

RHODES UNIVERSITY

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

**Cluster Centre Principals' perceptions of the
implementation of the School Cluster System in Namibia**

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in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Masters in Education
(Education Leadership & Management)

June 2007

ABSTRACT

The School Clustering System (SCS) was introduced five years after Namibia's independence in 1990. The rationale for its implementation was to improve the quality of education in Namibian schools by enabling the sharing of resources, experience and expertise among clusters and facilitating school administration by pooling resources from several schools to be shared equally. It was piloted in Rundu and then gradually expanded to the whole country. The cluster system groups 5-7 schools that are geographically close and accessible to each other in one cluster under the leadership of one of the principals known as a Cluster Centre Principal (CCP).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of CCPs of the implementation of the SCS in two clusters of a particular circuit in the Omusati region. It is a case study involving two CCPs, one serving Inspector of Education (IE), a former Inspector of Education, several teachers, principals and parents. Data were collected through interviews, document analysis, and focus group discussions.

The study found that the practice of cluster leaders is informed by contemporary leadership and management thinking. The participatory approach employed in cluster-based committees enables site-based management and collaboration. This has led to organisational learning. It was also found that a number of challenges are hampering the implementation of the SCS. These include lack of system support and inadequate resources. However, the human potential coupled with a high degree of readiness exhibited by cluster members are seen as potential drivers of further development of the system.

The study recommends the adoption of a national policy that formalises the SCS as well as the strengthening of system support to build cluster capacity. It also makes suggestions for further research in organisational culture and behaviour with the aim of developing leadership and management practices in the SCS.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study would not have been possible without the support, assistance and understanding of many ‘great’ people who motivated me throughout.

My deepest gratitude goes to my supervisor Professor Hennie van der Mescht for mentoring me with excellent advice and challenging questions, nurturing me to think ‘beyond’. Thank you for helping me to dig for my creativity and potential.

Grateful thanks go to my family for their love and patience, especially my two sisters Kaweva and Kaananhe who took care of my son Pondo during my study. To my son Pondo, I know I haven’t always been there for you when you needed me most, yet you are the reason for my success.

I would also like to express sincere appreciation to my supervisors and colleagues at work who supported and stood in for me during the contact classes. I also owe a lot to my respondents for their precious time, kindness and hospitality during my stay at their schools. Due to your great contributions, this piece of writing has come to fruition.

Finally, ‘bravo’ to the Education Leadership and Management group of 2005-2006, for inspiring and challenging conversations. Colleagues, you groomed my leadership thinking; bringing the best out in me. Thanks a lot to all of you.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my dear late friend, comrade and feminist,
Leopoldine Mudi 'Diye' Karufere,
a great inspiration in my life whose words of wisdom echoing in my mind
are still motivating me to strive for success.

ACRONYMS USED

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AT	Advisory Teacher
BEP	Basic Education Project
BES	Basic Education Support
BETD	Basic Education Teachers' Diploma
CCP	Cluster Centre Principal
CDP	Cluster Development Plan
CMC	Cluster Management Committee
DStv	Digital Satellite Television
EFA	Education for All
ETSIP	Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
HOD	Head of Department
ICT	Information Communication Technology
IE	Inspector of Education
KENSIP	Kenyan School Improvement Project
LRC	Learners' Representative Council
MBESC	Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture
MEC	Ministry of Education and Culture
MECYS	Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport
MGECW	Ministry of Gender Equality and Children Welfare
MOE	Ministry of Education
NANTU	Namibian National Teachers Union
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NQA	Namibian Qualification Authority
OHP	Overhead Projector
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
PQA	Programme Quality Assurance
PSC	Public Service Commission
RAISON	Research and Information Services of Namibia
RT	Resource Teacher
SB	School Board

SBM	Site-Based (School-Based) Management
SCS	School Clustering System
SDF	School Development Fund
SDP	School Development Plan
SIP	School Improvement Programme
SSA	School Self Assessment
UNAM	University of Namibia

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
DEDICATION	iv
ACRONYMS USED	v
CHAPTER 1.....	1
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Research Context	1
1.3 Research Motivation	2
1.4 Research Goal	3
1.5 Research Methodology	4
1.6 Thesis Outline	6
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	7
2.1 Introduction.....	7
2.2 The School Clustering System.....	7
2.2.1 Rationale behind the School Clustering System.....	8
2.2.2 The School Clustering System and Decentralisation.....	9
2.2.3 Formalisation of the SCS	12
2.3 The Theory.....	13
2.3.1 Site-Based (School-Based) Management (SBM)	16
2.3.2 Collaborative Management.....	18
2.3.3 Participative Management and Leadership.....	20
2.3.4 Teamwork	22
2.3.5 Transformational Leadership	26
2.3.6 Learning Organisations.....	29
2.4 Conclusion	31
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY	32
3.1 Introduction.....	32
3.2 Research Design.....	32
3.2.1 Orientation and Approach.....	32
3.2.2 Method	33
3.2.3 Working with Data.....	35
3.2.3.1 Data gathering.....	36
3.2.3.2 Data analysis	40
3.3 Ethical Issues	41
3.4 Validity	42
3.5 Conclusion	42
CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF DATA	43
4.1 Introduction.....	43
4.2 Presentation of Findings	43
4.2.1 The SCS's Organisational Outcomes.....	43
4.2.1.1 Establishment of new structures and infrastructure	44
4.2.1.2 Devolution of authority to local level	46
4.2.1.3 Intensified interactions at local levels.....	47
4.2.2 Personal Positive Outcomes for Stakeholders	49
4.2.2.1 Professional development workshops and training.....	50
4.2.2.2 Cluster based interactions and meetings	52
4.2.2.3 Perceptions of CCPs' managerial and leadership roles in the SCS	55

