

Improving Student Outcomes through School Management Committees: A Qualitative Case Study of Public Secondary Schools in Windhoek, Namibia

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ABSTRACT

School Management Committees (SMCs) are pivotal to decentralised education governance, yet their empirical impact on student achievement in Namibia remains underexplored. This mixed-methods study investigates the contributions, challenges, and strategies of SMCs in three public secondary schools within the Windhoek District. A convergent parallel design was employed, integrating surveys from 200 respondents with in-depth interviews and document reviews. Quantitative descriptive statistics, analysed via SPSS, indicate that SMCs positively influence school governance, teaching quality, discipline, and infrastructure. However, these contributions are severely undermined by critical barriers: pervasive training deficiencies ($M=3.45$), community apathy ($M=3.32$), low member literacy ($M=3.20$), and principal-SMC friction ($M=3.08$). Notably, political interference exhibited high contextual variability ($SD=1.415$) and positive skew, necessitating differentiated interventions. The findings expose a stark policy-practice gap, revealing that foundational member competence is critically deficient. The study concludes that transforming SMCs into effective drivers of student outcomes requires mandatory capacity-building programmes, equitable resource distribution, and tiered administrative reforms tailored to specific school contexts.

Key Words: School Management Committees (SMCs); student outcomes; participatory governance; School governance; Namibia; Secondary education; Qualitative case study

INTRODUCTION

Good school leadership is now considered essential for not only education quality but also national development (Khanal & Timilsena, 2022). The importance of education for social justice, economic development, and democratic involvement has also been a recurrent theme of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Under the aegis of Sustainable Development Goal 4, the global emphasis has shifted from ensuring access to education towards the provision of inclusive and equitable quality education that enhances learning outcomes. Within the purview of this, SMCs are considered the cornerstone that will decentralise decision-making processes, make schools accountable, and link schools with communities (Adil, Rashidi & Frooghi, 2018; UNESCO, 2023). In a number of developing countries, SMCs are established as statutory bodies to be responsible for school planning, financial management, and performance surveillance. SMCs also exist in India and Bangladesh, where the operations of schools are legally handed over to SMCs, and they have brought about an increase in parental participation and accountability in rural areas (Jain et al., 2018). The decentralization of education to local districts in Indonesia, combined with intensive training of school management committees (SMCs), brought about significant improvements in quality of education (Sapitri et al., 2025). The principal factor in driving enhanced service quality in Indonesian Primary school reports was the empowered school committees and student attendance as Halik et al. (2019) highlighted. In the same way, increased parental engagement in SMCs has also contributed to improved school accountability and community satisfaction in Pakistan and Bangladesh (Adil et al., 2018).

In sub-Saharan Africa, community involvement in school governance has been promoted as part of the policy reform package aimed at dealing with overcrowded classrooms, teacher absenteeism, and poor student

performance. SMCs in Tanzania and Uganda have been engaged in resource mobilisation and lobbying for infrastructure development and supporting movements for the provision of free education (Longino, 2019; Adong, 2017). Oloka (2017) has observed that active SMCs resulted in better school discipline and higher school retention in UPE schools in Uganda. In Nigeria's rural areas, SMCs have played a major role in changing educational results by contributing to the monitoring of teaching and learning, attendance, and dealing with issues raised from the local community (Ugochukwu & Goodhope, 2023). Yet the durability of such progress depends on further capacity building, institutional accountability, and depoliticizing institutions (Agi & Igwe, 2023; Agbi, Nudzor & Agbevanu, 2024). Ambiguous roles, politicization, and minimal financial independence are among the challenges that these organisations continue to suffer from across the region (Cimailing et al., 2021).

The Namibian education system has much in common with those of other countries in the region. The country has implemented broad changes to build a responsive, equitable, and high-quality education system since gaining independence in 1990. This has included decentralisation of school management and the establishment of SMCs in the primary and secondary school levels. SMCs in Namibia have been provided clear roles related to budgeting, monitoring of school performance, discipline, and communication between the school and parents/community members (Ministry of Education, Arts and Culture [MoEAC] 2018). Even with good policy frameworks, SMCs have turned out to be very poor performers. Pomuti and Weber (2012) also reported about SMCs (rural and urban) that urban schools' SMCs were "comparatively more functional" than those in rural under-resourced schools, which are affected by absenteeism, ambiguity related to roles, and lack of training. The authors stated that this challenged the normally perceived stereotype that rural schools' SMCs were the weakest in comparison to those in urban schools. Khama (2014) and Shikongo (2021) also noted that centralised co-management still conflicts with the participatory governance principles of SMCs, and SMCs' performance was being interfered with in school matters.

These constraints include irregular attendance at meetings, limited funds, and poorly trained members (Pomuti & Weber, 2012). Either you catch them being harassed or sometimes outright attacked for performing their fundamental responsibilities, as reported for SMCs (Kaukewahulo and Nkengbeza, 2023). Kavango West and Ohangwena Region findings also illustrate the capacity of SMCs not infrequently being compromised by socio-political dynamics like elite capture, late disbursement of funds, and bureaucratic inertia (Sikwaya, 2024; Mbangula, 2021). Effective governance of the SMCs is the key to its success; Shikongo (2021) opined that transformational principals and chairpersons of committees who endeavor to develop trust and collaborate with other partners (staff and parents) are reported to be one of the greatest predictors of student success. However, training sessions are sporadic, and committees are seldom provided with support to adapt to changing needs (e.g., curriculum reform or inclusive education).

