

# Exploring the Influence of Corporate Governance Pillars in Promoting Sustainable Learning in Zimbabwean Rural Schools

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**Abstract:** - Research on contemporary discourses on educational management methodologies has given the contextual realities contributing to low-grade infrastructure development and maintenance in schools. This paper sought to gain insight into the corporate governance pillars' influence in promoting sustainable learning in Zimbabwean rural schools. Qualitative approach guided the data generation, analysis and discussion. Sources of data that included conference proceedings, journal articles, textbooks, newspapers and policy circulars were purposively sampled. Researchers were chiefly aided by literature method and critical policy analysis in data generation. Generated was analysed in concurrence with emerging themes in line with the requirements of research integrity. Findings from the literature revealed that corporate governance through stakeholders' responsibility can promote transparency and accountability in school activities. Thus stakeholders' actions affect the school's learning environment either positively or negatively. Also, when in control of the system stakeholders can create a favourable environment for a well-organized development of learning infrastructure and resources. In conclusion, the interaction of accountability, transparency, control and responsibility in school management creates an environment that promotes sustainable learning in rural schools. We recommend a policy shift placing greater significance on corporate governance pillars as the cornerstone for effective and efficient management in rural schools.

**Keywords:** Corporate governance, pillars, rural school, sustainable learning

## I. INTRODUCTION

Most countries world over regard education as the most strategic sector in their national development, since it bestows into citizens the relevant knowledge, skills and values (Ali, 2017). In this regard, there has been a remarkable transformation of Zimbabwean learners' status both in education and at home (Machingura, 2006). Education policies were crafted as a response to the different forms of discrimination that the order of the day in the colonial era. Against this background, the government attempted to shrug off the stigma associated with primary and secondary schools in rural areas (Mapolisa & Chirimuuta, 2012). This enhances and value-adds learning in schools irrespective of their

location (Maluwa-Banda, 2003; Shizha 2013; Shizha & Kariwo, 2011). Therefore, this brought to the fore the issue of poor management of resources and its influence on learners' performance in learning activities and national examinations. However, the above is difficult to explain without touching on issues to do with corporate governance. The glaring indications of fiscal operations and infrastructure mismanagement resulted in the crafting of education policies guided by society's expectations (Gonye & Moyo, 2015; Muchenje, 2012; Ndikwe & Owino, 2016; Ozturk, 2002). According to the Ministry of Education, Arts, Sports and Culture (2004) the crafted policy guidelines were geared to foster learners' open-mindedness and personal esteem.

This requires a trend skewed towards most societies agreeing to take on inclusivity as a prerequisite for achieving the principle of 'Education for All' (Sibanda, 2018). The inclusion of stakeholders such as parents and guardians in the management of schools gave high priority to exposing disadvantaged learners to sustainable learning (Ali, 2017; Chikoko, 2008). Under the guise of cost recovery measures on incurred expenditures relevant stakeholders such as churches, parents and guardians were included in the running of schools under the guidance of the Education Amendment Act 1991 with Statutory Instrument 87 of 1992, Statutory Instrument 70 of 1993 and Education Amendment Act of 2006 (Chapter 25: 04) offering operational directions (Chivore, 1995; Gutuza, 2015). These statutory instruments gave birth to the School Development Committee in government-aided public rural and urban schools in Zimbabwe with its members elected from the parents and guardians of learners (Moyo, 2010; Nyandoro, Mapfumo & Makoni, 2013). However, most rural societies are depicted as being illiterate, ensuing in parents or guardians being inept to promote learners' acquisition of competencies (Du Plessis, 2014). We, consequently contend that in this study rural schools are not seen in the context of a deficit as societies within these schools are presumed capable of sustaining advancement initiatives (Chung, 1988; Hlalele, 2014; Ngwenya, 2020). With this in mind, we noted with concern that there was a dearth of studies on the influence of corporate governance pillars in promoting quality sustainable

learning in Zimbabwean rural schools. It is against this background that we sought to contribute towards the closure of this gap in sources through making available answers to the following question: ***How do corporate governance pillars promote sustainable learning in Zimbabwean rural schools?***

