Perceptions of educational professionals regarding the goals and implementation of the School Cluster System reform in Namibia: A Case Study of one Cluster in Caprivi region: 1999-2011

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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ABSTRACT

The School Cluster System (SCS) reform was introduced in Namibia from 1996 under the auspices of the Basic Education Project. The SCS entails the organising of schools into groups for educational, management and administrative purposes. In the framework of the SCS policy schools are grouped according to their geographical proximity and the curriculum they offer in order to work together as a collective network, one school in the group being selected as the core school, or Cluster Centre. There are varying goals for the promotion of the SCS policy depending on context, but close examination of the international literature reveals that the most widespread arguments for this policy are based on assumptions that a SCS seeks to enhance education quality through localised decision-making, interschool cooperation and community participation in education. One of the key assumptions of the SCS reform is that it seeks to achieve cost-effectiveness by allowing schools to pool educational resources. The focus on the SCS policy in the last two decades, in particular in the developing countries, appears to be closely linked to the ongoing efforts of achieving the internationally set goals of the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) within a context of financial austerity.

In this study, the purpose was to investigate how educational professionals perceive and understand the goals and the implementation of the SCS policy in the Caprivi region of Namibia. The study aimed to explore the views and experiences of the case study participants regarding the effectiveness of the SCS in relation to the goals of decentralized management and local support for rural schools. The study examines the views and experiences of implementers of the SCS in a rural context, including the challenges faced by the implementers in the process of implementation.

Data for the study was collected through extensive analysis of official documents, reports and interviews with various individuals involved with the implementation of the SCS. Qualitative data analysis techniques, mainly labelling and coding, were employed during the data analysis process. One Circuit Inspector, three principals, one Head of Department and eight teachers from a rural Cluster in the Caprivi region were interviewed.

The study found that, in practice, the strength of the SCS policy lies in the promotion of a democratic ethos in the form of local decision-making and devolution of management tasks to the Cluster Centre Principal (CCP) and to the Cluster Management Committee. On the other hand, cooperation among teachers in the interests of improving teaching and learning, within the framework of the SCS policy, is at times hindered by certain contextual factors, such passive resistance on the part of teachers, or lack of expertise and experience in subject support groups. The study concludes that, in the context of globalized education reform, the focus on the democratic values of decentralization has many positive outcomes but often conceals the fact that innovations like the SCS transfers financial responsibility for implementing and sustaining the reform from the central government to the local schools, communities and parents, the supposed beneficiaries of the SCS.

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DEDICATION

In Silozi language there is an expression which says “Zeni beleka kiza bana baka” which literally means whatever I toil for belongs to my children. Therefore this piece of work is, firstly dedicated to my two children, Mwilima (My father’s namesake) and Chuma (My mother’s namesake). They have been my source of inspiration to work hard in setting a good example, to motivate them to set high targets in life. Secondly I dedicate this work posthumously to my departed grandparents; Sibeso Silinda, Tembwe Mukasa, Kahimbi Mujiwa and Jobo Khama. Their spirit has always been a great source of inspiration for me.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The year 1990 marked a turning point in the education reform process in Namibia. Independence was achieved and at the same time, the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) was ratified in Jomtien, Thailand. The new nation was faced with challenges, such as redressing the inequalities of the past in education by expanding the provision of education to all parts of the country. On the other hand, the country was also expected to respond to the international call for achieving the EFA goals by the year 2000. The newly established Ministry of Education set four policy goals: 1) equitable access to education, 2) improvement of internal efficiency, 3) improvement of quality, and 4) democratic participation in education (Snyder & Voigts, 1998).

Shortly after independence, concerns about the efficiency and quality of the country's education increasingly became of concern to those in the education fraternity and beyond. A formal directive from the office of the Minister of Education and Culture in 1995 declared that, "during the year 1995, the Ministry's efforts were focused on improving education *quality* (Snyder & Voigts, 1998:1, my emphasis). At that time, the education system was grappling with the high cost of educational spending, which went together with low education quality, especially in rural schools (Chuard *et al.* 1995). This situation is illustrated by the Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) study carried out in 1995 in Namibia, which revealed that learners at predominantly rural schools in the northern regions attained the lowest scores in the Grade 6 English Reading comprehension test, compared to learners in schools in urban areas (Snyder & Voigts, 1998:85) confirm and highlight this finding and suggest a way to begin to address it:

> Achievement varied by location of school, with learners in the city schools having had scores nearly twice as high as those in rural schools. It should be pointed out that the socio-economic indicator and the location of schools were highly correlated. Learners in rural or isolated schools had, on average, a much lower socio-economic status than those in the city. A policy suggestion is to determine the causes for low achievements found in especially **Katima Mulilo**, Rundu, Ondangwa East and Ondangwa West regions and design programmes to improve the quality of education in these regions. (emphasis mine).

It is important to point out that, in the post-independence reform period in Namibia, from the early to mid-1990s, the government worked in partnership with various international development partners, who financially and technically supported and provided advice to the Ministry of Education in several areas of reform. Support and advice was often based on bilateral agreements with the external development partners and funders.

One of the major areas of reform to receive external support was the restructuring of education management structures, and the strengthening of teacher support programmes as ways of improving education quality (Ministry of Education, 1993). Between 1995 and 1996, the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation channelled support for education in Namibia through the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) under the Basic Education Project. It was through the Basic Education Project that the School Cluster System (SCS) was introduced in Namibia. With this initiative, a comprehensive cluster scheme for all schools was adopted by regional education offices in which schools were grouped for educational and administrative purposes. The SCS was developed mainly through sub-national work of GTZ, BEP staff, regional offices and consultants (Edwards Jr & Mbatia, 2013). The development process took into consideration factors such as the geographical proximity of schools, school size, grades offered and enrolment trends in the schools (Dittmar *et al*., 2002). Based on such factors, schools in the regions were assessed to determine which ones could together form a Cluster, and which would serve as Cluster Centres. It is important to note that the SCS initiative was mainly donor-driven, and that, in the initial stages of the system, financial and technical support was given for building infrastructure, such as Circuit Offices, and for training and curriculum development in Lower Primary sector (Dittmar *et al.,* 2002).

The SCS was introduced through a pilot project in 1996 in one of the northern regions. The project was first implemented in the then Rundu education region and, after 1996, was extended to other regions with the Basic Education Project providing technical and financial support. Schools were grouped into Clusters of five to seven schools for educational, management and administrative purposes. In some regions a Cluster could consist of less than five schools. Selection criteria depended upon, geographical proximity of the schools, and the curriculum offered by the schools in the cluster.

Three to four clusters in the same geographic area were grouped into inspection circuits. This means that a group of schools make up a Cluster and several Clusters make up a circuit. The circuit is headed by a Circuit Inspector and the Cluster is headed by a Cluster Centre Principal, who is the regular principal of the school selected to be the Cluster Centre. The theory underpinning the SCS in the Namibian context emphasises decentralised management and the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning in schools through the sharing of resources, and through networking amongst teachers in a Cluster (Pomuti & Weber, 2012; Nghatanga, 2010; Aipinge, 2007).

Those responsible for introducing the SCS assumed that clustering would provide a decentralized management and support structure between circuits and schools, which would in turn enhance teaching and learning. Thus, the SCS appeared to be a means of improving and strengthening education management and teacher support, especially for schools in the rural areas. Kawana (2010) argue that physical isolation, vulnerability and a lack of opportunity for professional development were some of the essential factors in describing rural education in the Namibian context. These conditions are often common in schools situated in communal areas which are not formally

proclaimed as towns, villages or settlements and in informal settlements where the social-economic conditions of communities are poorer. In these areas the sparse population, often make networking and delivery of effective education problematic. In the context of rural education Namibia in general, and in the Caprivi region in particular, it is imperative to note that the delivery of quality education continues to be hampered by a lack of basic resources such as adequate classrooms, laboratories, teaching and learning materials and lack of expertise in critical areas such mathematics and science, especially in rural schools. The rationale of the SCS in Namibia was based on the premise that organizing schools into clusters would promote effective delivery of education in schools belonging to one cluster. In the context of this study promoting effectiveness is based on the theory that through sharing resources teachers would engage in mutual exchanges of expertise which would translate quite simply into better management of schools, including teacher and student performance in cluster schools.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The research study attempts to assess how educational professionals perceive and interpret the goals and the implementation of the SCS in relation to the goals of EFA and of the government of Namibia. The specific approach in investigating these issues takes the form of a small-scale qualitative case study investigation in one rural cluster of schools. The study uses the perceptions of education professionals (inspectors, principals and teachers) regarding their interpretation of the goals and implementation of the School Cluster System in relation to the planning and practice of education policy. The specific aims of the study are to:

- Explore the perceptions of education professionals who have been engaged with the reform process regarding the effectiveness of the SCS in relation to the promotion of a decentralised management and support structure for rural schools,
- Examine the education professionals' perceptions regarding the role of the SCS as a tool for the improvement of teaching and learning in rural schools,
- Explore the perceptions of education professionals regarding the role of the SCS as a capacity building initiative for rural schools,
- Investigate what education professionals perceive as the challenges facing the implementation of the SCS.

1.3 Significance of the study

My interest in undertaking this study arose out of my work as an educator and school manager in Namibia. The focus of the study is a critical assessment of the broader outcomes of the SCS as part of the education reforms in Namibia from the perspective of inspectors, principals and teachers. In the course of teaching at a cluster centre school for eight years, I observed and participated in various activities as part of the process of the implementation of the SCS. My experience of this process was

that there were often unanswered questions regarding the goals of the system and the way in which the system was operating at local level. This personal interest motivated me to explore the details of the theoretical and operational aspects of the system and to critically assess its outcomes within a specific context.

The system is not unique to Namibia. As far back as the 1940s, school clustering became a preferred education innovation, with varying objectives, in different parts of the world (Bredenberg & Dahal, 2000). International studies (Bray, 1987; Giordano, 2008; Pellini, 2007; Bradenberg & Dahal, 2000) show that school clustering strategies have also been in operation in countries such as Zimbabwe, Sri Lanka, Peru, Britain, Nicaragua, Thailand and Cambodia since the seventies. The literature suggests that school clustering has been promoted over the last two decades, mostly in resource scarce contexts such as rural areas, and especially in the developing countries. Most of the literature cites one of the key goals of school cluster systems as being to improve teaching and learning in the schools in the cluster by their sharing of resources, experience and expertise (Bray, 1987; Giordano, 2008). School clustering has also been regarded as a key strategy to increase access to quality education in rural areas.

After the World Declaration on 'Education for All' in 1990, the school cluster strategy was the preferred model, especially for developing countries, as a means of promoting more democratic and localised decision-making, reducing drop-out rates in rural areas, and facilitating access to resources for quality education (Giordano, 2008; Pellini, 2007). Recent literature (Giordano, 2008; Dittmar *et al*., 2002; Ribchester & Edwards, 1998; Bray, 1987) depicts increasingly ambitious objectives for school clustering initiatives in the developing countries. Therefore it is imperative to critically assess the practical outcomes of the policy in relation to the theoretical aspects, which arise from the literature.

The available literature on the subject in Namibia suggests that there is a dearth of qualitative studies on the SCS. This study intends to provide an in-depth understanding of the SCS as an educational reform in Namibia from the perspective of the implementers. While previous studies have been conducted with regard to the SCS in Namibia, they have tended to focus exclusively on issues of management and leadership in Clusters. To illustrate, a study done by Aipinge (2007) of the SCS in the Omusati region of Namibia emphasises the management role of Cluster Centre Principals. Similarly, a recent study done by Nghatanga (2010) on the SCS has as its emphasis on the leadership roles of the Cluster Centre Principals in the Ohangwena region. No Namibian study has so far focussing on the perspective of the implementers of the system .This study aims to examine the goals and strategies associated with the SCS and to understand how education professionals interpret and understand the goals and the implementation process of the SCS in Namibia in relation to the planning and practice of education policy. It is hoped that the study might have significance and be of value in assisting education planners, education officers and inspectors of education to understand

more clearly and comprehensively the policy context in which they live and work. In addition, it might be useful not only in terms of identifying the strengths and limitations of the strategy in the specific context of the case study, but also in indicating the ramifications of the SCS for the broader policy terrain. The study might also be of value and significance for principals and teachers in Namibia. Finally, it is hoped that the findings of the study will be useful and beneficial both to national and regional policy planners and to stakeholders such as regional and local authority councillors.

1.4 Research methodology

This research study was located within the interpretive paradigm. According to Maree (2007:59), an 'interpretive approach therefore focuses on people's subjective experiences, on how people "construct" the social world by sharing meanings, and how they interact with or relate to one another'. The interpretive approach is suitable for this research as it is a means of providing understanding of the ways in which education professionals, such as inspectors of education, principals, and teachers interpret and understand the goals, the significance and the implementation of the SCS in their specific contexts. This approach allowed me to assess the extent to which the SCS has been and is perceived in terms of improving the quality of teaching and learning in a specific context, and how it was adopted and implemented in this context. (Maree, 2007:60). Basing my research on a qualitative case study model, I used document analysis, observations and semi-structured interviews as instruments for data collection. According to Leedy & Ormond (2010), a case study researcher conducts an in-depth study about a particular individual, programme or event. Thus, this research method is also useful for investigating how individuals or programmes change over time as a result of certain circumstances or interventions. In this study I aimed to understand and assess the nature of the SCS from the perspective of education professionals: how they have interpreted the goals of the SCS in terms of their own SC, and their particular experiences of the implementation of the SCS in a specific context.

Through the use of a variety of data collection tools, my aim was to capture the participants' views, perceptions, experiences and ideas which related to the subject (Hamilton, 2011:2). The case study approach was useful in this study as it provided me with the opportunity to capture 'rich data' and in-depth insights into the respondents' lived experiences as implementers of the SCS in their particular context. Before the interviews, I analysed various documents in order to collect as much information as possible about my research topic and this analysis continued throughout the course of the study and formed the basis for my interview questions. I analysed available documents about the SCS in order to complement the data collected through the interviews. I used field notes as a complimentary tool to capture possible important information about the research study that I could record at the research site.

Interviews were conducted with education professionals in one Cluster. The Cluster consists of four schools, and respondents from three of the schools participated. The Cluster falls under the Circuit Inspector's office, so I decided to include the Circuit inspector of education in the interview schedule Thus I conducted in-depth, face-to face, semi-structured interviews with one inspector of education, three principals, one HOD, and eight teachers. The respondents were purposefully selected based on their professional roles as educators in the selected cluster schools.

The document analysis and observations continued throughout the data collection period and were often coupled with extensive note-taking, generated by any interesting issues or interactions I encountered which related to my research topic. The note-taking was also a useful tool for recording what I observed whenever I visited the Cluster Centre, so that I could record any interactions of teachers or principals of satellite schools visiting the centre.

This research study was authorized by the Regional Director of Education in the region after I had written a letter to request permission to conduct the study in the cluster schools which I selected. All respondents who participated in the study did so through informed consent after they had voluntarily agreed to participate in the study.

1.5 Thesis structure

In Chapter One I introduce the study by explaining the goals of the study and what the study aims to achieve. The research motivation for the study is explained and the methodology briefly introduced.

Chapter Two presents a comprehensive literature survey on the school cluster system, and underpins the study. The chapter also takes a closer look at key theoretical and policy debates associated with the school cluster system.

Chapter Three discusses the methods of data collection employed in this study. It explains how data analysis was carried out, including the steps involved in the process of analysing the data. The chapter also addresses issues of validity, ethical considerations and the limitations of the study.

Chapter Four presents a comprehensive analysis of the data as well as the use of this analysis in an attempt to answer the research question, "How do education professionals interpret the goals and the implementation of the School Cluster System?" Chapter Five provides a conclusion to the study, discussing the findings in relation to the general literature outlined in Chapter Two. In this last chapter I provide suggestions for future research on the topic.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the relevant literature that frames the notion of the SCS. I start with an exploration of the idea of school clustering in a global context, in the course of which I will discuss the origin, purpose and models of the SCS from an international perspective, including examples of SCSs in other countries. I also provide a detailed discussion of the introduction by the Namibian Ministry of Education of the SCS, highlighting their rationale and objectives for introducing it. Lastly I include a critical analysis of the SCS against the positive aspects raised in the literature.

2.2 The concept of school clustering

In the context of this study, it was necessary to analyse the concept of school clustering in relation to educational policy issues. The available literature offers varying definitions for school clustering depending on which models of school clustering, taken from across the world, they base their definitions. The international literature shows that the concept is based on a strategy for 'grouping' schools, mainly for administrative and educational purposes, and it is important to note that, in varying descriptions and definitions of school clustering, the main descriptor tends to be the word 'group'. Various authors writing in different contexts tend to describe school clustering differently, but the claims made for clustering in terms of improving management and education quality through sharing resources seem to be a common denominator in their arguments (Bray, 1987; Ribchester & Edwards, 1998; Giordano, 2008). It is this specific claim about school clustering that needs to be understood in order to understand the motives of the Ministry of Education in choosing this model of education reform in the Namibian context.