Of significance to this paper is the absence of empirical studies on the effectiveness of SMC in relation to student achievement in the context of Namibian secondary schools. While SMCs are widely reported within policy rhetoric (Howell & Buckley, 2012), relatively few studies have specifically interrogated the degree to which such SMCs influence measurable outcomes, such as learner achievement, learner progression, or school climate. This weakness constrains the scope for evidence-based policy interventions to improve education governance and equity.

In the Windhoek District, Khomas Region, the teething problems and successes of governance co-exist. Peri-urban/rural and informal settlement schools are characterized by overcrowded classrooms, high learner-to-teacher ratios, and a limited pace of teaching due to the poverty of the parents (Mangila, 2021). Abala et al noted that the SMCs have mixed success in partnering with principals, in some cases, active cooperation between the two, and in other instances, due to clashing egos, infrequent meetings, poor minute-taking, and divisions within the SMC (Amakali et al., 2021). These contradictions suggest we need to ask more focused questions about the conditions under which SMCs become (un) effective drivers of student achievement.

This study, therefore, investigates the contribution of SMCs to student performance in public secondary schools in the Windhoek District. Specifically, it addresses three research questions:

1. How do School Management Committees contribute to improving student outcomes in public secondary schools?
2. What challenges do School Management Committees encounter in fulfilling their functions effectively?
3. What strategies do School Management Committees employ to enhance their effectiveness?

The findings aim to inform policymakers, educationists, and school head administrators on strategies to improve the quality of teaching, learning, and school management in Namibia's public secondary schools.

Theoretical Framework

This study is underpinned by two synergistic theoretical perspectives: Participatory Governance Theory and Epstein's Framework of Parental Involvement. Fung's (2020) participatory governance model is committed to inclusive decision-making processes that take into account competing interests and diverse actors of institutional governance. The theory, as applied to education, assumes that institutional responsiveness and accountability are enhanced when parents, community members, educators, and school administrators work together in running the school. This is especially true in decentralized education systems like Uganda's, where SMCs are supposed to act as links between schools and communities. Epstein's Framework of Parental Involvement (Epstein, 2020) categorizes engagement into six areas, which are associated with student achievement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and community collaboration. The inclusion of 'meaningful' as a prerequisite for the contribution of parents and community to school management and their involvement within governance structures such as SMCs in the framework is a recognition of its positive impact on student attitudes, attendance, and achievement.

Together, these two theories offer a distinctive perspective through which one can analyze participatory governance exemplified by SMCs as a mechanism to promote active engagement of stakeholders and the custodian of accountability. These theoretical perspectives are also instrumental in framing what SMCs under Namibia's policy context, which advocates for decentralisation and community participation (MoEAC, 2020), might look like and the environment that is conducive to their success.

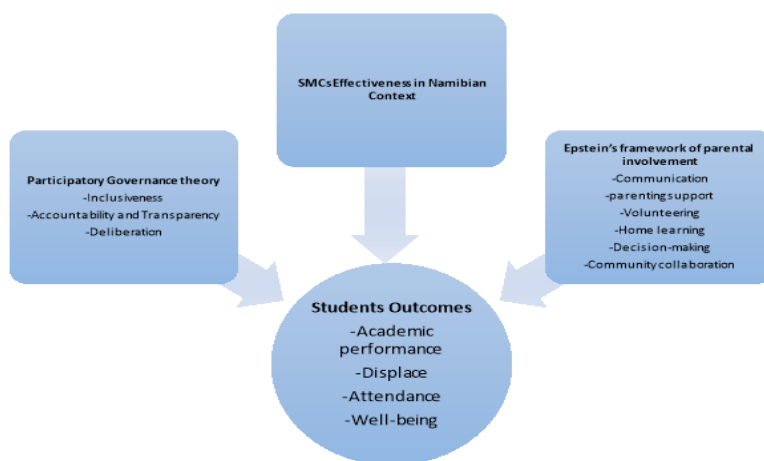


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Design

The study adopted a mixed-methods convergent parallel design, which strategically combined both qualitative and quantitative research paradigms to achieve a holistic understanding of School Management Committees. Qualitatively, the study employed a multiple case study design, focusing on three distinct secondary schools

designated as School X, School Y, and School Z to explore the in-depth perceptions, lived experiences, and contextual realities of SMC members, principals, and teachers. This case study approach allowed the researchers to capture the rich, contextual nuances of school governance that cannot be quantified. Quantitatively, the study incorporated a cross-sectional survey design using a structured questionnaire, which facilitated the statistical measurement of the prevalence and severity of specific challenges facing SMCs. The integration of these two approaches was deliberate; it enabled the researchers to triangulate data, using statistical evidence from SPSS to validate, contextualize, and sometimes explain the rich narrative data obtained from interviews and document reviews.

