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The Role of School Development Committees in School Governance and Development in Mission Schools in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

School Development Committees (SDCs) occupy a central but contested position in Zimbabwean school governance because they connect parents and communities with school leadership and the responsible authority. This position is particularly complex in mission schools, where denominational ownership and government regulation operate alongside statutory parent participation. The article examines how SDCs contribute to governance and school development in mission schools and assesses whether the existing legal framework provides sufficiently clear authority, accountability and coordination. A literature-based qualitative and documentary approach is used, drawing on recent academic studies, foundational Zimbabwean scholarship, legislation, regulations and policy guidance. According to the analysis, SDCs facilitate participatory decision making, fiscal accountability, resource mobilization, infrastructure development, and community representation, but their effectiveness is often hampered by inadequate legal and financial literacy, lack of resources, unequal access to information, and conflicts with the school leadership or responsible authority. The legal framework ensures that SDCs have been recognized, but it also leads to interdependence, since the responsible authority has become essential for setting up and running the governance system of the school. In mission schools, such an approach may encourage collaboration, but it may also result in duplication of authority over financial management, development planning, procurement processes, and institution identity. Therefore, it can be argued that the key issue of governance is not the lack of SDCs but unclear relationships between statutory parent governance and denominational and professional school management.

Keywords: School Development Committees; school governance; mission schools; responsible authorities; school development; Zimbabwe; Education Act

INTRODUCTION

Background to School Governance in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwean school governance has seen an increase in the number of structures where both community members and parents are involved in the decision-making process. In particular, SDCs have become the key structures used in this practice. According to Dhliwayo (2021), the process of decentralization has contributed to this process leading to increased local ownership. At the same time, the implication of such participation may vary depending on the specific circumstances. For example, according to Chikoko (2008), parent governors are often engaged in financial activities but do not speak about other management decisions. Recently, it has also been revealed that participation of individuals is formally conditioned by awareness, confidence, and access to information (Chidarikire & Hlalele, 2022). It is necessary to note that, according to Dzimiri and Dzimiri (2026), the network of community governance includes parents and other traditional and community leaders. Therefore, the key question here is the effectiveness of SDCs and their institutional capacity.

The role of SDCs in relation to finances and development activities has been discussed in many scientific papers. In particular, ineffective budgeting in secondary schools, as reported by Njini et al. (2022), results

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from the lack of policy knowledge and budgeting skills of the members of the committee. This statement has been confirmed by another study conducted among 61 respondents where inflation, non-payment of fees, and lack of financial literacy were identified as main problems (Njini et al., 2025). As was underlined by Ndongwe and Mukucha (2024), the committee is responsible for the infrastructure and procurement and, thus, plays an important role in development activities. However, as was noted by Dzvimbo et al. (2020), the condition of legitimacy of community-based governance lies in accountability and transparency.

Mission Schools and the Governance Context

Mission schools represent another layer of governance because the shared authority here belongs to the church or denomination and governance of education belongs to the government. As Muderedzwa (2022) noted, the Catholic schools in Zimbabwe have a distinctive moral and religious mission even though they fall under the regulations of national education system. Masengwe and Dube (2023) showed that the same could be said about adaptation of Church of Christ schools to the emerging educational challenges. Additionally, Methodist mission schools emerged as institutions that have social and community mission apart from the academic one (Masvotore, 2024). The findings of Hlatywayo (2017) indicated that leadership in United Church of Christ mission schools was determined by context and denomination. Therefore, mission schools are governed through the institution of shared space that cannot be investigated separately from each other.

This feature becomes especially important when there are overlaps in the scope of governance. The author Kurisa (2015) mentioned the cases of conflicts in Catholic run schools that had to do with financial management, SDC functions, staffing and division of tasks between the head and responsible authorities. Conflicts about accountability, infrastructure and SDC representation were also reported by parents in mission boarding schools (Mandikiana & Murairwa, 2022). Samutereko (2026) found out that there are eight common sources of conflicts among Anglican boarding schools, which include: governance and leadership; financial management and accountability; procurement and administration; communication and coordination; compliance and institutional duality; resources allocation and infrastructure; admissions; and human resource and well-being of the personnel. Similarly, Pilo et al. (2024) have found out that overlapping of governance functions may bring about uncertainties for the principals of faith-based schools in South Africa. Therefore, mission schools have special characteristics of governance other than being an alternative form of school governance.

Problem and Knowledge Gap

There is a current presence of quite some literature in Zimbabwe in regard to SDCs, decentralization, budgeting, involvement of parents and school development. However, most of the research carried out on SDCs does not separate the type of school under discussion on the basis of the identity and authority of the responsible party (Dhliwayo, 2021). There have been several studies done on mission schools, mainly taking into account their religious identity, leadership and perceptions about the school held by the parents but not from the angle of SDCs (Muderedzwa, 2022). Kurisa (2015) provides a piece of research on the issues of conflict among Catholic authorities, principals and SDCs; however, his study is biased geographically and denominationally. An example of the recent research on the overlapping of authority in Anglican mission schools is provided by Samutereko (2026), though he does not take into account the multidenominational aspect of SDC statutory authority.

Purpose and Objectives of the Article

The purpose of this article is to critically examine the role of School Development Committees (SDCs) in the governance and development of mission schools in Zimbabwe, with particular attention to the statutory framework governing SDCs and their relationships with school leadership, parents and church-based responsible authorities. The article approaches SDC effectiveness as both a legal-governance issue and a question of meaningful community participation.

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The specific objectives of the article are to:

- Examine the statutory and regulatory framework governing School Development Committees in Zimbabwe.
- Analyse the role of SDCs in participatory school governance, decision-making, accountability and transparency.
- Assess the contribution of SDCs to school development, resource mobilisation, financial management and improvement of school infrastructure.
- Examine the relationships between SDCs, school leadership, parents and church-based responsible authorities within mission schools.
- Identify governance challenges affecting the effectiveness of SDCs and propose policy and institutional measures for strengthening their role in mission-school governance and development.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