There seems to be wide agreement in the literature that school clustering is based on the premise that schools grouped and working together on educational issues have the potential to improve education quality in the participating schools (Delport & Makaye, 2009). School clustering is argued to be vital for addressing issues such as teacher development, the promotion of curriculum development, and the encouragement of innovation in the process of schools collaborating (Dittmar *et al* 2002).

2.3 Origin of school clustering

Bray (1987) argues that the cluster initiative originates from developments in micro-planning. Through recourse to the policy of clustering, the centralised ministry of education of a country is provided with a potential policy framework within which schools are grouped more usefully and effectively for educational and administrative purposes. Proponents of the SCS argue that consolidating available resources leads to schools in the clusters benefitting collectively (Bray, 1987). This would imply that the school cluster strategy grows from a need to expand educational delivery

and improve education quality, in particular in the rural areas, by enabling teachers in the schools to share resources for teaching and learning purposes. It is argued that the school clustering strategy as an education model reduces the inequalities in the provision of education resources and facilities by facilitating collective utilisation of resources, so that even the smaller schools, which are often isolated, can enjoy the benefits of better facilities and equipment (UNESCO, 1985:3).

2.4 The goals of school clustering

2.4.1 Improving education quality

Giordano (2008) believes that through the school cluster strategy it is possible to improve educational quality by fostering professional cooperation of teachers among a cluster of schools to encourage learning, diffuse good teaching practices, and share particular skills that can significantly improve teaching and learning in these schools. The implication here is that the cluster strategy is a way of providing a mechanism for collaboration in order to improve teachers' practice. Ribchester & Edwards (1998:25) stress that a shift towards improving quality education and promoting staff development among schools is one of the most important and long standing rationales of the clustering strategy. Ribchester & Edwards's argument is linked to the notion that the school cluster strategy is a mechanism through which teacher collaboration is enhanced as a structured system of support for teachers at the local level.

Given that many schools in the developing world are in isolated rural areas, Giordano (2008) argues that clustering combats the professional isolation of teachers and assists in the retention of teachers in remote areas. In earlier empirical studies conducted in rural clusters in the UK, Potter & Williams (1994) found that clustering was associated with reducing the professional isolation of teachers, and with improved relationships between schools, and that it had a positive influence on the pooling of ideas by teachers in those clusters. They argue that teachers in rural schools can benefit through effective clustering arrangements as these provide them with opportunities to enjoy some of the benefits enjoyed by urban schools.

In the same vein, Atkinson *et al*. (2007:65) argue that teachers in a school cluster are likely to benefit from being part of an extended professional community with greater opportunities for problem-sharing and peer support with regard to the teaching and learning activities in their respective schools. This process implies a degree of shared practice and a reflective attitude towards teaching and learning, enabled by the SCS framework.

Delport & Makaye (2009) stress that the school cluster strategy is a deliberate move by education departments to ensure efficiency in terms of teaching and learning resources. They argue that the limited resources that are available for teaching and learning, particularly in rural areas, can be used to maximum effect to benefit schools within the network of a cluster.

Galton & Hargreaves (1995) refer to issues such as sharing of teaching resources and joint planning of schools as some of the key aspects of the SCS. They go on to argue that, within the clustering framework, teachers from various schools can act as specialists to coordinate the work of colleagues in particular subject areas, and that learners from different schools can also be brought together, from time to time, to reduce the potential effects of rural isolation and to enable them to work cooperatively.

2.4.2 Improving cost-effectiveness

Bray (1987:7) argues that the school cluster strategy aims at achieving cost-effectiveness in providing quality education, especially in the developing world, where the lack of educational resources often accompanies a lack of financial resources. He recognises that there is a move to cut spending on education by rationalising educational functions because of pressing domestic and global economic challenges facing most countries in the developing world. In a context dominated by lack of financial resources, proper infrastructure, and adequate learning materials, the school cluster strategy is regarded by many education ministries in the developing world as a means to share these scarce resources in order to improve education delivery and to advance the goals of EFA (Giordano, 2008). Connolly & James (2006) argue that clustering promotes a situation in which schools are able to pool resources through sharing and collaboration with other schools. They argue that, by setting up a framework for schools to share resources and work together, the school cluster strategy enables education authorities to reach more learners and to redress imbalances in educational delivery.

This emphasis on promoting the sharing of scarce resources in poor rural schools in order to expand education delivery would seem to suggest the diminishing role of the state in providing financial resources to expand and improve education. This move could be seen as having close links with the context of neoliberal education reforms, which have tended to focus on maintaining minimal public spending on basic services, such as education, in favour of market forces. Therefore 'cost recovery' on the part of the state could be seen as being one of the underlying aspects of the clustering strategy.

2.4.3 The SCS as decentralisation

According to Chikoko & Aipinge (2009), decentralisation in education has to do with moving the power from central authorities in the education hierarchy to lower levels within regions, districts and clusters. They argue that the decentralisation of education will allow schools and communities to work together in determining the developmental needs of schools at the local level. Thus, the advocates of school decentralisation argue that principals and teachers need more control over the education they offer if they have to be accountable for the improvement of quality education they are delivering in their schools.

The strategy is deemed to promote decision-making at the lower-level of the educational hierarchy (Giordano, 2008:27). While school clustering is seen by policy makers as a framework to improve educational management at a local level, its successful implementation in terms of being beneficial to the education system as a whole depends on various factors (Pellini, 2005). Pellini argues that the school cluster system will work if effective coordination at various levels, including community participation, form part of the decentralisation process. Lugaz *et al.* (2010) in their study on school decentralisation, claim that a growing number of studies demonstrate that coordination of school actors (principals, teachers, community), and the schools' own involvement in defining and evaluating their own improvement, all have a profound impact on the general quality of education. They argue that such findings have contributed to the shifting of these responsibilities to the schools.

In a globalised, 'reform based' society, decentralisation is seen by governments and policy makers as a way to enable local authorities or schools to gain greater educational decision-making autonomy through the devolvement of control over the curriculum and teaching methods to local communities, teachers and principals (Carnoy, 2000:47). Underpinning this assumption is the idea that increased flexibility and collaboration through clustering allows for a significant improvement in educational delivery.

Carnoy argues that such decentralisation, especially if it financially driven, can often lead to the lowering of the costs of schooling in order to accommodate national budgetary constraints in a time of financial crisis, and thus runs the risk of putting the already 'at-risk' school population in developing countries in a worse situation, in terms of receiving quality education (Carnoy, 2000:50). He argues that, contrary to the claims that decentralisation brings educational delivery closer to the people and makes education more relevant and responsive to local needs, financially driven decentralisation is likely to reduce access and quality of education in areas with limited resources. This is because such types of decentralisation schemes are often accompanied by reduced state spending on education, which in turn tends to push for cost recovery schemes for the "consumers", who, in the case of education, are the parents. It is important to emphasize that schools and the parent community in rural areas often do not have sufficient financial resources to pay for their children's school fees or for other programmes run by schools.

Motala & Pampallis (2005), in Msinango & Chaka (2011:3), observe that international bodies such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been pushing governments to implement decentralization in education. The most significant feature of such reforms is that they are often packaged within the broader economic neo-liberal ideology which promotes market forces and pushes for cost recovery schemes such as user fees. They go on to argue that decentralization promoted in the neo-liberal market based reform model aims to reduce the financial burden of the state by sharing it with regional and local authorities and the consumers. Although the advocates of the SCS argue that, as a form of decentralization, it seeks to achieve greater community participation

and local decision-making, Schaefer (1994) cautions that devolution which is accompanied by reliance on the local community in terms of financial support is unlikely to lead to an improvement in educational quality, especially in resource-scarce areas. He goes on to argue that the situation can be worse in areas with high poverty levels because communities in those areas are unlikely to make any contributions to the running of a school and the delivery of quality education, which might have negative consequences for education delivery in such areas.

What this implies is that, the devolution of decision-making powers and local financial participation are often presented as the initial objectives of the decentralized reform in keeping with 'democratic principles', within the context of the neo-liberal market oriented ideology, decentralization can also be seen as way of cutting state expenditure on education and placing part of the burden for educational reforms on local communities.

2.4.4 Fostering community participation

One of the issues highlighted by the advocates of decentralization is the need for local communities to participate in educational activities. Dittmar *et al.* (2002:16) argue that the school cluster strategy promotes awareness among the community about the functioning of their schools. This implies a situation where the community becomes involved in the management of education affairs by working with the schools at cluster level in order to participate in local educational initiatives

One other significant aspect which advocates of the decentralization model put forward is that the school cluster strategy is aimed at promoting financial resource mobilisation from the community for education purposes. It is important to note that this assumption is controversial because communities in rural areas or poor urban areas are faced with socio-economic challenges such as poverty and unemployment, and are unlikely to have adequate financial resources that can be 'mobilised'

2.5 The types, models and characteristics of the School Cluster System

It was very important to discuss the types and models of school clustering as this provides a base from which to come to an understanding of the dynamics of the school cluster system as an educational reform strategy. A focus on various SCS models also contributes to understanding the various features of the school cluster system.

2.5.1 Cluster Typology

Giordano (2008:88) identifies two main categories of clusters:

- Those which are initiated by an education ministry and/or donor organisations, requiring the participation of schools in clusters as part of a larger education reform.
- Those which are initiated at the local level to exchange information and solve problems using limited resources and include schools that have expressed a desire to work together.

The first category depict a 'top down' large scale reform , where clusters are mandated or created by the education ministry and donor agencies in the context of aid programmes in education, such as in-service training of teachers or curriculum implementation. The ministry, often with support from a donor agency implements the reform. The model is applicable to the Namibian context under review, as the SCS was introduced with assistance of a donor organisation.

2.5.2 The Rural Cluster Model

Giordano (2008) observes that rural clusters have existed worldwide since the middle of the twentieth century, set up in order to address issues of access and quality of education. Rural clusters are often created in rural areas where educational delivery and quality tend to be poor, there being a high probability that these are areas where there is a general lack of facilities and materials for teaching and learning. The distinctive feature and benefit of the rural cluster model is that of providing opportunities for rural schools to share educational resources, such as classroom facilities and teacher development activities.

This model also seeks to provide a complete cycle of schooling in areas where there are schools which do not offer all grade levels. In this model, schools are connected within a network to allow for the progression of learners through all the grades, and potentially reduce drop-out rates. This strategy is seen as an attempt to promote access to education, in rural areas in particular, to contribute towards achieving the goals of EFA. As has already been suggested by researchers such as Schaefer (1994), Carnoy (2000), Motala & Pampallis (2005), and Mankoe & Maynes (1994), the role of the state in providing and improving education becomes questionable in such situations because the responsibility seems to be placed at the local levels where there are often insufficient resources.

2.5.3 The Network Model

The key feature of the network model is that of the co-operation between schools being based on voluntary participation, peer exchange and the absence of hierarchical relationships (Giordano, 2008:68). This model is what Bray (1987:28) calls the 'least extreme model', in that it is described as informal and based entirely on the 'self-help' principle, where people voluntarily participate in improving education provision in their local area, without requiring financial support from external bodies or government. Bray warns that voluntary arrangements can be very easily broken, and thus many governments choose to formalise clusters in order to make them more accountable to senior authorities. The above do not apply to the context under review as the SCS in Namibia is based on a national model which groups all schools in the country into clusters.

2.5.4 The Teacher Group Model

Teacher groups are generally a core aspect in this cluster model (Giordano, 2008:64). For Giordano, according to this model, the motive is to bring teachers together to collaborate in small groups

according to their subject specialities. The implication is that the model is a potential mechanism for teachers to collaborate with their colleagues from neighbouring schools. Examples of this model are the '*microcentros*' in Colombia and Chile and the '*microgrupos*' in Ecuador, where teachers from rural one-teacher and multi-grade schools come together to collaborate (Giordano, 2008).

Dittmar *et al.* (2002) observe that the cluster scheme in Namibia provides for cluster subject committees in which teachers meet to discuss matters related to their teaching areas in general, and their subject areas in particular. Teachers use their experiences, expertise and collegiality to reflect and to learn from each other.

2.5.5 The National Cluster Model

In this model, which is the model under consideration here, the ministry of education, in partnership with donor organisations, sets up clusters throughout the entire country (Giordano, 2008:47).The arrangement of clustering recommended in this model is organised as an intermediated structure between the district and the schools within a district. Giordano considers that in this way clustering becomes a more effective way of distributing educational materials and information to schools.

According to this model, the ministry of education and/or donor organisations establish school cluster centres where the core school, or Cluster Centre, is the focal point of all the schools in the cluster. The common feature of this model is that the cluster is regarded by both government and cluster members as a unitary model in which member schools work together as a single unit (Giordano, 2008). In this model local in-service teacher training is located and coordinated at the core school. This model is similar to Bray's (1987) intermediate model in which schools are formally grouped together by higher authorities. Cluster schemes in Namibia, Zimbabwe and Cambodia are typical examples of national cluster models.

Although cluster schemes vary, they retain common objectives such as networking among teachers and community participation in education. The national model would be an example of a cluster scheme which is part of the larger education reform of a country, and is often initiated by the ministry of education with the support of donors, especially in the Third World. For purposes of this study, in order to discuss the Namibian SCS, an example of the National Cluster Model, it is essential to provide an historical context for the country's SCS. The National Cluster Model is the model under consideration in Namibia.

2.6 The historical background of the School Cluster System in Namibia

In this section the details of cluster-based education reform in Namibia are discussed. In the first part a brief contextual background to the restructuring of education management after independence, with specific reference to the policy document 'Toward Education for All" (1993) is provided. Secondly

the section discusses the processes which led to the introduction of the SCS in Namibia. Decentralisation of education is briefly discussed in relation to the notion of the SCS.

2.6.1 Restructuring of education management and administration

Prior to independence in 1990, education in Namibia was administered by 11 education authorities, of which 10 were ethnically based. It is important to note that the education governance system which existed prior to independence was characterised by racial and ethnic segregation and inequality. Some notable characteristic features of the system were its lack of democratic participation and a lack of transparency on the part of education authorities in dealing with education matters. With the advent of independence in 1990, a single Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture was established, merging all the 11 administrations (Mutorwa, 2004:3). Following independence, the Ministry of Education undertook a comprehensive education reform process aimed at achieving four broad goals: access, equity, quality and democracy in education provision (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1993). One of the key policy goals was to extend access to education by increasing the number of schools countrywide in order to meet the goal of universal primary education. In the context of a newly democratic state, equity was to be achieved by making sure that all schools in Namibia were provided with the necessary resources for teaching and learning.

The improvement of education quality was an important aspect of reform at this time. One of the priorities for achieving this goal was to strengthen in-service teacher professional development programmes and pre-service training. This has been a key aspect of reform in developing democratic education in Namibia. The emphasis at the time was on developing a system organised around broad participation in decision-making and accountability of the various stakeholders in education. This was seen to be in keeping with the goal of democratic governance, and with the spirit of EFA (Ministry of Education, 1993). These policy goals arose out of "Toward Education for All", a policy document, which guided the education reform initiatives post independence, and was published in 1993 by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1993). The new Ministry of Education and Culture established regional offices in various parts of the country to serve as local centres for the administration and management of education. It was assumed at the time that such a move would enable the regional education offices to speed up the implementation of policies which were aimed at achieving the main goals of reform.

The establishment of regional education offices, and the subsequent establishment of circuit offices and school clusters, was a move towards a new system in the management structure of education. The central ministry was to retain the function of policy formulation, setting the standards of the education system, and the regional education directorates were responsible for the implementation of educational programmes in their regions in keeping with the goals of EFA.

The Namibian Constitution, article 20 (1990) enshrined compulsory primary education. Therefore, one of the priorities of the Ministry was to ensure that the education system was expanded and that more children had access to primary education in line with the provision enshrined in the Constitution. The regional education directorates were expected to monitor and spearhead policy implementation in schools. The emphasis was on achieving the four broad education goals and the reform was geared toward redressing the major disparities in the education system inherited from the apartheid education system and reaching EFA goals by the year 2000 (Ministry of Basic Education Sports & Culture, 2000).

Over the twenty years since independence, the Ministry's main focus has been on achieving the nationally set goals and the internationally set goals of Education for All (EFA) in Namibia. However, access to education for children, and professional development and support for teachers, particularly those in rural areas, remain challenges. The quality of teaching and of the performance of learners has remained unsatisfactory, particularly in rural areas. To illustrate this, the SACMEQ research results of a study carried out in 1995 on grade 6 English learners in Namibia revealed that the quality of education was poor at that time. Schools in the rural areas in particular were ranked lowest in terms of reaching the desired standard. The Katima Mulilo (Caprivi) region was ranked the lowest nationally, with a mean score of 16.6, followed by Rundu with 18 (Snyder &Voigts 1998).

During the nineties, all these issues seemed to require a major reform of the entire administration and management of the education system in order to achieve the broad goals of EFA as well as those of government. The need to strengthen the management structures at various levels of the education system in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools was seen to be a major factor influencing reform.