II. METHODOLOGY

The qualitative approach guided this study targeting for an in-depth indulgence in the issue under investigation (Borg & Gall, 2012; Chauraya, 2014; Mutemeri & Mugweni, 2005; Ncube, 2013a). Informed by School Development Committee’s mandate of spearheading infrastructural maintenance and improvement, most schools in rural areas still trail behind (Ncube, 2013b; Ncube, 2014; Nyandoro, Mapfumo & Makoni, 2013). This has compelled us to focus more on rural schools, with specific reference to how the community as a stakeholder in promoting sustainable learning. Sources on school administration and corporate governance such as relevant journals, textbooks, newspapers and policy documents were purposeful sampled (Makina, 2020; Maree, 2015). Inductive analysis permitted themes and categories to surface rather than being enacted before data generation and analysis (Miles & Huberman, 2002; Patton 2012; Swanepoel & Bruwer, 2020). Also, there were consistency and credibility checks to confirm that the category depictions belong to the allocated themes (Maree, 2015). Ethical considerations set for the study were adhered to, in the data generation and presentation (Ngwenya, 2020). Also, in the process of data analysis bias minimised and sources were cited.

III. DISCUSSION

This section with the view to provide answers to the issue under investigation focuses on the following themes: theoretical lens; control of the learning environment and its contribution towards promoting sustainable learning; accountability as a cornerstone for school management and transparency and its influence on promoting sustainable learning in rural schools.

*Theoretical lens*

This section considers rural schools social establishments, where different stakeholders (parents, guardians, school administration, teachers and responsible authority) in conformity with ‘Ubuntu/Unhu’ values influence conscientiously and cohesively in the school management (Nikolova & Arsić, 2017; Seidel, 2010). This calls for an infusion of the stakeholder-centred approach as part of the lens, since it is founded on this basis because an organization function through multi-faceted interactions and networks with interested parties (Prozesky, 2010). The stakeholder approach posits a concerted and interactive methodology to the rural school and the key stakeholders within the context of their interests (McAlister, Ferrell & Ferrell, 2003; Phillips, 1997). It infers that lawfully all stakeholders have a share of roles and responsibilities, with the view to contribute towards the promotion of sustainable learning in rural schools (Abdulkadir & Alifiah, 2020; Rossouw, 2010). For example, parents and guardians through their School Development Committee provide rural schools with the much-needed infrastructure and environment to enhance sustainable learning.

In the same thought the agency approach, founded on principal-agent interaction guides us in the distinguishing between the school administration and society’s responsibilities and roles (Fama, 1980; Fama & Jensen, 1983). Thus, parents’ representatives come in with an oversight role, thereby controlling routine school developmental processes by looking at financial reporting procedures and management activities (Miras-Rodríguez, Martínez-Martínez & Escobar-Pérez, 2018). Therefore, this brings legitimacy in creating a suitable and sustainable place for the rural school to operate in a guide by ethics and beliefs of a given society (Odoemelam & Okafor, 2018). This discussion has a holistic look at the course of action, which promotes sustainable learning in rural schools (Bisoux, 2004; Bryson 2018; Zuckweiler & Rosacker, 2014). Therefore this calls for the indulgence into how the interaction of school governance pillars in figure 1 promotes sustainable learning in rural schools in Zimbabwe.

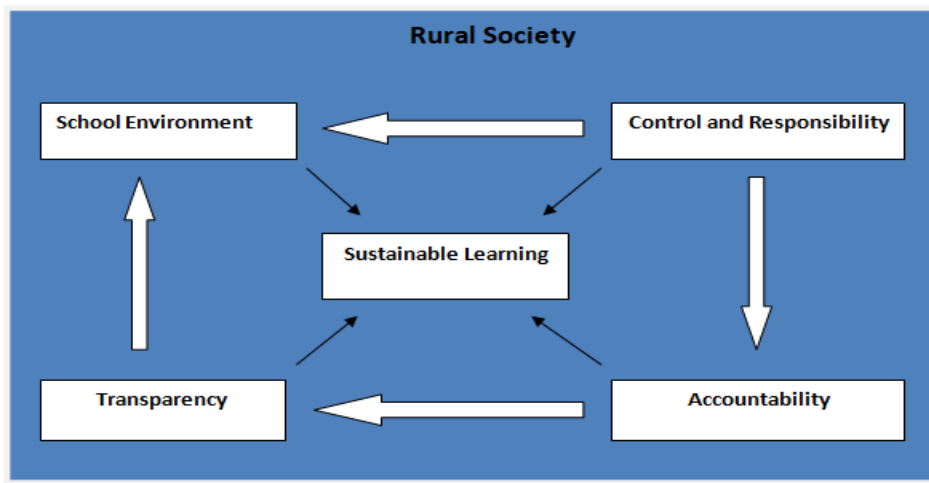


Figure 1: Interaction of school governance pillars in promoting sustainable learning