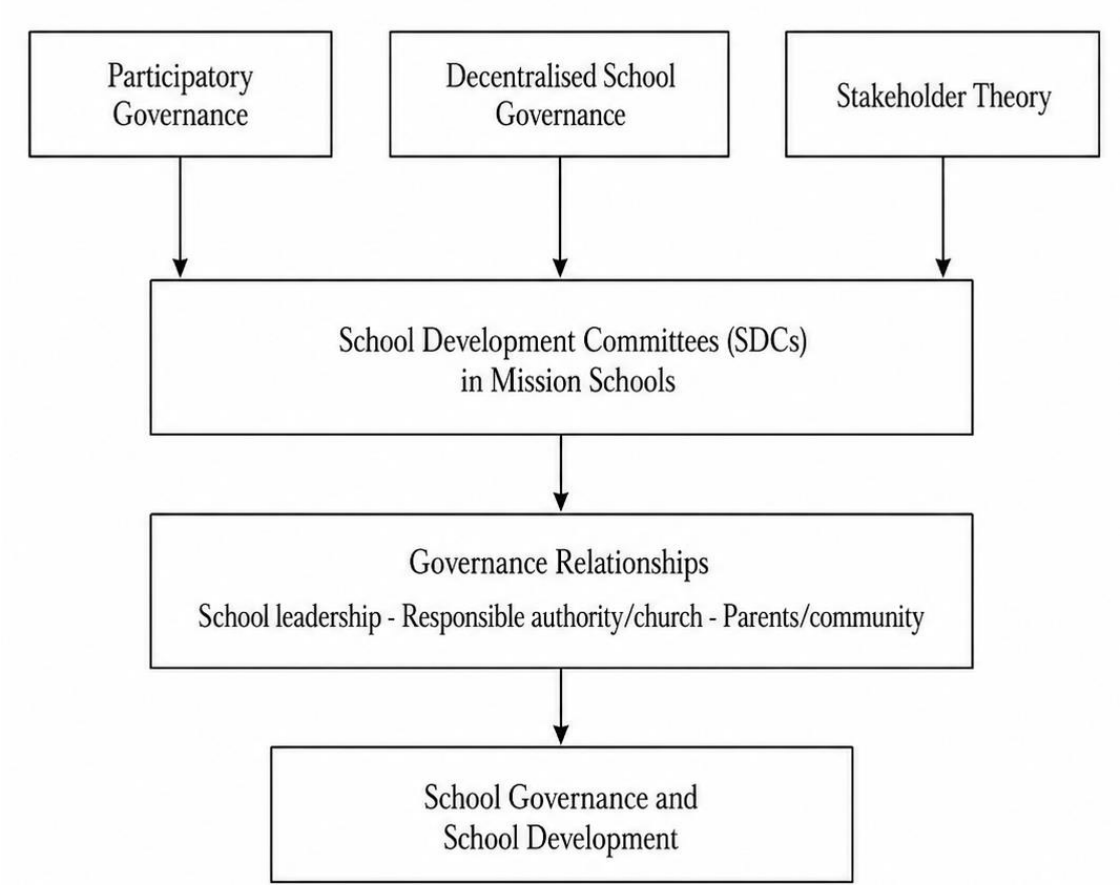


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework for Analysing School Development Committee Governance in Zimbabwean Mission Schools

Source: Author's conceptualisation based on the reviewed literature.

Figure 1 presents the theoretical framework used to analyse the role of School Development Committees in mission-school governance and development in Zimbabwe. The framework brings together participatory governance, decentralised school governance and stakeholder theory as the three main perspectives guiding the analysis. Participatory governance explains the importance of parent and community involvement in decision-making, accountability and school development processes. Decentralised school governance

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focuses on the transfer of selected responsibilities to school-level structures and the extent to which SDCs can exercise meaningful authority within this arrangement. Stakeholder theory explains the relationships among actors whose interests shape mission-school governance, particularly school leadership, church-based responsible authorities, parents and communities. The framework places SDCs at the centre because they operate at the point where these governance perspectives intersect. Their effectiveness is therefore assessed through the quality of governance relationships surrounding them rather than through their formal existence alone. The final outcome, school governance and school development, reflects the argument that effective SDC participation depends on clear roles, cooperation, accountability and balanced authority among stakeholders. In mission schools, this framework is especially useful because church authority and statutory school governance operate simultaneously and may either complement or constrain one another within the same institutional setting.

Participatory Governance

Participatory governance provides the first analytical lens because SDCs are intended to place parents and communities within school-level decision-making. Mifsud and Wilkins (2025), reviewing 361 publications, identify participation, accountability and stakeholder power as recurring concerns in the international school-governance literature. Davids (2022) states that there cannot be any correlation between structures and democratic practice as power may not be distributed equally between professional management and parent governors. Okyere (2026) found out in his research conducted in Ghana that the membership of the committee could become a tokenism in which members of the committee do not have any decision-making ability in financial matters or any other area. The lack of knowledge became a significant barrier to the involvement of SDC members in Zimbabwe according to Chidarikire and Hlalele (2022). This perspective is relevant to this topic as it contrasts formality with substance and concentrates on those who make decisions, who get information and resources.

In addition, this perspective shows the societal implications of decentralization of participation. According to Gerrard & Savage (2022), the school governance may transfer a lot of responsibility and labour to parents when some forms of participation are more valuable than others. Similar trends were observed by Dhliwayo (2021) concerning Zimbabwe – decentralization of schools may encourage the feeling of local ownership as well as impose costs on the community in the presence of social and economic inequality. According to Quan-Baffour (2020), the majority of parents in governing bodies may work well only if it is accompanied by real participation and not tokenism. Hlanga et al. (2021) observed that parents and school heads had different perspectives about parent involvement in Zimbabwe.

Decentralised School Governance

Decentralised school governance concerns the movement of selected responsibilities from central authorities to local school structures. Chikoko (2007) found that decentralisation in Zimbabwe encouraged ownership but was limited by rigid regulation, unequal power and insufficient stakeholder capacity. Further, according to Dhliwayo (2021), the logic of reform cannot be regarded as consistent since the social environment had a significant effect on the way the members of the SDC understood and fulfilled their responsibilities. In the international aspect, reforms connected with the issue of school autonomy may affect the balance between democratic representation and management competence, Blackmore et al. (2023). The role of local resources and institutions in the process will depend on the possibility of using decentralised procedures, which is proved by Kobayashi and Ogawa (2025). In such a way, the process of decentralisation must be regarded as a result of the negotiations of authority, rather than a transfer of all governmental functions to communities.

The problem of decentralisation is evident especially in cases, when there are enough local resources but professional managers are required to collect the necessary data and perform the corresponding actions. According to Tenha (2022) with the analysis of 12 participants from three Zimbabwean primary schools, misunderstandings between SDC and head duties may result in conflicts despite expectations of cooperation. Chimbunde et al. (2024) note that a reduction in the number of meetings of the committee led to less collaborative purchases and more actions of heads of schools individually. The same point is supported by

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Njini and Guvhu (2025), who claim that formal directions regarding finances are pointless in case the members of SDC are unable to implement them.

Stakeholder Theory and Mission-School Governance

Stakeholder theory is useful because mission-school governance involves several actors with legitimate but

different claims. The Ministry is responsible for setting and regulating national education standards. The responsible authority is the owner of the institution or the church. The principal needs to be responsible for carrying out administrative and professional duties. The SDC represents parents' interests within school governance. Njini et al. (2025) apply the stakeholder theory to research the involvement, cooperation, and accountability of stakeholders in the financial management of the school. The participation of the traditional leaders in the governance network is important according to Dzimiri & Dzimiri (2026) because it allows to involve the community in the processes and solve the conflicts. Scheunpflug et al. (2021) study relations between the churches, schools, and the state in five sub-Saharan African countries regarding financing and organizational characteristics of the mission schools. Therefore, the stakeholder theory makes it possible to regard the mission schools as the complex systems and not the institutions where the dominating factor is the influence of one actor.

