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RHODES UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**An investigation of how members of a School Board
perceive and experience their roles in a secondary school
in the Rundu Education Region of Namibia**

Submitted by

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**In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters in Education
(Education Leadership and Management)**

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate School Board members' perceptions and experiences of their roles in a secondary school in the Rundu Education Region of Namibia.

A case study was conducted within the interpretive paradigm. Six School Board members from the selected school were interviewed. The data were analysed using qualitative data analysis practices.

The findings of the study indicate that there are numerous constraints that interfere with the Board members' ability to effectively carry out their role as a school governing body. These constraints include a lack of knowledge and understanding of the Education Act, a lack of skill in conducting basic management and organization processes and a lack of support from the circuit inspector and Regional Education officers.

This study provides some understanding of the circumstances of the School Board in trying to execute its role in implementing the Education Act, especially the section dealing with School Boards. As such, this research provides an agenda for the support and improvement of the work of School Boards in Namibian secondary schools.

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My contacts with teachers, parents and learners of similar and different disciplines have enriched my professional knowledge as an education officer.

Finally, to my wife, mother, children and relatives, I express my sincere appreciation for their patience in foregoing my attention during these three years of study.

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, Sinvula Martin Kasokonya, hereby declare that this study is my own work, and that it has not been submitted before for a degree or examination in any other University and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been acknowledged by complete references.

Signed:.....

February 2006

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context and historical background

Prior to independence in Namibia, the policy of apartheid and racial discrimination was practised at all levels of governance and administration (Tötemeyer 2002:7). The education system was divided along ethnic and racial lines (Amukugo 1993:75, Cohen 1994:91-95). Resources (including human resources) were unequally allocated among the various ethnic groups in the country, with most investment in education destined for schools with white pupils (Namibia 1993:19, Namibia 2000:3).

Reports by the Ministry of Education and Culture have shown that the majority of the disadvantaged black population was denied access to and the right to participate in education matters. This included school governance, policy formulation, decision-making and the control of the implementation of education policy (Namibia 2000:3).

As was to be expected, Namibia's new government through the Ministry of Education and Culture found the inherited administrative structures unsuitable for meeting its political and economic objectives, and concluded that administrative reforms were necessary. As a result, independence brought about fundamental change, including in school governance.

Lusaseni (1998:7) and Sayed (1999:1-3) have concluded that the key concepts which emerged from a review of relevant international literature on education governance were those of centralization and decentralization. Their studies have revealed that throughout the world, the governance debate appears to be framed by these concepts.

A study of literature has shown that in a centralized system most decisions are made at the national level, while in a decentralized system most decisions are made through the

participation of local individuals, community organizations and governmental structures (Winkler 1989:4, Lusaseni 1998:8, Sayed 1999:1-3, Hanson 2000:9). A more decentralized system of education governance appears to be the best suited to accommodate the demand for community control of schooling and the involvement of primary stakeholders in the daily management of schools.

According to Buckland and Hofmeyr (1993:16-17), decentralization generally implies a devolution of power from the state to those deemed to have a more direct interest in the process of education. In his recent study, Sayed (1999:1) asserts that the policy of educational decentralization has in recent times become a key aspect of educational restructuring in the international arena. For example, in January 1987 the State government of Western Australia issued "Better schools in Western Australia: A program for improvement" (Carter and O'Neill 1995:7). The report recommended the devolution of decision-making from central bureaucracy to schools. The report urged the replacement of direct, centralized control with broader macro controls which would enable schools to exercise autonomy over their management in pursuit of system-wide objectives (Carter and O'Neill 1995:7)

Similar policies have been implemented elsewhere, most notably in China (Hawkins 2001:1), Mexico (Ornelas 2001:2), Spain (Hanson 2000:35), France (McGinn 1992:166) and Chile (Schiefelbein and Schiefelbein 2001:1-4).

In line with international practice, in South Africa the decentralization of educational control and decision-making is evident in discussions surrounding educational restructuring and it has been expressed in the call for greater community and parental participation in schooling (Sayed 1999: 1-3). The 1996 South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa 1996:14) requires representation of parents on school governing bodies and the act grants parents the right to participate as citizens in the determination of key areas of school policy.

Buckland and Hofmeyr (1993:30) define governance as:

Not simply the system of administration and control of education in a country, but the whole process by which education policies are formulated, adopted, implemented and monitored. Governance is an issue not only at the national level, but also at every level of the system down to the individual school. Because it is centrally concerned with the distribution of power, it is often summed up to be the question: Who decides?

According to Potgieter et al. (1997:7) school governance is the act of determining policy and rules by which a school is to be organized and controlled. School governance is widely agreed to be concerned with the formulation and adoption of policy for the management of the day-to-day delivery of education (Department of Education 1995:32).

The Namibian Education Act (Namibia 2001:15) provides for the creation of School Boards, which includes parents, teachers and learners (at secondary schools only), at all state schools. The concept of the school governing body is relatively new in Namibia. It is a concept that seeks to move away from a top-down management approach to a more participative one that involves a group of people in the decision-making process. Historically and politically the majority of black parents in Namibia are at a disadvantage as they have no previous experience of being involved in the education of their children. As a result, these parents are experiencing problems in coping with the changes and challenges.

The Education Act (Namibia 2001:15-16) stipulates the powers and functions of the School Boards. These relate to a school's mission, extra-mural programme, staffing recommendations to government and student discipline, among others.

As School Boards are a new phenomenon in Namibia few, if any, studies have been conducted on the decentralization of education and school governance, especially on how

members of School Boards perceive and experience their roles. As I was interested in school governance, I investigated how members of a School Board perceive and experience their roles in the context of the Namibian Education Act, No. 16 of 2001. I expect that this study will throw some light on issues and problems facing members of School Boards and that it will be of interest to most education role-players.

1.2 Research goal

The main research goal was to investigate how members of a School Board perceive and experience their roles in a secondary school in the Rundu Education Region of Namibia. The sub-goals of the research were:

- 1) to investigate School Board members' knowledge and understanding of their roles and functions,
- 2) to investigate how they exercise their roles and functions,
- 3) to investigate members' experience and perceptions of the impact of the School Board on the school in light of the Namibian Education Act, No. 16 of 2001.

1.3 Methodology

I carried out this research within the interpretive paradigm, since I was interested in understanding the perceptions and experiences of the School Board. The interpretive approach affords the researcher an opportunity to understand the situation of the phenomenon by becoming part of the target group, in their life situation (Cohen and Manion 1994:36). Furthermore, the paradigm allows the investigator to work directly with their experience and understanding (Cohen and Manion 1994:36).

A case study method was used for this research. Many researchers, for example, Merriam (1988:9), Robson (1993:35) and Yin (1994:2) describe the case study as an examination of specific phenomenon such as a programme, an event, a person, a process, an institution or a social group. In this case study I investigated how the members of a

School Board perceive and experience their roles and functions in a secondary school in the Rundu Education Region of Namibia.

The sampling methods I used were both convenience and purposive sampling. I selected a school that was geographically close to me and that has a functioning School Board. McMillan and Schumacher (2001:400-401) and Welman and Kruger (2001:63) observe that purposive sampling allows the investigator to handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality. In addition, Patton (2002:244) points out that convenience sampling allows the researcher to do what is easy or available at the time of data collection to save time, money and effort.

I used semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions which allowed me to discover the participants', in my case the School Board members' perceptions, interpretations and meanings which they attach to their actions (Cantrell 1993:84, Robson 1993: 228). I tape recorded all my interviews and transcribed them verbatim. I interviewed the school principal, two teachers, one learner and two parents (chairperson and secretary of the School Board) serving as members of the School Board of the selected school. The total number of participants interviewed was six. I supplemented the interviews some document analysis, including minutes of meetings and informal observation during visits to the school.

I analysed the data using qualitative data analysis techniques such as looking for categories and by checking for regular patterns of events and themes (Cantrell 1993:98) that addressed the research goal (Neuman 1997:421).

For ethical reasons, the names of the school and the research participants are kept anonymous (Best and Kahn 1993:46 and Christians 2000: 139). The participants were informed that the information would be kept confidential.

1.4. Outline of the thesis

This study is organized in the following manner: Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature relevant to the purpose of the study. Chapter 3 describes the methodology employed in this study. The sampling, data gathering, data analysis, ethical considerations and research quality are discussed. The data is presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the research findings. Chapter 6, the final chapter, offers a conclusion and recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW: THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING SCHOOL GOVERNANCE.

2.1 Introduction

The main purpose of this study was to explore and describe the views of School Board members regarding how they perceive and experience their roles in a secondary school in the Rundu Education Region of Namibia. In this chapter I review the literature on decentralization of education and school governing bodies internationally, regionally and nationally. The chapter further explores and reviews the key concepts associated with school governance.

Brink (2000:76) states that “literature review is a process involving finding, reading, understanding and forming conclusions about published research theory on a particular topic.” According to Burns and Grove (1999:46), relevant literature refers to those sources that are pertinent or highly important in providing in-depth knowledge needed in studying a selected research topic. I review relevant literature from 1988 to 2005.

Advocates of decentralization claim that it provides opportunities for local people to have a say in school governance, restore to them the feeling that they are not powerless and are in control of their own destinies (Winkler 1989:2-3, Department of Education 1995:32, Sayed 1999:4). This implies that a basic purpose of decentralization is to move toward collaborative decision-making, involving principals, teachers, parents and learners. A key demand in the debate concerning educational decentralization and governance has been the call for greater parental participation in schooling (Department of Education 1995:32, Sayed 1999:4). These authors further state that the policy of educational decentralization has in recent times become a key aspect of educational restructuring in both developed and developing countries. Winkler (1989:2-3), Lusaseni (1998:7) and Sayed (1999:1-3) have concluded that the key concepts which emerge from the review of

relevant international literature on education governance are those of centralization and decentralization. Their studies have revealed that throughout the world, education governance debate appears to be framed by these concepts.

In the sections that follow, I will look at centralization and decentralization in general and within the context of education governance.