Figure 1 presents a picture of how a school set up is immersed in a society with dynamic nature of relationships and legislative practices (Cashore, 2002; Garriga & Melé, 2004; Rezaee, 2009; Swick & Williams, 2006; Thompson, 2017). Under this scenario where the central government decentralized decision-making powers, the School Development Committee formed the moral cornerstone in promoting constructive corporate governance practices in rural schools (Omondi & Nyenyi, 2016; Teen, 2008).

Hence decentralized decision-making powers enable the rural community to control the running of developmental activities, to increase accountability in rural schools (Audit Commission, 2009; Leithwood & Menzies, 1998). Thus this enables us to explore how stakeholders (parents, guardians, responsible authority, teachers and school administration) link strategic planning with the effective control in promoting sustainable learning (Otley, 1994). This concurs with Abid, Khan, Rafiq and Ahmed (2014) who calls for accountability of all stakeholders in their involvement in rural schools' developmental activities. Hence these stakeholders are guided by prescribed management strategies and morals targeted at sustainable learning in rural schools. In support Miles (2011) depicted that this theory worries with the appropriate associations between the different stakeholders through the allocation of roles and responsibilities in the administration and control of rural schools (Friedman & Miles, 2006). In this regard, stakeholders place much emphasis on the flow of effective communication and information for them to correct any deviation from set goals (Hewege, 2012).

It is therefore of utmost importance to note that sustainable learning in this discussion is more than just focusing on the retention of knowledge and skills by learners, rather, it deals with the ongoing, focussed, approachable and hands-on learning (Eskici, 2019; Jackson, 2011) in rural schools. Thus sustainable learning generates and thrives on teaching methodology, which instils in competencies to enable learners to contribute towards making their society's advancement (Hays & Reinders, 2020). Schools depend on the ability of the society to create an environment where teachers and learners appreciate the importance of shared vision to achieve set goals (Boulanger, 2019; Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Cherkowski, 2012; Mullins, 2018; Sturmberg, 2018). For this, to be a reality there is a need for the existence of a relationship between the community (families) and school administration and teachers (Paat, 2013; Soyer, 2019). Under this scenario, each society outlines its expectations from the learning activities happening in their rural schools. It is against this background parents and guardians of learners at a particular school select representatives amongst themselves to form a School Development Committee mandated to oversee the inculcation of their morals and interests in the learning activities (Hashish, Hamouda & Taha, 2015; Nziramasanga, 1999).

From a management perspective, this committee is mandated with the decision-making function, including the setting of strategic plans for the school and to second its members to

various committees such as the finance committee (Madziyire, 2010; Mpofo, 2008). The committee centres its activities on the development dimension and directions as a means of uninterrupted enhancement of core practices, which promote sustainable learning (Ngwenya & Pretorius, 2013). In this regard, the school management is organized in a way that transforms the existing static structural interactions into dynamic relationships that promote sustainable learning. However, not much is documented on school governance pillars rural schools can employ in their quest to eliminate dysfunctional conflicts in infrastructure maintenance and improvement (Morris-Rothschild & Brassard, 2006). Hence the inclusion of an integrative approach (Nikolova & Arsić, 2017) incorporating the stakeholders and agency approach to form a lens through, which the issue under investigation is discussed.