The advantage of the theory is the evaluation of the quality of the relations and not only their existence. According to Pilo et al. (2024), the reason for the occurrence of the role ambiguity in the faith-based schools is the necessity for principals to perform secular and religious roles and be accountable to the governing bodies or trustees. Shula et al. (2022) state that the faith-based schools' leadership depends on people, community relations, and organizational context. Parents of mission schools require additional information and the involvement of the SDC (Mandikiana & Murairwa, 2022). Therefore, stakeholders can fail to be involved even in the presence of the structure. This idea is also expressed by Samutereko (2026). The stakeholder theory in the article is connected with the legal authority, ownership, professional authority and parents' voice.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The article adopted a literature-based qualitative and documentary research design. The purpose was to interpret existing academic evidence together with the legal and policy framework that regulates School Development Committees and mission schools in Zimbabwe. The design combined literature synthesis with doctrinal reading of legislation, statutory instruments and official guidance. It did not involve interviews, questionnaires or other primary fieldwork. The unit of analysis was therefore the body of published and official material addressing SDC governance, school development, parental participation, finance, responsible authorities and faith-based education. This approach was appropriate because the article seeks to clarify the relationship between legal rules and documented governance practice rather than to estimate prevalence or test a causal hypothesis.

Literature Search Strategy

A structured source-identification process was used to build the evidence base. Searches covered ERIC, Sabinet and journals.co.za, the Directory of Open Access Journals, African Journals Online, Zimbabwean and Southern African university repositories, publisher platforms and official legal or policy websites. Web-indexed scholarly discovery was also used to locate records that could then be verified through journals, repositories or DOI pages. The main academic period was 2021-2026. Older studies from 2010-2020 were retained only where they were directly relevant to Zimbabwean SDCs or mission-school governance, while a small number of pre-2010 sources were retained because of their foundational value. Zimbabwe-specific searching preceded African comparative searching.

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Search terms were organised around six concepts: School Development Committees and School Parents Assemblies; governance and accountability; school development and finance; mission, church and faith-based schools; parent or community participation; and Zimbabwe. Boolean combinations linked these concepts in focused searches such as “School Development Committees” AND governance AND Zimbabwe, “mission schools” AND governance AND Zimbabwe, and “responsible authority” AND schools AND Zimbabwe. Backward citation searching was used to locate foundational Zimbabwean studies, while author and title searching helped identify later related work. The source-identification process captured 89 records before deduplication, screened 65 unique records and produced a working evidence corpus of 40 academic sources and 7 primary legal or policy sources.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Sources were included when they addressed SDCs, parental governance, school finance, community participation, mission-school administration, responsible authorities or comparable African school-governance arrangements. Priority was given to peer-reviewed articles, scholarly theses where the topic was unusually specific, and official legal or policy materials. Sources were excluded when SDCs were incidental, the focus was higher education, the publication was unverifiable, or the material was a blog, commercial webpage or opinion piece where stronger evidence existed. Duplicate publisher and repository versions were counted once. Comparative African studies were retained only where they helped explain participation, authority, faith-based governance or accountability and were not treated as direct evidence of Zimbabwean practice.

Legal and Policy Sources

The legal analysis focused on the Education Act [Chapter 25:04], the 2006 and 2019 amendment Acts, the Constitution of Zimbabwe, regulations governing non-government schools and School Development Committees, the Education (General) Regulations of 2025, and the 2021 School Development Committees Handbook. These documents were read for provisions concerning the School Parents Assembly, establishment and functions of SDCs, the meaning and role of the responsible authority, school finance, fees and levies, development planning and accountability. Current consolidated law and official or authoritative versions were preferred. Where an older statutory instrument could not be independently retrieved in a current standalone official version, the analysis avoided unsupported section-specific claims and treated its historical role with appropriate caution.

Data Analysis

The documentary material was analysed thematically. Evidence was coded around statutory authority, participatory governance, financial management, accountability, parent and community representation, school development, responsible-authority relations, role conflict and governance improvement. Legal provisions were then compared with empirical findings to identify areas of alignment and tension. Particular attention was paid to the institutional chain linking the Ministry, responsible authority, school head, SDC, parents and community. This process allowed the article to move beyond description by asking how authority is distributed, where responsibility overlaps, and why formal legal participation may not always produce effective governance in mission-school settings.

Statutory and Institutional Framework Governing SDCs

The Education Act and Establishment of SDCs

The Education Act [Chapter 25:04] provides the central legal starting point because it applies to both government and non-government schools and defines the responsible authority as the person, body or organisation responsible for establishing and managing a school (Zimbabwe, 1987). Section 36(1) establishes the School Parents Assembly, while section 36(2) requires the responsible authority of a registered school to cause that assembly to establish an SDC. The 2006 amendment introduced the present

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structure of section 36 and made the responsible authority legally central to SDC establishment (Zimbabwe, 2006). Ngwenya and Pretorius (2013) show that legal recognition of parental involvement does not remove the practical problem of limited knowledge of governing instruments. The legal design therefore creates participation, but participation still depends on institutional capability.

Section 36(2)–(3) is important because it does not position the SDC as an autonomous body standing outside the school's ownership and management structure. Under section 36(3), the SDC's composition, functions, duties, procedure and powers are determined by the constitution of the School Parents Assembly; where that constitution is not satisfactory to the Minister, the prescribed provisions apply (Zimbabwe, 1987). This arrangement gives parents a formal governance platform, yet it also ties that platform to rules and relationships shaped by the responsible authority and the wider education system. Chikoko (2007) found that similar role structures in decentralised governance were negotiated in practice rather than simply followed as written. Moreover, Dhliwayo (2021) proves that local power dynamics and socio-economic structures determine perception of decentralisation. Therefore, the major legal problem is connected with the scope of discretion granted to SDCs upon their creation according to the law.

It should be noted that statutory provisions must be analyzed against the broader background of constitution and regulations. Section 75(1) of the Constitution protects the right to education, while section 75(2) recognises the right to establish and maintain independent educational institutions at one's own expense, subject to reasonable standards and non-discrimination; section 75(3) permits registration requirements (Zimbabwe, 2013). Although amendments introduced by the 2019 Education Amendment Act have changed a number of provisions of the Education Act, they have not changed the section 36 provisions about SDCs (Zimbabwe, 2019). As Chimbunde and Moreeng (2025) prove, non-state schooling in Zimbabwe includes different kinds of private schools. Thus, it is essential to distinguish faith-based mission schools from commercial private schools. Scheunpflug et al. (2021) state that faith-based schools operate in public-private spheres as a result of interactions of organizational and financial nature with the state sector. Therefore, mission schools can be defined as non-governmental regulated educational institutions rather than private church administrations.

Powers and Responsibilities of SDCs

The legal and policy framework gives SDCs responsibilities that extend beyond fundraising. The 2021 School Development Committees Handbook presents SDC work as including development planning, financial oversight, asset management, committee administration and stakeholder engagement (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2021). Empirical evidence suggests, however, that practice can become heavily concentrated on finance. Chikoko (2008) found that parent governors were more involved in financial matters than in curriculum, staffing or broader organisational decisions. According to Njini et al. (2022), even the financial dimension is undermined when committee members have poor comprehension of budgetary policies. Moreover, as stated by Ndongwe and Mukucha (2024), SDCs are supposed to address issues of infrastructure, procurement, and material availability. The scope of duties hence goes beyond the capacities of some committees.