4.2.3 Challenges Experienced.....	61
4.2.3.1 Provision of resources and infrastructure	61
4.2.3.2 System support.....	63
4.2.3.3 Inadequate capacity of the SCS implementers.....	65
4.2.4 Key Implementers' Recommendations.....	67
4.2.4.1 Continuous support system.....	67
4.2.4.2 Strengthened co-operation at all levels.....	67
4.2.4.3 Provision and development of resources	68
4.2.4.4 Improved system structure and implementation.....	71
4.2.4.5 General Recommendations	74
4.3 Conclusion	75
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS.....	76
5.1 Introduction.....	76
5.2 Administrative Guidelines for CCPs' Operational Framework.....	76
5.3 Participatory Management and Leadership Practices.....	80
5.3.1 Development of New Supportive Structures	81
5.3.2 Site-Based Management at Cluster Level.....	82
5.3.3 Democratic Approaches to Educational Leadership.....	86
5.3.4 Capacity Building and Empowerment of Stakeholders at Cluster Level	91
5.3.5 Teamwork, Cooperation and Collaboration at Cluster Level	94
5.3.6 Organisational Learning: Clusters as Learning Organisations	96
5.4 Further Development and Sustainability of the SCS.....	99
5.4.1 Formalisation of the SCS.....	99
5.4.2 Strengthening the Capacity of Clusters.....	103
5.4.3 Understanding the SCS in the Context of Decentralisation.....	107
5.4 Conclusion	108
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION	110
6.1 Introduction.....	110
6.2 Summary of Findings.....	110
6.2.1 Leadership and Management for Educational Improvement.....	110
6.2.2 Key Issues Holding Back the SCS Implementation	112
6.3 Significance of the Study	116
6.4 Limitations of the Study.....	117
6.5 Recommendation for Practice.....	118
6.6 Suggestions for Future Research	120
6.7 Conclusion	121
REFERENCES.....	122
APPENDICES	128
Appendix A.....	128
Interview questions for the Cluster Centre Principals (CCPs).....	128
Appendix B1	129
Interview questions for the former Inspector of Education in X Circuit	129
Appendix B3	130
Interview questions for the Current Inspector of Education in X Circuit.....	130
Appendix C1	131
Interview questions for the focus group discussion.....	131
Appendix C2	132
Focus group discussion plan	132
Appendix D.....	133
Site Visit Programme at selected Cluster Centres	133

Appendix E	134
Permission letter to do Research in Omusati Region.....	134

List of Figures

Figure 1	Changes in regional management.....	10
Figure 2	Levels of management.....	11

CHAPTER 1

1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a rationale for this study Cluster Centre Principals' (CCPs) perceptions of the implementation of the School Clustering System (SCS). The discussion first looks at the context of the study and its motivation, then states the research goals and the methodology employed and finally gives an outline of how the thesis is structured.

1.2 Research Context

Since independence in 1990 improving the quality of education delivery has been the major challenge confronting education in Namibia. Education reform and development were based on the four overarching goals of access, equity, quality and democracy as guiding tools combating colonial legacies to accomplish the major goals for education. Numerous policies were formulated to address the issues of quality and educational outcomes (Angula, in Zeichmer & Dahlström, 2001, p. 27). There was an increasing demand from the society at large including learners, parents, and the business community for better delivery of quality education. The demand prompted a greater need for an overall school improvement programme with regard to the school management system and the delivery of a curriculum more relevant to the larger society's needs.

In 1990, Minister Nahas Angula, of the former Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport (MECYS) appealed to the Namibian nation "to commit itself to the improvement of education through change, reform and renewal" in the Education Reform Directive titled *Change with continuity: Education reform directive 1990* (in Taylor, 2000, p. 15). Angula (1990) explained that "the process of reform in education and the rationalisation of education services require imagination, resourcefulness and cooperation from all. The process is meant to be collaborative, interactive and a partnership between the government and all social forces" (*ibid.*).

Tweya argues that beside the implementation of the national curriculum, “more effort is needed to support rural community schools.” He called for the promotion of broader community ownership, and a democratic and participatory approach to education (in Taylor, 2000, p. 45). Mendelsohn also argues that the management of education was hampered by the bureaucratic control approach by government: “there were lack of support and weak supervision in schools and circuits; and many principals are in dire need of training in management principles” (in Taylor, 2000, p. 34). Wainaina and Kasanda in Legesse, Wanaina, Auala, Scott and Burrows (2001) raise questions of great importance, namely whether the education reforms have provided quality education to the majority of Namibian learners, whether it is providing value for money and whether it is empowering its clientele (Legesse et al., 2001, p. 24).

The school clustering system (SCS) was developed as a reform addressing society’s need for better education management practices and planning and improved teaching and learning at local levels. It was initiated to improve access and throughput as well as overall school management, especially by enhancing communication between schools, circuit and regional offices (Mendelsohn & Ward, 2001, p. 3).

In their review of the SCS in Namibia, Mendelsohn and Ward (2001) outline the factors that necessitate the development and introduction of SCS as those of:

- the low level of management and support given to schools
- a great need for teacher support
- an obvious need for greater participation by all stakeholders in making and implementing decisions
- the isolated working conditions for most schools.

Against this broad background I now present a rationale for this study.

1.3 Research Motivation

A decision to undertake this study was motivated by various factors, chiefly my personal exposure as an implementer for the SCS, my wish to make an academic

contribution to educational development, and to raise public awareness of crucial educational issues.

First, my experience as teacher and Head of Department (HOD) at a Cluster Centre in Rundu Education Region, where the cluster system initially started, and currently as an Advisory Teacher in Omusati Region where the system was recently introduced, put me in a position to see both sides of the school clustering coin. It made me curious to find out more about what shapes the SCS's implementation and how key implementers view it. I believed it would be a learning experience for me as I searched for possibilities and alternatives to the effective implementation of SCS by all stakeholders.