2.2 Theoretical debates on centralization and decentralization

The literature review attempts to answer, with respect to both developed and developing countries, questions such as: What is decentralization of education and why are many countries keen on it? What does school governance mean? Who controls schools and what powers do they have? How desirable is the involvement of parents, teachers and learners in school governance? What are the challenges commonly faced by parents, teachers and learners in participating in school governance? Last but not least, what lesson, if any, can be learned from other countries' experience that would be relevant to Namibia, as the country attempts to redefine its future education governance?

2.2.1 The meaning of decentralization in education

Literature consulted for this purpose has revealed that different theorists use a variety of terminology in reference to the decentralization of education. For instance, some theorists claim that decentralization is at the heart of education reform efforts in many countries because it is often equated with concepts such as democratization of education (Hanson 2000:9); others equate it to privatization of education, school-based management, school site management, school-based budgeting, people-centred development and maximum participation of local communities in the daily management of school (Brown 1991:11).

Hanson (2000:9) observes,

Decentralization is a term that pre-supposes centralized and unitary states and describes a process by which powers (political decision-making and financial and managerial powers) are transferred from the centre to local governments (corporate bodies) giving them more autonomy and liberty to manage their local affairs within the framework of a unitary state.

The above explanation of the term 'decentralization' simply means a process of increasing participation in the formulation and making of decisions that affect the lives of persons in a society. Both Brown (1991:11) and Hanson's (2000:9) findings indicate that decentralization is believed to mean "the transfer of decision-making authority, responsibility, and tasks from higher to lower organizational levels or between organizations." Decentralization emphasizes the need for decision-making authority to be transferred from central government to local communities. These authors further state that studies on decentralization of education in both developed and developing countries have shown that 'decentralization' is a term that means different things to different people depending on their interests or focus. It is a concept that therefore carries several faces including the following: "deconcentration, delegation, devolution and privatization" (Winkler 1989:4, Brown 1991: 11, McGinn 1992: 164 and Hanson 1998:112).

In what follows, I will look at the meanings of the forms of decentralization and examples of educational systems corresponding to each form.

2.2.2 Forms of decentralization

The aim here is not to embark on an in-depth discussion of various forms of decentralization, but to briefly highlight them as presented and argued for by different theorists.

2.2.2.1 Deconcentration

Gildenhuys and Knipe (2000:240) describe the concept 'deconcentration' as a scaled-down form of decentralization. Deconcentration means handing some authority or responsibility to lower levels within the central government. According to Gildehuys and

Knipe (2000:240), this form of decentralization does not, however, mean the transference of comprehensive, high-level decision-making authorities to lower levels. According to Winkler (1989:4), this form of decentralization can take the form of shifting workload from central government ministries' headquarters to staff located in offices outside of the national capital. This implies that the decentralization in the sense of deconcentration simply means establishing the administrative offices of central government in regions, and does not imply real decentralization since decision-making powers remain vested in central authority in order to secure a high level of uniformity and quality (Winkler 1989:4, McGinn 1992:164, Mukwena 1998:32, Gildenhuis and Knipe 2000:240).

Under this heading, Winkler (1989:4) highlighted those countries which have established regional directorates of ministry of education. These are Peru, Colombia, Chile and the Philippines. As Winkler (1989:4) observes, "these directors vary in power, but they often have the responsibility of supervision and planning for the region." The determining factor here is the degree to which regional directorates and local officials participate in decision-making. For example, the more common decentralization reform in United States of America has been a deconcentration of government authority by moving officials from central toward more local offices (McGinn 1992:164). Thus, the Board of Education of New York in the late 1960s created a series of mini-boards of education dotted across the city. Similar forms of decentralization were implemented by the federal ministry of education in Mexico in 1978 by opening branch offices in the states (McGinn 1992:164).

In short, decentralization in the sense of deconcentration is therefore essentially an administrative arrangement and does not imply complete freedom from the central level or head office of the department (Gildenhuis and Knipe 2000: 240). In other words, its purpose is to secure greater efficiency and effectiveness.

2.2.2.2 Delegation

Decentralization in the sense of delegation simply means that the central ministry of education transfers authority for the control and governance aspects of education to another organization, generally at a lower level in the hierarchy (Winkler 1989:4, McGinn 1992:164, Hanson 1998:112).

McGinn (1992: 164) gives examples of some public universities which are autonomous. Although funding comes from the national government, allocation of funds and decisions about students, staff, curriculum and physical facilities are the responsibility of the university. It can take the form of transferring broad authority to regions or private institutions, to plan and implement decisions concerning the governance of specific activities within specified territorial boundaries. Winkler (1989:4) cited Lesotho as an example where most elementary education is delegated to the churches, with teacher salaries paid by the government.

2.2.2.3 Devolution

Some theorists, for example, Winkler (1989:5), McGinn (1992:164), Mukwena (1998:33), Hanson (1998:112), Gildenhuis and Knipe (2000:238) regard devolution as the far most ambitious form of decentralization because it can take the form of creating or strengthening sub-national units of the government whose activities are outside the direct control of the central government. These authors further state that devolution involves in the first place giving autonomy and independence to sub-national units of governments, which are allowed to exist as separate levels over which central authorities exercise little or no direct control. In this form of decentralization, the more central authority turns over all responsibility, including that of funding, to a more local organization (McGinn 1992:164). For example, in Nigeria, which has a federal system of government, the 1979 constitution turned responsibility for basic education over to states which in turn devolved responsibilities to local education authorities (McGinn 1992: 164). This gives regions the scope to make decisions in their areas of jurisdiction.

According to McGinn (1992:164), decentralization of education governance in the sense of devolution simply means that the governance of schools is exercised through the local School Boards, local Teachers Unions and Learner Representative Councils. In other words, this form of decentralization is associated with federal form of government whereby regional or local governments have responsibility for the financing and provision of elementary and secondary education (McGinn 1992:164). Many countries practise this form of decentralization.

2.2.2.4 Privatization

Privatization can range in scope from the free operation of public institutions to individuals or corporations in the form of parastatals (McGinn 1992: 164).

According to Hanson (1998: 112), privatization can include:

- Allowing private institutions to perform functions that had previously been monopolized by government;
- Contracting out the provision or management of public services or facilities to private institutions;
- Transferring responsibility for providing services from the public to the private through the divestiture of state-owned institutions.

The above scope can therefore be used as a basis for aims and objectives of privatization in the sense of decentralization. McGinn (1992: 164) and Hanson (1998:112) claim that the most complete form of decentralization from government's perspective is privatization because it shifts responsibility for functions from the public institution to the private institution. This implies that privatization is usually, but not always, accompanied by economic liberalization and institution development policies. It allows functions that had been primarily or exclusively the responsibility of government to be carried out by community groups, co-operatives, private voluntary associations and other non-government organizations (McGinn 1992:164, Hanson 1998:112).

2.2.2.5 Deregulation

Deregulation reduces the legal constraints on private participation in service provision or allows competition among private suppliers for services that in the past had been provided by the government or by regulated monopolies (McGinn 1992: 164). In recent years deregulation has become more attractive alternative to governments in developing countries.

Under appropriate conditions, all of these forms of decentralization discussed above can play important roles in broadening participation in school governance, political, economic and social activities in both developed and developing countries at sub-national levels. Where it works effectively, decentralization helps alleviate the bottlenecks in decision-making that are often caused by central government planning and control of important economic and social activities. This implies that decentralization can help cut complex bureaucratic procedures and can increase government officials' sensitivity to local conditions and needs.

The types of decentralization that I have discussed above are not mutually exclusive. In practice, governments use combinations of these forms. For example, China's educational leadership has been struggling with the issue of centralization and decentralization almost since the founding of the People's Republic China in 1949. Hawkins' (2001:1) findings indicate that terms such as "Walking on two legs", meaning combining both centralized and decentralized approaches to education, and "Minban Schools", meaning community run schools, were commonly used. He states that in China there are no clear examples of completely decentralized educational systems, but rather one finds a mixture of centralization and decentralization. Hawkins (2001:1) further argues that these processes are "fluid and in motion and change over time."

Similarly, Winkler (1989:5) also states that some countries do not fit well in any of the descriptions given above. Winkler's (1989) findings indicate that some countries have centralized and nationalized systems of primary education but decentralized systems of

secondary education, in large part because the central government does not have sufficient revenues to fully fund secondary education. The author cited countries like Kenya and Indonesia as good examples because they have free nationalized primary education and more decentralized provision of secondary education (Winkler 1989:5).

This implies that the mixture that will be adopted in a particular country will by and large be determined by a range of political, social, geographical and economic factors pertaining to that country. This is to be expected because countries differ, for example in terms of history, political systems, and levels of economic developments.

2.2.3 Rationales for educational decentralization

This section will briefly highlight the rationales for educational decentralization as presented and argued for by different theorists. Agbo (1997:4) identified seven rationales for educational decentralization, that according to them provide an opportunity for local people to have a say in school governance.

These are: Organizational, Accountability, Effectiveness, Efficiency, Redistribution of political power, Culture of learning and Financial. In the sections that follow each of these rationales are outlined.

2.2.3.1 Organizational

The organizational argument for decentralization concerns the way an organization distributes authority and decisions (Agbo 1997:5). The author further asserts that the argument for organizational decentralization is to increase efficiency where the nature of the organization does not allow efficiency in decision-making because of its size or complexity of technology Agbo (1997:5). Organizational decentralization has to do with distribution of information where those with the best information about a particular field can use their discretion to act on the information (Agbo 1997:5). This implies that

decentralization then becomes a necessary way of delegating responsibilities to ancillary units.

In the context of school governance, the power is designed to enable schools and communities to manage changes in education within a framework that fits the overall objectives, strategic plans, policies and curriculum initiatives of the education authorities (Agbo 1997:5).

2.2.3.2 Accountability

Accountability has long been a part of decentralization debate. Decentralization proponents argue that accountability follows the exercise of power, use of resources and implementation of policy (Beckmann 2000:8). Other decentralization advocates argue that accountability is inextricably linked to democratic management and other related concepts such as participation, decentralization, empowerment and transparency (Agbo 1997:6, Beckmann 2000:8). In short, the demands of both democracy and efficiency require some form of accountability in the school.