Such mismatch between responsibility and ability to execute is an important factor that makes for governance risks. As evidenced by the budgeting research conducted in 2025, there was poor competence among the members of SDC and school management to prepare budgets for schools, and inflation coupled with non-payment of fees added to difficulties (Njini et al., 2025). The same researchers discovered that there was poor utilization of already existing financial management documents due to the reason of the language used being legalistic, low literacy and lack of sufficient continuous training (Njini and Guvhu, 2025). In a similar research done on inclusive education, Chidarikire and Hlalele (2022) also concluded that most SDC members lacked the understanding of inclusive education.

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Responsible Authorities in Zimbabwean Education Law

The responsible authority is pivotal because Zimbabwean law links it to the establishment and management of the school itself. In a mission school, this role is normally exercised through a church or denominational structure, which gives the responsible authority both an ownership interest and a governance function. The Education Act defines the responsible authority broadly and places it directly inside the section 36(2) process that creates the SDC (Zimbabwe, 1987). The 2021 SDC Handbook describes the responsible-authority representative as a link between the school and the owner or custodian and as a channel for communicating institutional expectations (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2021). Kurisa (2015) demonstrates why this matters in practice, documenting disputes involving Catholic authorities, school heads and SDC functions. Responsible authority is therefore a legal category with concrete institutional power.

The regulatory requirements also mean that there is always a continuous involvement of the responsible authority in the administrative and financial activities of the school. Under regulation 20(5) of the Education (General) Regulations, 2025, the responsible authority must facilitate collaborative meetings between the school and parents concerning the payment of school fees and levies (Zimbabwe, 2025). In the process, the responsible authority ends up playing the role of mediator between the needs of the parents and those of the financial situation of the school. Muderedzwa (2022) explains the dilemma faced by the Catholic schools between their denominational obligations and the regulatory requirements of the government. This leads to contradictory obligations for the institution. Similar issues have been identified at the Anglican boarding schools in regard to conflict of interest between the church and the state (Samutereko, 2026).

Statutory Interaction between SDCs and Mission-School Authorities

The interaction between SDCs and mission authorities is characterised by legal interdependence rather than clear separation. Historically, the Education (School Development Committees) (Non-Government Schools) Regulations, 1992 provided a specific regulatory basis for SDC governance in non-government schools, including mission schools (Zimbabwe, 1992). The present operative extent of that instrument should be read carefully alongside later amendments and current regulations, but its influence remains visible in Zimbabwean scholarship. Tenha (2022) reports that school heads inducted SDC members using Statutory Instrument 87 of 1992. Kurisa (2015) found that disputes in Catholic-run schools included compliance with the same instrument. The persistence of an older regulatory framework alongside later reforms illustrates why legal clarity remains a practical governance concern.

The deeper problem is that several actors possess legitimate authority over the same institutional space. The Ministry regulates education, the responsible authority represents the church and manages the school, the head exercises professional administration, and the SDC represents parents and community interests. Samutereko (2026) shows that overlapping authority can turn ordinary decisions on procurement, finance and resources into recurring conflict. Pilo et al. (2024) identify a comparable problem in South African faith-based schools where poorly specified duties generated role ambiguity. Tarisayi et al. (2023) show in a different Zimbabwean context that unclear institutional boundaries and resource dependence can intensify contestation. The statutory problem is therefore not excessive participation itself. It is the absence of sufficiently operational rules showing how legitimate powers should be coordinated when they intersect.

Role of SDCs in School Governance

Participatory Decision-Making

The value of governance added by SDCs can be observed through the participation of the parents in decision making regarding priorities, budgeting, and developmental plans for schools. As Dhliwayo (2021) states, there is a high level of local ownership because of the decentralized structure. Nevertheless, the extent of the participation will depend on the power of the socio-economic factors. As Dzimiri (2018) mentions, SDC acts as a bridge between the school and the parents, local leaders and other stakeholders. Besides, according to

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Tenha (2022), SDC plays a significant role in bridging the gap between the school and the parents despite the disputes with the heads. Comparative studies conducted in South Africa show that parent governing bodies facilitate constructive participation of the members when they are influential (Quan-Baffour, 2020). Therefore, the value of the governance in SDCs lies in the bridging role that is being undermined due to the centralization of the information and decision-making.

The participation of SDC members will be valuable if the process of deliberation happens prior to implementing any decisions. As Chimbunde et al. (2024) found out, the interruptions in SDC meetings decrease collective procurement approvals and increase the number of the heads' decisions. Also, Okyere (2026) recognizes the same difference between the formal attendance at the committees and actual decision-making powers in the school governance of Ghana. As Davids (2022) argues, democratic school structure should be protected from imbalances caused by the lack of separation of governance and professional management. As Blackmore et al. (2023) point out, autonomy reforms may cause the transformation of governing bodies from democratic to expert and managerial organizations. In the context of the mission schools in Zimbabwe, the participation will depend on the ability of the members to formulate agenda, obtain information, deliberate and supervise.

Accountability and Transparency

Another crucial element which facilitates the necessity of SDCs' involvement has to do with the accountability matter which involves the resources of the school provided and managed by the parents and communities. Specifically, as noted by Dzvimbo et al. (2020), the efficiency of SDCs is defined by accountability, transparency and higher level of parental involvement. As well, Njini et al. (2022) stated that the problems associated with budgeting have much to do with the issue of accountability as there was not enough awareness of financial policy among committee members. In the recent studies, Njini and Guvhu (2025) found that the guidance documents were inefficient because of their complicated nature and insufficient training. Also, Nyaude et al. (2026) highlighted that the active involvement of stakeholders' supervision can resolve the problem of inefficiency of accountability in private secondary education. Thus, regarding the matter of accountability, SDCs are efficient when they are able to interpret financial information and conduct financial transactions.

The transparency of SDCs has a lot to do with the process of collective and ongoing actions. For instance, Chimbunde et al. (2024) highlighted that weak meetings are associated with procurement problems and lack of collective consent. As Mandikiana and Murairwa (2022) conducted the research involving 31 parents at mission boarding schools, they found that such problems as governance, infrastructure and synergies were experienced along with the necessity for better feedback and non-formalized representation in SDCs. As mentioned by Samutereko (2026), the financial management problems in Anglican schools are caused by the overlapping of responsibilities and the problem of inefficiency of accountability processes. Okyere (2026) states that the involvement in SDC is meaningless in case of inefficiency of financial oversight. Thus, transparency cannot be achieved through forced signatures after decision-making. Timely disclosure of information, clear records, reports and ability to question financial decisions are needed.

