' current understanding of inclusion and the broader, more inclusive vision articulated by educational policies. This includes addressing practical issues, such as school enrolment challenges and ensuring that SGB members are adequately trained and informed. Only through a concerted effort to align parents' perceptions with the principles of inclusive education can the full benefits of inclusion be realised for all children.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A limitation of the current study is that the findings are confined to parent members of SGBs in township schools, and therefore, cannot be generalised to the rest of the population. Future research can examine SGBs of

schools in suburban areas to ascertain if differences in perceptions exist.

CONCLUSION

SGBs have become integral to the functioning of government schools since the promulgation of SASA in 1996 (RSA, 1996). However, while the decentralisation of power was envisaged to advance a democratic society, the literature provides evidence to the contrary (Mafora, 2013).

Inclusion is understood to encompass four elements: social, psychological, physical and systemic (GEMR, 2018). However, these results demonstrate that parent SGB members' perceptions of inclusion focus predominantly on the physical element of inclusion, with an interest in who is to be included and where they should be included. This focus lacks a depth of understanding of inclusion and negates the social, psychological and systemic inclusion requirement. With a lack of focus on what happens to learners once they are in an institution, SGB members are likely to promote internal exclusion, which means that children will be allowed in a group, such as a class or school, but excluded from the interactions that occur within that group (Mncube, 2007).

Given the limitation in knowledge regarding inclusion, parent SGB members' ability to value inclusion limits the choices that they make in this regard. It is evident that inclusion, while valued, is valued less than other functionings and capabilities by parent members of the SGB. The perception that inclusion may detract from their children's educational experiences results in parents viewing inclusion in a negative light. By valuing inclusion less than education itself, parents may make choices that oppose inclusion, thereby choosing to limit the admission of children with barriers to learning.

This study has shown that inclusion is a multifaceted concept that is not fully understood by the parent SGB members under study. Instead, parent members of the SGB appear to focus on the tangible elements of inclusion, such as resources, children, and buildings, while overlooking the more abstract elements of inclusion that refer to a process of reform, curriculum changes and teaching methodology modifications (CRPD, 2016). Parents need to undergo a process of reform to fully grasp the social, psychological, physical and systemic dimensions of inclusion (GEMR, 2018). Only once a holistic understanding of inclusion is grasped, can parents fully support inclusion for all.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand's human research ethics committee (non-medical) (protocol number: H16/08/14), as well as that of the Gauteng Department of Education.

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