According to Winkler (1993:128), “accountability requires clear assignment of responsibilities, public information on finance and performance, and mechanisms by which to hold decision-makers responsible.” As Brown (1990:104) simply puts it: “To be accountable means to answer for one’s actions to someone else.”

It is apparent that accountability involves voluntary or compulsory reporting to other people. It includes having a conscience or moral responsibility about what one is doing. Lello (1993:1) argues that accountability entails being answerable to other stakeholders both junior and senior to yourself. It implies that decentralization goes with a system of accountability to ensure that public funds are used according to certain guidelines, that there is improvement in the provision of education and that there is a way of providing information to show how the schools are doing (Fryer and Lovas 1990:38).

2.2.3.3 Effectiveness

The effectiveness rationale for decentralization argues that the centralized planning policies popular in the 1960s have resulted in expensive education, which is decreasing in quality (Winkler 1989:2). The author also asserts that after independence, many countries nationalized and centralized their educational systems and established free education as a right. Given current fiscal constraints, such a policy can continue to be followed only with decreasing educational quality. The effectiveness argument for decentralization mainly concerns the belief that community people and in-school authorities are more knowledgeable about school functions at the local level than central authorities, and are more capable of making and effecting decisions that would result in school improvement (Winkler 1989: 30). However, Winkler (1989) further states that the prospect of better decision-making responsibilities being exercised at the local school level raises questions about how schools make decisions, how they obtain the information base from which they draw and how decisions increase learner achievement and success (p.3). Philbin (1996:1) refers to the concept 'capacity' as an organization's ability to achieve its mission effectively and to sustain itself over the long term. Philbin (1996) further states that capacity includes the skills and capabilities of individuals within an organization that are used to do their jobs more effectively.

2.2.3.4 Efficiency

According to Winkler (1989:2), efficiency arguments for decentralization typically focus on the high unit costs of primary and secondary education provided by the central government. Another explanation is the costs of decision-making in a system where even the minor local education matters must be decided by geographically and culturally distant bureaucracy in the capital city. Yet another explanation is the frequent application by education ministries of national standards for curriculum, construction, teacher quality, thereby preventing cost savings through adjustments of educational inputs to local or regional price differences (Winkler 1989:2).

2.2.3.5 Redistribution of political power

Redistribution of political power is rarely stated as an objective of decentralization, but democratization or inclusion of marginal groups in society is a frequently stated goal (Winkler 1989:3). An example is the 1972 Peruvian educational reform, which explicitly included Indians and other disadvantaged groups in decision-making. In other words, decentralization in education has nothing to do with either structural reform or with classroom instruction or the learning of the learners. Decentralization can be a process of participative management designed by politicians to support fulfilment of people's needs.

Winkler (1989:3) argues that:

redistribution of political power is the primary objective of decentralization. With that as the objective, decentralization may be undertaken to empower those groups in society which support central government policies or to weaken groups posing obstruction to those policies.

In other words, politicization of decentralization tends to underscore a number of purposes such as the redistribution of authority, safeguarding government legitimacy and the encouragement of cultures of learning. Thus, decentralization in Mexico has served to reduce the power of the teachers union by transferring salary negotiations from central to the state government level. From this perspective, decentralization is less concerned with the transfer of power from one level of government to another, and ironically, one consequence of decentralization may be to increase the effective control of the central government, or at least that of key decision-makers within the central government (Winkler 1989: 3).

2.2.3.6 Culture of learning

In a recent study, Agbo (1997:8) asserted that Native children fail in school because the rich experiences they acquire in their own culture and language do not prepare them for the boring routines and activities of the school. This suggests that the cultural context of

the learning process is crucial to learners' achievement. According to Agbo (1997:8), the rationale behind the concept, cultures of learning, is to localize education in order to meet the various social and economic needs of learners. The author further views culture as having a cause-effect relationship with personality and human learning. To help Native learners learn effectively, teachers must be aware of the cultural and value differences and linguistic variables that are likely to affect the teaching-learning processes, as education is the process by which individuals learn the culture of the society and become its members (Agbo 1997:8). The author further states that even under centralized educational systems educators increasingly recognize the significance of culturally specific learning environments and accept the learning of languages that are peculiar to specific locales.

2.2.3.7 Financial

Winkler (1989:2) asserts that the financial arguments for educational decentralization are a recent phenomenon. The issue here is that the proportion of school-age children enrolled in primary and secondary schools has grown rapidly over the past two to three decades, and educational expenditure has grown rapidly as well. As a result, central governments now find themselves facing severe fiscal constraints to continued expansion of educational opportunities. Hence, shifting part of the burden for support of primary and secondary education to sub-national units and to parents has become an increasingly attractive alternative. The form of shifting advocated in decentralization plans varies with a variety of country characteristics, including the form of government, colonial administrative heritage, and traditions of community involvement (Winkler 1989:2).

Decentralization policies are at the heart of education reform efforts in many countries because they are often equated with concepts such as democratization of education (Hanson 2000:9). In the section that follows, I will look at the meaning of a democratic system of educational management.

2.3 Democratic education system and management

2.3.1 Educational democracy

Prior to the independence of Namibia there was little provision for parental or community involvement in school governance. However, since independence the democratic participation of parents, learners and community members in the education of their children has been promoted (Namibia 1993:41). Democracy is one of the four major principles or goals of the Namibian Education System. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (Namibia 1993:41), the introduction of educational forums in the regions and the setting up of School Boards in schools, whereby parents and learners in schools are serving to chart the future of school governance, are some of the interventions which have been put up to give meaning to the concept of democracy. In Namibia, these interventions were made legally binding by the promulgation and subsequent implementation of the Education Act, No. 16 of 2001.

According to Sayed (2002:37), the general view is that educational decentralization redistributes, shares and extends power and enhances participation by removing centralized control over educational decision-making. He states that such an argument suggests that greater democratization is effected when education systems are decentralized to allow for more locally based decision-making. Sayed (2002:37) further raises doubts as to whether decentralization in the sense of democratization of education does indeed engender a transfer of power. If it does, he thinks that it is mainly for professional and middle-class parents who benefit from decentralization. In other words, educational decentralization does not always extend participation to all (Sayed 2002:37).

Sayed (2002:37-38) identified certain ambiguities that can be present in educational decentralization, which if not considered in the implementation phase, can cause confusion. According to him the difficulty of understanding educational decentralization in relation to participation and democracy is that there are two versions of participation and democracy which have potentially contradictory policy implications. These are:

The first version, which is expressed in systems of representative democracy, is that people participate through the cycles of election which empower those politically elected with the authority to act on their behalf. The classic way in which this is done is that those politically elected work with the bureaucracy to implement the desired policy change. This version of democracy and participation is potentially centralizing and does not elicit participation besides the act of voting. The second version of democracy is that of participatory democracy where people are able to make decisions about their lives at the level at which it happens. In this version, central political authority and professional expertise is constrained by more local forms of participation (Sayed 2002:37-38).

In reality both versions of participation and democracy can be seen in policy and practice of a country.

Democracy is one of the four major principles or goals of education in Namibia (Namibia 1993:41). This goal advocates broader participation of stakeholders in education, namely, principals/teachers, parents/guardians, School Boards, Inspectors/Advisory teachers, Education forums, National Advisory Council on Education, Regional Education Director and learners in the education process, decision-making and school governance (Namibia 1993:41, Namibia 2000:6).

In the following section, I will look at decentralization in Namibia.

2.4 Decentralization: The Namibian Context

Since independence in 1990, Namibia has initiated several decentralization reform programmes which have entailed a mix of delegation and devolution (Namibia 1999: 1). Decentralization in Namibia has occurred through strengthening the newly established regions and constituencies country wide, whereby various central government ministries are represented in regions and constituencies by local staff; and such staff are accountable to their respective regions and constituencies. Ideally, regions and constituencies in Namibia have been established for the purpose of delegating specific functions at

regional and constituency levels through the creation of regional council, local authorities, regional education offices, and regional health offices.

Decentralization in Namibia aims to ensure economic, cultural and socio-economic development; provide people at grassroots level the opportunity to participate in their own decision-making; and extend democracy to them as a right based on national ideals and values (Namibia: National Planning Commission Secretariat 2005:9).

In other words, decentralization in Namibia is designed to achieve the following objectives:

- To extend, enhance and guarantee participatory democracy.
- To ensure, enhance and safeguard rapid sustainable development.
- To transfer real power to regional councils and local authorities based on national ideals and values.
- To improve the capacity of regional and local government councils to plan, implement, manage and monitor delivery of services to their constituents (Namibia: National Planning Commission Secretariat (2005:9).

According to the policy, in the long term Local Authorities and Regional Councils would be responsible for all functions that are presently carried out by the central ministries' administration (Töttemeyer 2002:13). This is meant to take place in the context of a Unitary State, where central government is responsible for policy making and public services standard setting and enforcement (Namibia 1999:1).

2.4.1 School governance

Current transformation initiatives in education, such as decentralization, have had a major impact on school governance.

Potgieter et al. (1997:7) offer a useful general definition of school governance that is appropriate to both developed and developing countries: "school governance is an act of determining policy and rules by which a school is to be organized and controlled." These

authors further indicate that school governance includes ensuring that such rules and policies are carried out effectively in schools. Karlsson (2002:328) notes that the primary aim of governance reforms in many countries is the democratization of schooling. In South Africa, the Education White Paper 2 clearly states that “governance policy for public schools is based on the core value of democracy” (Republic of South Africa 1996:16).

The above characterizations of school governance can be interpreted to mean its purpose is to encourage local community participation in school administration through the governing boards of individual schools. Karlsson (2002: 328) noted that the primary aim of decentralised school governance is to fulfil the concept of the “democratization of School Governing Bod(ies).”

2.4.2 Education Act, No. 16 of 2001

The Namibia Education Act, No. 16 of 2001 came into operation on 27 December 2001 (Namibia 2001:1). Namibia being a unitary state, the Act applies to education in the whole country. The Education Act provides, among other things, for the creation of School Boards that include parents, teachers and learners (at secondary schools only) at all state schools (Namibia 2001:2, 15).