Second, since the establishment and implementation of the SCS in the Omusati Region in 2001-2002, no substantial study of the perceptions of CCPs has ever been conducted in the region. The brief Basic Education Project (BEP) report of 2004 on the Kenyan School Improvement Programme's (KENSIP) learning visit to Namibia, though informative, did not explore the views of grassroots people in Omusati Region. The findings of this study are thus likely to be useful and beneficial to future national and regional planning and policy-making of government, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and projects with an interest in education. The study may also be significant to CCPs, Advisory Teachers (ATs), Inspectors of Education (IEs), Constituency Councillors and other stakeholders in education as supportive figures of the system's implementation.

1.4 Research Goal

The purpose of the research was to explore CCPs' views and experiences of the SCS implementation in the Omusati Region, particularly in one specific circuit. The aims were to:

- explore Cluster Centre Principals' perceptions of the implementation of the school clustering system, and
- determine the enabling and inhibiting factors of the system from the perspective of grassroots people and make relevant suggestions and recommendations.

1.5 Research Methodology

The research was conducted in the interpretive paradigm using a qualitative approach, because my intention was to understand the perceptions of Cluster Centre Principals with regard to the implementation of the phenomenon. I felt that access to CCPs' views on what enables or inhibits the system would allow me to have a deep understanding of the system but more particularly what those who implement it feel. According to Cantrell (1993, p. 84), the interpretive paradigm allows a researcher to understand the situation of the phenomenon and to interpret meaning within the social and cultural context of the natural setting. To achieve this I selected data gathering tools which would provide "first-hand accounts and "rich detail" (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 124).

I used the case study method in order to gain an intensive, holistic description and analysis of the school clustering system. I chose the case study method because it allows researchers to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events. Case studies focus "on a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life contexts" (Yin, 2003, p. 2, 13). Smith argues that "in general, a case study is appropriate when one is interested in detailed information specific to a particular case" (Smith, 1999, p. 3). The study was conducted in two Cluster Centres of one circuit in the Omusati Region of Namibia. Two Cluster Centre Principals were involved in the study. The CCPs were purposefully selected in collaboration with an Inspector of that specific circuit.

A variety of data collection techniques was used, namely document analysis, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. These techniques were included to complement each other (Patton, 1990, p. 245). I studied a range of documents to ascertain the leadership role of the Cluster Centre Principals and determine evidence of workload and transformational leadership, if there was any. For example: I reviewed cluster visions and mission statements, minutes of cluster meetings, cluster year plans and Cluster Development Plans (CDPs) in order to support, verify, clarify or qualify data obtained from the interviews and focus group discussions (Cantrell, 1993, p. 97).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two Cluster Centre Principals as well as the current and former Inspectors of Education to develop an in-depth understanding of the individuals' perceptions of the phenomenon, in accordance with my research goals. Semi-structured interviews were appropriate because they allowed the respondents to provide answers at length and also enabled me to probe for further follow-ups. Interviews were conducted in English and were tape-recorded with the respondents' permission.

Focus group discussions at each Cluster Centre were conducted with principals, some School Board members and teachers to share views and discuss ideas, and also to gain insight into pressing concerns of the SCS (Yin, 2003, p. 112). A note-taker was used during the focus group discussions, and proceedings were audio-taped. Since some School Board members were not conversant in English, the interviews were conducted in Oshiwambo, the vernacular language, transcribed and translated into English.

All the collected data from document analysis, interviews and focus group discussions, as well as notes, were analysed using a generic qualitative data analysis technique. Triangulation was employed to find out to what extent the sets of data complemented each other and whether there were similarities or variations, because interpretive analysis is believed to "provide a thorough description and simultaneously generates emphatic understanding of the phenomenon being studied" (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999, p. 139).

Both the Regional Education Officer (Deputy Director) and the Inspector of Education granted permission to carry out the study before the research was undertaken. Each participant was made aware of the purpose and objectives of the research in order to give informed consent, and create a sense of confidence and trust. From the outset I guaranteed confidentiality, anonymity and the rights of participants. All participants were accorded an opportunity to edit and verify collected data before final research reporting.

Since this is a case study of two CCPs of one circuit in Omusati region, the study may not represent the views of all CCPs and thus generalisation to other regions is not claimed.

1.6 Thesis Outline

In Chapter 2, an overview of literature in the context of the research topic and goals is given. The chapter explains the rationale and the systems thinking behind the SCS with regard to the national decentralisation policy on education. It also reviews the management and leadership theories that inform the SCS operational framework.

Chapter 3 examines the research methodology employed to conduct the research. It provides detailed descriptions of the procedures used for data collection, organisation of the data, analysis and interpretation. The chapter also comments on validity, ethical issues and the potential limitations of the study.

In Chapter 4 all the raw data generated from the data collection procedures are presented and interpreted.

Chapter 5 presents a detailed analysis of the data in terms of the research goals and questions. Findings from the data are thoroughly discussed in relation to the literature provided.

In Chapter 6, a summary of the main findings, recommendations and comments based on the findings are given. The chapter makes suggestions for future research in the area of the SCS, presents the general conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at two things. First it provides an overview of the rationale behind the SCS, especially with regard to the Namibian decentralisation policy. Second, it provides a brief review of management and leadership theories that inform the SCS, especially with regard to the implications for people at the grassroots level.

2.2 The School Clustering System

The word ‘cluster’ refers to things grouped, growing or working together, in this case schools grouped together for a common purpose. Mendelsohn and Ward (2001, p. 7) and Dittmar, Mendelsohn and Ward (2002, p. 4) describe the SCS in the Namibian context as a system that requires the grouping of schools into clusters, each normally consisting of between five and seven schools. In each cluster one school that is central and easily accessible, has adequate facilities, and is situated at a development centre with suitable social and commercial services is selected as a cluster centre. A strong and committed principal with a vision that can extend beyond his/her school to the needs of all schools and the community in the cluster is appointed to serve as a Cluster Centre Principal.