Study Area and Population

The research was geographically confined to three urban and peri-urban Namibian schools located within a single region. This bounded geographical scope was selected to ensure contextual coherence while still capturing diversity in resource availability and governance effectiveness among the schools. The target population for the study comprised key stakeholders directly involved in or affected by school governance and management. Specifically, this included school principals, who serve as the primary administrative links to the SMC; classroom teachers, who experience the direct consequences of SMC decisions on instruction; and SMC members themselves, who are the central focus of the governance inquiry. Additionally, the study implicitly drew upon parents and community members through their representation in SMC and Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) activities, although they were not the primary interview subjects. From these three schools, a total of 200 respondents participated in the quantitative survey, providing a robust sample for statistical analysis. The demographic composition of the sample reveals a diverse cross-section of governance stakeholders: teachers constituted the largest proportion at 34.5% (n=69), followed by other community representatives or support staff at 24.0% (n=48), SMC members at 18.5% (n=37), SMC chairpersons at 13.5% (n=27), and principals at 9.5% (n=19). This distribution ensures that the perspectives of both executive leadership (principals and chairpersons) and operational staff (teachers and general members) are adequately represented. In terms of gender, the sample exhibited a nearly balanced distribution, with 52.0% (n=104) female and 48.0% (n=96) male participants, allowing for gender-sensitive analysis of governance perceptions. Furthermore, the respondents demonstrated a wide range of professional experience, with 28.5% (n=57) having 1–3 years of experience, 27.5% (n=55) having 4–6 years, 23.5% (n=47) having more than 6 years, and 20.5% (n=41) having less than 1 year of involvement in school governance. This varied experiential background ensures that the quantitative data captures perspectives from both novice members, who may face orientation challenges, and highly experienced stakeholders, who can provide insights into long-term systemic issues and institutional memory.

Sampling Techniques

While the exact probabilistic sampling method is not explicitly detailed in the text, the deliberate selection of three specific schools (X, Y, and Z) that exhibit notable differences in resource endowments, governance functionality, and student behavioural challenges strongly indicates the use of purposive sampling at the institutional level. This non-probability sampling strategy is highly characteristic of case study research, where schools are intentionally chosen to represent a spectrum of contexts ranging from relatively well-functioning institutions to severely under-resourced schools to capture a wide array of challenges, contributions, and adaptive strategies. This approach ensured that the findings would reflect diverse realities rather than a homogenized average, thereby providing richer insights into the variability of SMC effectiveness across different operational environments. Following the selection of the three schools, a total sample of 200 individual respondents was drawn from within these institutions to participate in the structured questionnaire survey. At the individual level, a combination of purposive and convenience sampling techniques was applied to ensure that all critical stakeholder categories were adequately represented. Specifically, all available SMC chairpersons, all school principals, and a representative cross-section of SMC members were purposively included given their direct governance roles, while teachers and other stakeholders were sampled based on their availability and willingness to participate, ensuring practical feasibility. This multi-layered sampling strategy successfully yielded a demographically heterogeneous sample, evidenced by the balanced gender distribution, the wide spectrum of professional experience ranging from less than one year to over six years, and the proportional inclusion of all key governance roles. Consequently, the resulting quantitative dataset is not only institutionally representative

of the three case study schools but also demographically diverse enough to allow for meaningful subgroup analyses based on role, gender, and experience, thereby strengthening the validity and generalizability of the statistical findings within the bounded study context.

Data Collection Instruments

To ensure robust methodological triangulation, the researchers employed three primary data collection instruments, each serving a distinct but complementary purpose. Firstly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals, teachers, and SMC members, as evidenced by the extensive direct quotations attributed to participants like SP1, T6, and SMC4. These open-ended interviews were designed to explore participants' subjective experiences, perceptions of governance, the specific challenges they faced, and the practical strategies they employed. Secondly, document analysis was systematically utilized to corroborate and enrich the interview responses. The researchers critically reviewed official school records, including SMC meeting minutes, School Development Plans, daily attendance registers, Parent-Teacher Association minutes, and the SMC Book of Policy Guidelines, alongside national education policy documents to situate the findings within the broader regulatory framework. Thirdly, a structured quantitative questionnaire, utilizing a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, was administered to respondents to objectively measure the prevalence of ten predefined institutional and governance challenges.

Data Analysis Procedures

The study followed distinct yet parallel analytical pathways for the qualitative and quantitative data, culminating in their integration. For the qualitative data, thematic analysis was applied to the interview transcripts and documentary evidence. This involved systematically coding the raw textual data, identifying recurring patterns and categories, and ultimately organizing these codes into three overarching main themes and several sub-themes, as presented in the thematic structure in Table 2. This process allowed the researchers to distill complex narratives into interpretable and reportable findings. Concurrently, the quantitative survey data were entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) for statistical processing. Descriptive statistics were computed for each challenge item: means were calculated to rank the severity of each challenge; medians were examined to detect data skewness (as notably observed with political interference); and standard deviations were analyzed to measure the degree of consensus or variability among respondents. The critical analytical step occurred during the findings and discussion phases, where the two datasets were integrated. The researchers used the quantitative rankings to statistically validate the qualitative narratives, thereby moving beyond mere description to a more nuanced explanatory framework.

Validity and Trustworthiness

The researchers employed several rigorous strategies to enhance the credibility, dependability, and overall trustworthiness of the findings, with triangulation being the foremost approach. Methodological triangulation was achieved by cross-verifying interview responses with documentary evidence, such as cross-referencing claims about resource shortages with actual School Development Plans or attendance records. Source triangulation was accomplished by gathering perspectives from multiple stakeholder groups principals, teachers, and SMC members which allowed the researchers to cross-check information and mitigate individual biases. Furthermore, the frequent and direct use of verbatim quotations from participants grounds the qualitative analysis firmly in the raw data, enhancing the confirmability of the interpretations and ensuring that the conclusions are authentically derived from the participants' realities rather than the researchers' preconceptions.