One of the most important aspects of the Education Act is the involvement of parents, teachers and learners in School Boards. Parental involvement in Namibia was well-known only in the former white schools (Namibia 2000:3). As a result, the introduction of parental involvement to all state schools was welcomed. Historically and politically the majority of black parents are at a disadvantage as they have no previous experience of being involved in the education of their children.

The Education Act (Namibia 2001:15-16) stipulates powers and functions for School Boards. I do not intend to discuss these powers and functions in detail, but a brief outline

is provided to indicate the extent of the possible involvement of parents, teachers and learners as member of the School Board members.

Part V Section 17 of the Act (Namibia 2001:15-16) headed "Powers and functions of all School Boards" stipulates the duties and responsibilities of a School Board. The discretion of the School Board is limited to the manner in which it performs its duties.

These are:

- i. Developing the mission, goals and objectives of the school;
- ii. Advising the school's management on the extra-mural curriculum of the school;
- iii. Recommending the appointment of teachers and other staff members at the school;
- iv. Advising the regional director of education on educational needs and the curriculum of the school;
- v. Allowing the use of the school facilities for community purposes;
- vi. Considering any case of misconduct by a learner or staff member of the school;
- vii. Exercising other powers and performing other duties and functions as authorized or imposed by or under this Act.

These powers and functions depend on the capacity of a School Board. For this reason capacity building programmes were provided by the Namibian government.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed decentralization in the context of global education reform, including in Namibia where it has found expression in the establishment of School Boards, which is the focus of my study.

The following chapter provides a discussion of the methodology of this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This study focuses on how members of a School Board perceive and experience their roles in a secondary school in the Rundu Education Region of Namibia. The emphasis is on the School Board members' knowledge and understanding of their roles and functions, how they exercise their roles and functions, and how School Board members experience and perceive the impact of the School Board on the school in the light of the Namibian Education Act, No 16 of 2001.

This chapter briefly outlines the research paradigm and method, basic assumptions relating to interpretive research, sampling methods, approach to data collection and the data analysis used in this study. The ethical considerations implemented during the research process and the limitations of the methodology are also discussed in this chapter.

3.2 Selection of research paradigm

In the context of a research design the selection of a research paradigm represents a choice in a set of beliefs that will underlie and guide the entire research process (Cantrell 1993:83 and Creswell 2003:6). In other words, a paradigm provides a researcher with a unified set of concepts, principles and rules to select the approach appropriate to his/her research study and how it should be conducted. Webster's New World Dictionary (1968:1060) defines the term paradigm as "a pattern, example, or model." As the term is used in social science, a paradigm is a perspective or frame of reference for viewing the social world, consisting of a set of concepts and assumptions. A paradigm is the mental window through which a researcher views the world (Bailey 1982:2).

Many scholars, for example Cantrell (1993:83) and Guba and Lincoln (1994:109-111), make the point that there are many views in the social sciences as to how many research paradigms exist. Cantrell (1993:83) argues for only three research paradigms, namely, positivism, interpretivism and critical science. In contrast, Guba and Lincoln (1994:109-111) identify four major research paradigms, positivism, post-positivism, constructivism and critical theory.

Both Cantrell (1993:83) and Guba and Lincoln (1994:109-111) assert that the choice of a research paradigm has implications for the choice of methodology, method of data collection and analysis in a research study. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994:107), Denzin and Lincoln (2000:157) and Creswell (2003:6), each paradigm influences a researcher to make claims about what is knowledge (ontology), how she/he knows it (epistemology), what values go into it (axiology), how she/he writes about it (rhetoric), and the process for studying it (methodology). In other words, every researcher starts a research study with certain assumptions about how she/he will conduct or carry out her/his study.

Guba and Lincoln (1994:107) assert that whether consciously or not, every researcher works from some theoretical orientation or paradigm. In my case it is the interpretive paradigm, which I will discuss in the next section.

3.2.1 Interpretive paradigm

My research study was conducted within the interpretive paradigm. According to Schwandt (1994:118), interpretive researchers place more emphasis on understanding through looking closely at people's words, actions and records. Interpretive researchers believe that reality is in the minds of people, it is internally experienced and is constructed through social interaction and interpretation. All in all, interpretive paradigm is concerned with meaning and it also seeks to understand social members' definition of a situation.

Schwandt (1994:125) asserts that interpretivists believe that knowledge and meaning are acts of interpretation hence there is no objective knowledge which is independent of thinking, reasoning humans. According to Cantrell (1993:83), interpretive paradigm influences researchers to follow an inductive research path where realities are socially based and the researcher is linked subjectively to the participants in a research study.

It is also very important to note that the theoretical framework for most qualitative research emerges from an interpretive perspective, a paradigm that sees the world as constructed, interpreted and experienced by people in their interactions with each other and within wider social systems (Mason 1996:4). This implies that the research does not only focus on objective verifiable facts but also on the many subjective meanings that people attach to them. According to Mason (1996:4), identifying, sorting and analyzing those meanings in relation to objective behaviour, decisions, actions and practices are the methodological substance of the interpretive framework.

The methods associated with this perspective tend to be those that enable participants to speak freely and to understand the investigator's quest for insight into phenomena that the participants have experienced Mason (1996:4).

Consistent with my earlier discussion of paradigms in social research, my study will be a qualitative case study. In the section below, the case study as the research method for this study is discussed.

3.3 Research method: Case study

I conducted a case study using qualitative data. Some scholars, for example Bassey (1999:3), assert that the increased acceptance of qualitative research has again sanctioned the case study approach as an acceptable research method for educational studies. I choose a case study for this thesis because case studies are believed to be preferred research strategy when "how", "what" and "why" questions are being asked, and when

the researcher has a little control over the event or when the research is being carried out in a real life context (Yin 1988:23).

Many researchers, for example Merriam (1988:9) and Robson (1993:35), describe the case study as an examination of a specific phenomenon such as a programme, an event, a person, a process, an institution or social group. In support of this description of the case study, Yin (1994:13) defines a case study as:

An empirical study that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.

The definition provided above makes it clear that the intention of case study is generally proposed to gain an “in-depth” understanding of the concerned phenomenon in a “real-life” setting. In other words, the case study allows the researcher to single out one aspect of the problem to be studied in some depth within a limited time scale (Yin 1994:13).

Tellis (1997:1) makes the point that there are many views as to how many types of case studies can exist. For example, Stake (1994:237) identifies three major types of case studies, intrinsic, instrumental and collective. According to Stake (1994), an intrinsic case study is when a researcher wants a better understanding of particular case. This implies that the case itself is of interest to the researcher. My study can be categorized as an intrinsic study as I aimed to gain understanding of how members of the School Board perceive and experience their roles in a specific case, which is a secondary school.

3.3.1 Rationale for using the case study approach

I conducted a single case study using a qualitative research method. According to Bell (1999:10-11),

a case study can be described as an umbrella term for a family of research methods that have a common decision of focusing on inquiry around an instance. What is important about a case study is that it allows the researcher to concentrate on a specific situation and identify the various interactive processes at work.

Bell (1999:11) concludes that “the case study approach is particularly appropriate for individual researchers because it gives an opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth within a limited time scale.” Robson (1993:52) provides a slightly more elaborate definition of case study, as “a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence.” “Empirical” in this context does not mean “scientific” so much as signal a commitment to the collection of evidence about what is actually going on in a complex real-life situation, using investigative strategies such as observation or interview as “multiple sources of evidence” (p52).

Due to the kind of information sought and the qualitative nature of the investigation, it was important that sources, the people from whom the data would be collected, be carefully selected. The quality of the data would depend upon the careful selection of research participants.

The case study school was purposefully chosen because it is believed by residents of Rundu, especially those with some acquaintance with School Boards, to have a model School Board. My own experience as an education officer in the Rundu Region corroborates this. According to Runkel (1980:175) cited in Lusaseni (1998:32), “a single case study can be a trial; a demonstration that a thing widely thought to be unlikely can indeed be brought about.” This remark seems particularly relevant to the selected case school, which can indeed be seen as embodying possibility, as exemplifying just what can be achieved in seemingly unpromising circumstances.

On 20 January 1970 the case study school opened its doors to the first group of 24 learners as a private school under the name, Afrikaans Medium Private School. The school was opened with the assistance of the South African Defence Force, which was

operating in the region at the time. By 1978 the number of learners had increased to 134, from grades one to seven. The following year (1979) the first principal of the school introduced a secondary phase. The case study school soon became one of the top schools in the region. In 1986, the school managed to buy a school bus with money raised by the community. The bus was used to take learners on educational tours.

As the years passed, the number of learners and teachers continued to increase. Currently the secondary school has 710 learners from all of Namibia's ethnic groups. There are also a few from other countries. The school has 24 teachers. Despite the fact that it draws its learners from all corners of the region, it is known for its excellent discipline and good examination results.

3.4 The research process

3.4.1 Sampling

I used both convenience and purposive sampling. I selected a secondary school that was geographically close to me and that has a functioning School Board. McMillan and Schumacher (2001:400-401), Welman and Kruger (2001:63) and Hoyle et al. (2002:187) observe that purposive sampling allows the investigator to handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality. Patton (2002:244) points out that convenience sampling allows the researcher to do what is easy or available at the time of data collection to save time, money and effort. My case study was convenient to me in view of proximity, time and financial considerations.

3.4.2 Data gathering

Data for this study was collected mainly through semi-structured interviews with individuals. I chose interviews because I was interested in the participants' knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences and interactions which are meaningful to the nature of my research study (Mason 2002:63, Patton 2002:341). According to

Patton (2002:341), researchers interview people to find out from them those things a researcher cannot directly observe. This implies that the purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow a researcher to enter into the other person's perspective with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowledgeable and able to be made explicit. Researchers interview to find out what is in and on someone else's mind (Patton 2002:341).