The SCS was first piloted in the Rundu Education Region, one of the seven education regions in the Ministry of Education at that time. The focus of the implementation was to meet the need for better education management and planning at local levels, and for improving the quality of teaching and learning. Its implementation was facilitated with the support of the German-based organisation *Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit*’s (GTZ) Basic Education Project (BEP) (Mendelsohn & Ward, 2001, p. 7). The benefits of the SCS in Rundu led three other education regions – Katima Mulilo, Keetmanshoop and Khorixas – to request support from the BEP to develop their own clusters (Mendelsohn & Ward, 2001, p. 8 and Ward, Mendelsohn & Tjirare, 2001, p. 5). Earlier on the Namibian Presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Training Report (Namibia, Ministry of Basic Education, Sport

and Culture, 1999, p. 101) had recommended the expansion of SCS throughout the country. The commission also viewed the system as complementary to the four major goals of access, equity, quality, democracy and further recommended it to be formalised.

This strengthened the development of clusters in all current 13 regions and by 2001 to 2002 the SCS was operational throughout the country. In the Omusati region, part of the former Ondangwa West, implementation steps were initiated in May 2000 and recommendations for the establishment of clusters and circuits in the regions were finalised in September 2001.

2.2.1 Rationale behind the School Clustering System

After Namibia's independence the government embarked on major changes in the education system, namely the replacement of the Cape Education System by the Cambridge Education system, the introduction of Learner-Centred Education that is democratic and participatory, teachers' in-service training in the Basic Education Teachers' Diploma (BETD), and the development of major goals in education, namely access, equity, quality and democracy.

Nandi (2004, p. 9), in the Kenyan School Improvement Project's (KENSIP) report on School Clustering, stated that in the mid-1990s the Namibian government realised that despite the changes brought about, progress in education was increasingly hampered by poor leadership and ineffective management of schools. Mendelsohn (in Taylor 2000, p. 34) has attributed this to the idea that the educational authorities at regional and national level were still using bureaucratic control approaches inherited from the previously segregated education system. In this bureaucratic approach the educational authorities think that they have a clear idea of what is happening in schools and also what is best for schools (Taylor, 2000, p. 34). This is complemented by Nandi's observation (2004) that "education delivery and support structure was highly centralised with authority and control being vested at the Ministry of Education's headquarters" (Nandi, 2004, p. 9). This implies that major tasks of management such as planning and decision-making in education were hierarchical at macro and meso levels with little involvement of policy implementers at the micro level, and minimal

support from meso to micro level. Schools were supervised from long distances, with Inspectors of Education based at regional offices providing the only link between schools and education authorities. Inspectors of Education were overseeing huge numbers of schools in their jurisdiction, and as a result the support and supervision given to these schools was weak in most cases (Taylor, 2000, p. 34). Another important issue for the SCS was the professional isolation of the majority of schools, resulting in the lack of or minimal support for professional exchange in subject expertise, collective subject planning and other areas.

The philosophy of education reform in Namibia is geared to a number of major initiatives and programmes, amongst others the development of democratic education through the promotion of participation by people at the grassroots level for the improvement of school management and better curriculum delivery. For this purpose a new approach to management of education in Namibia that is democratic, participative and empowering was needed and the SCS was viewed as a potential means of lifting the education system to new heights in order to provide better education and planning practices at local levels (Mendelsohn & Ward, 2001, p. 8).

2.2.2 The School Clustering System and Decentralisation

The SCS was introduced at the peak of the implementation of government policy on decentralisation and the devolution of power from national to regional level (Nandi, 2004, p. 10). In general, decentralisation is viewed as bringing government closer to the people in terms of governance, policies, power and infrastructure at their local disposal.

In its policy document titled *Toward education for all* (1993) the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) explains that decentralisation in education entails the location of responsibility and authority at school level, chiefly with principals and School Boards. It argues that if the education system is to be improved and the quality of education programme delivery is to be upgraded there is a need to maximise local participation in decision-making and policy implementation. It further argues that decentralisation in education has the potential benefits of smooth communication, integration of rural schools and communication through allocating shared resources,

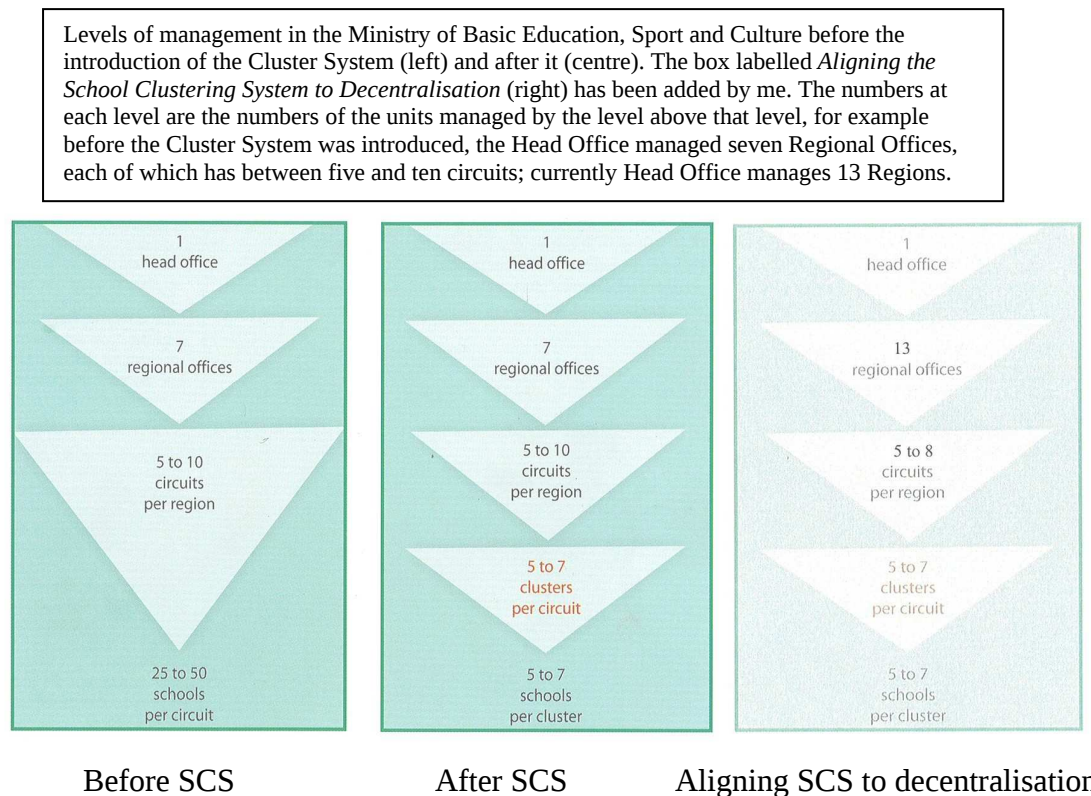
increased quality service delivery, and a flexible and innovative administration system (Namibia, MEC, 1993, pp. 169-170).