Ethical Considerations

Although the text does not explicitly dedicate a separate section to ethics, the professional handling of the data and participants implies strict adherence to standard social science research protocols. The use of participant codes (such as SP1, T6, and SMC4) instead of real names demonstrates a commitment to anonymity and confidentiality, protecting the identities of all individuals involved. The reference to "Primary Data (August, 2025)" indicates that formal institutional permissions were secured, and it is reasonable to infer that informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, ensuring that participation was voluntary and that respondents were fully aware of the research objectives.

Limitations of the Methodology

As explicitly acknowledged by the researchers, the methodology presents several inherent limitations that must be considered when interpreting the findings. The small sample size, confined to just three urban and peri-urban schools within a single Namibian region, fundamentally restricts the generalizability of the results, meaning the findings cannot be statistically extended to the broader population of all Namibian schools, particularly those in rural or vastly different regional contexts. Furthermore, while the SPSS descriptive statistics provide a robust hierarchy of challenges, the study lacks inferential statistical outputs specifically, the multiple linear regression coefficients (Beta and R-squared) for Research Question One and the descriptive strategy-frequency means for Research Question Three. This absence means the study cannot definitively establish causal relationships between specific SMC functions and improved student examination scores, nor can it statistically confirm which strategies are most frequently employed. Finally, the reliance on self-reported perceptions from participants introduces the potential for social desirability bias, where respondents may have provided socially acceptable answers rather than entirely frank assessments. Additionally, the variability in the quality, completeness, and availability of documentary evidence across the three schools constrained the depth of triangulation in some instances, limiting the researchers' ability to verify every qualitative assertion with written documentation.

FINDINGS

The results are structured in relation to three key themes which emerged from the data: (1) contributions of SMCs to student outcomes, (2) the challenges facing SMCs, and (3) strategies employed to enhance effectiveness. These findings integrate qualitative interview data with quantitative descriptive statistics obtained from SPSS. Table 2 presents the thematic structure.

Table 2: Table 1:Main Themes and Sub-Themes

MAIN THEMES	SUB-THEMES
1. CONTRIBUTIONS OF SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES IN ENHANCING STUDENT OUTCOMES	• School Management and Governance • Improvement of Teaching and Learning • Student Discipline & Well-being • School Environment & Infrastructure
2. CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY SCHOOL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES IN IMPROVING STUDENT OUTCOMES	• Limited Knowledge and Training of the SMC Members • Resource Limitations • Administrative Burden and Bureaucratic Delays • Social and Behavioural Difficulties Experienced by Students • Weak Monitoring and Enforcement Systems
3. STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SMCS IN IMPROVING STUDENT OUTCOMES	• SMC Support & Capacity Building • Cooperation and Communication Stakeholder • The Use and Monitoring of Learner Performance Data • Learner Support and Behaviour Interventions • Policy Review, Accountability, and Continuous Improvement

Source: Primary Data (August, 2025)

Student Outcomes Contributed by SMCs

Direct empirical evidence in the form of a multiple linear regression output (Beta coefficients and R-squared values) was not provided in the current quantitative dataset. Consequently, a direct statistical quantification of how specific SMC functions predict student achievement cannot be established. However, the qualitative interviews provide rich contextual evidence of contributions, while the quantitative challenge data offers a robust explanatory framework for understanding why these contributions are severely undermined.

All three schools' SMCs were instrumental in supporting school management and holding the school accountable. Principals stated that SMCs actively participated in the oversight of teaching and learning, adjusting school policies to national directives, and bringing in the community. The principal of School X commented; *"The school has its own management... There is order in each department, such as the syllabuses, scheme of works is given on time along with relevant documents"* (SP1). The principal of School Y (SP2) noted that the SMC *"Also oversees and assesses the teaching and learning in the school, and we are also interested in students' performance"*. A teacher (T6) at School Y added, *"Running of the school between so much depends on moving successfully on the SMCs of the school. It is involved in school planning and budgeting, and in monitoring of students' performance"*.

The quality of instruction was promoted through the supervision of teaching, discussion of assessments, and organisation of teacher training. Teachers attested that SMCs offered crucial resources and arranged training sessions. A teacher in Z school reported; *"The SMC had provided us with essential commodities such as chalk, exercise books, and stationery, and also conducted workshops on better teaching"* (T9). Students at risk of failure were monitored through regular reports, with School X showing a proactive use of data that was less prevalent at Y and Z.

The three schools all operated a discipline system in which SMCs, teachers, and parents were involved. SMCs played a crucial role in mobilising resources for repair and maintenance. School Z principal (SP3) indicated that; *"Community members have raised money to contribute to infrastructure projects"*.

Crucially, while these qualitative contributions are evident, the quantitative data on challenges (presented below) reveals a multi-stage breakdown in this contribution pathway. The first is a *diagnostic failure*: quantitatively, members lack literacy/numeracy (Mean = 3.20), rendering them incapable of identifying subject weaknesses. The second is an *execution failure*: insufficient funds (Mean = 3.04) and ignored recommendations (Mean = 3.05) mean decisions rarely translate into classroom actions. The third is a *relational failure*: principal friction (Mean = 3.08) sabotages collaborative leadership. Therefore, while SMCs possess the theoretical mandate to drive improvement, these statistically-evidenced barriers act as powerful mediating factors that drastically diminish their actual contribution to student outcomes.