2.6.2 The GTZ-Basic Education Project

In the decade following independence, the Ministry of Education was faced with a variety of t challenges in ensuring the achievement of the EFA goals and the national goals. Expanding access to basic education was seen as a key aspect of reform because of its link with the EFA goals. In the context of policy development, Leven (2010:743) argues that, in policy-making, governments are faced with having to deal with many complex issues at once in the process of formulating policies. Policy-making in education has added complexities. Significantly during the early to mid-1990s, the Ministry of Education worked in partnership with various donor agencies and development partners who supported and advised the ministry on various policy initiatives. Some donor organisations and development partners offered technical assistance to the ministry in different areas, and wielded significant influence in the reform process. One of the initiatives funded and supported by the donor community was the 'Basic Education Project' (BEP), which supported education reform programmes such as decentralisation, curriculum reform and material development in African Languages (http://www.nied.edu.na).The initiative was supported by German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) and

funded by the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development. The assistance and funding was based on bilateral cooperation between Namibia and the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation (Ministry of Basic Education Sports & Culture, 2000).

One of the key areas of support for the GTZ/BEP project was that of the decentralisation of management and supervision of schools (Ministry of Basic Education Sports & Culture, 2000:22). Prior to 1996, all inspectors and subject advisors were based at the regional offices far from schools. Dittmar *et al*. (2002:4) report that a survey conducted in Namibia in 1995 found that on average each school was inspected once every two and a half years. The GTZ/BEP pilot project, in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, embarked upon the SCS project in 1995, in the Rundu Education region, starting, in this initial phase, to design and implement the decentralized system of management and supervision of education in this region. This led to the development of circuit offices, and school clusters in the region from 1996 to 1997.

The goals of the piloting process, and the subsequent introduction of the SCS throughout the country, were to develop a new system of school management by dividing schools into a number of circuits and school clusters in order to improve school management and teaching and learning (Mendelssohn & Ward, 2000). It is important to note that the pilot project was not formally adopted as national policy, but was essentially a donor driven initiative for the Basic Education Project and the project enjoyed the support of the ministry and the regional education directorates.

According to the Ministry of Basic Education & Culture (1997:19), the SCS was aimed at the promotion of more efficient administration and management of schools and provide teacher support. In the "Education for All" (EFA) report for the year 2000, the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture (2000:22) makes the following reference to the SCS:

> A donor-funded project attempted to enhance the quality of teaching through improved support mechanisms including the provision of new circuit offices, organising the schools in clusters and providing management training to the staff of the regional office including the inspectors. The new circuit offices brought the inspectors closer to the schools they served, making contact that is more frequent possible. By organising the schools in clusters, mutual support was encouraged and in-service training efforts became more manageable.

What is important to note here is that the SCS was not a ministerial policy; the donor agency supported regions in setting up the system in line with the agreed areas of support, after it was formally piloted and introduced in Rundu. Eventually, in 1999, the SCS was extended to other regions including Caprivi region, with the support of the GTZ/BEP.

Available literature indicates that, after the introduction of the 1996/97 SCS in Rundu, GTZ/BEP support was extended to other regions in the form of technical assistance and financial support and training, with the focus on decentralized management(Mendelsohn & Ward, 2001:53).The areas of focus were:

- Improving management in schools
- Local curriculum development and planning
- In-service training of teachers at local level.

2.6.3 The need for the SCS

According to Mendelsohn & Ward (2001), the SCS in Namibia evolved as a means of meeting management needs in the framework of decentralised education management. One of the stated goals underpinning the SCS is the development of better management and planning practices which would in turn improve the delivery of education at the local level. The implementation of the SCS in Rundu in 1996 was also motivated by the need to improve the flow of learners from one school phase to another in order to address the high drop-out figures in schools in rural areas, where most schools were small and did not offer a complete cycle of all grade levels (Dittmar *et al*., 2002). This implies that, in the framework of the SCS, the flow of learners within the cluster schools from one school phase to the other could be easily coordinated among the schools in the cluster.

Since the initial introduction of the SCS in Namibia was a donor-driven initiative, and was introduced in various regions at different times, it is important to discuss some of the key contextual factors which motivated the introduction of the SCS.

2.6.3.1 Management and organisational problems

Chapman (1990) describes school-based management as a form of educational management in which the school becomes the primary unit of decision-making, thereby allowing local management professionals at schools opportunities to be involved in decision-making. One of the main arguments against the existing model of education administration and management was that such a system limits the level of participation by all stakeholders in decision-making and in the implementation of educational programmes. In the context of democratic participation the SCS reform is seen as allowing lower level managers, such as principals, to have more autonomy in making decisions and solving problems, in schools as they arise.

2.6.3.2 The isolation of schools

Isolation has many different connotations. In the Namibian context Dittmar *et al*. (2002:3) suggest that isolation of schools and teachers has many dimensions, from physical isolation and distance from urban centres or centres of government services, to lack of contact between teachers in neighbouring schools. Then there is the lack of support and monitoring in the form of visits or inspections from the relevant officials, especially to schools in rural areas. Teachers and schools in rural areas, even more than those in urban areas, need professional support from inspectors and advisory teachers. It was against this background that a need arose for a framework which could provide rural schools and teachers' opportunities for regular meetings and communication with other teachers and schools.

Isolation of schools and teachers, particularly in rural areas, was seen as one of the major factors which promoted the introduction of the SCS, taking into consideration the lack of resources from the government to extend and expand education provision in those areas. Clustering was seen as a potential tool to counter the effects of isolation and improve education delivery in rural areas.

2.6.3.3 The size of schools

Mendelssohn & Ward (2001), in their study on clusters in Namibia, found that most Namibian schools, especially those in rural areas, were very small. Their review indicated that one third of all schools in Namibia by the year 2001 had five or fewer teachers and a very low learner enrolment. This implies that the teachers operating in small schools were often forced to teach a variety of subjects and grades, thereby compromising the quality of instruction in these schools.

Potter & Williams (1994) argue that the small size of schools often leads to the social and professional isolation of teachers in these schools. This results in teachers working in isolation without having opportunities to share ideas and experiences with colleagues offering the same subjects in the same grades. Therefore, the small size of schools seems to be a general problem that proved to be a significant factor in promoting the introduction of the SCS in Namibia.

The SCS was introduced in Namibia in an attempt to address some of these key systemic factors outlined above. The need for government to achieve its national goals, and the EFA goal of providing quality basic education in the context of limited resources, are some of the issues which are linked to the promotion of the SCS in the country.

2.7 The Advantages of the SCS

2.7.1 Improving management practices

Advocates of school-based management argue that local decision-making based on stakeholder participation promotes responsive to local needs (Chapman, 1990). In this context, the SCS provides a platform for coordination between principals, teachers, advisory teachers and inspectors of education to deliberate on matters affecting education. In this process the cluster centres become centres of administration as management units which connect schools to the offices of inspectors and to the regional office. Dittmar *et al.* (2002:12) claim that this decentralised educational management system improves the delivery of education as management decisions are made at schools and clusters in a collaborative management style.

2.7.2. Improving teaching and learning practices

Dittmar *et al*. (2002:11) argue that one of the advantages of the SCS is that it enables the diffusion of good teaching practices in schools, in that it provides for a framework within which teachers engage in collegial support through various cluster-based subject groups. The argument for this is that, within

these frameworks, learners in the cluster benefit from common cluster tests and examinations as teachers have the opportunity to share and interpret the curriculum goals in groups and reflect on their teaching and learning situations.

Advocates of the SCS argue that, in the process of enhancing professional contact with others through the structures of the clusters, teachers will benefit from improved subject didactics as clustering offers them opportunities through in-service training and workshops at local levels.

2.7.3 Sharing of resources to enhance teaching and learning

Sharing and cooperation are central to the notion of the SCS. Open discussions and strong cooperation between schools enable resources such as teaching materials to be shared. Specialised teachers can be shared among schools within the framework of the SCS (Mendelsohn & Ward, 2001:14). Furthermore, teachers and principals within the cluster can make use at the cluster centres of available resources and equipment such as copiers and duplicating machines to the benefit of teaching and learning in the satellite schools. Advocates for the SCS work on the assumption that the sharing of resources by schools within this framework has an indirect impact on quality education delivery in the system (Dittmar *et al*., 2002).

2.7.4 Empowerment at local level

According to Dittmar *et al.* (2002:13), the SCS serves as an empowerment model for the teachers and principals of schools organised under the cluster system. They argue that, in the process of working together in various collaborative groups, teachers become motivated and will be encouraged to carry out their work within a supportive environment. They argue that the delegation of authority to circuits and clusters empowers principals through circuit and cluster management committees to make decisions appropriate for their particular context in clusters and satellite schools.

2.7.5 Improving efficiency

'Efficiency' is a term with a number of different connotations in economic and financial contexts. In simple terms it denotes lowering the cost of education, while on the other hand it is linked to sophisticated distinctions used by economists relating to what they call 'cost-effectiveness'. In the context of the SCS Dittmar *et al*. (2002:14) refer to efficiency with regard to the smooth administration and management of schools. The argument suggests that the SCS improves efficiency in this context as it can speed up communication and the flow of information between the regional offices, circuit offices and schools. Improving efficiency in the context of the SCS seems, according to its advocates, to carry with it the assumption that the administrative and management structures of clusters can significantly improve with the coordination between schools and the administrative offices of the circuit inspectors, and eventually the regional office, a move that can be closely linked to cost cutting as it involves shifting some educational costs to schools.

2.7.6 In-service training

With regard to in-service training of teachers, Dittmar *et al*. (2002:16) suggest that the SCS provides a framework which enables training needs analysis to be carried out at the local level within the clusters, so that teachers receive tailor-made training from advisory teachers, inspectors and cluster facilitators that is responsive to their particular needs and contexts. According to this in-service training model, advisory teachers, and inspectors of education are seen to coordinate training through the relevant structures such as the subject committees at the cluster level, and which in turn are seen to be ideally versed in the appropriate training needs of teachers. According to this model, the SCS leads to a more effective implementation of training programmes in that stakeholders such as subject facilitators are empowered to train the teachers in their respective schools within a cluster.

Proponents argue that, within the framework of the SCS, teaching and learning can benefit from the collegial support and cooperation promoted among teachers through their sharing of teaching expertise and other educational resources in the schools. This implies that the SCS would potentially improve planning and delivery of the curriculum.

2.8 The introduction of the SCS in Namibia

Since the introduction of the GTZ/BEP baseline project in the Rundu Education region in 1996/1997, the SCS has been introduced gradually throughout the other regions of the country. Dittmar *et al.* (2002) observe that the implementation of the SCS evolved and proceeded in different ways in each region according to local needs, constraints and opportunities. What has been common in all phases of implementation is the baseline studies carried out for the regions which provided specific recommendations for the grouping of schools into clusters and clusters into circuits. Between 1999 and 2000 the SCS was introduced in the Katima Mulilo (Caprivi), Keetmanshoop, and Khorixas education regions after successful baseline studies and mapping were concluded.

By the year 2000 baseline studies for the northern regions of Ondangwa East and Ondangwa West had been initiated, and the SCS was finally introduced in 2001 in the two regions (Mendelshon & Ward, 2001). The last region to introduce the SCS was the Windhoek education region, where the system was implemented in 2002. All schools in Namibia had been grouped into 260 clusters. The clusters were in turn grouped into inspection circuits with five to seven clusters in each circuit (Dittmar *et al*., 2002).

Mendelsohn & Ward (2001) outline the different approaches adopted in the baseline studies in different regions during the implementation phase. The first approach entailed visits to all schools by the GTZ/BEP officials and regional education representatives to assess their relationships with nearby schools, to analyse the development needs of the schools, and their suitability as potential cluster centres. This approach was used in the Rundu, Katima Mulilo, Khorixas and Keetmanshoop education regions. The second approach used included consultative meetings with inspectors of education,

senior education officials in the regions, and political office bearers such as councillors and some selected members of the public. The objectives of the consultative meetings between the GTZ/BEP officials, education officials and school boards were to assess the suitability cluster centres and recommend the establishment of clusters.

2.8.1 A map showing the implementation of the SCS strategy by year in Namibia

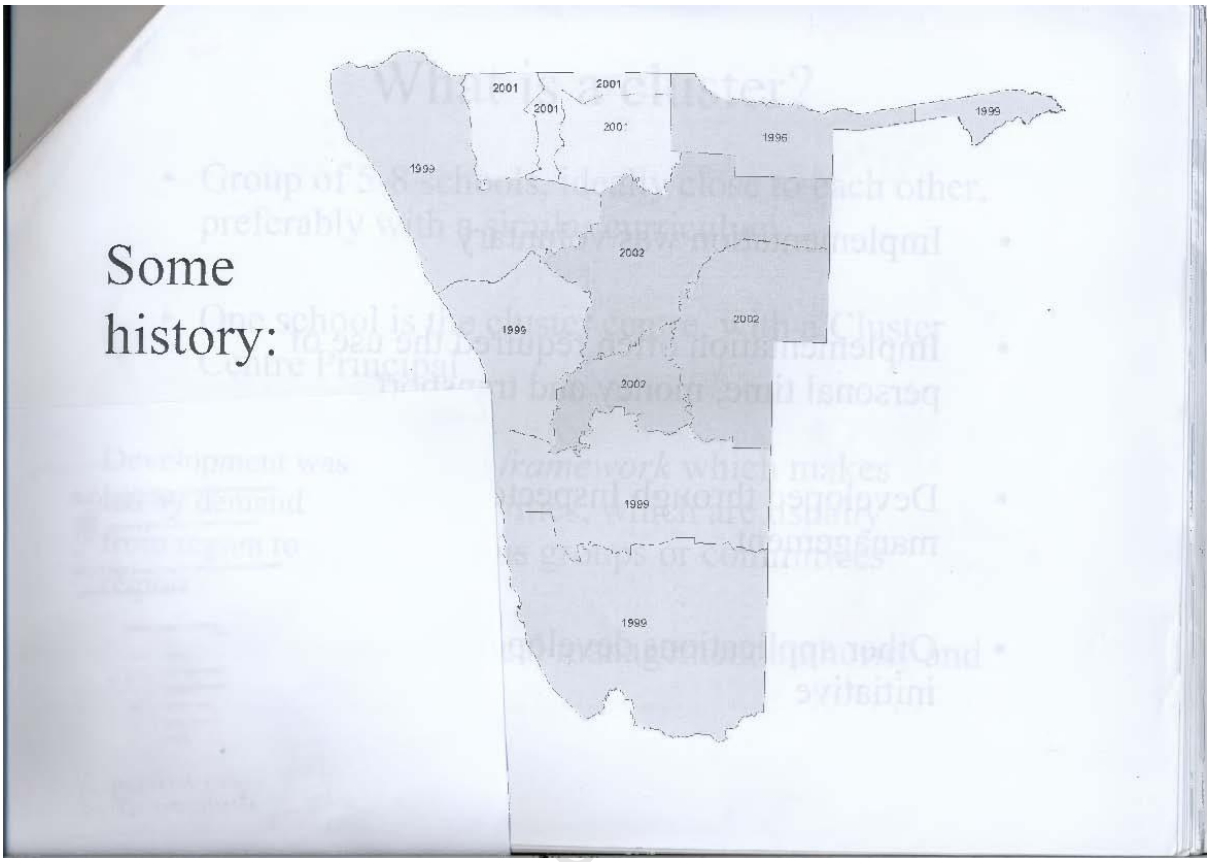

Figure 1

Adapted from Mendelsohn & Ward 2007

2.9 Steps towards formalisation of the SCS

From its initial introduction, the SCS operated somewhat informally despite being implemented in the regions with the assistance of the donor agency. Although the SCS was not formalized into policy, the Ministry of Education recognised the system. This means that the SCS has been made part of the education and management structure in all regions in the country. The problems that have arisen as a result of this lack of formal structure will be highlighted below. These problems indicate a growing need for the formal adoption of system which could provide a framework for the monitoring and evaluation of the policy. A review of the system by the Ministry of Education and various stakeholders, including the teachers' union in 2007, provides a framework towards the formalisation of the SCS (Mendelshon & Ward, 2007).

2.9.1The Draft SCS Policy 2010

The Ministry of Education, in response to some of the reports mentioned and reviewed in the previous section (Dittmar *et al.,* 2002; Mendelshon & ward 2001; Mendelshon & Ward 2007), introduced a

draft school cluster policy in 2010. The Ministry of Education (2010) draft SCS policy represents a step towards formalising the SCS policy. The draft policy attempts to codify the issues raised by the various reports into a policy document intended to provide a guide for implementation of a SCS. The document revolves around two key issues, namely, management and professional support of teachers. The move towards formalisation and institutionalisation of the SCS as stated in the draft SCS policy (2010:7) includes and emphasises the need for the monitoring and evaluation of the policy through:

- Trimester cluster reports to the regional education office
- Regional reports to the directorate of Programmes and Quality Assurance (PQA)
- Annual school self-evaluation process
- National External School Evaluation (NESE) visits

The draft is in favour of this policy as it begins with a clear identification of the goals and alludes to most of the key issues discussed in previous studies and reports, such as reducing the isolation of teachers, collaboration, and the raising of standards of teaching and learning. It indicates the framework within which all schools in Namibia will be required to operate through standardisation of the SCS. Furthermore, it provides for the adoption the SCS as a formal structure of the ministry. The draft policy (2010:4) document also makes explicit the scope of the activities which are permissible under the framework of the SCS, stating that:

> The Ministry of Education adopts the school cluster system as the formal structure for the management of education and for professional support of teachers. Every school in Namibia will be a member of a cluster of schools. This requirement holds for all schools, whether private or government, that offer any component of formal Grade 1 to 12 curricula. School clusters, in turn, are grouped into circuits, each of which is led by an Inspector of Education.