Figure 1

[Adapted from Dittmar et al., 2002, p. 22]

The matrix below (Figure 2) shows the levels of management before and after the implementation of the SCS.

Figure 2



[Adapted from Dittmar et al., 2002, p. 5]

Given the above context the SCS was perceived as a mechanism to enable decentralisation in education in practice by establishing closer links between circuits and schools through manageable units or clusters. Dittmar et al. (2002) argue that

by partitioning schools into manageable groups, clusters provide the new regional council administrations with a framework for managing and planning education and other regional services such as water supply, transportation, electricity, distribution of materials and information, network connections, collection of statistics, training, organisation of sports and cultural events, etc. (Dittmar et al., 2002, p. 31).

While addressing the BEP's Project Planning Workshop the former Minister of Basic Education, Sport and Culture (MBESC), cited by Topnaar (2004, p. 16), emphasised that the SCS should be regarded as the "core structure for education management" and argued that "it was necessary to look at the relationships that exist between the

circuit, the advisory services and the conduct of activities at circuit and cluster levels”. This implies that it should be used as a support system by various divisions in the education sector as well as NGOs with interests in education, and that all officials should work together to develop the professional capacity of clusters and enhance curriculum implementation by cluster members. Furthermore, the former Deputy Minister of Basic Education, Sport and Culture also called for stakeholders’ efforts in harnessing the effective implementation of the SCS, arguing that it would contribute greatly to decentralisation and the achievement of the four broad goals (democracy, equity, access and quality) of the Namibian education system (Topnaar, 2004, p. 16).

In their review of the SCS in Namibia, Mendelsohn and Ward (2001, pp. 13-14) found that the application of the SCS as a decentralisation tool had enabled a number of good practices. I focus on two of these. First, there was an improvement in the quality of teaching and learning, management applications, empowerment at cluster level, efficiency and staff allocation, training, co-planning and access to schooling as well as frameworks for other programmes. Second, a range of groups was formed to support various cluster needs such as cluster management committees, subject groups and exam committees (Dittmar et al., 2002, pp. 24-25) thereby enhancing democratic participation by involving various stakeholders in education. Despite the fact that the SCS was successfully piloted in the Rundu Region and later developed to other regions, Mendelsohn and Ward (2001, pp. 15-16) argue that its effective implementation was still being hampered by a number of challenges and constraints.

2.2.3 Formalisation of the SCS

As mentioned previously the non-formalisation of the SCS was seen as one of the challenges undermining its effective functioning and implementation. The Namibian Presidential Commission on Education and Training of 1999 recommended the formalisation of the SCS and the development of Cluster Centres into centres of excellence at local levels (Namibia, MBESC, 1999, p. 101). Echoing this notion, Mendelsohn and Ward (2001, p. 63) in a review of the SCS, pointed out that by formalising the SCS, benefits of the clusters could be better sustained and problems

encountered and lessons learnt from implementing the system could be dealt with within the boundaries of a legal policy framework.

In April 2005 the Ministry of Education issued a brief draft national policy on the formalisation of SCS in Namibia. The document consists chiefly of findings from the Research and Information Services of Namibia's (RAISON) current research on the SCS and it invites input from various stakeholders. However, it is difficult to find the ministry's voice in this draft policy and hence difficult to identify the official position on whether and how the SCS should be formalised. At the time of writing there was still no clarity regarding the formalisation of the SCS.

2.3 The Theory

Against this background I now turn to management and leadership theories which may be seen to inform the SCS. What has emerged thus far is that the SCS may be seen as an example of decentralisation of the education system, devolving decision-making to grassroots levels and aiming at broader participation. A discussion of theories which support these notions now seems appropriate.

However, it is necessary first to distinguish between the basic concepts of management and leadership, for though the literature at times collapses these I argue that they are two *different* though *related* concepts which can be combined to deliver quality in any organisation or system of education. The implementation of the SCS is influenced by both management and leadership, as my findings will reveal; hence the need to distinguish between them now.

Management is described as task or result-oriented. According to De Wet in Van der Westhuizen (1991),

management is viewed as a process through which the manager co-ordinates the activities of a group of people by means of planning, organising, leading and controlling in order to achieve specific set organisational goals or aims (Van der Westhuizen, 1991, p. 39).

For Schmuck (1986) management is also about the use of power or authority to control what happen in the organisation. He further stresses that managers act in the interest of the organisation rather than individuals and they act in a rationally detached way (Schmuck, 1986, p. 5). Management is also associated with issues such as “efficiency and stability” and “things” rather than people (Hoy & Miskel, 1991, p. 374; Owens, 2001, p. 250).