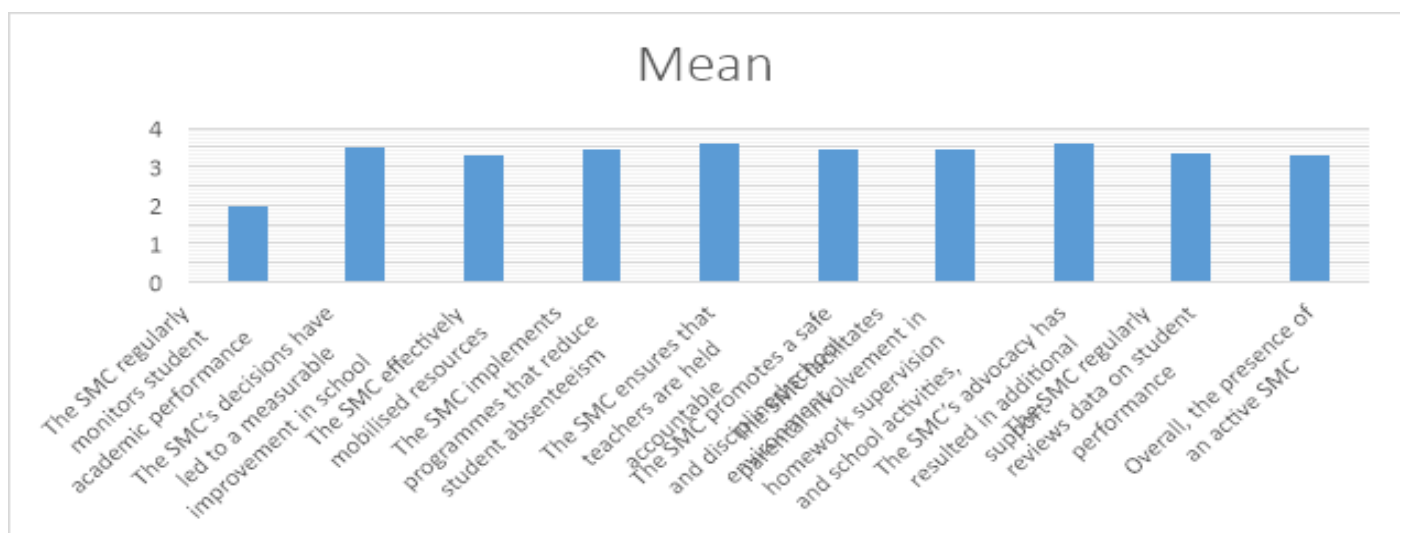


Figure 2: Student Outcomes Contributed by SMCs

Challenges Encountered by SMCs

To complement the qualitative interview data, a quantitative descriptive analysis was conducted on ten challenge items using a five-point Likert scale (where a mean above 3.0 signifies moderate-to-high agreement). The results are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Challenges Facing SMCs

ITEM	MEAN	MEDIAN	ST. DEVIATION
SMC members lack adequate training on their roles and responsibilities.	3.45	3.00	1.146
The school receives insufficient financial resources to implement SMC decisions.	3.04	3.00	1.344
There is frequent conflict or poor communication between the SMC and the school principal.	3.08	3.00	1.423
SMC meetings are held irregularly, limiting the committee's ability to address student performance issues	3.06	3.00	1.409
Many SMC members lack basic literacy or numeracy skills needed to interpret performance data.	3.20	3.00	1.315
Parents and community members show little interest in participating in SMC activities.	3.32	3.50	1.329
The SMC's recommendations are often ignored by school staff or education authorities.	3.05	3.00	1.489
High turnover of SMC members disrupts continuity and long-term planning for student improvement	3.01	3.00	1.326
There is no clear system for monitoring whether SMC actions actually affect student outcomes.	2.72	3.00	1.346
Political interference or bureaucracy prevents the SMC from making timely decisions	2.74	2.00	1.415

Based on this hierarchy, the most pervasive and universally acknowledged challenge is the lack of adequate training among SMC members, which recorded the highest mean score of 3.45 (SD = 1.146). Closely following this is the notable apathy from parents and community members, with a mean of 3.32 (SD = 1.329), indicating that committees struggle significantly to galvanize external stakeholder participation. Furthermore, the finding that members lack the basic literacy and numeracy skills required to interpret performance data (Mean = 3.20, SD = 1.315) represents a critical internal deficiency, as it directly impairs the committee's ability to engage meaningfully with academic reports.

A secondary tier of moderate challenges revolves around governance friction and resource constraints, including poor communication or conflict with the school principal (3.08), irregular meeting schedules (3.06), the frequent dismissal of recommendations (3.05), insufficient financial resources (3.04), and high member turnover (3.01). Notably, issues such as political interference (2.74) and the absence of a clear monitoring system (2.72) were ranked lowest, suggesting they are perceived as comparatively less severe.