2.9.1.1 The Cluster Centres

The draft SCS policy (2010:5) further makes explicit the role and position of the cluster centres as units of management and professional development of teachers. One of the aspects highlighted in the policy document is that the reiteration by the Ministry of the role of cluster centres as key to a development process aimed at serving the needs of the teachers. The draft policy also includes budgetary provisions, extra personnel, facilities and other services that the Ministry is expected to provide.

2.9.1.2 The Cluster Centre Principal (CCP)

An important point to make here is that, in the 14 years of the existence of the SCS in regions, prior to the draft policy, the Cluster Centre Principals operated informally as the heads of the clusters by virtue of being the principals at the core schools. The 2010 draft policy document stipulates clearly that the principal of the core school, apart from being an ordinary principal, is to be formally appointed as CCP, with accompanying benefits such as training and extra remuneration. Thus, the policy document provides a direction towards formalisation of the expanded functions of the CCP,

and guidelines as to the parameters within which he or she will operate. The draft SCS policy (2010:5) states clearly that:

> While the Cluster Centre Principal is the most senior authoritative staff member in a school cluster, he or she will not be involved unnecessarily in the day-to-day affairs of each school, which will be the clear responsibility of the principal or designated head of each member school.

However, this stipulation is potentially controversial because the same document authorises the CCP to be the formal leader of the Cluster and empowers him/her to be responsible for promoting and coordinating all activities between the schools that make up the cluster. There is no clear division of powers between the CCP and the other principals. It is not clear from the draft policy what activities would be regarded as interference by the CCP in the day-to-day affairs of the satellite schools.

2.9.1.3 Training of teachers

The draft School Cluster Policy (2010:6) emphasises that in-service training of teachers within the cluster schools be conducted under the framework of the cluster. This implies that the SCS enables teachers and other staff members to be trained at the Cluster Centres in various programmes related to their work. It further stipulates how in-service training is to be carried out in the circuit: in-service training will be targeted through the Clusters and Cluster representatives will be trained and will provide training to teachers in their respective clusters.

2.9.1.4 Financing of the School Cluster

As described in the previous section, one of the crucial aspects of the draft SCS policy (2010) is the question of financing the activities of the Cluster Centres. The draft SCS policy (2010:7) states that, within the framework of the policy, regional offices will make budgetary provisions for the running costs of the Clusters. However, the policy also states that Clusters will be responsible for providing extra sources of funds through the establishment of the Cluster Development Fund. This implies that the financial responsibility for the educational activities and services of the Clusters will at least in part be shifted to the schools and the community.

This aspect of the policy would seem to be linked to the 'cost recovery' policy ideology, where the government covers the running cost of the cluster, and the responsibility for the development budget devolves to the schools and the community, who are expected to raise their own funds to improve the education quality in their schools. What seems to be highly controversial here is the stipulation that schools may draw from their School Development Fund (SDF) to cover cluster related expenses such as travel. This could be interpreted as a move on the part of the government and Ministry towards shifting the financial responsibility of the reform to the schools and the community. The suggested use of a "tariff" for travelling costs for member schools seems to create a burden for schools, especially those in rural areas, where parents often find it difficult to pay their contributions to the SDF, and often have no financial stability.

2.10 Conclusion

The widespread arguments which promote the SCS revolve around the ideas rooted in the concept of devolution or community control of education which have been emphasised by World Bank and IMF educational planners from the 1990s as an administrative mechanism for meeting seemingly contradictory goals – the need to increase equity and democracy while at the same time dealing with fiscal economy for governments in an era of recession and economic retraction. The emphasis on cost effectiveness, localised decision - making and decentralised management reflect that strategy and a rhetorical commitment to the promotion of an efficient and effective delivery of public goods and services (Edwards & Mbatia, 2010). These strategies are closely related to the neo-liberal agenda which promotes market - oriented policies in which key public sector services are privatised or semi-privatized, with the central government playing a lesser role in the provision of such services. Although advocates of the SCS emphasise that the SCS can potentially promote democratic ethos and strengthen the overall effectiveness and accountability of schools, the stress on these aspects can conceal the dual agenda and motive behind the SCS policy.

The theory of the SCS suggests that the reform can potentially provide many positive outcomes, when implemented in varying contexts. The literature referred to above puts a strong case for the desirability of SCS policy but does not present strong evidence to point to real and significant change and improvement with regard to equity and quality of educational delivery in the rural contexts where it has been implemented. The main arguments presented in favour of the SCS are based on a theoretical commitment to the theories which underpin decentralization and devolution, but these are not backed up by sufficient evidence of the transformative potential of decentralization and local management. In each case the question of the cost of the reforms to the local community in terms of the "cost recovery" strategy seem to be largely neglected. The theory which supports the SCS reform agenda, linked closely to the policy of decentralization, would seem to imply the promotion of educational rights, the improvement in the quality and access to education, and promotion of democratic ethos of education in rural and disadvantaged areas. This study will examine the experience of those most closely involved in such a policy initiative in a specific geographical rural area of Namibia during the period since independence.

In this chapter I have discussed the literature which underpins the notion of the SCS. This literature sets out the guidelines for the aims and objectives of the SCS policy in general terms. I have described how the SCS was introduced in Namibia as an education reform strategy, aimed at providing a decentralized management structure in order to improve teaching and learning conditions in schools, particularly those in rural and isolated areas. The chapter described and discussed the historical steps leading to the introduction of the SCS in Namibia and the development of the SCS in different regions of the country. The last part of the chapter provides a critical analysis of the SCS policy in the context of the current study.

CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In Chapter Two I presented a review of the literature for the study. In this chapter, I discuss the research design I employed, including the tools I used for collection of data. This chapter also provides a brief discussion on the process of data analysis for the study and addresses issues of ethics and validity.

3.2 Research design

3.2.1The case study method

This study was situated within the broad qualitative approach in the form of an interpretive case study. According to Leedy & Ormrod (2010), case study designs are useful when conducting an in-depth study about a programme or event. From an interpretive perspective, the case study approach was appropriate for this study because I aimed at understanding how participants in a specific context interpret the goals and implementation of the School Cluster System (Maree, 2007).

Hamilton (2011:2) stresses that case studies enable the researcher to build a rich picture by using a variety of data collection instruments. By using different tools of data collection, the researcher captures the views, perceptions, experiences and ideas of the individuals relating to the subject, issue or case being studied. One of the advantages of the case study approach, and why it was appropriate for this study, is that it provided an opportunity to obtain "rich data" as it gave me in-depth insight into the participants' lived experiences within a particular context. Employing this approach provided an opportunity for me to explore and interpret the perceptions, experiences and ideas of participants regarding the goals and the implementation process of the SCS in a 'real life' context.

3.2.2 The Sample

In research, *sampling* refers to the selection of the site and population of the study. Maree (2007:172) cautions that "it is usually impossible to include the entire population in your study, the two main restrictions being time and cost" My study was confined to one rural Cluster of four schools. I selected this cluster by using convenience and purposive sampling. The participants included three principals, one Head of Department, and eight teachers. In addition, one circuit inspector of education who supervises the cluster was selected. One element justifying convenience sampling is that participants were easily and conveniently available. Ball (1990), cited in Cohen *et al.* (2007:115), explains the suitability and value of purposive sampling in particular kinds of studies, explaining that "purposive sampling is used to access 'knowledgeable people' who have an in-depth knowledge on a

particular issue, maybe by virtue of their professional role, power, access to networks, expertise, or experience". Thus, the respondents in the sample, besides being selected for convenience, were also selected on the basis of their professional roles and experience as implementers of the School Cluster System in Namibia.

Cohen *et al.* (2007) argue that, although this type of sampling is not representative, and therefore renders the responses not generalisable, the primary concern of the study is to acquire in-depth information from those who are in a position to give it. In addition, the combination of the convenience and purposive sampling model employed in this study was based on reasons of convenience, accessibility and the availability of the participants. As an educator in the region, I am familiar with the environment so it was easy for me to access the schools and the respondents who volunteered to participate.

3.2.3 The research process and navigating access to the research sites

I first requested permission from the regional Director of Education in the Caprivi region to conduct a study in the Cluster I had selected. In the letter to the Director I briefly explained the details of the research. I was duly permitted to conduct the research study in the region and I received a letter to that effect (see appendix D).

Secondly, at a general meeting to officially open the academic year (2012), hosted by the Directorate of Education in Caprivi region at the beginning of the year, I met the principals of the selected schools in the Cluster. I presented the letter of permission from the Regional Director to the meeting. I then set up appointments with the principals. Prior to the actual data collection exercise I held a brief meeting with each of the three principals and the teachers where I explained the details of the research and set up appointments for the interviews with the principals and teachers at the respective schools.

All respondents, teachers and principals participated openly and were eager to answer the questions during the discussions.

3.2.4 Data collection instruments

According to Bell (1993), the approach adopted for a research study and method of data collection depends on the nature of the inquiry and the type of information required by the researcher. In this research, the concern was to understand individual perceptions of the goals and implementation of the School Cluster System. I used the case study approach because of its adaptability to various data collection instruments and because it enabled me to get detailed data from various perspectives. The main data collection instruments I used in this research were document analysis and semi-structured interviews. While in the field, I realised that observing some situations at cluster schools would provide additional data that could be useful for my research. I took notes throughout the data

collection process and attempted to record any interesting situations and issues that occurred that related to my research topic.

To map out the focus for my research I began by consulting relevant official documents to provide a background to the topic. The documents analysis helped me to formulate my interview questions. I made appointments with all the participants and explained the issues that were going to be covered in the interview sessions. In each case, I explained the aims and the potential value of the research to the participants. At each stage of the process I presented the letter of permission from the Regional Director to participants.

3.2.4.1 Document analysis

Various writers on research methodology argue for the value of documents as part of the data collection process. Maree (2007:82) recommends the use of a wide range of documents: "When you use documents as a data gathering technique, you will focus on all types of written communications that may shed light on the phenomenon that you are investigating". I used document analysis in order to establish a background from which I could launch the enquiry and to assist me in clarifying and formulating the questions to be posed during the interviews. Burns (1997:372) argues for documents as an important tool of data collection, in that they are another way of corroborating or triangulating evidence derived from other sources.

In addition to the official data relating to the SCS in Namibia (Mendelssohn & Ward, 2001; Mendelshon & Ward, 2007; SCS draft policy, 2010), I closely analysed some documents used in the schools in the Cluster which related to the Cluster policy and management, such as minutes of the committees and correspondence regarding the SCS. These documents provide both a record and insight into the actual process of implementation. The Cluster Centre kept files with documents relating to the Cluster, which I accessed through the Cluster Centre Principal who permitted me to make copies of some of the relevant documents from the files.

The analysis of documents was important in order to obtain some formal descriptions of the activities of the SCS as recorded and presented in the documents.

The document analysis prior to conducting the interviews assisted me to map put the focus of the study as it informed the design of the interview schedule and the formulation of the questions, and I continued with document analysis throughout the data collection process. With the permission of the principals at the schools, other documents were made available to me. I was allowed to photocopy some of the documents, including:

- official reports on the SCS in the early years of its implementation
- Cluster Centre Principals' Manual
- minutes of the Cluster Management Committee

- minutes of subject committees

3.2.4.2 Observation

Maree (2007:82) argues that observations allow researchers to learn through personal experience about the ways in which the setting is socially constructed in terms of power, communication lines, discourse and language. In the context of this study, observation was not a principal tool of data collection but I 'naturally' used it to enrich and supplement data collected using the other methods. I used observation during data collection at all the sites to record all the information which I found useful, or potentially useful, for my study, recording my observations in a research notebook.

Kumar (2011:140) stresses that, in situations where relevant and full information cannot be elicited by the posing of questions, either because participants are unaware of the answers, are not sufficiently articulate, or do not wish to divulge what they consider to be sensitive information, observation can close the data gap by supplementing the information collected from participants during questioning.

3.2.4.3 Semi-structured interviews

Maree (2007:87) sees semi-structured interviews as being suitable for case study research projects as a means of corroborating data emerging from other data sources. According to Walliman (2001:239), this approach to interviews is useful because it strikes a balance between achieving definitive answers to definitive questions, and leaving time and space for further development of those answers. One of the characteristics making for the increased flexibility of semi-structured interviews is that open-ended questions can be included. Moore (2000:122) concurs with this by pointing that the use of semi-structured interviews allows the researcher to exercise some control over the circumstances of the interview so that data collected is consistent, while at the same time, the flexibility and responsiveness of an in-depth interview is maintained.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with the Cluster Centre Principal, two satellite school principals, one Circuit Inspector, and one Head of Department. I also interviewed eight teachers from the three of the four schools which make up the Cluster. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face with the participants. I asked the Circuit Inspector questions regarding his views and experience of the SCS, as an education manager. Because I was aiming at an in-depth understanding of how these professionals interpret, view and perceive the goals and implementation of the SCS, I asked principals and teachers the same questions about their views and experiences, including the challenges faced, or facing, them as implementers of the SCS.

I obtained permission from the participants to record the interviews using a digital voice recorder. Although none of the participants is a first language speaker of English, all interviews were conducted

in English, and all the participants were comfortable with it since it is the official language in their work environment and in Namibia. The interviews were transcribed to permit data analysis from the transcripts.

3.2.4.4 Data analysis

According to Cohen *et al*. (2007), qualitative study data analysis is about organising, accounting for, and explaining the data. It involves making sense of the data in terms of the research subjects' definition of the situation by noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities. Notes that were taken from the documents and interview transcripts were coded and then sorted into categories in relation to the research goals. Maree (2007: 105) defines coding as "marking the segments of data with symbols, descriptive words or unique identifying names." From the categories I developed themes and sub-themes in relation to the research questions. This process included comparing and looking for patterns in the different categories and data sources.

The coding process enabled me to retrieve and group together data collected using different tools as I worked back and forth to examine and compare similarities in the sorted bits of data. During the process of data analysis, I found it useful to use colour codes, so that I could link similar sections of coded data into categories. This approach allowed for the data to be turned into meaningful and useful information, which enabled me to make sense of the perceptions of the participants regarding the goals and implementation of the SCS. Throughout data analysis I was continuously comparing, contrasting and rearranging the categories and themes that emerged from the different tools.

3.3 Research ethics

To comply with the requirements I submitted the UCT research ethics form, which is a requirement for conducting research with human subjects. The research ethics form was forwarded to the School of Education for ethics clearance so that I could conduct my study within the parameters of the UCT School of Education ethical rules.

According to Leedy & Ormrod (2005: 101), most ethical issues in research fall into one of the four categories:

- Protection from harm
- Informed consent
- Right to privacy
- Honesty with professional colleagues

Due consideration was taken to ensure that all participants were well informed of the aims and objectives of the study from the onset. I prepared consent forms, which I gave to the participants to sign after explaining the details of the study. The main principle regarding informed consent in research is that individuals can choose to participate in a study after being informed of the facts that would be likely to influence their decision to participate. In the letter of permission I made it clear that participation was voluntary.

Cohen *et al.* (2007:64) stress that one of the key ethical issues in research is 'anonymity', which means, "Information provided by the participants should in no way reveal their identity". To fulfil this principle, the participants in this research are identified with specialised codes and the cluster is identified with a pseudonym. I also assured the participants that their confidentiality was guaranteed. Cohen *et al.* (2007:65) stresses that "confidentiality means that, although the researchers know who has provided the information, or are able to identify participants from information given, they will in no way make the connection known publicly".

To comply with this general principle of research, I explained to the participants that their privacy and sensitivity were protected. I assured the participants of their rights to participate voluntarily and the right to withdraw at any stage. This helped me to build trust and a sound relationship with the participants.

3.4 Validity

In order to enhance the validity of my research findings triangulation was used to reduce the chances of reaching inconsistent conclusions. According to Maree (2007:39), triangulation is critical in facilitating interpretive validity and establishing data trustworthiness because it "reduces the risk of chance associations and systematic bias, and relies on information collected from a diverse range of individuals, teams and settings, using a variety of methods". I used a combination of methods of data collection so that I could provide a more detailed picture of the key issues in the study, and because it enabled me to approach the research questions in a number of different ways. To build confidence and trust I assured participants that I was not in any way conducting an inspection of their professional work but that I was engaged in understanding their perceptions regarding the goals and the implementation of the SCS. A further step to enhance validity was the constant quoting from primary sources.

3.5 Limitations

The study was conducted within certain limitations and has to be read with those limitations in mind. Firstly the amount of available literature on school clustering, particularly that relating to Namibia was limited. While there is an overrepresentation of cases, models and experiences from Asian countries, little has been written or researched about SCSs in African countries, Namibia in particular.

Time constraints were other limitation to this study, as it was conducted within a short period of time. The data collection time was significantly shortened because, as a fulltime student, I had to speed up the writing up of the research report and return to work, from which I had been granted leave for only a few months. Finally, there were financial constraints, as I had received no funding. I had to travel to schools in the cluster to conduct interviews with those principals and teachers who were participants in the study. Interviews were often conducted at times that suited the participants. In a few instances,

work related emergencies at the schools interrupted the process, because I had to wait for the participants at times when they were not immediately available.