Leadership, on the other hand, is seen as people or process oriented. Hoy and Miskel define leadership as a “social system shared among others” and a “social influence process in which intentional influence is exerted by individual(s) over others to structure activities and relationships in a group or organisation” (Hoy & Miskel, 1991, p. 374). Leadership is also described as a “capacity to mobilise a potential need in followers” to achieve certain objectives (Hunt, 1992, p. 210). According to Schmuck (1986), leadership is about earning power through recognition by followers. He also argues that leaders act for the “welfare of their followers’ wishes, interests and concerns”; and that they value “teamwork and togetherness among followers” in striving “to accomplish shared visions” (Schmuck, 1986, p. 5). Furthermore, House and Aditya argue that leadership involves the articulation of an organisation’s vision and the introduction of major organisation change (Lussier & Achua, 2001, p. 18). The picture that emerges positions leadership as essentially a personal and inter-personal process, whereas management is viewed as being chiefly about systems and structures.

Despite the fact that there is a clear-cut distinction between management and leadership, it is also true that these two concepts are interlinked and mutually related. Management and leadership functions complement each other and both are needed in any organisation. Lussier and Achua (2001, p. 18) point out the relation of the two concepts by explaining that “management is the implementation of the leader’s vision and changes introduced by leaders, and the maintenance and administration of organisational infrastructures”. In contextualising this for education practices, educational managers plan and budget, organise and allocate staff, control and solve problems in their organisations, while educational leaders establish directions with

vision and strategies, align people, initiate change, and motivate and inspire colleagues and followers. Organisations clearly need both.

Schmuck (1986) argues that education administration benefits largely when it combines management and leadership skills to facilitate changes and development.

Management produces efficiency, concern with detail and co-ordination, and the wherewithal to keep educational development on track; at the same time leadership brings the energy, enthusiasm, and commitment required to get educational development on track (Schmuck, 1986, p. 5).

Adapting Schmuck's argument to the context of SCS, this implies that without management Cluster Centres and schools could come apart at the seams with too many short-lived programmes; and without leadership Cluster Centres could become dull and routine-bound places. Therefore the effective implementation and practice of the SCS need managers capable of leading as well as managing. Given this claim I review selected theories from the fields of management and leadership, which are seen as relevant to this study.

In the first section it was explained that the goals and rationale of the SCS were to bring about a practical approach to education management in Namibia that is both democratic and participatory. The approach was to transform the education system beyond bureaucratic practices in education policy implementation and to improve service delivery. The SCS evolved as a useful tool providing opportunities for better education management and planning practices, increasing the participation of major stakeholders in education and fostering co-operation among schools in democratic ways.

The thinking behind the goals and the rationale for the SCS is underpinned by several key current management and leadership theories to which I now turn.

2.3.1 Site-Based (School-Based) Management (SBM)

SBM is believed to “structure relationships between districts and school sites in a manner that places much power, authority and accountability in the school” (Vincent, 2000, p.1). Vincent further argues that it has the potential to enable comprehensive reform for schools and districts seeking to improve educational systems. Malen et al. define SBM as a

form of decentralisation that identifies the individual school as the primary unit of improvement and relies on the redistribution of decision-making authority as the primary means through which improvements might be stimulated and sustained (in Ortiz & Ogawa, 2000, p. 487).

It “represents a change in how a school district is structured”, that is how authority and responsibilities are structured and shared between the district and its schools” (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004, p. 56). Bezzina (1997, p. 197) also argues that the practice of SBM “involves significant and consistent decentralisation” whereby authority to make decisions related to the allocation of resources is vested at school level.

Lunenburg and Ornstein (2004, p. 56) explain that in restructuring, SBM can change roles and responsibilities of staff within a school and can also affect the “organisational structure of the central school’s office with regard to its size, roles and responsibilities”. They further argue that the practice of SBM allows professional responsibilities to replace bureaucratic regulations.

In this sense, the SCS is a manifestation of SBM because most management decisions and training take place at local schools and clusters. It also has the potential to change the hierarchical structure of schools and roles of staff as well as the allocation of resources. For example, one school in each cluster that is central and accessible to all and has adequate facilities is selected as a Cluster Centre with a principal providing general leadership and supervision of all activities in the clusters. These

characteristics are likely to enable what Lunenburg and Ornstein (2004, pp. 56-57) claim about SBM, namely the ability to “share the decision-making authority with the schools’ major stakeholder groups, namely teachers, parents, students and other community members through school-site councils”. This was clearly part of the thinking when the SCS was established, because a number of management structures support the SCS:

- The Circuit Management Committee consisting of an Inspector for Education, an Advisory Teacher, CCP and co-opted community members
- A Cluster Management Committee made up of CCP as the chairperson, school principals from satellite schools within the cluster and co-opted members such as Head of Departments (HODs) and School Board members
- Cluster Groups or Committees on subjects and other needs such as sports, culture etc., headed by subject facilitators with specialised knowledge in the matter; and cluster examination committee headed by HODs or Senior Teachers (Dittmar et al., 2002, pp. 23-26).

These structures have certain roles and responsibilities as well as a degree of autonomy to collectively undertake shared decisions, team training and planning and to co-ordinate various tasks in the cluster.

According to managerial principles articulated by Wilenski in Lingard, Hayes and Mills (2002) a reform intervention “should be aimed at achieving more efficiency and more effectiveness, while at the same time seeking more representative and open bureaucracies, more democratic participation and more equitable outcomes” (Lingard et al., 2002, p. 16). Similarly in a review of SBM, Bezzina (1997, p. 198) says that SBM is about the ownership and empowerment of key stakeholders in educational decision-making that offers the potential enhancement of organisational effectiveness and improved learner outcomes. One good example of this trend is the innovation of joint Cluster School Boards in several circuits in Rundu Education Region, whose boards submit reports to circuit offices about management practices and curriculum delivery at schools in their Clusters, thus bringing improvement through informal collegial decisions (Mendelsohn & Ward, 2001, p. 14).