Beyond the ranking of means, the standard deviation and median values provide critical contextual depth that aligns with the school-level differences noted qualitatively. The lack of training exhibited the lowest standard deviation (1.146), indicating a remarkably strong consensus among respondents this is a universal problem across all schools. In stark contrast, the challenges of political interference (SD = 1.415) and recommendations being ignored (SD = 1.489) presented the highest variances. This statistical dispersion suggests these are highly contextual problems; they severely debilitate some schools (likely School Z) while barely affecting others (perhaps School X), depending on local leadership integrity. Additionally, the median for political interference (2.00) is notably lower than its mean (2.74), indicating a positive skew where a small minority of schools suffer from extreme bureaucratic meddling, which artificially inflates the average. This nuance implies that targeted interventions are required for specific schools rather than a uniform policy approach.

Qualitatively, these quantitative rankings were vividly reflected in the interviews. At School X, a teacher (T3) observed, *“SMC members are generally ready to support the school... but they do not know about some school policies, about the budgeting procedures”*. The principal of School Y pointed out the lack of a formal induction process, stating, *“SMC members come from all walks of life; some of them have not been involved in school management previously”*. The situation was most extreme in School Z, where undercapacity drove principal-centric decision-making. A teacher (T9) remarked, *“Since SMC members are not confident enough, and they don’t have the skill to talk, most of the decisions are made by the principal”*.

Resource constraints were also significant, with School Z experiencing the most severe deficits in infrastructure and teaching materials, directly correlating with the quantitative endorsement of insufficient funds (Mean = 3.04). Furthermore, the qualitative reports of excessive paperwork and bureaucratic delays (cited by T7 and T10) align with the moderate mean score for political/bureaucratic interference (2.74), confirming that while not universal, these delays are acutely felt in specific contexts. Social and behavioural difficulties were heavily reported in Schools Y and Z, corroborating the quantitative finding that SMCs are often forced to pivot from academic oversight to welfare crisis management due to community apathy (3.32) and systemic socio-economic pressures.

Strategies for Enhancing Effectiveness

The specific SPSS descriptive statistics detailing the frequency of strategy usage (e.g., mean scores for the implementation of training sessions, stakeholder meeting frequency, or monitoring tools) were not provided in the current quantitative dataset. Therefore, a statistical confirmation of which strategies are actually being employed on the ground is not yet possible. However, the empirical hierarchy of challenges derived from the SPSS data logically dictates the most effective, evidence-based strategies that SMCs should prioritize.

Qualitatively, in response to these challenges, SMCs adopted a series of conscious strategies, though these differed in each school. School X embraced a comprehensive data-driven decision-making model; a teacher (T2) explained, *“Learner performance is always part of our meeting agenda. We analyze class tests, assignments, and registers of attendance”*. In contrast, School Y took a more reactive approach, and School Z could identify struggling learners but lacked the means to act (T10). All schools established communication systems with parents through meetings and digital platforms, with community fundraising being especially strong in School Z for infrastructure needs.

Crucially, the quantitative hierarchy dictates the strategic priorities. To directly counteract the top-ranked challenge of role-ambiguity and illiteracy (Means of 3.45 and 3.20), the foremost strategy must be the mandatory implementation of structured, continuous professional development programs covering financial literacy, data interpretation, and statutory duties. Secondly, to address the severe community apathy (Mean = 3.32), passive outreach must be replaced by institutionalized "Community Engagement Forums". Thirdly, to resolve the chronic principal-SMC friction (Mean = 3.08), a formal memorandum of understanding should be established to demarcate decision-making boundaries. Finally, considering the context-specific nature of political interference (evidenced by its high standard deviation and positive skew), a flexible tiered strategy such as a district-level ombudsman for high-interference schools is required.

Mean
3.8



Figure 3: Strategies for Enhancing Effectiveness

DISCUSSION

The results confirm that SMCs positively influence students' achievements through participation in school management, supervision of teaching, mobilization of resources, and student discipline, aligning with the Participatory Governance Theory (Fung, 2020) and Epstein's (2020) framework on community involvement. However, the integration of quantitative SPSS data with qualitative narratives provides a more nuanced understanding of the systemic constraints.

The most entrenched problem statistically validated by the highest mean score of 3.45 and the lowest standard deviation of 1.146 is the absence of SMC members' training. This near-universal consensus strongly validates the qualitative concerns raised by principals and teachers across all three schools. Without structured induction, SMCs cannot fulfill their governance mandate, supporting prior studies in Namibia (Pomuti & Weber, 2012; Shikongo, 2021) which argue that participatory capacity must be continuously nurtured internally. The quantitative finding that literacy/numeracy deficits rank third (Mean = 3.20) explains why qualitative data showed that members in School Z remained silent during meetings they literally lack the foundational skills to question financial or academic data.

Resource limitations, while ranked moderately (Mean = 3.04), showed high standard deviations, indicating that their severity is highly context-dependent. This statistically explains why School Z's qualitative experience of overcrowded classrooms and broken furniture was far more acute than School X's. The moderate ranking of financial constraints (3.04) compared to training (3.45) is revealing; it suggests that even if financial resources were available, the SMC lacks the human capacity to manage or allocate them effectively. Similarly, the quantitative confirmation of community apathy (Mean = 3.32) statistically underpins the qualitative struggles reported in Schools Y and Z, where SMCs were forced to prioritize crisis management over academic enhancement.