Parent and Community Representation

Finally, the SDC presents the participation of parents and communities in the process of school governance. According to Hlanga et al. (2021), the participation of parents in Zimbabwe in general is seen through the lens of supervision and financing of educational services and the head of the school considers the participation of parents in the process of governance as providing facilitation and assistance. The case of lack of trust and bad relationships concerning the participation of parents can be illustrated by the work of Mazambara and Sepeng (2023); however, there are some schools that seek the consultations of their parents. Discussing the role of traditional leaders in rural school governance, the mobilization and mediation in the network of rural school governance by the traditional leaders were mentioned by Dzimiri and Dzimiri (2026). The participation of parents in governance systems cannot be neutral according to Gerrard and Savage (2022) because it implies unequal obligations to the family. To provide adequate representation, the

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SDC should take into account the diversity of interests of the communities involved in the process of decision-making and not limit the parents with only financial means and manpower.

The problem of the representation of parents is especially acute in case of mission schools because parents can recognize the denominational character of the mission schools but at the same time want to participate in the process of governance in matters concerning services, infrastructure, and finances. Mandikiana and Murairwa (2022) reported that parents appreciate the academic and moral identity of mission schools but at the same time expect accountability from them. The parents from the Catholic mission schools in Kenya belong to various boards, associations, and committees, but not to strategy and financial issues (Munya et al., 2025). As Scheunpflug et al. (2021) state, the engagement of Christian mission schools in the sub-Saharan Africa is conditioned by the variety of the relationship between the state and the local community. Finally, as Muderedzwa (2022) highlights, the religious mission is critical for Catholic schools in Zimbabwe. The parents' engagement in the mission schools should be regulated but not controlled by the denomination.

Relationship with School Leadership

A connection between the SDC and the school head becomes of particular importance considering that most of the governance problems should be professionally implemented. According to Tenha (2022), some role misconceptions and pre-conceived notions may be the source of conflicts, however, the application of induction and conflict management tools was observed to increase cooperation between these stakeholders. Chikoko (2007) indicates that negotiations and negotiated roles become a problem in the framework of decentralised governance in schools. Chimbunde et al. (2024) explain how the weakening of interaction in the SDC can lead to the transition to unilateral decisions of management. Mazambara and Sepeng (2023) showed that the reaction of the heads to difficult relations with the parents included increased consultations. All of these facts prove that conflict is not always associated with the malfunctioning of the institution process, but it becomes its integral element. However, the situation becomes problematic when one of the sides gets power in terms of information, procedures and resources that make the role of another side legally meaningless.

Therefore, it becomes essential to keep the boundary between governance and management processes. Davids (2022) states that the power of the parents as governors can be limited or exceeded leading to the difficulties in the professional management of the school. As Pilo et al. (2024) indicate, faith-based institutions become especially prone to role ambiguity because of the expectations regarding the principal in terms of both governance and religion. Hlatywayo (2017) proves that mission-school leaders should become collegial because of the necessity to respond to the contextual and staffing needs of the institution. Samutereko (2026) indicates that communication and coordination become typical sources of conflicts in Anglican schools. The ideal interaction between the SDC and the head of school is neither the control over management on the part of SDC, nor arbitrary headship.

Role of SDCs in School Development

Resource Mobilisation and School Financing

The function of resource mobilisation still plays one of the most visible roles for SDCs as the resources of a local nature are used to develop the schools. Budgeting and financing are the most important concerns for SDCs as stated by Dzvimbo et al. (2020). According to Njini et al. (2022), budgeting could not only be regarded as an administrative process but also as the matter of governance that needed some policies and joint efforts. Inflation and non-payment of the fees largely influenced budgeting in the secondary schools in Zimbabwe according to Njini et al. (2025). It is also proven by Oyedele and Chikwature (2016) that funding could be used for teachers' welfare and retention and not just for the infrastructure. Therefore, the development function of SDCs is quite varied, but dependence on local funding makes poor communities vulnerable and inequality of school resources possible.

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However, it is also necessary to note that resource mobilisation is different from financial governance. Ability to collect levies and fundraising activities do not guarantee proper management of the funds. Lack of expertise and ineffective use of the guidance influenced the financial practices of SDCs according to Njini and Guvhu (2025). Parents' governors are already involved in financial matters extensively according to Chikoko (2008). It means that finance can take over governance. Dhliwayo (2021) warns that decentralisation may cause inequality because the costs are transferred to the community. According to regulation 20(5) of the Education (General) Regulations, 2025, collaborative effort of responsible authorities, schools, and parents concerning levies and fees is needed (Zimbabwe, 2025). Thus, resource mobilisation is legitimate only if it involves affordability, budgeting, and prioritization.

Infrastructure Development and Maintenance

SDCs have also been closely connected with the physical development of schools. Ndongwe and Mukucha (2024) indicate that the committees faced challenges such as shortage of funds, infrastructure, material and procurement capacity in Mudzi District. Mandikiana and Murairwa (2022) reveal that parents of mission boarding schools were concerned about the infrastructure as well as the quality of education and accountabi-

lity. Ngwenya and Nyakora (2024) based on 20 administrators from four Seventh-day Adventist schools link moral and spiritual leadership with resource and infrastructure development. Masvotore (2024) locates the mission schools in the history of community formation and transformation. Therefore, development of infrastructure is important not only because of improving teaching conditions but also in terms of whether communities see that the school and the SDCs take care of their needs.

However, the development of infrastructure can be regarded as an inadequate indicator of the work of the SDCs. Chidarikire and Hlalele (2022) indicate that the SDCs need capacity for promoting inclusive education and this task cannot be limited to construction of new infrastructure. Oyedele and Chikwature (2016) show that teachers' welfare can be included in the development agenda. Dzimiri and Dzimiri (2026) point out the contribution of community mobilisation and conflict resolution to the functioning of schools. D'Agostino and Asadullah (2025) emphasise the role of faith-based education in development through governance, values, and social networks. The implication of the analysis is that the development of the schools can be considered as improvement in institutional and learning capacities and community trust rather than construction of facilities.

Supporting Teaching and Learning

The effects of SDCs on teaching and learning processes occur mostly indirectly. The research of Chidarikire and Hlalele (2022) indicates the role of SDCs in terms of their knowledge in the ability of rural schools to provide for inclusive education. The findings of Hlanga et al. (2021) indicate that involvement of parents is related to sustainable learning and that parents and heads interpret the concept of support differently. Oyedele and Chikwature (2016) state that teacher retention is affected by the attempts of SDCs to improve welfare and working conditions. Shula et al. (2022) indicate that leadership in faith-based schools is associated with the development of staff and supportiveness. Therefore, the role of SDCs cannot be in interfering into the work of teachers but SDCs can influence the environment in which teaching takes place through resources, welfare, inclusion and community involvement.

The indirect role of SDCs is especially important for mission schools because the quality of educational process is always associated with the broader mission of the school institution. Muderedzwa (2022) states that the mission of Catholic schools is based on the attempt to preserve religious formation while meeting modern educational challenges. Similar is the description of mission schools of the Church of Christ given by Masengwe and Dube (2023). Ngwenya and Nyakora (2024) indicate that spiritual leadership is connected to the discipline, administration and resource management of Adventist schools. According to Mandikiana and Murairwa (2022), the parents valued academic and moral characteristics of mission boarding schools. The involvement of SDCs into teaching and learning must, therefore, be based on respect for professional curriculum authority and alignment with both national standards and the school ethos.