Putting SBM theory into practice affords opportunities for Cluster Centres and satellite schools to practice more participatory forms of management. The devolution of power emphasised in the practice of SBM has the potential “to curb isolation among schools, increase job satisfaction of the teaching fraternity, promote direct participation of all relevant stakeholders in education, and raise community understanding” (Lingard et al., 2002, pp. 16-17). In view of decentralisation and democratic principles, Lingard et al. (*ibid.*) argue that “decisions should be made by those who have access to the best local information, who are responsible for implementing policies and who have to bear the consequences of the decisions.”

Drawing on Bezzina’s arguments of SBM’s role in restructuring, clusters can be seen as centres of critical inquiry and not mere targets of change. The SBM concept entails a collaborative approach to education development through staff development, networking and problem centred activities by various committees with the focus on the learners’ needs (Bezzina, 1997, p. 198), hence the need to look at the notion of collaborative management.

2.3.2 Collaborative Management

Clegg, Kornberger and Pitsis (2005, p. 250) explain that collaborative management “ensures co-operation, mollifies conflicts, and advocates integration”. They further note that “collaborative management is an important means to access new knowledge and transfer skills that an organisation lacks” (Clegg et al., 2005, p. 260). Dittmar et al. (2002, p. 13) say that the “framework provided by clusters brings people together in various collaborative groups and this enhances empowerment and integration”. These notions of transferring skills and learning together, increased cooperation and decreased conflict underlie the purpose of the SCS. Earlier in this thesis it was mentioned that one of the purposes of the SCS was to curb isolation among schools and bring about co-operation among them and their communities through meaningful contact between neighbouring schools and other stakeholders in education. Schools within the cluster are expected to work together collaboratively, mapping out resources and networking to share the resources to the benefit of all schools.

According to Clegg et al. (2005, p. 260), collaboration can also trigger the creation of knowledge and organisational learning when schools work closely together with stakeholders in education. This implies that the implementation of the SCS can enable the cluster centres and their satellite schools to collaboratively share knowledge internally with their members and externally with various stakeholders at regional levels namely Resource Teachers (RTs), Advisory Teachers (ATs), Inspectors of Education (IEs) and other officials. However, Whitaker cited by Ipangelwa (2002) cautions that

creating a collaborative management culture also requires that those in senior management positions learn to see their leadership roles as one of empowering others in the organisation rather than controlling them (Ipangelwa, 2002, p. 21).

This implies that the implementation of SCS needs collaborative and interactive leadership among education managers at meso- and micro-level to ensure collaborative management.

From the Namibian perspective those in senior positions such as Inspectors of Education, Advisory Teachers (ATs) and Cluster Centre Principals (CCPs) have relinquished certain tasks and powers at both cluster and school levels. For example, Inspectors of Education often delegate certain management tasks and decision-making about cluster centres and satellite schools to CCPs through circuit and cluster management committees. Dittmar et al. (2002, p. 22) argue that

when inspectors intervene at individual schools, they should do so in collaboration with the CCP, and CCPs can stand in for inspectors when they are away from their offices, allowing ... the principals to gain experience in that kind of work.

Similarly, Advisory Teachers for various subjects may also channel their subject inputs in cluster-based subject groups to reach all teachers within given clusters through trained cluster subject facilitators (Dittmar et al., 2002, p. 11; Mendelssohn & Ward, 2001, p. 15).

2.3.3 Participative Management and Leadership

Stewart and Dinkmeyer (cited in Udjombala, 2002, p. 20) describe the participative style of management and leadership as a philosophy that puts emphasis on involvement, based on the concept that employees closest to the job have the necessary experience and knowledge to develop the best solution to job related problems. Mungunda (2003, p. 25) argues that participative management “allows and encourages subordinates to participate in decisions that affect them or organisational operations” including those persons who are “to execute those decisions”. These ideas are similar to those expressed in the Namibian developmental policy document: *Toward education for all* on reform intervention in education. The Namibian government emphasised that management and leadership in a democratic education system should be “characterised by broad participation of stakeholders at local levels” and by “clear accountability of educational leaders and implementers” to ensure effective implementation of the reform programme (Namibia, MEC, 1993, p. 4).

It is believed that change happens more effectively when it involves people within organisations. Consequently organisational gate-keepers play an influential role in the process of change. The way in which change programmes are managed and the way in which people are directed on how to go about change determine the effectiveness of what is desired. To illustrate this Evans (1996, p. 22) argues that education managers and leaders who are participative “relinquish conventional uses of power and politics and nurture shared governance and collegial interaction” instead. Literature also claims that any education reform aimed at school improvement is embedded in the ethos of empowerment and collegiality through participatory leadership of education managers.

Therefore the implementation of the SCS requires traditional management approaches to be replaced by “shared governance and leadership and collegiality” (Evans, 1996, p. 231) if it has to serve its purpose. Somech cited by Mungunda (2003, p. 25) argues that flatter management and decentralised authority structures have the potential of achieving outcomes unattainable by the traditional top-down bureaucratic structures of schools. Somech (in Mungunda, 2003) further suggests that employing current

approaches of leadership and management in education such as participative management holds the potential for implementing change in schools (*ibid.*). In addition Topnaar (2004, p. 19) argues that in ensuring democratic education, there is a need to “increase participation in school-community relations” by creating “meaningful relationships among teachers, parents, learners and principals in schools within clusters”. Therefore it is argued that “in a democratic education system for a democratic society, teachers must be active creators and managers of the learning environment and not just its masters and caretakers” (Namibia, MEC, 1993, p. 42). Indeed, it seems clear that the participation of all stakeholders in educational reform strategies such as the SCS is vital to ensure success.