I used open-ended questions to allow in-depth probing, which allowed me to discover the perceptions, interpretations and meanings that participants, in my case the School Board members, attached to their actions (Cantrell 1993:84, Robson 1993:228). I tape-recorded all my interviews and transcribed them verbatim.

I interviewed the school principal, two teachers, one learner and two parents (chairperson and secretary) serving as members of the School Board of the selected school. The total number of participants interviewed was six.

The questions I asked the interviewees depended on how they responded to the main questions I had prepared for them. Questions focused on roles and experiences, issues of democracy, decision-making, accountability, and relationships between stakeholders. I selected the interviewees on the basis of the positions they occupy in the School Board with the aim of getting participants who would be able to supply the information I needed. I interviewed one participant each day for a period of six working days in September 2004. Each of the interviews stretched to approximately 120 minutes.

I also analysed minutes of School Board meetings and conducted informal observation during visits to the school. However, the weight of my data work depends on the interviews.

3.5 Data analysis

I analysed the data using qualitative data analysis techniques such as looking for categories and checking for regular patterns of events and themes (Cantrell 1993:98) that addressed the research goals (Neuman 1997:421). I proceeded by examining the interview transcripts as well as my notes from the documents I analysed and the observation to identify appropriate categories for sorting the data on School Board members' roles and experiences.

3.6 Research quality

Qualitative research is often accused of being unreliable, invalid and generally “unworthy of admission into the magic circle of science” (Robson 1993:402). The heavy reliance on the human instrument increases the potential for bias. To ensure validity and reliability I took care to be objective throughout the study. Objectivity should be an integral part of research to ensure that the researcher's personal biases and preferences do not prejudice the interpretation of the findings.

The interview questions were first discussed with my supervisor to ascertain their appropriateness and whether they corresponded with the objectives of the study (Polit et al. 2001:309).

After the discussion with my supervisor, I conducted a pilot study at one of the junior secondary schools in the Khomas Education Region of Namibia. On the basis of this pilot study, some of the interview questions were further altered.

I ensured internal validity by complying with ethical research standards during my data collection. I also made sure that the data were recorded fully and maintained principles of neutrality during data collection (Rossow 2000:178-179).

3.7 Ethical considerations

The main ethical concerns in research are informed consent, confidentiality and potential harm to the participants. Anderson (1998:18) and Christians (2000:138-139) maintain that proper respect for human freedom generally includes the three above-mentioned conditions, that is, participants must agree voluntarily to participate in research without physical or psychological coercion. This means that the participants' agreement must be based on full open information about aims of the study. Both Anderson (1998) and Christians (2000) argue that codes of ethics in a study insist on safeguards to protect participants' identities and those of the research locations.

This implies that privacy and confidentiality need to be considered as the primary safeguard against unwanted exposure. All personal data ought to be secured or concealed and made public only behind a shield of anonymity (Christians 2000:139).

In ensuring safety of the participants and preventing violation of human rights, permission to carry out this case study was sought from the Ministry of Education through the office of the Director of Rundu Education Region and the principal of the selected case study secondary school. Informed consent was obtained from each respondent after a thorough explanation of the aim of the study and the potential benefits of participating. The respondents were assured verbally that for the sake of anonymity and confidentiality their names would not appear anywhere in the research findings. Anonymity was of particular importance to board members who might have felt threatened by the presence of a senior member of the Ministry of Education.

All participating School Board members had access to transcriptions and to their transcribed interviews. For ethical reasons, the name of the school and the research participants were kept anonymous (Best and Kahn 1993:46, Anderson 1998:18 and Christians 2000:139) and I have used pseudonyms.

3.8 Limitations of my methodology

The interview is generally regarded as the prime source of case study data. However, to obtain a more comprehensive picture, researchers are encouraged to use multiple data source such as documentation, file data, direct observation, participant observation, site visit and physical artefacts (Anderson 1998:155). Anderson (1998) further points out that multiple sources of data provide a comprehensive perspective and validate and cross-check the findings (p.155). In terms of the scope of this study, however, I thought it sufficient to limit myself to interviews. Using multiple data sources would have resulted in much more data than one may reasonably be expected to cope with in a half thesis.

Another potential limitation is that the participants may have found it difficult to reveal problematic areas, because they may not have been sure to whom I would communicate the information. To counteract this possibility I assured them that their names as well as the name of the school would not appear in the data and that the original data would be kept confidential.

My study is a small, qualitative case study of one secondary school in the Rundu Education Region of Namibia. One of the potential limitations of the case study method lies in generalizing the findings across differing contexts. However, Anderson (1998:134, 152) contends that a case study is not conducted to understand other cases, but to understand that particular case. Anderson (1998:134, 152) further explains that generalization is not a fundamental component of qualitative research, therefore qualitative researchers should not be worried by this limitation. Therefore the findings of my research would not be generalized, but could nevertheless inform other schools working with similar School Board members and inform the policy makers about the issues surrounding the implementation of the Education Act.

3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the research paradigm in which this study is carried out, the approach and methodology I used in the course of this study. The following chapter provides data presentation of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data obtained from my interviews. I interviewed the principal, two teachers, two parents (Chairman and Secretary of the School Board) and one learner (from the Learners' Representative Council) serving as School Board members. The purpose of the interviews was to establish how the School Board members, as the school governing body, experience and perceive their roles. The questions I asked the interviewees depended on how they responded to the main questions I had prepared for them. The following questions formed the basis for the interviews:

- Would you tell me how you were recruited/elected to become a member of the School Board (procedures followed, composition, recruitment requirements, and termination of service for member and term of office for members)?
- My second question to all interviewees focused on School Board members' roles and experiences: What roles does your School Board play in this school and how do you perform them? (individual roles within the board, involvement of board members in the management of the school, board members' experience with the school management, guidelines on how the board should function (if available), who determines them and how helpful)
- The third question addressed issues of democracy, decision-making and accountability: According to the Namibia Education Act, No. 16 of 2001 (Namibia 2001), School Boards operate along democratic lines. Does this School Board subscribe to democracy? Explain to me how you arrive at decisions and how you exercise your accountability.
- The fourth question aimed at gathering information about School Board members' relationship with the Regional Education Authorities, the parents, community, local organizations, learners and teaching staff, and was asked in

the following way: The Namibia Education Act, No. 16 of 2001 (Namibia 2001) requires you as School Board members to operate on the basis of good relationships and partnerships based on trust between stakeholders, namely parents, teachers, learners, other staff at school, the local community and education authorities; how do you maintain this relationship? (system in place to communicate effectively with all stakeholders, fund raising and education authorities' control over funds generated by school).

- The fifth question focused on how School Board members' experience and perceive the impact of the School Board on the school with a view to Namibian Education Act, No. 16 of 2001. (Did you receive training or in-service training related to your responsibilities as a member of School Board? Change(s) brought by the Board and elsewhere at the school, challenges encountered by the Board in trying to manage changes at the school, can you tell me any story of things you are proud of as a Board).

The following section provides a closer look at the prominent themes that emanated from the data and what my participants had to say about how they perceive and experience their roles and functions in a secondary school in the Rundu Education Region. The data is arranged according to the questions I asked, and the respondents' answers are integrated under each sub-heading. A discussion of the findings under themes will form the basis of this chapter. For ethical reasons, the names of the school and research participants are kept anonymous. The participants were referred to as Respondent one (R1), Respondent two (R2), Respondent three (R3), Respondent four (R4), Respondent five (R5) and Respondent six (R6).

4.2 Election and composition of School Board members

Respondent five (R5) started with a short explanation that "School Board is an organization that has to run the school for a period of three years and after three years, new members have to be elected." Both R4 and R5 said that they were invited to attend a parents' meeting at the school. According to R4, parents with children at the school and

teachers teaching at the school attended that meeting. According to this respondent, the purpose of the joint meeting was to elect the School Board members. R4 noted that for the first round of elections, all members of the School Board - parents, learners and teachers – were elected under the supervision of the Education Officer from the Regional Education Office (circuit inspector) and the school principal. All the interviewees said that they were first nominated and their names were put on a list of candidates to be voted for and then the candidates with a higher number of votes became members. Respondent one (R1) stated that by virtue of being the principal of the school, he/she automatically becomes a member of the School Board.

With regard to election procedures, R4 stated that:

Looking at the procedures, I will say I was very happy with the way elections were conducted. As I said already, the parents were not alone; they were assisted by the Ministry of Education officer together with the school principal and the teaching staff. And secondly, the parents were well represented because the school hall was full and all parents were very active taking part in the deliberations, where nominees came out of the people to become members of the School Board. So, I was very much satisfied.

R5 also registered his happiness with the way in which the elections were carried out by saying that:

Yes, because parents were given the chance to choose who they think can be in the School Board. So, I found myself there and I was very happy to serve as a member of the School Board.

Other respondents, for example, R1, R2, R3 and R6 also noted that they were happy with the procedures because the elections were free and fair.

With regard to requirements to be a member of the School Board, R2 and R3 said that one needed to be member of the teaching staff. According to Respondent six (R6), one needed to be a member of the Learners' Representative Council at the school (LRC). R5 mentioned two requirements; the first one is that if you are a parent you need to have a child at the school and the second one is attending parents' meetings at the school.

All respondents stated that if a member misses three School Board meetings consecutively without valid reasons, then that member can be disqualified or cease to be a member of the School Board.

In terms of the term of the office, R6 stated that:

I am not sure about that one because this is my first time to be a member of the School Board and also is my first time to serve as a member of Learners' Representative Council.

Similarly, R3 also stated that: "I am not sure whether is one year or two years. I am not sure for the teachers." Asked why they were unsure of their term of office, R6 and R3 pointed out that they have not yet read the Education Act. Other respondents, for example, R1, R2, R4 and R5 stated that the term of office is three years for parents and teachers. According to these respondents, the term of office for learners is one year. They also revealed that after three years new members are elected and there is a possibility that some of the old members can be re-elected.

It has been observed that the procedures of recruiting the School Board members were followed. The perception is that all serving members of the School Board are satisfied with the way they were elected. It was further observed that some members are not aware for how long they are supposed to serve as members of the School Board. In the next section, I present the respondents' perceptions of their roles and experiences as transpired from the data.