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Community-Based School Improvement

The benefit of improving the community through the SDC lies in the potential of the SDC to mobilize participation other than the required financial contribution. Dzimiri (2018) presents the SDC as a bridging organization in the local governance network rather than an office bearer committee. Mobilization of people and resolution of conflict can be achieved through the SDC where the roles are coordinated well, as stated by Dzimiri and Dzimiri (2026). Trust is important in this context since the poor relationship between the parent and the school may result in non-participation despite the presence of the structures as suggested by Mazambara and Sepeng (2023). In a similar way, Quan-Baffour (2020) demonstrates that the effective parent involvement requires active participation and not representation. Thus, the developmental role of the SDC will be in the ability of the SDC to transform the social relations into collective action while ensuring accountability of the decisions and resources.

The mission schools may possess more social capital since the church has local networks, moral authority and organizational capability. The social transformation aspect of the Methodist mission schools is explained by Masvotore (2024). Hlatywayo (2017) explains that the leadership of the mission schools is influenced by history and the community. Scheunpflug et al. (2021) demonstrate that the Christian schools are providers of

public goods in many African countries regardless of different organizational structures and financing. D'Agostino and Asadullah (2025) consider the faith based service delivery as development opportunities and challenges to accountability, pluralism and religion-state relations. The SDC would enhance the institutional capacity with democratic and community legitimacy, but not where church networks replace the parents' participation rights.

SDCs within Mission-School Governance

Nature of Mission-School Governance in Zimbabwe

Governance of mission schools in Zimbabwe could be characterized with the help of layers model of governance. In this regard, the responsible authority will be presented with the church or denomination, while the state will regulate the educational process in mission schools. School head is in charge of professional governance, while the SDC will be in charge of the parents from the standpoint of statutory governance. According to Muderedzwa (2022), Catholic schools maintain their religious mission and work as national education institutions. Hlatywayo (2017) notes that the leadership of United Church of Christ mission schools is based on the denomination history and social changes. Masengwe and Dube (2023) reveal that Church of Christ schools create their Christian identity in compliance with the demands of modern education. As per Scheunpflug et al. (2021), the relations between the church and state in African faith-based education system could be found in most cases regardless of differences in financing and governance. It proves that governance of mission schools in Zimbabwe is neither public nor denominational governance.

The layered model could be regarded as a positive approach since it involves different actors with different types of authorities and knowledge. Responsible authority gives the guidance in relation to institutions and denomination, while the school head gives professional knowledge. At the same time, SDC takes care of interests of parents and Ministry provides public regulation and minimum standards. Shula et al. (2022) note that faith-based governance can be improved with the help of people-sensitive and task-oriented governance model. Furthermore, as pointed out by Munya et al. (2025), the parents of the Catholic mission schools are involved in the governing of their children's education through structured processes, but their influence in the process of decision-making is not strategic. Secondly, as confirmed by Mandikiana and Murairwa (2022), the parents of mission schools value morality.

SDC-Responsible Authority Relationships

The SDC-responsible authority relationship begins with law because, under section 36(2) of the Education Act, the responsible authority must cause the School Parents Assembly to establish an SDC (Zimbabwe,

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1987). This formulation gives the responsible authority an enabling role, but it may also create perceptions that the SDC is subordinate to the owner rather than accountable to the parent assembly. The 2021 SDC Handbook attempts to manage this relationship by identifying the responsible-authority representative as a custodian and link between the school and owner (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2021). Kurisa (2015) shows that such role boundaries can nevertheless become contested in Catholic schools, especially around finance, staffing and SDC functions. The legal architecture therefore requires cooperation, but it does not remove the possibility that enabling authority becomes controlling authority in practice.

The financial aspect of governance is especially disputable. Thus, under regulation 20(5) of the Education (General) Regulations, 2025, responsible authorities are supposed to foster collaborative negotiations between the schools and parents with regard to fees and levies (Zimbabwe, 2025). Njini et al. (2025) note that budgeting of the school is now hampered by competence and economic factors and requires involvement of actors having financial skills. Moreover, Njini and Guvhu (2025) argue that governing documents may be underused if committee members face difficulties with understanding them. Samutereko (2026) indicates that the domains of financial accountability and procurement become the main sources of conflicts in Anglican boarding schools. If the responsible authority or the head owns the financial information, SDC monitoring becomes formal. On the other hand, lack of technical skills on the part of SDC members can result in lower control. In this case, successful governance implies communication and delegation of authorization responsibilities.

Priorities of development become another controversial issue as mission schools try to meet both educational and denominational objectives. Masvotore (2024) emphasizes the social and religious mission of Methodist mission schools. As Muderedzwa (2022) states, Catholic schools are faced with the challenge of maintaining mission identity in current conditions. Mandikiana and Murairwa (2022) note that parents can assess mission schools according to some criteria such as infrastructure, feedback, and ethos. D'Agostino and Asadullah (2025) point out that faith-based education is characterized by some governance problems related to accountability and pluralism. Thus, an SDC may concentrate on relevant issues, while responsible authority takes into consideration long-term institutional or denominational interests. It becomes controversial only if one of the actors has rights for unilateral establishment of development priorities.

Areas of Complementarity

There are visible areas where SDCs and mission authorities can show potential for complementarity. Responsible authorities can provide their contribution due to governance continuity, organizational networks and institutional identity, while SDCs can contribute due to their local knowledge, parents and community mobilization. According to Dzimiri (2018), there are some advantages that can be provided due to connective governance structure when it comes to contacts with different local actors. Hlatywayo (2017) stated that the collegial and context-specific leadership is an essential aspect for mission schools. Shula et al. (2022) also stressed the role of faith-based leadership, which is connected with service, people development and communities. Moreover, according to Dzimiri and Dzimiri (2026), wider local actors can participate in mobilization and conflict management due to the coordination of roles. Therefore, SDC and responsible authority can be viewed as complementary institutions, as the former one is characterized by ownership and mission, while the latter one is characterized by participation and local accountability.

The possibility to achieve the potential of complementarity may be seen when it comes to preliminary information sharing prior to decision-making. As mentioned by Tenha (2022), the processes of induction and conflict management were effective in terms of the establishment of relationship between SDCs and school heads. Mazambara and Sepeng (2023) state the necessity of consultation for restoration of parents' trust in difficult cases. According to Njini and Guvhu (2025), simplification of guidance and continuous support have to be used for achieving financial governance and avoiding the dependency on limited number of technically experienced actors. Mandikiana and Murairwa (2022) stress the necessity of feedback and proper representation of SDCs in mission schools. All of the above led to the development of practical governance model.

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Areas of Tension and Overlapping Authority

The first and the most prominent symptom of tension is uncertainty regarding the boundaries of jurisdictions of the relevant parties. In particular, according to Kurisa (2015), conflicts have been occurring in Catholic mission schools because of the overlapping jurisdictions of various actors as regards financial management, SDC creation and functioning, staffing, and responsibility allocation. Furthermore, as per Samutereko (2026), based on the data provided by 24 participants from four Anglican boarding mission schools, structural aspects like overlapping jurisdictions played the role of the cause of conflicts in governance, procurement, policy compliance, and resource utilization. Moreover, Pilo et al. (2024) noted the problem of role ambiguity at Muslim integrated mission schools caused by the overlapping of jurisdiction of school principal and religious governance structure. Finally, Tarisayi et al. (2023) indicated that in the case of Zimbabwean schools, there may be interdependency and lack of clear responsibility as causes of controversy in school relations. To put it briefly, the problem is not in the number of governance actors present in the mission school context. The problem is in the possibility of the overlapping of their jurisdictions and inability to overcome it.