3.6 Conclusion

The research process in the field provided me with an ideal opportunity to learn about the principles and steps of qualitative research. In the course of the research process I gained knowledge and insight into qualitative research in general. It was an excellent opportunity for me to explore and learn about research in a relatively short period of time. In this chapter, I explained the research process and the methods I used to collect different kinds of data for my research, and how the data were analysed.

A detailed description of the stages of this data analysis, as outlined in this chapter, together with the actual presentation of the findings of the research study, will be presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the data collected, using the tools discussed in Chapter Three, and the techniques of the analysis of the data, as discussed in the previous chapter. The data presented in this chapter was collected through the analysis of documents, transcribed interviews, and observation notes made at the research sites. Priority is accorded to data assembled from the interviews. During the inductive analysis of data transcripts, four main categories were established under which the findings of the study are reported. For each of the categories evidence from data sources is presented. Data from the interviews is supported by data from the analysis of documents, and from field observation notes where appropriate. The presentation is interpretive and the data is communicated by constantly quoting the actual words of the respondents as well as constantly citing from the documents.

4.2 The research environment

Lulali (pseudonym) Cluster consists of four schools. There are three combined schools offering grades one to ten, and one is a primary school offering grades one to seven. One of the three combined schools is the Cluster Centre. The other three are the satellite schools of the Cluster. According to the official regional boundaries, two of the four schools are situated within the jurisdiction of the Kabbe Constituency, while the other two are situated within the jurisdiction of the Katima Mulilo Rural Constituency. The 2011 national census results put the population of the Kabbe constituency at 14,500, and Katima Mulilo Rural at 16,300 respectively. The Cluster is in a predominantly rural area, with a few amenities, such as clinics, next to schools A and B. All the schools are electrified, through the government's rural electrification programme and are connected via a gravel road. There are churches and small grocery shops situated within a short distance from schools A and B. Most teacher accommodation is in the form of mud huts built by community members, as is the practice in the region.

School A

School A is the Cluster Centre, with a teaching staff of 21, and a total enrolment of 365 learners. The school is situated in Kabbe Constituency, approximately sixty kilometres east of the regional capital of Katima Mulilo. The main economic activity for the community in the area, as is the case with all the other schools to be described, is subsistence farming. The school consists of an administration block housing the office of the principal, the secretaries and the HODs. There are three blocks of classrooms. All the buildings are permanent structures built with bricks. Although the centre is poorly serviced with educational resources, there is a resource centre for teachers from the schools in the

cluster. The Cluster Centre school also has a computer room consisting of 21 computers, all connected to the internet. The school is surrounded by a clinic, a local church, a few small shops, and an Agricultural Rural Development Centre for the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry. The office of the Regional Constituency Councillor is situated approximately 500 metres from the school. There is no running water at the school, water being supplied by means of water tankers of the Department of Rural Water Supply. The school is connected with a modern telecommunication landline.

School B

School B is a Combined School, offering grades 1 to 10, with 18 teachers and a total enrolment of 333 learners. The school is also situated in Kabbe Constituency, approximately twenty kilometres east of the Cluster Centre. The school consists of a brick office block for the principal and secretary, and three blocks of classrooms. One of the rooms in the classroom block is used as a library. The walls of the library room are decorated with some posters but there are very few books and other educational materials. There are small grocery shops, a church and a clinic next to the school. Water to the school is also supplied by the Directorate of Rural Water Supply.

School C

School C, like school B, is also a Combined School, with 16 teachers and a total enrolment of 233 learners. The school is located approximately thirty kilometres south of the Cluster Centre. There is a brick built administration block housing the offices of the principal and the HOD and the secretary' reception office. There are two blocks of classrooms and a block of pit-latrines for teachers and learners. There are a few small grocery shops next to the school.

4.2.1 A Map showing Circuits and Clusters in Caprivi region

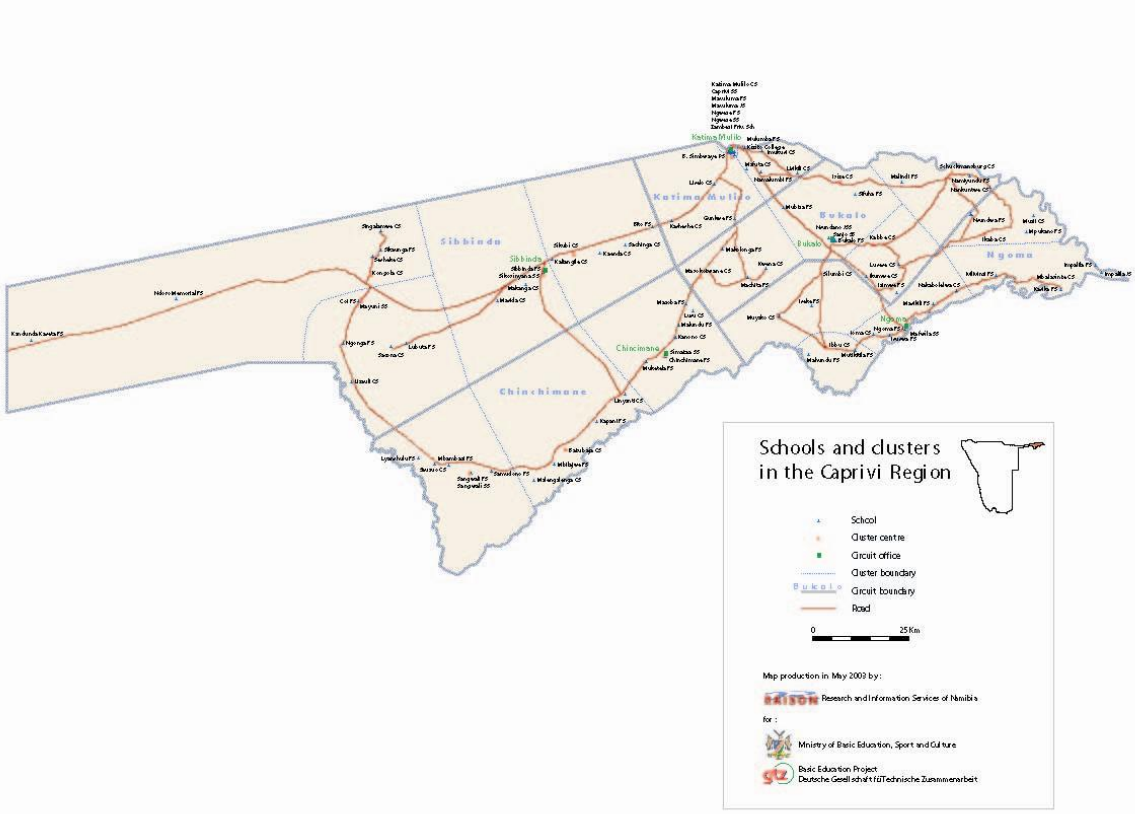

Figure 2

4.3 Profiles of the participants

The participants in this research were purposefully selected from the schools which constitute the Cluster. I interviewed a total of 13 respondents from three of the schools in the Cluster. Three principals, one head of department (HOD), eight teachers and one inspector of education were interviewed. The leadership in the cluster seems to be dominated by males, all three principals being male; the one HOD who participated is also a male. There was gender balance in the ordinary teacher participants as four were males, while the other four were females. The respondents had different viewpoints in relation to the goals of the SCS, and different impressions of the implementation of the SCS, as they occupy different positions at different levels of the SCS. In order to comply with the anonymity and confidentiality requirements, I have used codes for the respondents. The 'IE' code is used to identify the inspector of education. The 'P' code represents the principals and the 'T' is used to identify teachers and the HOD.

IE

IE was, at the time of the study, a male inspector of education of the Circuit under which the Cluster falls. Prior to becoming an inspector, he served as a teacher and principal at various schools in the

region. He held a Bachelor of Arts Degree and a B Ed (Honours). He had been in the education system in various capacities for the past thirty-four years.

P1

P1 was a male principal at the Cluster Centre and the chairperson of the Cluster Management Committee. At the time of this study he was 48 years old and held a B Ed (Honours) degree. He had been in the teaching profession for the past twenty-three years.

P2

P2, a male principal at School B, one of the satellite schools of the Cluster, was 46 years of age and holds a B Ed (Honours) degree. He had been in the teaching profession for the past twenty-two years. Before becoming the principal of School B in 2003, he was a teacher at other Clusters and schools in the region.

P3

P3 was a male principal at School C of the Cluster. He was 46 years of age. He held a B.A degree and a Higher Education Diploma (HED). He had been in the teaching profession for the past twenty-one years. In 1999, when the SCS was introduced in the region, he was already a principal at a school in another Cluster. He moved to this school and Cluster in 2010.

T1

T1 was a male teacher at the Cluster Centre School and was 34 years of age. He held a Basic Education Teacher Diploma (BETD) and an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) in History. He had been teaching for the past ten years in various Clusters and transferred to this cluster in 2007. He had been a member of the Cluster Examination Committee for two years at the time of the study.

T2

T2 was a female teacher at the Cluster Centre School. She was 42 years of age. She held a National Higher Education Certificate (NHEC) and had been in the teaching profession for the past nineteen years.

T3

T3 was a female teacher at the Cluster Centre School and she was 48 years of age. She qualified with an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) and had eighteen years of teaching experience.

T4

T4 was a female teacher at School B in the Cluster. She was 47 years of age and she held a Certificate in Primary Education (ECP) and a Diploma in Education African Languages (DEAL) from the University of Namibia (UNAM). She had twenty-two years of teaching experience and had also for the last three years been the coordinator of the extracurricular programme known as Window of Hope at her school.

T5

T5 was a 51 year old male teacher at School B in the Cluster. He had a Higher Education Diploma (HED) qualification and had been in the teaching profession for the past twenty-eight years.

T6

T6 was a 49 year old male teacher at the School B in the Cluster. He held a Senior Primary Teacher Diploma (SPD) qualification and had been in the teaching profession for the past twenty seven years.

T7

T7 was a 43 year old female teacher at School C in the Cluster. She held an NHEC qualification and had been in the teaching profession for eighteen years.

T8

T8 was a male teacher at School C in the cluster. He was 51 years of age. He held an HED qualification in History and had seventeen years of teaching experience.

T9

T9 was a Head of Department at School C in the Cluster. He was 56 years old and had thirty four years of teaching experience. He qualified with a Secondary Education Diploma (SED). At the time of the study he was the Head of Examinations at his school and offered Geography in the junior secondary phase.

The information above is tabulated as follows:

Code	Gender	Age	School leaving qualifications	Professional Qualifications	Years of Experience
T1	Male	34	Grade 12	ACE	10
T2	Female	42	Grade 12	NHEC	19
T3	Female	45	Grade 12	ACE	18
P1	Male	48	Grade 12	B Ed (Hons)	23
T4	Female	47	Grade 12	DEAL	23
T5	Male	51	Grade 12	HED	28
T6	Male	49	Grade 12	SPD	27
P2	Male	46	Grade 12	B Ed (Hons)	22
T7	Female	43	Grade 12	NHEC	18
T8	Male	51	Grade 12	HED	17
T9	Male	56	Grade 12	SED	34
P3	Male	46	Grade 12	BA (HED)PG	21
IE	Male	not given	Grade 12	BA, B Ed (Hons)	34

4.4 Presentation of findings

In Chapter Three I discussed how the data for this research was analysed. The themes used to present the data emerged from the inductive analysis of data collected in relation to my research goals. Data from documents and the interviews were systematically coded. During the coding process I labelled all data transcripts with descriptive words. As discussed in the preceding chapter, I used colour codes to sort the bits of coded data so that I could link similar segments into categories. I looked for similarities and meanings and grouped together related parts of the data. From the categories, I developed the themes in line with my research goals. The following main themes and categories, under which the findings of this study are presented, emerged from the data:

- Governance
- Perceptions of participants on the benefits of the SCS
- Tension surrounding the implementation process of the SCS

- Challenges experienced in the implementation of the SCS

The categories are presented with headings and subheadings in relation to the research goals.

4.4.1 Governance

As was discussed in the previous chapter, the strength of the SCS is widely perceived to be its promotion of more effective school governance in the form of delegation of authority to local level, localized decision-making and the promotion of community involvement in education in the interests of promoting equity and delivering quality education. The SCS model has been favoured globally because it is seen to be efficient in promoting these goals.

4.4.1.1 Delegation of authority to local level

The SCS is promoted as providing a more effective management and administration structure by strengthening the links between the office of the inspector and the schools. It is seen as a key innovation in providing a platform for collective planning and decision-making among members of the Cluster. An official document, dated April 15 2002, used in the training of the Cluster Centre Principals (CCPs), indicates that both the Ministry of Education and the regional offices supported the strengthening of the SCS through the delegation of authority to cluster-based management. The document identifies issues such as planning linked to the local needs of schools and promoted by local needs analysis of clusters. The document used in the training of Cluster Centre Principals (2002:6) claims that:

> The Cluster System encourages the delegation of decision-making functions from circuits to cluster and from cluster to schools, thus empowering the stakeholders on all levels. It allows flexibility in the use of local and national resources. Where assistance is not available locally, the request can be sent up the line until a solution is found.

Many respondents view the establishment of the Cluster Management Committee as a form of delegation because principals were charged with making collective decisions. Although specific areas of decision-making were often not identified, many respondents described the SCS in terms of a platform for leaders of the schools to plan together for the successful running of their schools. Many respondents viewed the SCS as a mechanism for the promotion of the decentralization policy, and as an empowerment tool for the principals and teachers in the Cluster in terms of management and planning for all the schools in the clusters. T8 commented positively on the SCS as a way of empowering teachers and principals in the planning process:

> I think the SCS is decentralization of education for us to plan our own activities…The CCP and the other principals are there to work together and plan for the cluster…so this whole thing of clustering is to bring us together under the CCP so that we can work together and plan for our cluster. It is the easiest way of empowering us.

In support of this view, IE claimed that the SCS has promoted more effective management and administration of schools. The IE claimed that the functioning of the SCS has allowed for the smooth

flow of information from schools to the regional education office via the Cluster Centre. He commented positively on this process and the increased autonomy of the CCP:

> It is a kind of decentralisation whereby all stakeholders in the system are empowered and involved in making decisions about education. When I am here at the circuit office, and I have a Cluster Centre Principal at school X…that office of the Cluster Centre Principal there is like the office of the inspector here…information from schools to regional office is processed through the CCP up to the regional office.

Complementing this view, P3 claimed that, through deliberations at the level of the CMCs, principals are empowered to initiate and plan programmes which are aimed at improving their schools and sharing their management problems before seeking solutions from higher authorities. He pointed out that:

> We have seen an improvement in the management of our schools…because the more we come together as principals we are able discuss issues affecting our schools and seek solutions together…It is not good to wait for someone from the top to come and tell you what to do.

An official document for a CCP meeting, dated 24 March 2002, outlines the management structures and channels created in the process of the implementation of the SCS. According to the document, the cluster level management structure is intended to form the link between the schools and the regional office. The document identifies the management structures and channels as follows:

- Regional Management Committee (RMC) chaired by the Director of Education
- Circuit Management Committee (CMC) chaired by the Inspector of Education
- Cluster Management Committee chaired by the CCP
- School Management under the principal of a school

From the analysis of documents, it emerges that, with the introduction of the SCS, and the subsequent movement of inspectors from the regional office to circuit offices located outside the regional office, another management structure was created in the form of the Circuit Management Committee (CMC). The documents show a CMC made up of the inspector and all the CCPs in his circuit, with the responsibility for the planning and management of the educational affairs of the circuit. The Cluster Management structure is in turn made up of the CCP and all principals of the satellite schools in the cluster, and they are authorised to plan and manage education in their respective schools. T9 expressed positive views about the rearrangement of the management structures which has created the cluster as a management level between the schools and the circuit inspector's office. Although he was positive about the SCS allowing the principals to meet and discuss issues to do with their schools, the question of how representative the management of the Cluster was of the school boards and community members was also raised in the interview:

> What we have seen is that there is a channel of communication which is created by the SCS…when the principals meet as the cluster management a lot of things affecting our schools are discussed. It is as good as local authorities run by our councillors…but I think school board members and learners should also be actively involved in cluster management.

T2 viewed the SCS in a different light in terms of delegation of authority. He expressed the view that, although the SCS is widely believed to promote decentralized management, the reality is that the Cluster has served mainly as an information collection centre for the Regional Office. He expressed negative views about the powers granted to the CCP to make decisions, being of the opinion that in most cases the CCP had limited capacity to make decisions because in the end the inspector has the final say in all educational issues in the circuit. He pointed out what he considered to be the weakness in the structure in terms of delegation of authority and decision-making:

> I think there is a lot of duplication of powers, because authority lies with the inspector… it is just because the inspector cannot reach all schools, so they thought of the SCS….In reality the CCP is just there to channel the issues to the inspector...The CCP still have to forward all the issues to the inspector for a final say…now what is the purpose of having the CCP?