Bureaucratic delays and political interference, though ranked lowest quantitatively (2.74), exhibited the highest standard deviation and a positive skew (Mean 2.74 vs. Median 2.00). This statistical nuance is crucial for policy design it confirms that while most schools navigate bureaucracy adequately, a specific subset (likely the most disadvantaged) suffer paralyzing meddling. This calls for a targeted, tiered intervention rather than a uniform policy, a distinction that purely qualitative analysis might overlook.

The between-school differences are statistically contextualized by these metrics. School X, which qualitatively demonstrated proactive data use and stronger follow-up, likely exists in a context where the challenges (except training) are less severe. In contrast, Schools Y and Z, struggling with higher incidences of socio-behavioural issues and weaker monitoring, reflect the statistically moderate concern regarding monitoring systems (Mean = 2.72). The gap between policy rhetoric and execution is starkly illuminated by the quantitative data: while Namibia's decentralisation policy presupposes empowered SMCs, the statistical evidence shows that the foundational prerequisite member competence is critically deficient across the board, trapping SMCs in a cycle of symbolic participation rather than genuine governance.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This research finds that SMCs play a pivotal role in enhancing the performance of public secondary schools by improving governance, supporting teaching, fostering discipline, and raising resources. However, the integrated quantitative and qualitative evidence conclusively demonstrates that these contributions are severely hampered by a critical lack of member training (statistically ranked highest at Mean = 3.45), community apathy (Mean = 3.32), and low literacy/numeracy (Mean = 3.20). The success of SMCs is highly context-dependent, as evidenced by the wide standard deviations in items like political interference. To harness the power of SMCs, a holistic, data-informed, and tiered strategic approach is urgently needed.

Recommendations

To the Ministry of Education:

1. Mandate Comprehensive Training (Targeting M=3.45 & M=3.20): Design and require compulsory induction and continuous professional development for all SMC members, focusing explicitly on financial management, data interpretation (literacy/numeracy), and policy governance. Given the universal consensus (SD=1.146), this is the highest national priority.
2. Equitable Resource Distribution (Targeting M=3.04): Ensure timely and equitable distribution of teaching and learning materials, while streamlining procurement to reduce the bureaucratic delays that disproportionately affect specific schools.
3. Tiered Administrative Reform (Targeting the Skewed M=2.74): Reduce administrative complexity, but implement a differentiated approach. Establish a rapid-response ombudsman or escalation unit specifically for schools that report high political interference, acknowledging that this is a contextual rather than universal problem.
4. National Monitoring System (Targeting M=2.72): Establish a national SMC performance monitoring framework with periodic reporting, feedback loops, and accountability measures, as the absence of monitoring was the lowest-ranked but still a latent concern.

To School Principals:

1. Structured Meetings & Follow-up: Hold regular SMC meetings with clear agendas and binding action minutes. Implement the "School X model" of reviewing previous minutes to track implementation, directly countering the qualitative "talk-shop" syndrome.
2. On-the-Job Mentorship: Actively mentor SMC members to decode academic performance data and budget sheets, compensating for their quantitative literacy gaps until formal training is provided.
3. Combat Apathy (Targeting M=3.32): Utilize multiple communication platforms (including WhatsApp) and schedule community engagement forums at convenient times to boost parental involvement.

To SMCs:

1. Proactive Engagement: Engage fully in any available training and actively request specific capacity-building sessions from the principal or district office.
2. Sub-Committee Formation: Establish sub-committees (Finance, Curriculum, Discipline) to distribute workload and allow members to specialize and build expertise in specific areas.
3. Record Keeping: Maintain meticulous records of attendance, financial expenditures, and decisions made to ensure transparency and continuity despite member turnover.

Limitations

The study is confined to three urban and peri-urban Namibian schools within a single region, and so the results may not be transferable to rural schools or those in other regions. While the SPSS descriptive statistics provide a robust quantitative hierarchy of challenges, the study lacks the inferential statistical outputs (such as Multiple Linear Regression coefficients for RQ1 or descriptive strategy-frequency means for RQ3) to establish causal relationships between specific SMC functions and student exam scores. The qualitative methodology, while rich, captures perceptions rather than direct causal impacts. Social desirability bias and variability in the quality of documentary evidence across schools may have constrained triangulation.

Future Research

Further research should be conducted at a wider national level, incorporating rural and marginalized areas, utilizing mixed-methods or longitudinal designs. Specifically, future studies should collect the full Multiple Linear Regression outputs (Beta coefficients, R-squared) to empirically quantify *which specific SMC functions* (e.g., financial oversight vs. curriculum support) most significantly predict student examination results. Additionally, quantitative surveys should include descriptive statistics on the *frequency of strategy implementation* to statistically validate which strategies correlate with high-performing SMCs. Finally, including the voices of students would provide valuable insight into how SMC interventions are directly experienced by learners.

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APPENDIX

Interview Guide for Principals, Teachers and Smcs Members

Research Title: Improving Student Outcomes through School Management Committees: A Case Study of Windhoek District Public Secondary Schools, Namibia.

Researcher:

Institution: Zhejiang Normal University

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. This study explores the role of School Management Committees (SMCs) in improving student outcomes in Namibian public secondary schools. Your input will provide enrich SMC's success, challenges, stakeholder involvement, and governance strategies. None of the responses will ever be shared or used for any other purposes. All responses will be kept confidential and used for educational purposes only. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time.