#### *Accountability and transparency as the cornerstone for sustainable learning in rural schools*

In this discussion, education involves the wholesome process of imparting lifelong competencies to the learners' benefit and the society at large (Ball & Exley 2010; Moyo & Modiba, 2013; Logan & Beoku-Betts, 2001; Masaka & Chingombe, 2013). With this in mind, the government established School Development Committees consisting of five members elected by the parents and guardians of learners, head, deputy head and a teacher at the school in terms of section 69 of the Amendment Education Act of 1991 in public schools (Gutuza, 2015; Zvobgo, 1997). The committee created the opportunity for parents in a transparent and accountable manner to be involved in the improvement and maintenance of the availability of resources needed in the school to promote respectable academic performance (Huafang & Jianguo, 2007; Mpindu, 2012). Thus this places on the shoulders of the stakeholders the responsibility to undertake actions and provide an account of those actions that affect the learning environment (Bathula, 2008; Deegan, 2004; Gary, Owen & Maunders, 1991; Zairi & Peters, 2002). However, this calls for accountability amongst the stakeholders, which contributes either directly or indirectly towards the competent management of resources and reducing their expropriation by those in the corridors of power (Omondi & Nyenyi, 2016). This is grounded in social accountability, which calls for a decrease in information irregularities between the knowledgeable and uninformed stakeholders in school management.

It is against this background that stakeholders through a legal framework adopt sound financial sustainability measures and practices targeted at promoting sustainable learning. This committee is responsible for planning and implanting the school financial plan, accounting and reporting back to other stakeholders and parents according to policy (Wang, Tsai & Lin, 2013). Thus, the financial committee acts as an overseer, offering check and balances in the financial and reporting procedures (Wu & Li, 2015). In executing their mandate the committee is not influenced by the school administration and

its findings are important in the decision-making process (Tricker, 2015). Thus, this committee ensures that accountability, responsibility and transparency are at the core of the internal financial controls and procurement of supplies according to the plan to promote sustainable learning in rural schools. This structure provides a platform through, which short and long term education goals can be put into practice, monitored and achieved (West, 2009).

#### *Management control and its role in promoting sustainable learning*

In sustainable learning activities, it is crucial to acknowledge that parents by their natural right as first gate-keepers of children are naturally the primary educators who at times make decisions that affect their growth and development (Bude, 2005; Parker, 2000). Hence as local school governance committee, this enables them to create a strong foundation for quality sustainable learning. In this context, the committee will in one way or the other advancing on behalf of parents and guardians their expectations, desires and opportunities (Nardine & Morris, 1991). However, this requires a school head and teachers who view the local community as a meaningful team member in school governance and not solely as fund-raising, infrastructure construction and face-lift advocates (Banks, 2005; Chikoko, 2008). It is against this background that the School Development Committee through its sub-committees assumes roles and responsibility in activities such as the formulation of vision, mission statement and income-generating strategies (Fiske & Ladd, 2000). In this regard, their involvement in these activities to enhance accountability in all activities undertaken by rural schools (Herman 2004). From this perspective parents and guardians are viewed as one of the key stakeholders in the decision-making committee, resulting in them contributing immensely to the promotion of sustainable learning (Gordon, 2004; Leithwood & Menzies, 1998).

The involvement of parents and guardians in school activities empowers them to actively participate in school governance through grassroots-based decision-making (Watson 2005). This form of participatory democracy leads to pronounced efficacy within the learning activities (Astiz, Wiseman & Baker, 2002; Harber & Muthukrishna, 2000; Schlechty 1991). This creates a favourable environment for teachers to make informed pedagogical decisions that are closest to learners' needs and to increase their pledge towards promoting sustainable learning (Bastianni, 2008; Hess, 1991; Hystek & Louw, 2009; Lundahl, 2002). However, in light of the low levels of education among rural parents and guardians are not expected to make "difficult" curriculum decisions, such as those concerning instructional methods, the selection of set books and assessment (Chikoko, 2008; Powers, 2010). There exists a sense of shared roles and responsibility between the key stakeholders in mentoring learners to make them ready for the next levels of education and training.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

We acknowledge that governance is a modern administrative tool that makes use of previous experiences and introduces new ways through available resources to improve the efficiency of an organisation (Al-Ajlouni, 2020). From this discussion, we concluded that the interaction of the governance pillars namely: control and responsibility, school environment, transparency and accountability, which guide operations of School Development Committee promote sustainable learning in rural schools. It is recommended that there be a policy shift that places greater significance on corporate governance pillars as the cornerstone for effective and efficient rural schools' management as a way of achieving sustainable learning. For further research, we recommend that similar studies be done in urban and peri-urban schools for the relevant stakeholders to compare findings and come up with relevant policies on roles and responsibilities of the School Development Committee in promoting sustainable learning.

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