4.4.1.2 Administrative efficiency

According to the official documents, efficiency in the context of the SCS is related to the smooth administration and management of schools. Many respondents tended to compare the efficiency of the administration of schools in terms of before and after the implementation of the system. Previously administrative functions, such as the collection of school statistics, ordering of textbooks and the purchasing and obtaining of supplies, were channelled directly from individual schools to the Regional Office. However, with the implementation of the SCS, satellite schools now submit their documentation to the Cluster Centre and the CCP channels all the documentation of the Cluster to the office of the inspector.

Many respondents expressed the view that cluster-based processing of such administrative activities was an efficient and effective way of administration because the Cluster Centre served as a local administration centre for all schools in the cluster. They did, however, note that this placed a burden on the CCP who has to attend to all the administrative tasks of the cluster. Respondents expressed the view that, although the travelling of the principals to and from the cluster for the processing and delivery of administrative documents was costly, travelling by principals and teachers to the Cluster Centre was more economical and convenient.

4.4.1.3 Local decision-making and problem solving

Respondents expressed the view that the SCS, through the CMCs and other cluster-Based Committees, has been provided a platform for principals and teachers to deliberate various management and educational issues affecting the schools in their cluster. These meetings take place at the Cluster Centre. Principals from the satellite schools are members of the Cluster Management Committee, and some teachers are members of subject committees comprising of teachers from various schools in the cluster according to their subject specialisations. Commenting on the work of the Cluster Management Committee in improving the management of all the schools in the cluster, P1 had this to say:

> We have cluster management committee meetings where principals of all schools in the cluster come together …. we look into the short-comings of each and every school and then we draw up a programme and that programme becomes an activity plan that we follow in the year to improve all the schools in our cluster…it helps us a lot unlike before when each school operated in isolation.

Respondents claimed that through the cluster-based committees teachers in the cluster are provided the opportunity to get timely feedback regarding subject related problems because teachers who are subject facilitators are based in the cluster. The subject committees are composed of teachers who are specialists in specific subject areas and who meet regularly to share and resolve issues related to their subjects. The subject committees are also responsible for coordinating the setting of cluster-based tests and examinations. Many respondents expressed the view that teachers no longer felt the need to wait for visits from subject advisors, who are based at the regional office, to solve their curriculum problems. T8 commented positively on this development:

> Now when we have problems regarding our subjects the subject committees are there as a platform where we can have our problems attended to…you can get a quicker solution about the problem because the assistance is available here at the cluster level.

Many respondents were positive about the fact that the management problems of teachers and learners no longer needed to be referred directly to the regional office for consideration. They viewed as a positive development the fact that the SCS creates a management level where problems affecting the schools are directly and immediately addressed, and solutions sought, before they are referred to the regional office. T9's positive response encapsulated teachers' attitude to this development:

> We are seeing changes…now if we have a problem here we don't run to the circuit office…we go to the CCP and he is the one who is going to facilitate everything or if we have something that is very difficult to solve here we don't invite the inspector, we invite the nearby person, the CCP…some problems are solved internally within us…after all this is the whole idea about having this system.

Most respondents considered it to be the role of the CCP and other principals in the cluster to ensure that educational problems within the Cluster are handled amicably at the cluster level before being taken up with higher authorities because principals, through the CMC, have the opportunity to address such problems as and when they arise in the cluster schools. Many respondents were of the view that educational problems were receiving greater and more immediate attention than previously because the principals in the cluster were being allowed to decide on issues affecting schooling in their respective schools. Most respondents described in positive terms how decisions regarding issues such as collective planning for teaching and learning are always handled at the level of the SCS. P1 described the positive aspects of this collaborative process:

> We normally do not wait for a long time before an issue is attended to…when we have a certain school within the cluster with a problem, say of lack of teaching materials, or any other education problem, we make sure that when we convene as a cluster management committee and we brainstorm on how we can find a solution to such a problem.

Although most respondents see the Cluster Management Committee, and other cluster committees, as decision-making structures within the cluster, a few respondents expressed reservations about the

functioning and capacity of the CMC in terms of making regular and timely decisions on various issues in the cluster. These respondents claimed that the proper functioning of these committees has at times been hampered by the internal resistance of some of the teachers who do not want to recognise the authority of such committees. In the views of these respondents, such committees do not serve any purpose because the proper functioning of the committees depends heavily on the involvement of the teachers from various schools in the cluster. Some respondents, such as T5, expressed the view that the kind of guidance and assistance needed by subject teachers was really only available through the subject advisors who are based at the regional office and that the local committees did not have the expertise or authority to solve many of the issues that arose. This has contributed, in their view, to the poor functioning of these committees.

Most respondents viewed the CMC and cluster based committees as structures crucial to the delivering of educational decisions within the cluster, and to solving problems as they arise within the cluster. Many respondents expressed the view that, because the CMC was representative of the principals of the schools, members of the committee were in a position to collectively deliberate and plan for the cluster. However, some respondents felt that the composition of the CMC and the cluster was threatened by the lack of participation by some teachers and they were reluctant to accept the legitimacy of such committees and activities regarding curriculum issues. This seems to indicate the need for a more formal structure to give legitimacy to these structures.

4.4.2 Perceived educational benefits of the SCS

Many respondents agreed on the practical benefits of the SCS in the provision of education. Many saw the enhancement of co-operation and professional interaction among teachers and principals as positive aspects of the SCS. However, a number of respondents ventured some critical views regarding the benefits of the SCS.

4.4.2.1 Local professional support

Most respondents considered that cooperation among schools has provided the teachers in the Cluster with an opportunity to support each other as professionals on a local level, in keeping with the goals of the SCS. Minutes of the Cluster Management Committee meeting, dated 02-03-2012, reveal that the cluster management had recommended the strengthening of a mentoring programme among teachers in the cluster. The document provided guidelines on how activities such as co-teaching would be conducted in the cluster. The same document outlined the planned schedule and administration of the Cluster test, including the exchange of marking scripts as a way of inter-cluster support of teachers, and sharing of the combined expertise available in the cluster. Commenting on these inter-cluster teacher activities, T9 described the professional benefits of this kind of collaboration:

> In our cluster as teachers sometimes we come together…we plan together in terms of teaching and share common things like setting of examinations…and sometimes even small tests during

> the course of the week or during the course of the month…when this is done it benefits the professional growth of the teachers in the cluster.

IE described a programme of professional support from within the clusters through exchange of expertise among teachers in the cluster. He described that in the past, activities such as the specialised support and in-service training of teachers were the sole responsibility of the regional office. Now, with the implementation of the SCS, activities such as mentoring and co-teaching are conducted in the cluster by teachers in their respective subjects. He explained that such activities are carried out in the cluster through the coordination of the CCPs and cluster-based subject committees:

> What we are seeing now is that schools within the clusters have been networking…suppose we have a teacher at school X who is very good in mathematics…that teacher is requested to come and help teachers who are struggling in the subject…this has been very good, especially for schools in the rural areas where we have a shortage of qualified teachers in some subjects…many of our schools are now performing because of that interaction among teachers who are struggling and those teachers who are performing…so that is a major outcome of the system.

Many respondents expressed positive views in terms of the opportunity provided by the SCS to share expertise and to learn from other teachers in the cluster. Most felt that cluster groups allowed for a culture of learning from one another and for enhancing professional practice. T8 commented positively on this kind of support and collaboration:

> Previously people were afraid to ask from their colleagues…thinking that maybe the colleagues will think they do not know…but in this system we have learnt that to ask colleagues is part of our own growth. We have grown professionally through sharing information with colleagues in the cluster subject groups …the system is very important because it brings us together as teachers.

However, some respondents expressed reservations about the effectiveness of professional support within the SCS because of the lack of properly organised support. They were of the view that those collaborative activities which could enhance professional development were not sustained because of internal resistance from some of the teachers, especially those from satellite schools who often have to travel from their schools to the cluster centre without receiving financial support. T1 described the decline in these collaborative cluster activities:

> It was successful that time when we started…but for now I can see that few people are turning up for cluster activities…there is some resistance towards the cluster activities especially from teachers who are from the satellite schools, because most of the activities involve travelling and they have to do it on their own because there are no funds…So teachers have been developing a negative attitude, although some of them still turn up, especially during examinations.

Some respondents expressed the view that, although there were potential benefits from collaboration with other colleagues, they considered that teachers were still individually responsible for their jobs. This seems to suggest that some teachers have some resentment with regard to what they might consider to be doing work for others who are unmotivated to do it themselves, and for which they get no reward. T3 summed up this negative response to cluster-based professional collaboration:

> As professional teachers I think we are just going ahead with our work of teaching….the cluster activities sometimes seem to have a lot of questions so we cannot wait …we just go ahead and do

> our job…if other people do not want cooperate with others, as it should be with the clustering system, there is nothing you can do…you just have to continue doing your work.

Although many respondents thought that the SCS provided a framework for professional support, some respondents considered that there was insufficient support for this due to such factors as lack of incentives and motivation among teachers. Some expressed the view that the lack of experience amongst some teachers in the groups was at times a hindrance to the progress of professional support and development. T5 was of the view that, even when teachers had the opportunity to meet regularly and often in their subject groups, this would not always translate into effective professional support, claiming that effective professional support is about working together systematically to understand the issues affecting one another's teaching practices, and to gradually work towards addressing and solving such issues:

> You will find that sometimes when you meet as teachers it might be that all of you in the group do not have a clear understanding of the part of the subject which you have to discuss…so who is going to provide the support to the other?

Although many respondents expressed positive views about those aspects which they saw as enhancing the professional support of teachers within the framework of the SCS, some saw resistance to participation in cluster-based subject meetings by some teachers as a hindrance to the enhancement of local professional support as promoted in the rhetoric of the SCS.

4.4.2 .2 Shared understanding of the curriculum/quality teaching and learning

Those respondents who supported the SCS viewed such activities as vital for the building of teachers' and principals' capacity to interpret curriculum issues, and to improve teachers' general confidence and motivation in dealing with their subjects. Many respondents expressed positive views about the kind of collaboration provided by the SCS framework, one of the most significant aspects being to enable teachers to better understand the curriculum requirements and to collectively interpret curriculum documents such as syllabuses and the assessment manuals of various subjects. P3 commented on the benefits of this for teachers:

> We have been given the opportunity to bring our teachers together…in most of the subjects teachers have managed to develop a uniform scheme of work…they are be able to support each other because I believe, even if you know the subject, you are not good at all topics…so those teachers who are cooperating have benefited.

Some of the respondents saw the SCS not only as an initiative for teachers to support each other in understanding the requirements of the curriculum. They expressed the view that subject meetings provided them with an opportunity to enhance their pedagogical skills, even though this was often hampered by the limited experience and lack of commitment among some of the teachers. T1 claimed that the networking activities which were conducted with other teachers through the exchange of ideas in the respective subjects provided a learning platform for those teachers who participated:

> There was a time when each term we had to meet…we would meet and share ideas on certain topics of the syllabus…by doing this we could identify topics we were not good at…you could invite a colleague in the afternoon to come and share with you what they know…even to demonstrate in classes…it was very much beneficial to us…unfortunately such things are not always happening now because teachers are discouraged.

T9 described how the results of his school improved and attributed this to the collaboration activities within the Cluster:

> In 2008 we had a poor pass rate at our school which was 20%...in 2009 we strengthened the system of peer-coaching and co-planning with other schools in the cluster…that year we attained a 71% pass rate…because we involved our colleagues in the cluster our results improved…our learners worked together…our teachers worked together and the Cluster went up.

T8 viewed this kind of tangible benefit from subject teachers collaborating within the SCS, especially for those teachers who actively participated, in a positive light. He indicated that, since the implementation of the SCS, there has been an understanding that teachers in the cluster should work together to help one another to understand and interpret the curriculum requirements so as to improve education quality and results in their respective schools:

> Previously schools were competing with one another and we have learnt that it is better to cooperate than to compete because when you cooperate you produce more, all of you at a higher level…we have seen the fruits of cooperation on our improved performance in teaching and learning.

P1 considered the academic success of the schools in the Cluster over the past two years to be attributed to the cooperation of teachers and principals in the Cluster:

> In recent years we have seen an improvement in the standard of teaching and learning in our cluster…for the past two years our cluster has been ranked the best in terms of the results…topping all clusters in the region…this have been a remarkable achievement for us.

Many respondents expressed the view that the cooperation of teachers provided by the SCS framework had had a positive effect in terms of improving the quality of education in the schools in the cluster through sharing of curriculum documents such the syllabus and the assessment manuals. They expressed the view that this kind of cooperation provided the opportunity for teachers to increase their professional capacity and generally enhanced the quality of teaching and learning in the Cluster.

4.4.2.3 Uniformity

Respondents generally expressed the view that the SCS had promoted uniformity in dealing with teaching and learning matters in their cluster. A cluster management committee meeting minutes dated 27-02-2007 includes a programme of the subject coordinating committee for the use of all the schools in the cluster. The document indicates specific activities, such as the setting of cluster tests and subject meetings. P1 commented on the benefits of this in terms of maintaining a uniform standard of testing and assessment:

> You see some schools have got veteran teachers and others have novice teachers…during their interactions in the cluster subject meetings, they have been able to draw uniform schemes of

> work…they have also been able to draw tests and projects, and plan together…as a result the standard of teaching and learning is maintained.

Some respondents expressed the view that this standardization was also achieved during examinations, when certain subjects were assigned to certain schools to set, and standardised marking was often being done at the Cluster level, where moderation of the scripts is carried out. Respondents were of the view that working collaboratively within the system has helped schools and teachers in the cluster to attain a standardized way of doing things which they regarded as beneficial for schools. P3 commented on the benefits of this structured collaborative process in terms of achieving a uniform standard:

> You will find that if one school gives a test, the same test is written by others in the cluster and then it help those teachers with less experience from other schools to benefit from a group effort and improve their teaching…this is what we have been doing, although it calls for more coordination in terms of planning… we had common schemes of work…so when our teachers are teaching they are using the same tool.

Many respondents expressed the view that joint activities have promoted standardization, and this has developed as a process through collaborative efforts in the Cluster schools. However, some respondents expressed reservations about the lack of a properly organised support structure and the lack of expertise amongst the teachers in the Cluster groups, which they regarded as a hindrance to the implementation process of the SCS. The lack of a properly organised support system leads to ineffective support activities which can be detrimental rather than beneficial to the educational goals which are meant to be achieved through the SCS.

4.4.3 Perceived tension in the implementation of the SCS

This section reports on what respondents perceived as key factors that have created, and continue to create, tension in the implementation process of the SCS. The following issues which seem to generate tension are reported in this section:

- The lack of formal recognition of the Cluster Centre Principal
- The ambiguous position of the Cluster Centre Principal
- Passive resistance among teachers and principals to the cluster system
- The lack of expertise at local level to sustain the curriculum development proposed

4.4.3.1 Recognition of the Cluster Centre Principal

To help frame the interpretation of this section I would like to consider the following quote from 'The Namibian' newspaper of 11.02.2008, published in the short message service (SMS) section of the newspaper.

> "*Ministry of Education when will the CCPs be paid for doing Cluster work?"* The response from the Ministry of Education was as follows*: "The Ministry of Education, under the Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP,) is busy working on a*

policy on the Cluster System. Compensation of Cluster Centre principals is being considered."

One of the key issues to come out strongly from the respondents was the lack of clear lines of authority for the Cluster Centre Principal after 12 years of the existence of the system. The Training Course Manual for CCPs (2004:13) lists the key roles and responsibilities of the CCP as follows:

- Provide general leadership and supervision of all activities in the cluster
- Visit schools in the cluster to offer support and help solve problems
- Promote the formation of groups to improve the teaching and assessment of all subjects
- Promote the efficient and equitable allocation of teachers

Despite all these stated responsibilities, the CCP does not have legal grounds to hold other principals in the Cluster or teachers accountable, because the CCP position has not yet been formalised by the Ministry. The CCP does not have a salary category above other principals and, above all, he or she does not have any financial support for administering and coordinating the Cluster. The CCP assumes the role because her or his school happens to be the Cluster Centre. P1 commented critically on this lack of clarity and formalisation of the role and functions of the CCP:

> Today you still find that there are still questions as to what exactly are the roles of the CCP…there is still no clarity as to who appoints the CCPs…they say its inspectors but it is not the case…so there is a lot of ambiguity…the system is too general and we find it very difficult to operate because there are no formal appointments of the CCPs there is often mistrust amongst principals…recognition is not there…when we talk about convening a meeting, calling in principals, you are all the same.

IE underscored the fact that, because the CCP has not been formally recognised, it is difficult for him or her to enforce her or his authority, especially over the other principals in the cluster:

> Currently CCPs are not empowered to administer the other principals because they are on the same level…a CCP can go and visit the other school and the other principal will ask, how can you come and check my work…because they are on the same level…in other words in the process of implementation CCPs are undermined by the other principals because they are on the same level.

P3 emphasised that this situation sometimes leads to internal-conflicts between some satellite school principals and the CCP: "There is always misunderstandings because there are principals who do not recognise the authority of Cluster Centre Principal…those kinds of attitudes will always bring conflicts and they exist because the CCP is just a principal like any other principal." (P3).