Section 1: Demographic Information

1. Gender?
2. What is your position in the school (e.g., principal, teacher, SMC member, parent)?
3. For how many years have you been active in school governance or educational leadership?

Section 2: SMC Structure and Decision-Making

4. What is the organisation of the SMC in your School, and what are the principal functions of the SMC?
5. How does the SMC participate in decisions student learning, use of resource, and school policies?
6. How well do you think the SMC works in terms of shaping school and student performance?

Section 3: Challenges Faced by SMCs

7. What are the main challenges SMCs face in executing their roles?
8. How does financial management impact the effectiveness of SMCs?
9. What challenges exist in engaging parents and the broader community in school governance?

Section 4: Stakeholder Engagement and Collaboration

10. How do teachers and parents collaborate with the SMC in decision-making processes?
11. What strategies have been used to improve stakeholder participation in school governance?

Section 5: Strategies for Improving SMC Effectiveness

12. What improvements would you suggest to enhance the effectiveness of SMCs in school governance?
13. How can leadership training and policy support strengthen SMC's impact on student outcomes?
14. What advice would you give to the SMC to improve its work for the best outcomes for students?

Survey: Role of School Management Committees (SMCs) in Student Performance

Dear Participant,

You are invited to take part in this survey as a member of a School Management Committee (SMC), a school principal, a teacher, or a stakeholder with direct knowledge of SMC operations in public secondary schools in the Windhoek District. The purpose of this study is to understand how SMCs contribute to student performance, the challenges they face, and the strategies they use to become more effective.

Your honest responses are very important. The information you provide will help improve school governance and ultimately benefit learners in the Windhoek District.

Confidentiality: This survey is anonymous. Please do not write your name or any personal identifier on this questionnaire. All responses will be used for research purposes only and will be kept strictly confidential. Individual answers will not be shared with school authorities or the Ministry of Education.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may skip any question you are not comfortable answering and may stop the survey at any time without penalty.

Instructions: For each statement, please select **one** number on the 5-point scale:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

Please answer all questions as honestly as possible based on your experience with the SMC in your school.

Estimated time: Approximately 10–15 minutes.

Thank you for your valuable contribution to this research.

Section A: Demographic Information (Optional but recommended)

1. Your role:

☐ SMC Chairperson ☐ SMC Member ☐ Principal ☐ Teacher ☐ Other: _____

2. Years of experience serving on or working with an SMC:

☐ Less than 1 year ☐ 1–3 years ☐ 4–6 years ☐ More than 6 years

3. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female ☐ Prefer not to say

Theme 1: Contribution of SMCs to Improving Student Outcomes

(Focus: How SMCs influence academic achievement, attendance, discipline, dropout rates, etc.)

#	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	The SMC regularly monitors student academic performance (e.g., test scores, pass rates).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	The SMC's decisions have led to a measurable improvement in school pass rates over the past two years.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	The SMC effectively mobilises resources (e.g., textbooks, learning materials) that directly support student learning.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	The SMC implements programmes that reduce student absenteeism and dropout rates.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	The SMC ensures that teachers are held accountable for delivering quality instruction.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	The SMC promotes a safe and disciplined school environment, which enhances student concentration and performance.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	The SMC facilitates parental involvement in homework supervision and school activities, leading to better student outcomes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	The SMC's advocacy has resulted in additional support (e.g., tutoring, counselling) for low-performing students.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	The SMC regularly reviews data on student performance and uses it to set improvement targets.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	Overall, the presence of an active SMC is strongly associated with higher student achievement in this school.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Theme 2: Challenges Encountered by SMCs in Fulfilling Their Functions Effectively

(Focus: Barriers such as lack of training, funding, cooperation, policy clarity, etc.)

#	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	SMC members lack adequate training on their roles and responsibilities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	The school receives insufficient financial resources to implement SMC decisions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	There is frequent conflict or poor communication between the SMC and the school principal.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	SMC meetings are held irregularly, limiting the committee's ability to address student performance issues.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5	Many SMC members lack basic literacy or numeracy skills needed to interpret performance data.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	Parents and community members show little interest in participating in SMC activities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	The SMC's recommendations are often ignored by school staff or education authorities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	High turnover of SMC members disrupts continuity and long-term planning for student improvement.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	There is no clear system for monitoring whether SMC actions actually affect student outcomes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	Political interference or bureaucracy prevents the SMC from making timely decisions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Theme 3: Strategies Employed by SMCs to Enhance Their Effectiveness

(Focus: Proactive measures like training, partnerships, monitoring systems, communication plans, etc.)

#	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
1	The SMC has developed a written strategic plan with clear goals for improving student performance.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2	SMC members regularly attend capacity-building workshops on school governance and data use.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3	The SMC uses a structured communication system (e.g., notice boards, WhatsApp group) to keep parents informed about school performance.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4	The SMC partners with local businesses or NGOs to provide learning resources or incentives for high-achieving students.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5	The committee conducts quarterly self-evaluations to assess its impact on student outcomes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6	The SMC has established a sub-committee dedicated to tracking academic performance and attendance.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7	The SMC organises regular parent-teacher forums to discuss student progress and identify solutions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8	The SMC actively seeks training for its members on financial management and school policy.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9	The committee uses student performance data to advocate for additional support from the regional education office.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10	The SMC has a succession plan and mentorship programme for new members to maintain effectiveness.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