4.3 School Board members' roles

Respondent five (R5) explained that the School Board is the governing body of the school. This respondent mentioned that the School Board sees to it that a school is run effectively and is also involved in the recruitment of the teaching staff. R4 was not sure about the roles of the School Board. The reason R4 gave was that no induction or

training was given to newly recruited members of the School Board. Another reason R4 stated was that since his recruitment, he never read the Education Act. He further confirmed that he was aware of the Education Act. Why could the respondent not read it? The answer was that there was no time and the document was too thick. But what this respondent could recall is that the school management will not take a decision or solve a problem without informing the School Board. This is what R4 had to say:

The School Board and School Management took a decision to introduce discipline procedures at school where I participated during the deliberations. We decided to introduce two books (black and red) for each class group. The black book is where all offences committed by a learner during the course of lessons is/are recorded from Monday to Friday. Every Friday all the black books for each class group are summarised and transferred to the red book. The red book has a page for each learner in a given class group. We have categorized offences into three categories. Category one offences are regarded as minor classroom offences, such as making noise; category two offences are regarded as serious offences, such as failing to do classroom activities and give in homework; and category three offences are regarded as major offences, such as fighting, stealing, late coming for a lesson and using abusing language.

I was fortunate to read through the minutes of a meeting of the School Board dated 24 March 2004 where the above decision was taken. Another role this respondent could remember is that members of the School Board are allowed to visit the school any time of the day to see what is going on.

R1 mentioned the following Board roles: “running of the school, appointing teachers, supervising the work of the teachers, see to it that learners are learning and monitor the attendance of each learner.” R2 was not sure about the exact roles of the School Board. What this respondent could say was that the school is ruled by the School Board. R3 stated that the School Board has a number of roles to play, for example, advise the principal, advise the entire school management, administer discipline, control the budget of the school, have authority over how the money of the school should be utilized. This respondent concluded by saying that there are many things the School Board can do. R6 was of the option that the School Board deals with the issues related to disciplining of

learners and reminding parents to pay school fees. This respondent (R6) stated that “I am only allowed to be present when the disciplinary hearing involves a learner. If a disciplinary hearing involves a teacher I am not allowed to be present.” R1 put it clearly to me that there are confidential matters, like being overstaffed and one or two teacher having to be transferred to another school; learners are not allowed to have access to such information. R1 further pointed out that when issues related to the appointment of a teacher at the school, learner Board members were excused from such meetings. The school management only invites the chairperson and the secretary of the School Board as observers. Their presence is to make sure that proper procedures of recruiting are followed. In other words, Board members will be present but will not participate as panel members.

With regard to how the School Board performs its roles, R2 said: “Well, we just follow the Education Act, because we are working within the framework of the Education Act, and it stipulates what the School Board should do, such as promoting school welfare.” According to this respondent, the Education Act is a thick document which was written by the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture to guide and direct Board members on anything which has to do with the school, the learners, the parents and the teachers.

The general view of the respondents is that every member of the School Board has certain responsibilities to carry out within the Board. R3 noted that: “My role in the School Board is to see to it that whatever decision taken by the board is to the benefit of teachers and also give feedback to teachers on issues discussed and decisions taken by the School Board.” The respondent further pointed out that it is a two way communication, feedback from teachers to the School Board members and from board meetings to teachers.

According to this respondent, his role in the School Board is to protect the interests of his colleagues. He stated that:

There are different roles allocated to individual members, such as chairman, secretary and a person in charge of finance, but as teacher myself I am not given the roles, I only serve as a member and take part in decision-making.

Similarly, R6 also stated that: "So far, I am just a member, others are chosen as chairperson, secretary and treasurer. As a learner, I am just a member of the School Board." What this respondent perceives to be her role is just to assist other Board members when there is an issue involving her fellow learners. Asked whether she gives feedback to LRC, the response was "yes". Unfortunately I could not attend the LRC meetings; however, I was given some of the notes of their meetings where feedback was given to other members of the LRC.

R4 is aware of his roles in the School Board. This respondent stated that:

I am a chairperson of the School Board, coordinator between parents and teachers, coordinator between learners and the school as well as the school and the ministry. I chair all the meetings of the School Board. So, my role in actual fact is to make sure that there is a good relationship between the parents, the school, as well as learners. I am there to coordinate the activities which involve the Ministry of Education. For example, I facilitated the appointment of the English teacher at the school by convincing the Education authorities at the regional level after Grades 9-12 learners stayed for a long time without a teacher.

I was given letters where joint signatures appeared for chairperson of the School Board and the principal of the selected case school. A positive response from the Regional Education Authorities was received. Another interesting story was the step that the chairperson of the School Board took to pay a teacher for four months from his own pocket and other members of the School Board.

Similarly, R5 is aware of his roles in the School Board. This respondent mentioned that:

I am the secretary of the board. In most cases, I take the minutes during meetings and also invite or remind all board members about the next meeting through sending letters and sometimes by phoning them.

R1 mentioned that he is the ex officio of the School Board. The respondent stated that:

My role is to direct the house because I am involved in day to day running of the school. I inform other Board members of the policies in place. I also make sure that issues discussed during School Board meetings are in line with the Ministry of Education policies. For example, if the school is short of one teacher, the School Board would not know. It is my duty as a principal to inform other members. Other School Board members will only recommend.

With regard to the involvement of Board members in managing the school, R5 noted that the School Board is the governing body of the school and the school principal is part of this governing body. This respondent further revealed that in their meetings the school principal would table issues concerning the school to allow Board members to decide on certain issues, what exactly should be done, such as the starting time in the morning and to determine how much learners can pay per year as school development funds. According to R5, the School Board has a right to suspend a teacher, a learner and even the principal if they are not happy with what is going on at the school. R3 was of the opinion that the School Board gets involved when there is an emergency case, such as disciplinary measures against the teacher, or the principal and learners. This respondent pointed out that “the involvement of the School Board in managing the school is not yet clear as far as I know.”

Similarly, R6 also mentioned that:

I am not really sure, but I think the School Board is very much involved with the activities of the school. I know because the chairperson of the School Board is my dad. He is ever at the school and well informed about things happening at school. He sometimes calls urgent meetings to solve problems at school.

R5 has stated that the School Board has not experienced problems with the management of the school. This respondent mentioned that “everything is fine, the management members communicate with us, and we meet to share information and discuss issues related to the school. For example, when teaching staff need a transfer and if there is

something needed at the school. The school management informs the members of the School Board about any development at the school and board members inform other parents.”

With regard to guidelines how the board members should function, R6 stated that “I don’t know, maybe my dad would know.” According to this respondent, whether there are guidelines or no guidelines, she has not seen them. Similarly, R3 also noted that “not what I am aware of now. Even though there are acts about how the School Board should function, I have never seen one to study it.”

In contrast, R5 revealed that there are guidelines on how the School Board should function. This respondent mentioned documents such as Namibia Education Act and School Board Act. According to this respondent, the guidelines are very helpful and give directions on how board members should function at school, for example, mobilizing funds for the school or recovering funds from parents who are in arrears with the development funds. R4 also acknowledged that there are guidelines prepared for them. However, this respondent is not happy with the guidelines given to Board members. He cited the incident where the School Board took a decision of not admitting a learner who was transferred from a neighbouring school. The decision of Board members was not respected by the Ministry of Education officials; the learner was finally admitted to the school against the Board members’ decision.

R1 clearly stated that the relationship between School Board and school management is good because the school management does not take a decision without the involvement of the School Board members. The respondent cited the recent decision which was taken by the school to lock the school gate to not allow latecomers to get in. The issue was discussed and a decision was reached to do so in order to curb late-coming.

With a cursory look at the roles stated by the participants, one learns that some of the board members are unaware of their roles because no induction or training was given to them. It was recognised that some members of School Board did receive the Education

Act but could not read it, while others read it but could not comprehend the content of the Act. The responses also reveal that some Board members have never seen the Education Act document where their roles are enumerated, such as developing the vision and policies of the school. In the next section, I present the perceptions of the respondents with regard to issues of democracy, decision-making and accountability.

4.4 Democracy, decision-making and accountability

Board members meet regularly to discuss issues and take decisions. R5 expressed himself as follows:

As a body, we are governing the school. The school principal and the chairperson of the School Board draw up the agenda a week before the meeting at school and the secretary of School Board sends it to all School Board members to familiarize themselves with issues to be discussed in the meeting. In the meeting, the chairperson gives the opportunity to each and every member to contribute to the discussion until an amicable decision or solution is reached.

This respondent further noted that if Board members are not in agreement over an issue, they end up voting to see who is for and against, and then the majority decision will be considered.

With regard to how Board members exercise their accountability, all respondents seem not be aware that whatever they do or whatever action they take is subjected to scrutiny by somebody. R4 blamed the Education Act for referring to their responsibilities as advisors. He is of the opinion that School Board members do not have the power to do their job because their job is to advise. This respondent maintained that the powers are clearly stated in the Education Act, but these powers are being limited to advice. R4 expressed himself as follows:

The powers are there but these powers are being connected to giving advice. The School Board can take a decision but it will be determined by

the Ministry of Education Authorities. That is how I see it. The Ministry of Education officials can reverse some of the decisions of the School Board members.

The following is an example given by R4 where the decision of the School Board was reversed by the Ministry of Education officials at regional level.

I can give you an example where a decision was taken not to allow any child to be admitted at the school because we were sitting with a list of other learners who applied to join the school. The school was full to capacity, as board members we took a decision not to accept any learner. But because of reasons we were not aware of, one learner from the list of ten learners was allowed to join the school by the Ministry of Education officials. Only one learner out of ten learners was allowed but others not. Reasons we don't know.

From the respondents' responses one learns that School Board members are of the opinion that their decisions in certain issues are not useful or don't carry weight. Some of the responses of participants are appealing to Ministry of Education authorities to consider and value the Board members' decisions as School Governing Body.

The following section presents data on how Board members maintain relationships with other stakeholders in education.