Many respondents also saw tension being created by the fact that the CCPs have a division of responsibilities and this makes it difficult to separate their roles. In terms of the SCS, the CCP has to take on the additional responsibilities of leading and coordinating the other schools in the Cluster. IE summed up the problematic nature of the role and status of the CCP and the tension this has caused:

> When the clustering system was introduced they did not think that one day CCPs will ask for extra money…they are also complaining about the teaching load because as principals they also have to teach…all these issues remain unresolved and create a lot of problems in the implementation process.

What came out strongly from the respondents was how the lack of formal recognition of the CCP, after 12 years of existence of this policy, has contributed to the tension around the practical implementation of the SCS. Many respondents expressed the view that, although the CCP is regarded as the head of the Cluster, his exercising of leadership over, and guidance to, the satellite schools is hampered by the fact that the CCPs lack any formal authority. The CCP is widely expected to carry out a number of activities in the Cluster in terms of promoting education quality, but some respondents considered that such activities could not be carried out effectively as the CCP does not receive the managerial authority and financial support to carry out such functions.

4.4.3.2 The ambiguous status of CCP

Some respondents expressed the view that the vaguely defined and unformalised status and function of the CCP was in fact disadvantaging the satellite schools in terms of dealing with some issues. They expressed the view that, in most cases the CCP had to decide on issues affecting both his school and the satellite schools. Some situations included the requisitioning or ordering of materials and some respondents thought it was difficult for the CCP to make choices which would benefit other schools at the expense of his own school. P3 described this situation:

> When we have some administrative problems…I have to consult the CCP…but you know he is also a principal like me…he will always take his needs first…so he will solve his problems first before he comes to mine.

The expanded role of the CCP as principal of his own school and as overseer of other schools was identified by respondents as a serious area of tension in the practical implementation of the SCS. Many respondents expressed the view that it was difficult for the CCP to shift the focus from his own school to the others because he is formally accountable to the ministry for the running of that particular school, and not for the other schools in the cluster. In T4's view this is a serious problem because the situation has a direct impact on the functioning of the Cluster as a whole:

> You will find that the CCP is only focused on his school…now the other schools will not benefit from his leadership and guidance to know what is going on…I think this is a serious setback…so maybe something should be done so that all schools will get attention.

What emerged here is that the role of the CCP to provide leadership and guidance to other schools in the Cluster leads to contradictory actions on the part of the CCP because it involves making decisions about other schools which can be difficult for the CCP, given the fact his prime responsibility is to his school. Some respondents expressed the view that this creates serious tension around the SCS implementation because the CCP has to make decisions which involve both his own school and the other schools in the Cluster.

4.4.3.3 Passive resistance versus enhanced collegiality

Many respondents saw tensions arising from the fact that some teachers appreciate working together in a collegial way, while others feel that their professional autonomy is being eroded. As P1 remarked

negatively: "Attitude is another problem because there are those people who want to keep themselves a distance from what is going on and do not simply want to work with others". The general feeling amongst respondents was that the SCS does not automatically guarantee enhanced collegiality because issues such as professional autonomy and competition for promotions also come into play. T6 commented on the element of fear and competitiveness in this tension:

> Some people do not want to share information with others…some individuals within the cluster feel that if the other school get information or are guided properly in some subjects then they will perform better than them…there is always this fear among colleagues.

T2 echoed this view: "You will find that some schools and their teachers don't want to work with others…they want to be on their own…some will not even participate because they think some other teachers are more clever than them." This seems to suggest that, although cooperation is generally highly valued by teachers with regard to the SCS, some staff members may feel that by working with or assisting colleagues they are actually doing their jobs for them. This may apply to subject groupings where specific teachers are selected to lead and coordinate a subject group and to set examination papers or tests for the Cluster. T9 commented on the unwillingness of some teachers to share expertise:

> You will find that we have teachers with different attitudes towards the work…so, simply because we have a cluster does not mean that all the teachers appreciate working with others…some do not believe in sharing with others and sometimes they simply do not turn up for meetings arranged by the clusters or their subject committees.

While the expectation of the Ministry was that the SCS, through networking and fostering the collaboration of the teachers, could contribute to improved collegiality amongst teachers and principals, many respondents expressed the view that this enhanced collegiality depended on the attitudes and the willingness of the teachers to work with others.

What emerged from the interviews was that tensions in the implementation of the SCS are manifested in various ways. Respondents expressed views about three important areas of tension in the practical implementation of the SCS. Many thought that the lack of formal recognition of the CCP creates tension around the effective implementation of the SCS on the ground due to the lack of authority of the CCP to "interfere" in the affairs of the satellite schools in terms of control and general leadership as was and is widely expected by the ministry. Although the CCP was expected to perform a number of activities as the leader of the Cluster, there were no formal parameters for this as he was not remunerated for these extra duties. What also emerged was that, although the SCS is widely believed to be a way of enhancing collegiality, many respondents confirmed that collaborative activities at Cluster level are often hindered by passive resistance among teachers, which can be linked to fears of their professionalism being eroded.

4.4.4 Challenges experienced

Many respondents expressed the view that, although the SCS generally had positive benefits for education, its effective implementation was challenged and held back by external factors, such as lack of financial support, transport, infrastructure and educational resources. Many respondents expressed the view that to date the success of the SCS was based mainly on personal sacrifices and the willingness of teachers and principals to participate. The problem underlying all of these factors is the lack of formal structure relating to the implementation of the SCS, and the provision of finances and resources to support the initiative.

4.4.4.1 Lack of financial support

The following quote from one of the respondents frames the interpretation of this sub-section.

"*I can say that for the SCS to be implemented effectively, it needs a great deal of funding"* (P3)

Many respondents expressed the view that the implementation of the SCS was being seriously hampered by the lack of financial resources to manage and facilitate the programmes of the Cluster. They felt that the meagre financial resources allocated to the individual schools by the education department are not enough to cover the costs of the Cluster activities. The lack of financial support from the ministry contributes to the lack of motivation and commitment among teachers and principals in participating in cluster related activities. Many respondents expressed the view that the effective implementation of the SCS depends heavily on the availability of financial resources. P3 commented on the lack of financial support:

> When teachers go and attend meetings they need to be reimbursed…there is a cost of doing that…and where there is a cost someone else must pay for the cost...if there is no one who pays for the cost then you cannot force someone…there is a lot we can do but these things are not possible because funding is lacking.

Many respondents thought that the lack of an organised financial support structure was imposing a burden on the Cluster Centre and satellite schools. The financial situation is exacerbated by the fact that schools in rural areas do not manage to collect much in terms of the School Development Fund (SDF) because the majority of the parents cannot afford the payments. According to the Education Act (16) of 2001, such funds are specifically intended to finance the development needs of schools, but despite this schools, especially the Cluster Centre school, are often forced to use the meagre funds collected from parents for cluster activities. P1 described the negative effects of this lack of financial support on the implementation and running of the SCS:

> The clustering system has put a burden on the Cluster Centre School…we end up using our School Development Fund because there were no funds allocated from the ministry to run cluster activities…and you will also find that there is a negative response from the other schools because, when they move between their schools and the Cluster Centre they have to do that at their own costs.

Minutes of the Cluster Management Committee meeting held on 12-12-2007 indicate that the committee endorsed the establishment of a Cluster Fund. This fund was intended to be separate from the SDF and it was proposed that learners in all schools in the cluster would contribute an annual fee of N$3.00. The minutes indicate that this fund would be used for transport and meals for those who have to travel distances to attend Cluster meetings and workshops. Minutes of the Cluster Management Committee held on 24.04.2007 record a proposal by the committee that the chairpersons of school boards make monthly contributions of N$5.00. Principals and HODs were to contribute N$20.00 and teachers N$10.00 towards the Cluster Fund.

Many respondents expressed the view that the idea of contributions from teachers and learners would not be supported because teachers were unlikely to agree to the contributions. These respondents saw this as being the responsibility of the ministry. The additional contribution from the side of the learners suggests an extra cost added to their SDF contributions, which would be unlikely to gain support from local teachers, parents or communities. Such issues raise questions about the Ministry of Education regarding the degree of its financial responsibility for the implementation of the SCS. The general feeling of these respondents seemed to be that the lack of financial support from the ministry represents a shifting of the responsibility for funding the implementation of the SCS to the schools and local communities. T3 encapsulated the response from the teachers to the lack of financial support from the Ministry of Education:

> I remember the other time the principal told us that we must contribute N$10.00 per month for the Cluster Fund…we refused to contribute…I believe money for such activities was supposed to come from the regional office…why should we pay for the Cluster activities instead of the regional office…?...so those contributions were refused and up to now we still want the ministry to allocate money for the Cluster because we are even paying already when we go for the educational meetings at the cluster which I think should not be the case.

The views expressed by many respondents suggest that the financial issue was a key negative element in the implementation of the SCS. Lack of financial support from the ministry has a significant negative effect on the SCS implementation, and schools are struggling to sustain the Cluster activities. Travelling was cited as one of the major costs involved in implementing and sustaining the SCS and one which has not been taken into account by the Ministry of Education in terms of financial assistance. Most of the respondents described how teachers and principals are often forced to use their own funds for Cluster related travelling costs.

4.4.4.2 Lack of transport

There was a general view among respondents that the lack of transport provision is a major hindrance to the successful implementation of the SCS. Many respondents revealed that many cluster activities were not carried out successfully because there was no available transport for people to move to and from the Cluster Centre for educational meetings and other activities. The expectation on the part of the Ministry of Education was that the CCP would regularly visit satellite schools, but, due to the

unavailability of transport, it was often difficult for him to do so. T8 commented on the lack of transport:

> We don't have transport readily available at our disposal…so it is a bit challenging…they say we have to put our resources together so the biggest problem we have is lack of transport to and from the Cluster if there are meetings or Cluster workshops.

The IE also considered transport to be the major obstacle in the implementation of the SCS, as it was by the CCP, given the fact that CCPs are required by the Regional Office to supervise satellite schools. He reported that, when the CCPs have to deliver documents or conduct meetings at satellite schools, they often do not have official transport at their disposal to execute such activities. The IE expanded on this issue:

> Say I have documents that I need to go to schools through the Cluster Centre…the Cluster Centre Principal will say I do not have transport…and I have to understand him because that is the reality…they do not have official transport…we could talk of them using their own vehicles for those who own vehicles…but mind you…they do not have an allowance to claim…so even when they do that it is out of their own pockets.

Most respondents expressed critical views on the transport issue with regard to the implementation of the SCS. These respondents saw the general lack of financial support by the education ministry as an impediment to successfully implement the SCS, as T3 lamented: "if they cannot provide us with transport to move around…then we should be provided with money for private transport because in most cases we end up using our own money if we go for cluster meetings".

4.4.4.3 Lack of educational resources and other facilities

Many of the respondents expressed the view that the lack of facilities which should have been specifically earmarked for such cluster activities as meetings, seminars or workshops, was a serious hindrance to the implementation of the SCS. Many also expressed the view that the expectation from the teachers and principals was that the Cluster Centre itself would be well resourced for providing adequate support to the other schools, but that this was not the case in reality; they did not have sufficient resources, equipment or materials to effectively facilitate the kind of support network required and expected within the SCS. Respondents such as P2 expressed their disappointment at the failure of the ministry to provide these resources:

> What we were meant to understand when SCS was introduced is that the Cluster Centre was supposed to be well resourced so that satellite schools and teachers could benefit…but what we are seeing now is that the Cluster Centre does not even have sufficient educational resources to provide support to other schools. So I think for us to benefit, the ministry should provide the Cluster Centre with sufficient resources.

T2 echoed this view:

> The Cluster school should be fully equipped, so that when we process our cluster examinations and other materials there… we do not have to rely on equipment for the Cluster Centre School. I think the school which is the Cluster Centre should have things such as photocopiers and other teaching materials so that it can serve the other schools well.

From the views of the respondents it emerges that, in terms of an effectively functioning SCS, the support network among schools is hampered by inadequate resources. Respondents viewed the lack of adequate facilities and resources at the Cluster Centre as a hindrance to promoting the goals of the SCS, particularly as the Cluster Centre was intended and should be the core of all activities among schools in the Cluster.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to present a comprehensive picture of the responses and perceptions of educational professionals regarding the goals and the implementation of the SCS. The picture that emerges from the data is that, although the SCS is perceived as a strategy for enhancing management and teacher support at a local level, there exist tensions with regard to the effective implementation of the SCS in the current circumstances. Although delegation of authority is seen as promoting democratic participation and local control in education, what emerged was that the SCS does not provide a clear line of authority for the CCP as the leader and coordinator of the educational activities in the Cluster. Tension has also arisen as a result of the internal passive resistance of teachers and principals to working together within the framework of the SCS as there is no official or professional incentive for participation.

Perceived challenges to the successful implementation of the SCS were mainly the lack of financial support from the ministry, which not only failed to fund a revised staffing structure in keeping with the needs for the new system, but failed to fund the establishment of resource centres aimed at educational support. In addition the financial burden on local personnel such as principals and teachers, and the drain on school funds in terms travel costs, was seen as a negative factor. In addition the cost of cluster related activities is being carried by the Cluster Centre as the school is often forced to use its own meagre financial resources for these activities.

In the next chapter, I will conclude the study by discussing the key emerging themes, linking these to the literature discussed in Chapter Two.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.1 Overview

This final chapter seeks to draw together the findings of this study by providing a brief discussion of key emerging themes in relation to the literature discussed in Chapter Two. This chapter draws on the theoretical discussions and perspectives on school clustering presented in Chapter Two in order to provide an understanding of the findings of the study in general. The discussion also pays particular attention to the goals of the study presented in Chapter One, in an attempt to address the research questions presented at the beginning of the study. From the themes I used to discuss the findings of the study as they emerged in Chapter Four, I have developed three broader areas on which the discussion in this section will focus. The summary of the findings is therefore discussed under the following broad areas:

- The SCS as decentralization
- The SCS as a platform for collaboration for teaching and learning purposes
- Challenges of implementing the SCS: The financial aspect

As indicated earlier, I will discuss these themes emerging from the findings both with the research goals in mind and through the lens of the literature reviewed and discussed in Chapter Two.

5.2 The SCS as decentralization

Chokoko & Aipinge (2009) have argued that, in the context of the SCS, the process of shifting educational responsibility to lower levels in Clusters is a way of empowering those at local level to take charge of education development in their respective localities. While the findings of this study show that respondents view the implementation of the SCS as a way of promoting local decision-making and management, one of the main findings emerging from the data is that the respondents consider the SCS, in the process of decentralization and 'democratisation' of education, has in fact created a hierarchy between the office of the Circuit Inspector and the schools.

While the SCS has established a management and administrative unit between individual schools and the office of the Circuit Inspector, the Regional Education Office remains the top structure. This development would support Bray's (1987) claims that the SCS allows for the improvement of educational administration at the lower levels because the Cluster Centre becomes the central point for the coordination of educational activities by schools in close proximity. The data have revealed that the establishment of various decision-making structures such as the Cluster Management Committee and the Cluster Subject Committee are some of the crucial elements in the effective functioning of the decentralized structure within the SCS framework. Furthermore, it emerges from

the study that respondents view the SCS in a positive light as a mechanism for empowerment of educational leaders such as principals and teachers in terms of localised management and planning of educational activities. This view is consistent with Sui-chu Ho's claims (2006:593) that, in comparison with centralized education management and administration, the decentralized management of schools enables principals and teachers to have more control over the education being offered in their schools and to strengthen and improve educational accountability. The findings showed that respondents perceived the SCS framework to have provided an effective line of interaction between the Regional Office and the school level.

What is also apparent in the findings is that the dominant perception of respondents in terms of the goals of the SCS with regard to decentralization is that decentralization impacts positively on education management at the local level through delegation of authority. Evidence for this is provided in the form of positive comments on the establishment of a Cluster Management Committee (CMC) and the cluster-based subject committees, where teachers in the cluster have the opportunity to meet in order to deliberate on educational issues. This finding supports the claims of Giordano (2008:27), who has argued that the SCS is designed to allow for the development and enhancement of collective decision-making about education, especially in resource-scarce contexts such as rural areas. In these areas teachers and education officials, through the cluster system, are provided opportunities to plan collectively with the goal of improving the quality of education in their schools. Bray (1987:9) also claims that school clustering enhances 'decision-making' and 'empowerment' of schools, particularly those in isolated areas.

What also emerges from the study is that respondents have positively acknowledged administrative efficiency as one of the main features defining the SCS in the context of decentralization. Respondents view the carrying out of administrative activities at the Cluster in a positive light because this allows for educational matters to be processed through the Cluster Centre, from schools to the Circuit Inspector's office; this is believed to be a crucial activity contributing to the efficient operation of the system. This supports Brown's claims (1994), in Sui-chu Ho (2006:592) that, in a decentralized structure, aspects such as the delivery of educational materials and local staff development enable people at the local level to be in direct control of their needs and to work out ways of enhancing educational development at this level of the education system.