The second symptom of tension is related to the difference between the mission-based nature of institutional ownership and parental responsibility for children. In particular, members of the church might regard the sch-

ool as mission-based institution that belongs to the church. On the contrary, parents might perceive their participation in the SDC as an opportunity to affect the resource flow within the institution. To give an example, Muderedzwa (2022) considered the importance of mission in Catholic institutions. At the same time, Gerrard and Savage (2022) pointed out that the role of parents in the SDC implied important responsibilities but no authorities. Mandikiana and Murairwa (2022) identified the desire of parents to participate in governance activities in the process of maintaining mission identity of the school. Davids (2022) argued for not marginalizing parents.

Challenges Affecting the Effectiveness of SDCs

Limited Knowledge of Statutory Roles

Insufficiency of knowledge about the statutory duties constitutes another weakness that comes up continuously from the evidence. According to Chidarikire & Hlalele (2022), the majority of the members of the SDC in the rural school-based study had insufficient knowledge to promote inclusive education. In their budgeting study, Njini et al. (2022) point out insufficient policy knowledge as another significant weakness. The technicality of the language of the law and insufficient financial knowledge constitute some of the weaknesses in using the guidelines stated by Njini & Guvhu (2025). According to Tenha (2022), there may be conflicts due to inappropriate expectations of the roles of SDC and head despite induction. This weakness is particularly prominent in the case of mission schools where not only the members require knowledge of the powers of SDC, but also about the legal position of the head and the Ministry.

Financial and Resource Constraints

Not only does funding and lack of resources restrain the ability to carry out development but also affects the level of institutional autonomy. As mentioned by Njini et al. (2025), the factors like inflation, lack of money to pay fees, and budgeting skills are barriers in financing the process in the school environment. Lack of funding and resources, as mentioned by Ndongwe and Mukucha (2024), are barriers for the work of SDC concerning the aspects of infrastructure and procurement. According to Dhliwayo (2021), decentralization may result in placing the financial burden on the community as well as inequalities between schools. As noted by Oyedele and Chikwature (2016), assistance in welfare for the teachers was limited by the availability of funds and skills of the committee. Hence, SDC in the poor communities with mission schools faces the challenge of structural contradiction in development.

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Accountability and Transparency Challenges

In situations where there is lack of knowledge about the financial policies, inaccessibility of the financial documentation or centralization of the decision making process, the problems arise due to lack of accountability. According to Njini and Guvhu (2025), although the guidelines are available, they are not always adhered to. As per Chimbunde et al. (2024), lack of the control over the purchasing process was caused by the low level of committee meetings. Financial accountability and purchase procedures are sources of conflicts in Anglican schools as per Samutereko (2026). According to Nyaude et al. (2026), involvement of the stakeholders will help to ensure the quality of the education in case of the danger of corruption. The lessons that can be drawn from this experience are that transparency should be viewed as a regular process and not as the solution to any doubts. SDC members need clear information on the budget, purchases, financial statements and their explanation. In case the above conditions are not met, accountability is nothing but signature of the document.

Governance Conflicts and Role Ambiguity

Role ambiguity can be capable of converting regular differences in an institution into conflicts. As discovered by Chikoko (2007), decentralization of governance required constant negotiation as the lack of rules was a factor that did not allow establishing the power balance between actors. Kurisa (2015) identified direct conflicts between Catholic responsible authorities and school leaders concerning the roles related to the SDCs.

It was also found out by Tenha (2022) that the perceptions of authority that exist before any actions can have an adverse impact on the relationship between heads and SDCs. Samutereko (2026) states that institutional duality in Anglican schools makes authority conflicts structural in nature rather than relational. This is because each actor has different sources of legitimizing its authority: heads – professional management, churches – ownership and mission, and SDCs – parents. Thus, the role protocols cannot be considered as bureaucratic procedures as they are necessary to avoid the paralysis of governance.

Limited Parental and Community Participation

Even with the existence of the SDC, parental involvement can still be limited. As noted by Chikoko (2008), the parent governors were involved more in issues concerning finance while less concerned about other governance issues. The difference between what is meant by parental involvement by the parents themselves and by the head may be another factor leading to poor parental involvement according to Hlanga et al. (2021). Some of the problems associated with parental involvement as noted by Mazambara and Sepeng (2023) include poor relations and mistrust among others. Non-ceremonial participation by giving feedback has been advocated in the case of mission boarding schools by Mandikiana and Murairwa (2022). In this regard, there could be parental involvement just in name and not in substance. This means that there could be an operational SDC as far as documents are concerned, but the ordinary parents are not participants in the decision-making and governance process.

DISCUSSION

SDCs as Instruments of Participatory Governance

Thus, the literature shows that SDCs are true instruments of participatory governance, however, under some conditions. On the one hand, SDCs are set up by law to be an official mechanism for parental participation, while on the other hand, the empirical literature shows that they can impact on funding, development, procurement, and community mobilisation. According to Dhliwayo (2021), they help widen local ownership. Dzimiri (2018) shows that they can involve different stakeholders. Chidarikire and Hlalele (2022) claim that knowledge shortage may hinder formal participation. Okyere (2026) gives the example of tokenistic SDCs because of the absence of power. The article does not share any of the extreme views mentioned above as

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SDCs are neither ineffective committees nor self-governing bodies. The latter ones do not exercise any influence in the absence of information, knowledge, and power.

Such an interpretation helps us understand why fundraising should not be used as the measure of success of SDC. Chikoko (2008) showed that parent governors were already over-represented in terms of finances, and thus such a situation may occur in case we see fundraising as the main problem. Gerrard and Savage (2022) prove that the governance process may be reconstructed in such a way that would distribute work and responsibility among parents but not provide them with power. Njini et al. (2025) prove that financial issues require technical skills that parent governors do not have just because of being in charge of them. Dzimiri and Dzimiri (2026) show that governance also involves mobilisation, conflict resolution, and communication with local leaders. Thus, the new definition of SDC covers deliberation, control, and representation.

Statutory Authority versus Institutional Practice

Another crucial finding is the gap between statutory authority and practice. Under section 36(1)–(2), parents or guardians at a school constitute the School Parents Assembly, and the responsible authority of a registered school must cause that assembly to establish an SDC (Zimbabwe, 1987). However, Ngwenya and Pretorius (2013) describe the disparity between awareness of legal documents amongst different stakeholders of governance. In addition, Tenha (2022) describes possible misunderstandings in roles of the parties during daily activities of SDCs and heads of schools. Finally, Njini and Guvhu (2025) show the fact that available guidelines can be ignored. Therefore, the problem does not relate only to non-compliance with the law, but also to the assumptions made about the capabilities of local actors to comprehend and follow complex rules, which are dispersed all over Acts, regulations, constitution and guidance. It creates a unique governance chall-enge for volunteers representing parents.