4.5 Maintaining relationships with all stakeholders in education

All respondents stated that the relationship with all stakeholders in education is well maintained. They said whenever there is something which needs to be brought to the attention of parents or the community at large, the School Board communicates through sending letters with children to their parents. They sometimes use local media to communicate the message to the entire community. R3 has this to say concerning the relationship with other stakeholders in education:

The most formal way is the meeting. Every term we hold at least one meeting for the parents where Board members address issues concerning the school with parents. Parents are free to give their views, comment and talk about anything that they see is happening at the school or anything

they have heard. It could be a problem at school where learners in a certain grade(s) have no teachers. During the meeting, parents come up or give ideas how best to deal with that issue.

The respondent further noted that the education authorities, such as circuit inspectors, or the Regional Director of Education are also invited to attend the School Board meetings, as letters are written to them if there is something to discuss where their views are needed, for example, awarding prizes to the best learners at the school. Sometimes the communication is done telephonically by the chairperson of the School Board or the school principal. With regard to financial assistance from business people, all respondents stated that the practice in place is to write letters or send a team consisting of Board members and school teachers to solicit funds.

Fund raising at the school is also perceived by all respondents as a factor of maintaining relationship with stakeholders in education, for example, annual fun-runs, and donation papers given to all learners to collect funds from the public. The School Board will also mobilize parents and explain why the school needs the funds. For the past two years the funds collected were used to purchase 20 computers and the school has established a computer lab connected to the internet. R4 is of the opinion that an activity at school geared to generate funds is another approach the Board members introduced to maintain relationship between the school and other stakeholders in education. Some of the activities mentioned are the school fun-run, gala dinner, sports and cultural dances. According to respondents, the aim is two-fold, firstly to generate funds to supplement school development funds and secondly to strengthen the relationships with all stakeholders in education. R6 noted that there are a lot of things happening at school. One of them is a fun day where parents and prominent local businessmen and women are being invited to school to buy small things prepared by the school and learners. The community is also involved through functions such as braais and other social get-togethers, and the profit made is given to school.

With regard to the role of education authorities over the funds generated by School Board members, R4 had this to say:

Well, the Regional Office for Education doesn't have much role because as a governing body, we have the treasurer, the chairperson and the secretary in place. The regional staff can only be briefed in our School Board meetings how far things were done. But otherwise, the School Board itself has got power to do its business without any interference.

Similarly, R3 also noted:

I don't think there is, I am not aware of anything. What I am aware of is that at the end of each financial year, the School Board chairperson or the principal has to give an audited financial report of the school to the Ministry of Education to see how the money has been used. That is all I am aware of, but these little activities around where we raise one thousand, two thousand, three thousand to ten thousand, we use the money for things the school needs, like sport clothing, parties and school materials.

All in all, the respondents said "the education authorities have no direct control over funds generated by School Board". R6 said "I don't know".

The respondents indicated that the relationship between Board members and other stakeholders in education is well maintained. This was confirmed after I had read through minutes of the School Board meetings. In issues related to disciplinary hearings, parents of those learners are invited and informed about the consequences. The issue of late-coming and the resolution taken to discourage late-coming among learners was also communicated to all stakeholders in education.

In the next section, I will present the views of the respondents on how Board members experience and perceive their impact on the school.

4.6 The impact of the School Board on the school

The Namibia Education Act, No. 16 of 2001 (Namibia 2001) provides that the principal is an ex officio member of the School Board. This implies that by virtue of being a school principal, he/she has a right to be an ex officio member of the School Board. As an ex

officio member of the School Board, the principal has no voting rights within the Board, but plays a vital role in providing information related to policy implementation. Some of the respondents stated that they never received training or in-service training related to their responsibilities as members of the School Board. This is how different respondents expressed themselves with regard to training related to their responsibilities. R6 said that “not yet.” R5 stated that “unfortunately it did not happen yet.” R3 noted that “to date not yet. We were just promised that as soon as possible a major training will take place to train all Board members in the region when all schools in the region have finished electing Board members with assistance of the circuit inspectors. That is what we are still waiting for.” All respondents expressed the need for the training. R1 is the only one who attended a two-day workshop which was facilitated by the circuit inspector at the circuit office in March 2004. According to this respondent, the workshop highlighted a number of issues, like how the school should be managed, how to run the school, how to run the finance of the school, how Board members can solve some of the problems at school level and how the community at large should be informed about how the school is being run as well as how the money that they have contributed to the school is being handled and used at the school.

With regard to changes brought by the School Board at school, all respondents affirmed that the School Board brought significant changes to the school. Some of changes the respondents claimed are “appointments of teachers / non-teaching staff and discipline at the school.” For example, the procedures of handling disciplinary problems, the Board members and School Management introduced “black and red books” in which to record offences committed by learners while at school. The renovation of the school sport field and the swimming pool was another change, or rather school development, that the Board members brought to the school. According to Respondent two (R2), the School Board members worked hard to raise funds to open a computer centre at the school and to upgrade the playground for the junior primary learners. Board members mobilized parents and local businessmen and women to contribute money and also gifts in kind to upgrade the playground for the junior primary learners. All these renovations, changes and developments at the school were brought in by the current School Board after realising that

the state of some of the facilities was in a bad condition and not user friendly. Another achievement cited by R4 at the school is that the discipline of the learners has changed. This respondent has this to say:

From the time we started one very important thing is the discipline of the learners has changed. We arranged a meeting with all learners where a number of issues were discussed related to how they should behave at school and towards their teachers. We had meetings with all parents to address the same issue. We continued inviting parents through the register teachers by sending invitation letters to parents/guardians of those learners to come to school. The first meeting is basically for counselling the learner(s). The parent(s)/guardian(s) and the register teacher sit together with the learner and talk to him/her about his/her conduct in school. If the same learner continues to violate the rules of the school, the parent/guardian will be invited to school. This time the learner will receive the first written warning from the principal which will be signed by the parent/guardian. If another set of three offences is recorded in the red book after the first written warning, the parent/guardian will be called to school to sign the second written warning. This to my understanding worked correctly.

With regard to challenges encountered by the School Board members in trying to manage the changes at the school, Respondent 5 had this to say:

It is difficult to make some changes because there are people who believe that when you bring in some changes you are trying to dominate. These are some of the challenges and we have to work on them in order to make everybody understand that when a change comes, it comes for the better. The Board members are working hard to educate each other and assigning each other tasks to accomplish related to development at the school.

R2 stated that there are many challenges, such as, how to get money to start a development at the school. This respondent said, "Sometimes you have to struggle to get money to let that development go and we have to sit and plan how to get the funds from local business people."

With regard to things the School Board is proud of, R6 had this to say:

We have improved the communication between the school and the public. The School Board uses different modes of communication with parents, for example, through the local radio. However, it was discovered that not everyone listens to the local radio station. The communication was further improved by sending a letter to every parent. This is done by the School Board secretary. The parents are now open and free to come to the school if they have problems, unlike in the past when parents were scared to talk to the principal. When it comes to discipline, the learners are well disciplined both at school and out of school.

Similarly, R2 also stated that:

I am proud to be a member of the School Board because our school so far is performing well in the region. The school scored an overall pass percentage of 75.6% in 2005 compared to 69% in 2004 in Junior Secondary end year examinations (Grade 10). There is an increase of 6.4%. The school still ranked 4th as far as the regional ranking is concerned. Learners behave well at school, classes are clean, the school is managed well, school buildings and the stationery are being taken care of.

I was taken around and I was able to see for myself how clean the school is. I also visited the storeroom where the stationery and textbooks are kept. The school has enough in stock and each learner has enough materials.

R5 had this to say:

Well, I am really proud to see the way the prize giving is being organized. The School Board mobilizes the community for the event and also participates in setting the criteria for outstanding behaviour in order to qualify for the prize award. It is organized in such a way that all parents are happy because awards are given to those learners or children doing well in terms of good behaviour, caring for other learners, good performers in any activity and school subjects. This really makes the board members very proud because it is an activity which brings parents together at the school.

From the respondents' responses one learns that some Board members are appealing to the education authorities to give them orientation and training related to their responsibilities. Most of them operate in the dark.

4.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented descriptive data depicting the perceptions and experiences of School Board members of their roles in the governing body of the case secondary school in the Rundu Education Region of Namibia. In the next chapter (Chapter 5), I discuss the data with reference to relevant literature.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 4 I presented how the School Board members experienced and perceived their roles in a secondary school in the Rundu Education Region of Namibia. In this chapter I discuss my main findings in terms of the relevant literature, as well as my research goals.

The presentation revealed a number of issues that warrant discussion. For the purpose of this study, I focus only on School Board members' knowledge and understanding of the Act, how ignorance of the Education Act negatively affects the potential influence of the Board, Board members' involvement in the school's management, and whether the learners' contribution adds value and enhances community relations.

5.2 Knowledge and capacity

5.2.1 Participants' knowledge and understanding of the Education Act, No. 16 of 2001

Some of the research participants have seen the Education Act (Namibia 2001) but have not read it. Some acknowledged a lack of interest in reading the Act. There is no reading culture in that school community. Others feared the unknown and the thickness of the document. They indicated that they had insufficient knowledge and understanding of the Education Act and that they are unsure of their roles. However, the School Board does have office bearers, such as a chairperson, a secretary and a treasurer who controls the school development funds. These contextual factors call for specific support for School Boards from the education authorities.

However, the data reveal that the School Board members have not received any training since becoming School Board members. The respondents reported that they had been



promised that training would take place once all the schools in the Region had elected their School Boards. This process has now dragged on for over two years. So these Board members have still received no induction training.

The literature reveals that effective policy implementation requires that implementers know and understand what they are supposed to do (Van Meter and Van Horn 1975:478). They further argue that even where directives and requirements are clear, problems may arise as implementers fail to comprehend fully what is expected of them (Van Meter and Van Horn 1975:478).

With regard to how Board members understand and exercise accountability, the findings revealed that they are unaware that they are accountable to anyone. Advocates for decentralization (Agbo 1997:6, Beckmann 2000:8) hold that accountability is inextricably linked to democratic management and other related concepts such as participation, empowerment and transparency. However, the participants were unable to relate accountability to their powers. In fact, the data show that some of the Board members felt that they do not have any power, and therefore accountability, because they believe their responsibility is limited to being advisors only.