The findings show that efficiency in terms of administration and education delivery is perceived to be linked to the Cluster Centre as an administrative tier for other schools, through the processing of documentation, the distribution of materials and the provision of school statistical information within the cluster. What emerges from the study is that, as a strategy for improving efficiency, the Cluster Centre serves as the administration centre for all schools in the cluster. This finding is in line with Dittmar *et al.* (2002:14), who argue that the SCS helps to improve efficiency in the sense that the administrative workload of circuits is reduced to manageable units in the form of Clusters rather than

individual schools. This also allows potentially for a more rational and economical use of educational resources among the schools in the Cluster.

It also emerged from the findings that respondents describe the SCS in their specific context as a positive aspect of decentralization in that it has provided a platform for empowering the CCP and other principals in taking educational decisions on issues affecting their schools. This means that respondents understand the SCS on the basis of the notion of power being devolved to the local people through the CCP and other cluster-based committees. What is also apparent from the findings is that, in the context of the case study, the local education structures, such as the CMC, carry the entire responsibility for ensuring that education activities planned at Cluster level are well coordinated, including funding for such activities. This situation confirms Carnoy's (2000:47) argument that, although education decentralization reforms are often presented as a means of giving powers to local staff such as principals and teachers, as is the case in the SCS, such a situation can in turn shift problems, such as the financial responsibility for the running and sustaining of the cluster, from the higher authority to the lower, local level. In the context of the SCS in Namibia, the findings of the case study would indicate that financial responsibility for educational activities in schools is shifted to the cluster, the CMC in particular, who have to find strategies to fund the activities of the Cluster, an aspect which seem to a hidden strategy of the SCS.

The findings indicate that, although the composition of the CMC and other cluster-based committees is described by policy makers and stakeholders as constituting decentralization, support for such structures, in terms of achieving the educational goals of clustering, will have to come from the Ministry of Education. The data discussed in Chapter Four show that the operation of the SCS as a form of decentralization rests directly and entirely on the CCP and other principals within the Cluster in the case study cluster. Welsh & Mcginn (1998) observe that promoting good governance and efficiency in schools is one of the crucial prerequisites for sustaining the SCS. Decision-making, delegation and local problem solving, key issues in the implementation of the SCS, are described in the data mainly in terms of the roles of the CCP, CMC and the Cluster subject committees. What is apparent is that the responsibility and functions of the state in terms of providing quality education are shifted to the CCP and his cluster management.

The findings of this case study would indicate that, in the context of the SCS in Namibia, the responsibility for the achievement of the goals of education development in the schools has been transferred to the Cluster Centre and its satellite schools, which do not have adequate resources to ensure effective collaboration and the realization of the stated education goals. This is in spite of the establishment and functioning of the CMC and other cluster-based committees being identified as constituting an empowering model for local level educational leaders to manage and be responsible for decision making on educational matters affecting their schools collectively.

5.3 Collaboration and local involvement

Since one of the goals of this study was to examine the perceptions of educational professionals regarding the role of the SCS as a tool for the improvement of teaching and learning in rural schools, it is important to discuss the main findings that emerge from the data in relation to the theory as posited in the SCS literature I discussed in Chapter Two. Dittmar *et al.* (2002:11) point to the formal meetings of teachers within the cluster to promote shared practice and the sharing of expertise about teaching and learning as one of the outstanding aspects of the SCS in terms of improving education delivery in isolated areas.

According to the findings of this case study, the SCS framework has provided a platform for cooperation amongst the schools that make up the Cluster, often through shared educational activities such as co-teaching and common standardized tests and examinations. The findings indicate that such activities are viewed positively in terms of having promoted the professional support of teachers in schools in the Cluster. This supports the claims by Muijs (2010:2), who argues that, through inter-school collaboration, cooperation is encouraged with the purpose of diffusing good teaching practices and sharing of the kind of expertise necessary for enhancing teaching and learning among teachers and learners in cluster member schools. An important finding is that such collaborative activities are valued and recognised as a potentially valuable strategy for improving education quality in the schools in the cluster.

In terms of teaching and learning, the findings of this case study reveal that the strength of the SCS lies in the organisation of interactive and collaborative approaches towards improving the quality of teaching and learning among cluster members, with the overriding principle being the sharing of teaching practices and skills.

Natichtigal (1985), in his study of a rural cluster in the USA, reported similar positive improvements in the teaching of sciences through in-service training interventions which adopted common teaching approaches and embarked on the sharing of teaching strategies. In addition, the findings show that the participation of teachers from various schools in the subject committees is a crucial element in terms of improving and promoting professional support among teachers in the cluster, although in the case study, such activities are seen to be threatened by issues such as internal resistance, the attitudes of some teachers, and lack of funding.

Despite the positive perceptions of collaboration that emerge from the findings of this study which would seem to be in line with studies done elsewhere, what also emerged was that, although there were perceived benefits from collaboration through the cluster-based committees and other shared educational activities, in practice factors exist which prevent the realization of these benefits. The findings of the study confirmed the existence of contextual realities in the cluster militating against the successful implementation of the SCS in Namibia, such as the lack of teaching expertise amongst

members of the cluster-based committees and internal resistance from teachers, implying that collaboration would probably not entirely achieve the goals of improving teaching and learning through these cluster-based structures. This important finding in terms of the contextual realities of a SCS supports the claims of Muijs (2010:2), who argues that, although collaboration is an important strategy for improving the quality of education, it does not become a 'panacea' for education quality, as different factors form prerequisites to the achievement of education quality through inter-school collaboration. The findings indicate that factors such as, appropriate incentives, and external support for teachers and principals from the relevant education authorities are crucial to achieving the educational goals of the SCS. In the case under investigation such support was minimal.

The findings of this case study indicate that, although the SCS in Caprivi region has been implemented for over twelve years, with ambitious goals, such as the improvement of education quality through inter-school collaboration, in practice the realization of the goal of the SCS is threatened by contextual factors such as the lack of adequate external support, passive resistance among staff members, and, above all, the lack of funding to carry out the shared education activities which need to be organised and structured for the benefit of all the schools in the Cluster.

5.4 The Financial Aspect: Cost Recovery

One of the crucial issues emerging from the study is the issue of funding. The findings of this study show that in the Cluster Centre and satellite schools in the case study, principals, teachers and learners/parents have been contributing financially to the functioning and sustaining of the SCS. The financial contributions from teachers are often in the form of payments towards travel costs for cluster activities. Cluster activities, such as examination and subject committee meetings, do not have the financial support of the central government. It emerged from the study that the lack of formal recognition for the system leads to the lack of a formalised funding system from the education ministry to support the successful implementation of the SCS.

In order to sustain the successful implementation of the SCS, schools and the community in the case study cluster, through the learners, are in turn expected to contribute financially towards the implementation of the SCS. This aspect emerging from the data supports Carnoy's (2004:1) claims that, as countries, particularly those in the developing world, are increasingly pressurised by funding systems that require the reduction of expenditure on education they are required to introduce reforms to expand access to education and to improve education quality, within the framework of financial austerity. According to Carnoy, in the process of trying to reach goals such as improving education quality and EFA within the context of financial austerity, developing countries are often forced to reduce the cost, or at least raise the cost effectiveness, of their public education investments. This means turning to reforms which favour the cutting of government spending as a way of cost saving. The findings of this case study indicate that, although the SCS has been positively recognised as a strategy for promoting decentralized management, democratic participation, and local decision-

making within a broader perspective, the lack of financial commitment from the state and the financial contributions staff members and the community are forced to make to sustain the system, suggest a link with the 'cost recovery' strategy of the state.

What emerges from the study is that, although the SCS aims at empowerment of local professionals through collaboration and sharing of resources, the lack of financial support by the ministry, would indicate the reduced role of the state in providing financial resources to support the decentralized functions and activities in the Cluster. This would suggest 'cost cutting' from the side of the government, as the provision of expert support for curriculum development and of educational resources to the Cluster Centre and library, would carry a cost. The costs incurred by the schools in the case study cluster have been identified as related to travel for teachers and principals, meals, and transportation of materials for teaching and learning. The supply of materials for the resource centre and the training of teachers to acquire expertise necessary to allow local teachers to take effective control have been identified as lacking from the side of the ministry. It can be argued that, as a matter of principle of government providing education to the citizens, such costs should be carried by the education ministry.

From the findings of the study, it is clear that local structures in the case study cluster face a financial challenge in the process of furthering the goals of the SCS. The study has shown that one of the ways to sustain the operation of the system in Lulali cluster is the reliance on personal contributions by teachers and principals from schools in the cluster. In line with Carnoy's argument, this development reveals that the focus on devolution, community participation and local decision-making has not led to the effective functioning of the SCS in Namibia. Instead it has placed a financial burden on the local tier of the system, which has to be funded with the meagre resources that are available in the schools.

The available evidence from this study seems to indicate that additional resources are often required in order to carry out educational activities effectively within the framework of the SCS, particularly at the Cluster Centre. Contrary to those views that see increased collaboration among schools in a SCS as allowing for an improvement in the management and the quality of education in rural and isolated areas, the findings of this study indicate that, in practice, achieving such goals requires sufficient financial support from education authorities, given that the schools and the community, especially those in rural areas, like the case study cluster simply do not have the financial resources to fully realize the goals of the SCS.

What clearly emerges from the study is that the simple existence of governance structures, such as the CMC and other committees, does not guarantee the effective operation of the system. The stated goals of the SCS can only be achieved with substantial financial and administrative support from a central authority. This conclusion supports Carnoy's (2000) claims that a process of decentralization which is financially driven, and in which the state plays a lesser role than the schools themselves in terms of

providing financial resources for education, is likely to reduce rather than increase access and education quality, in particular in areas where there is a lack of resources.

It emerged clearly from the findings of this study that, within the framework of the SCS, respondents indicated that in Lulali Cluster financial support was not forthcoming from the side of the state as most of the activities of the cluster were being financed by the local professionals and to a certain extent by SDF moneys collected from parents. This clearly shows that the SCS carries hidden cost which is presently absorbed by the schools and the community through learners' contributions rather than by the state. Since the SCS is viewed as a decentralized structure, such responsibility is shifted down to those at the lower levels of the cluster. This supports the claims made by Whitty & Power (2003:312), who argue that, in a global context, reforms which promote devolution can be seen in the light of budget-cutting strategies by the nation state, although they are often marketed under the banner of local participation and decentralized decision-making.

The findings of this study have shown that the strength of implementing the SCS in Lulali Cluster lies in the promotion of the ideals of decentralization, such as local participation and decentralized decision-making and management. Most respondents viewed the SCS positively in terms of the establishment of local structures such as the CMC and the CCP. It also emerged that efficiency in terms of the rationalization of education management in the Cluster was viewed as a crucial and positive aspect of the SCS in the context of the case study.

One of the positive findings of the study is that collaboration among schools is viewed in a positive light, a view based on shared education activities through an interactive approach developed within the Cluster. However, what also emerged was that collaboration was threatened by such contextual factors as lack of experience amongst members of the cluster-based subject groups, and a certain amount of internal passive resistance among professionals in the cluster schools. Lastly, the findings of the study reveal a lack of direct financial commitment by the state both to the implementation process and to the sustaining of the SCS. This was a widely held perception on the part of the respondents and engendered feelings of frustration and disappointment among teachers and principals attempting to participate in, and gain the perceived benefits from, the SCS.

Last but not least, the findings of this study reveal that in the case study cluster evidence to support the goal of a decentralised management structure is the existence of the cluster management committee and some cluster-based subject groups. However due to a lack of clarity regarding the division of responsibilities and authority, these structures remain inactive as there is no external professional and financial support to ensure the implementation of such structures in the interest of improving education management in the cluster.

The findings would indicate that in practice, there is a shaky theory of action regarding the improvement of the teaching and learning situation in the cluster. Though some positive aspects are

reported, the findings demonstrated that the desired results of the SCS in regard to promoting teaching and learning in the cluster was only through cluster-based subject committees which in turn were not fully functional thereby dismissing the theoretical claims that clustering improves teaching and learning through collaboration and sharing of expertise. Despite the existence of the subject groups the findings would indicate that there is no clear evidence which supports the notion of improved teaching and learning as a result of the implementation of the SCS in Lulali Cluster.

Theoretical arguments of the SCS indicate that clustering as an offshoot of decentralisation is motivated by the desire for 'cost effectiveness', which is presumed to arise when schools in the cluster manage their own resources. However, the findings of the current study indicate that in practice the emphasis on "cost effectiveness" conceal a move to partially shift financial responsibility to the cluster schools. Evidence indicates that the lack of funding and financial support to the Lulali Cluster has been one of the outstanding challenges in the course of implementing the SCS.

Lastly, the case study has shown that although some of the desired operation or outcomes of the SCS has been actualised in Lulali Cluster, much can be achieved in terms of improving education in Caprivi region and Lulali Cluster in particular, provided those responsible with crafting policy are realistic in their aims, the design and the implementation, taking into consideration the contextual realities of the policy environment in which implementation takes place.

5.5 Suggestions for future research

I believe that, in order to extend an understanding and an evaluation of the policy and implementation of the SCS in the Namibian context, further research related to this subject could be conducted in the following areas:

- A study and analysis of the views of the officials from the head office of the Ministry of Education in order to understand the subject from the point of view of the policy planners and developers as well as that of participants in the SCS at local level.
- The role of the cluster-based subject committees in promoting education quality in schools which needs to be investigated and evaluated.
- The role of the community in the implementation of the SCS is a crucial aspect and one which the literature suggests as one of the important aspects in terms of community participation in education at local level.

5.7 Limitation of the study

It is important to note that this study was undertaken as a small-scale case study in one of the clusters in the Caprivi region of Namibia. The Caprivi region consists of twenty clusters. Due to time and resource constraints, I could only involve respondents from one Cluster in the study. I believe if more respondents from other Clusters had been included, not only would more data be assembled, but the

scope of the study would be broadened. However, Maree (2007:76) observes that a case study research is aimed, not at generalising conclusions, but at gaining greater insight and understanding of the dynamics of a specific situation. Thus, it is important to note that, while this study provides insights into one small part of the entire SCS, the results of this study cannot be generalized.

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Appendix A

Interview guide for principals and teachers

- What are your views regarding the SCS? What did the SCS seek to achieve?
- What have been your roles as principal/teacher regarding the implementation of the SCS?
- What roles do subject committees have in the implementation process of the SCS?
- One of the objectives of the SCS was to allow schools to share resources. How has this been done?
- Do you think the SCS contributed to raising standards of teaching and learning particularly in your cluster? Explain more……
- How has the guidance and support been given in the context of the SCS? Have the support strategies been adequate or effective? Explain more….
- Do you think the SCS has managed to promote sound teaching practices among cluster members? In what ways?
- What would you say are the major outcomes of the SCS?
- What would you say are challenges facing the implementation of the SCS? Explain more….
- What would you point out as specific issues which hinder the successful implementation of the SCS?
- What would you say are the strong/weak points about the SCS? Explain more…
- What would you say are the intended and unintended outcomes of the SCS?

Appendix B

Interview guide for Circuit Inspector

- What are your views on the SCS? What did the SCS seek to achieve when it was introduced in the country and in the region?
- What is your role as an inspector/manager at regarding the implementation of the SCS? Explain more…..
- Since its introduction, what role have the SCS played in terms of enhancing the teaching practice among cluster members such as teachers? Explain more…..
- What would you say are the major outcomes of the SCS in terms of management and administration of schools?
- What challenges are you facing as the lead implementers of the SCS at circuit level?
- What would you point out as the intended and unintended outcomes of the SCS?

Appendix C

Confidentiality Consent Form

I the undersigned agree to keep all the information that I will provide and share in the interview discussion of the study entitled: 'Perceptions of educational professionals regarding the goals and the implementation of the School Cluster System in Namibia: A Case Study of one Cluster in Caprivi region 1999-2011', as confidential as possible.

The nature and general purpose of the study, and all possible risks, have been explained to me beforehand and I understand that I have the right to terminate my participation in this research study at any time I desire.

I indemnify and hold harmless the researcher, the University of Cape Town and its employees from any and all liability, actions or causes of actions that may accrue to me as a result of activities for which this consent is granted.

Name of Participant

……

Signature

……..

This is to certify that I (researcher) have explained the purpose of the study to the research subjects and promise to keep the information provided to me confidential.

Signature of Researcher

……...

Appendix D

Republic of Namibia
Caprivi Regional Council
Directorate of Education

Enquiries: Mr C M Matengu
File No:

Tel: 066 253002/253210
Fax: 066 253187

17 January 2012

Supervisor
School of Education
University of Cape Town
Private Bag X3
Rondebosch
7701

Attention: Mr Nicolars Tembwe

RE: PERMISSION TO UNDERTAKE EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ON THE SCHOOL CLUSTER SYSTEM (SCS) POLICY IN SCHOOLS: CAPRIVI REGION

Your letter requesting for permission to conduct a research as per above has reference.

Kindly be informed that the Ministry of Education does not have any objection to your request to conduct a research study as intended. However, be advised that such granted permission should not disrupt the normal teaching and learning activities at those schools you intend visiting.

It will be highly appreciated if you would share your findings with the Ministry.

Thank you

MR L S LUPALEZWI
REGIONAL DIRECTOR

CAPRIVI REGIONAL COUNCIL
DIRECTORATE EDUCATION
17 JAN 2012
DIRECTOR
PRIVATE BAG 5006 - KATIMA MULILO