Regulation 20(5) of the Education (General) Regulations, 2025 requires the responsible authority to facilitate collaborative meetings between schools and parents concerning payment of school fees and levies (Zimbabwe, 2025). However, the impact of the rules depends on who has access to the information, structure of the meeting and opportunity to affect the decisions through opinion expression. Chimbunde et al. (2024) state that the weakness of the committee process leads to concentrating the authority in the hands of school leaders. In addition, Mandikiana and Murairwa (2022) describe that despite the presence of governance structure, parents may consider the representation inappropriate. Finally, Samutereko (2026) explains that policy compliance becomes an additional source of conflict because of different perceptions of the responsibilities of the church and school authorities. Thus, statutory authority needs to be transformed into operational procedures.

The Mission-School Governance Paradox

Innovative element in the research work is mission school governance paradox. Mission schools have multiple sources of governance such as regulation by the state, denominational governance, professional governance by the school head, and parent/community governance. On one hand, mission schools provide checks, resources and institutional continuity, but on the other hand, mission schools will have overlaps. Muderedzwa (2022) proves the continuous Catholic identity of the mission schools. Responsible authorities and SDC are subject to the same statutory provisions under the Education Act (Zimbabwe, 1987). Samutereko (2026) examines the institutional dualism as the possible cause of governance conflicts. Pilo et al. (2024) discuss the similar governance ambiguity of another faith-based educational institution. Plurality paradox is that on one hand it leads to additional accountability, but on the other hand reduces accountability if jurisdictions of the parties are not clear.

Solving of the puzzles should not be to the detriment of denominational governance and parent governance. As Masvotore (2024) puts it, faith-based schools fulfill their social goals via church governance. Denominational governance in fulfilling the educational goal is validated by Masengwe and Dube (2023). Parent governance is vital from the legal as well as democratic angle. Parents in mission schools have a

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responsibility to support school development and a legitimate interest in participating in decisions affecting their children's education (Mandikiana & Murairwa, 2022). Relationships between the church and the state in faith-based education depend on context according to Scheunpflug et al. (2021); there is no universal model which can be applied somewhere else. Zimbabwe needs to develop the coordination of governance arrangements. SDC should be recognized as the co-governance entity which has rights for information, consultation and oversight; at the same time, responsible authorities need to maintain legal ownership and mission governance, and school heads should exercise professional governance.

Contribution to Existing Scholarship

The paper integrates two different streams of literature on the subject matter of Zimbabwean literature – each stream of literature deals with a specific issue. Whereas the literature on SDCs deals with such issues as decentralization, parent governance, budgeting and local development, the literature on mission schools focuses on the denominational purpose, leadership and relations between church and state. Dhliwayo (2021) provides an analysis of the pressure on the governance function of SDCs in the decentralized context. Njini et al. (2022) provide an analysis of the pressure on the finances and policy knowledge due to budgeting. Muderedzwa (2022) provides an analysis of the effect of denominational purpose of mission schools on the authority. Finally, Samutereko (2026) provides an analysis of the conflicts arising from the overlapping of authorities through the structure. Together, the literature listed above can be used to gain an adequate understanding of the position of SDCs in terms of responsible authority. Therefore, this article proposes that the effectiveness of SDCs must be regarded as an institutional design problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Clarification of Governance Roles

The first priority is clearer operational definition of governance roles. Each mission school should maintain an accessible governance protocol showing the decisions reserved for the responsible authority, those requiring SDC participation, those delegated to the school head and those requiring parent-assembly approval or consultation. The protocol should be aligned with the Education Act, current regulations, the SDC constitution and Ministry guidance. It should also explain approval sequences for budgets, procurement, fees, levies and development projects. Written clarity would not eliminate disagreement, but it would reduce the scope for actors to rely on informal custom or institutional status when asserting authority. The protocol should be reviewed periodically and used during induction of every new SDC.

Strengthening SDC Capacity

SDC capacity building should move from one-off induction to continuing governance education. Training should cover statutory roles, basic financial management, budgeting, procurement, record interpretation, development planning, conflict management and meeting procedure. Material should be written in simple language and, where useful, made available in local languages. Training should involve school heads and responsible-authority representatives as well as SDC members so that all actors receive the same interpretation of roles. District or provincial education offices could support standard modules and periodic refresher sessions. Capacity building should also include practical exercises using budgets, minutes and procurement scenarios. This would strengthen the ability of parent representatives to participate confidently without encouraging them to cross into professional management functions.

Improved Accountability Mechanisms

Mission schools should institutionalise routine joint accountability rather than waiting for conflict or audit concerns. SDC members should receive timely budgets, expenditure statements, procurement records and development-project reports in formats they can understand. Major procurement and development decisions should record the responsible actors, the approval basis and any dissenting views. Parent reporting should occur at predictable intervals, and financial questions raised through the SDC should receive documented

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responses. Where church or diocesan structures hold separate financial authority, the relationship between those accounts and school-level funds should be explained clearly. A simple annual governance review involving the responsible authority, head and SDC could identify unresolved risks before they develop into wider institutional disputes.

Strengthening Collaboration with Responsible Authorities

Collaboration should be formalised through regular joint meetings between the responsible authority, school leadership and SDC office-bearers. These meetings should focus on strategic priorities, finance, development projects, policy changes and areas of possible conflict rather than only ceremonial reporting. Mission and denominational priorities should be stated openly so that parents can understand how they shape school decisions. Equally, responsible authorities should treat SDC participation as a statutory governance function rather than voluntary community assistance. Where disagreement persists, a clear escalation process should identify whether the matter goes to the School Parents Assembly, the responsible authority's higher structure or the Ministry. Structured collaboration would preserve the distinctive identity of mission schools while making authority more transparent and accountable.

CONCLUSION

The article has shown that SDCs occupy a legally recognised and practically important position in the governance and development of Zimbabwean mission schools. They connect parents and communities with school leadership, contribute to budgeting and accountability, mobilise resources and support development.

Their effectiveness, however, is limited when members lack legal or financial knowledge, when resources are scarce, or when information and decision-making become concentrated in school or church authorities. Mission schools intensify these challenges because denominational responsible authorities add a legitimate layer of ownership and institutional identity to an already decentralised governance structure. The result is not necessarily conflict, but a continuing need to coordinate several forms of authority within one school.

The central conclusion is that the main weakness lies less in the existence of SDCs than in the operational clarity of their relationships with responsible authorities and school heads. Zimbabwean law creates an interdependent governance arrangement in which parents, responsible authorities and professional managers all have legitimate roles. Effective mission-school governance therefore requires these roles to be translated into clear procedures for consultation, finance, procurement, development planning and accountability. Stronger induction, continuing capacity development, accessible financial information and routine joint governance processes would allow SDCs to move beyond fundraising and ceremonial representation. Such measures would preserve the distinctive mission of church schools while strengthening parental voice, public accountability and the developmental purpose of school governance.

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