5.2.2 Capacity

Van Meter and Van Horn (1975:480) also assert that successful policy implementation is a function of the implementing organization's capacity to do what it is expected to do. Besides a lack of knowledge of the Act, the data reveal that Board members believe they lack the capacity to carry out the stipulations of the Act. Even though group members may have the required knowledge of policy expectations, Philbin (1996) points out that without the capacity, skills and capabilities individuals need to perform their responsibilities, successful policy implementation is unlikely (p.1). Neither the circuit inspector nor the Regional Education Authorities have made any effort to offer training in basic management processes, such as effective meetings, communication and decision-making, for example. According to Van Meter and Van Horn (1975:480) the ability to

implement training may be hindered by such factors as overworked and poorly trained staff, insufficient information and financial resources, or impossible time constraints.

Philbin (1996:1) asserted that any organization needs capacity to achieve its mission and to sustain itself. The School Board in this study appears to be in this situation. Due to an absence of both knowledge and capacity it is unable to effectively achieve its mission and therefore to sustain itself.

It is clear from this case that the Regional Education Authorities, through the circuit inspector, need to urgently provide training for school governing bodies to help them to understand and perform their functions. Decentralization of school governance is often recommended today as a solution for low levels of participation by communities, teachers and parents in school decision-making (Muta 2000:11). But in order to improve the administrative capacity of school leaders in general, it is necessary to offer training to School Board members, principals and school management (Muta 2000:11).

5.2.3 Ignorance of the Education Act negatively affects the Board's potential influence

Ignorance of the Education Act emerged from the data as one of the factors affecting the potential influence the Board could have as the school's governing body.

According to the Namibian Education Act, No. 16 of 2001 (Namibia 2001:15), a School Board's functions include the formulation of the school's vision and policies, recommending the appointment of personnel, mobilizing and controlling school resources, developing the school's infrastructure, promoting welfare and communicating with parents and the community. Although the participants were able to mention what they perceived as their roles as Board members, they are unaware of most of these functions, such as the formulation of the school's vision.

School Boards are responsible for the formulation and adoption of school policies and for developing management guidelines for the day-to-day delivery of education in a school (Department of Education 1995:32). This is not happening at the case study school.

Besides capacity related concerns, due to ignorance of the scope of its responsibilities, the School Board is unable to fulfil its potential to influence teaching and learning in the school for which it is accountable.

Furthermore, the research participants believe the Regional Education Authorities are also largely ignorant of the Act and its provisions. They believe this is one of the main reasons why they are unable to support School Boards. In addition, they think the authorities lack the ability and resources, such as reliable transport, to communicate with schools.

5.3 Board members' involvement in the school's governance

Winkler (1989:2-3) states that it has become common practice to move towards collaborative decision-making by involving principals, teachers, parents and learners in school governance. Sayed (1999:4) points out that this approach has a lot of advantages in that parents and members of local communities are in the best position to know what a school really needs and what its problems are. This is the reason for creating a School Board for every state school.

Despite their ignorance of the Education Act (2001), Board members at the case study school have participated in decisions concerning the time in the morning when school should start, how much each learner will contribute towards the school development and the drafting of a code of conduct for learners. The code of conduct includes the types of behaviours to be punished, the types of punishment to be given for different behaviours and disciplinary procedures to be followed by the school.

5.4 Learners' contribution to the Board

Decentralization proponents argue that the term democracy calls for more individuals to add their voices to public debate and to elect their own representatives who will be held accountable for their actions (UNESCO 1999:97). The Ministry of Education and Culture (Namibia 1993) requires that schools allow active role-players, including learner participation, in school governance, discussions of school management and administration and evaluation of the quality of instruction and learning (p 42). The Education Act (2001) provides for learners to elect their own representatives in all public secondary schools to serve on School Boards.

The selected case study school allows learner contributions during Board meetings. All members are allowed to speak freely and participate in decision-making regarding those issues. When Board members are unable to reach agreement on an issue, a vote, including that of the learner representatives, is taken.

That the School Board goes out of its way to involve learners shows, in the view of the research participants, its commitment to participatory governance. The learners reported contributing to discussions and decisions concerning learners' disciplinary hearings, sporting and social matters. However, learners are excused from matters involving teachers, such as their recruitment, selection and transfer. These issues are treated as confidential.

5.5 Enhanced community relations

In the Board members' view the Board has helped parents become involved in their children's schooling and school governance. The School Board arranges activities at the school that allow teachers to talk to parents. Register class teachers talk to parents individually about issues such as their child's behaviour and performance, both good and bad, as well as outstanding school development fund payments. Parental meetings are the most formal way of maintaining relationships with parents.

The Board also mobilizes parents for fund raising activities. The School Board and the school organize events such as school fun-runs, gala dinners, sport and cultural dances, school fun days, braais (barbeques) and the selling of soft drinks and other small items prepared by teachers and learners to raise funds for the school. The findings reveal that the purpose of these functions and activities is two-fold. The first is to generate funds to supplement school development funds and the second is to strengthen relationships among local education stakeholders. Whenever there is an activity at the school, parents and local businessmen and women are invited to have fun while at the same time buying small items prepared by the teachers and learners. The general perception of the respondents is that there has been an improvement in the relationships and communication among the stakeholders.

Another element of enhanced community relations is that School Board members from time to time visit the community members they represent to inform them about school developments. The Board also communicates school related information to parents and other role-players through letters and the local radio station. Lello (1993:1) points out that decentralization goes with a system of accountability to ensure that there is a way of providing information to show how a school is doing.

The data reveal that communication between the school and its local community has improved. Parents are now free to visit the school and to air any grievances, unlike in the past when they were too fearful to do this. Learner discipline has improved. The Board is proud that the school is now one of the best performing schools in their region in year-end examination results. Most parents attend the annual prize giving.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have briefly discussed the key issues to emerge from the data. These issues are Board members' knowledge and understanding of the Act, their lack of capacity in implementing the Act, how ignorance of the Education Act and a lack of capacity negatively affects the potential influence of the Board, involvement of Board members in the school's management, the learners' contribution to the Board and enhanced community relations. A key finding is that the Board's work is severely curtailed through a lack of knowledge of their potential role and the capacity to execute it. Nevertheless, through their (and the teachers') commitment, initiative and effort, the Board has made a difference, in enhanced community relations in particular.

In the next chapter I summarise the main findings, make recommendations for practice and suggest possible future research.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for further research related to the roles and functions of the School Board at the case study school.

The research question was: How do members of the School Board perceive and experience their roles in a secondary school in the Rundu Education Region of Namibia. The chief goal was to gain insight into, and understanding of, the School Board members' knowledge and understanding of their roles and functions in light of the Namibian Education Act, No. 16 of 2001 (Namibia 2001). The findings were discussed in the preceding chapter and the conclusions and recommendations of the study follow from that discussion. First I give an overview of the findings.

6.2 Summary of main findings

It is evident from the data that the involvement of parents, teachers and learners in decision-making processes is understood to be fundamental to participative management.

The Board members were elected according to the procedures provided for in the Education Act. However, the data indicate that a number of the Board members lack knowledge and understanding of the Education Act and that this hampers their ability to effectively carry out their roles in the highest decision-making body of the school.

The findings revealed further that a lack of capacity in basic organization functions also hampers the Board members in carrying out their governance responsibilities. Besides being supported in studying the Education Act provision for School Boards for themselves, there is an urgent need for Board members to be trained in the content, their

responsibilities and the expected management and organization processes of the Act. These training needs are to be conducted by facilitators who are themselves well versed in the Act and its processes. The research participants expect that this will enable the Board to fulfil its mission and to sustain itself.

The school's management welcomes the involvement of the School Board in the management of the school. For example, Board members were involved in decision-making regarding the time when classes should begin in the morning and the drafting of a code of conduct for learners.

In addition, the learners' representatives on the Board participate actively in the work of the Board, unless it entails a matter concerning teachers, in which case the learners are excused. Finally, the participants believe that the Board has been successful in increasing parental involvement in school governance and in improving relationships between the community and the school in general.

6.3 Recommendations

Given Namibia's school history and the rural environment in which this school exists, it cannot be assumed that School Board members will read policies and understand and implement them. While the School Board members in my study are very willing to participate in the school's governance, they cannot do justice to this willingness without substantial support, which has not been forthcoming from the Regional Education Authorities. Any newly elected Board members need an ongoing support programme to enable them to fulfil their mission and to take advantage of the possibilities for school self development offered by the Act.

In the case of my study school, the school management is very open to the increased involvement of parents and the local community in the school's governance and development. A well prepared School Board will be in a position to make a substantial contribution to the school's development.

6.4 Suggestions for further research

According to Bassey (1999:3), the value of case studies is believed to lie in their ability to provide insights that may be pursued in subsequent studies. To this end, I identify the following areas for potential further research.

- My research investigated how members of a single School Board perceive and experience their roles and functions in a secondary school. Similar case studies, or large scale national surveys representative of all state secondary schools in the country, could tease out the nature of School Board preparedness for their role, what their needs are, the extent to which School Boards and their role are welcomed by schools and their communities and what contribution they are making to schools.
- Circuit inspectors are the conduit between Regional Education Authorities and schools, including School Boards. Research is needed to investigate how circuit inspectors perceive and perform their roles with regard to School Boards within the context of education decentralization.

6.5 Conclusion

This interpretive qualitative case study sought to describe School Board members' perceptions and experiences of their roles in a secondary school in the Rundu Education Region of Namibia. The findings of this study indicate that there are numerous constraints that interfere with the Board members' ability to effectively carry out their role as a school governing body. These constraints include a lack of knowledge and understanding of the Education Act and a lack of support from the circuit inspector and Regional Education officers. This study provides some understanding of the circumstances of the School Board in trying to execute its role in implementing the Education Act, especially the section dealing with School Boards. This can provide an agenda for the support and improvement of the work of School Boards in Namibian secondary schools.

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