According to Evans (1996, p. 231) the need for participation rests on three core beliefs: “rightness, effectiveness and transfer”. It is underpinned by the belief that “shared leadership and a culture of collaboration and collegiality ... encourage democratic virtues and a high standard of performance” (*ibid.*). This is simply because when people are collectively involved in decision-making in their organisation they work better, boosting performance in the organisation as a whole. According to Evans (1996) the goal of participative management is to tap the unique resources of each organisational individual, creating an intellectual community of lifelong learners (*ibid.*). It can then be argued that the practice of participative management may unleash the knowledge and skills of cluster members through collegial leadership and collaboration in various committees within clusters of schools.

Moreover Ipangelwa (2002, p. 22) argues that the practice of participative management can enable organisations to “produce high quality decisions and plans by involving the skills of different perspectives and expertise in developing solutions”. For example, cluster members from different schools may form a committee to work on a certain cluster agenda such as organising and coordinating cultural or sports activities. Ipangelwa (2002) also argues that greater participation of educational stakeholders in school matters can promote greater responsibility, accountability, commitment and support of policy implementation and learner performances in schools (*ibid.*). This is because through participative leadership, school leaders create cultures that contribute to team spirit and organisational integration. For instance, when individuals or various subject groups and committees are given certain roles and

tasks to accomplish, it provides opportunities for individuals and groups to enrich their professional experience and pursue professional development, gaining ownership of common goals. According to Ipangelwa (2002) stakeholders' participation in management issues such as "planning and decision making at school level" may assist in "overcoming resistance to change and ineffective practices" (*ibid.*). Bush (2000, pp. 64-66) similarly believes that in "true participation and collegiality", stakeholders "share a common set of values", work together to "examine the challenges" they face, and "consensually as teams make decisions" on a number of organisational matters.

Drawing on the literature it is obvious that broader participation of organisational members may contribute significantly to the development and building of leadership and management capacity in organisations. Davidoff and Lazarus (2002) emphasise that leaders who employ participatory management and leadership approaches in schools encourage "respect for one another, openness, transparency, accountability, and meeting structures that maximise participation" (Davidoff & Lazarus, 2002, p. 177). They further argue that this is because participative leaders have a tendency of "showing interest in others, affirming the contributions made by people and ultimately, the recognition that every person makes a valuable contribution" which needs to be fostered (*ibid.*).

2.3.4 Teamwork

I regard teamwork as an essential prerequisite for the effective implementation of the SCS and hence the need to discuss it here. The teamwork concept is associated with a sense of shared purposes and collective responsibility among team members. Lussier and Achua (2001, p. 249) believe that teamwork is the "understanding and commitment of group goals on the part of all team members". Hayes (2002, p. 113) argues that team leadership is characterised by the principles of "keeping goals clear, building confidence, commitment and skills, managing external relationships, creating opportunities for team members and doing real work". Shared understanding and close interaction toward a shared commitment are thus qualities which characterise

teams as distinct from groups of people. In the process of interaction team members learn from each other and combine skills needed to accomplish the team task. Therefore teams are considered to be highly “specialised groups” characterised by “equality” in the sense that they share responsibility, but also “individual accountability” (Lussier & Achua, 2001, p. 249).

In the organisational structure of the SCS, there are numerous committees that support its operation and can be referred to as teams, namely:

- a team of all the Cluster Centre Principals in a circuit with the Inspector of Education as a team leader
- a team of all the principals in each cluster led by the CCP
- teams of subject teachers according to their specialisation led by subject facilitators with in-depth subject knowledge
- a team of all School Board chairpersons led by one of them and
- sub-teams of various disciplines according to cluster needs.

Team leaders such as Inspectors of Education, CCPs, Subject Facilitators and chairpersons of various other committees belong to the team and operate from within it and are therefore entrusted with responsibility to give teams direction and vision to ensure teamwork. Therefore as team leaders, they are expected to play a significant role in team building, team managing and team empowering.

In team building, team leaders need to “encourage cohesion between team members and establish a sense of professionalism or working competence through training” (Hayes, 2003, p. 113). This may allow team members to identify with their team and feel proud of belonging to it. The other aspect of team building emphasised by Bloisi, Cook and Hunsaker (2003, p. 406) is the role of team leaders to “clarify personal and team goals, and harmonise them to share common vision, purpose and goals” which will point out where the team is heading. Bloisi et al. (2003) further argue that in clarifying goals, team leaders direct their teams on how “decision making, participation, team improvement, and conflict resolution can be undertaken” (*ibid.*). Adapting the ideas of Bloisi et al. (2003), team leaders in the SCS can mobilise teams

to analyse the existing situations of their clusters, share their goals and create common cluster visions.

Additionally Hayes (2003, p. 113) argues that in organisations that emphasise teamwork, the roles of team managers are to ensure that “overall organisational targets and timeframes are established and negotiated upon both with the team and with other sections of the organisation”. Hayes (2003) also emphasises that team managing is about ensuring that the teams have “access to the resources they need and an effective monitoring mechanism to see how teams progress” (*ibid.*). This may enhance empowerment in the organisation which is regarded as an important concept in teamwork. Hayes (2003) explains that the philosophy of empowerment in management assumes that the “day-to-day decisions about work are best undertaken by those who are doing the work” i.e. team members (*ibid.*). The SCS framework provides empowerment opportunities to cluster members by bringing people together in various collaborative teams where they share responsibility and authority. According to Dittmar et al. (2002, p. 13) the “delegation of authority to circuits and clusters empowers principals through circuit and cluster management committees to make decisions”. When cluster members are given authority and their contributions are recognised they are likely to be motivated to do their work well and increase the interaction among themselves.

To ensure effective teamwork in organisations Hayes (2002, p. 114) and Lussier and Achua (2001, p. 275) recommend a number of managerial and leadership roles for team leaders. They may:

- break the overall goal down into a number of smaller manageable targets
- work towards developing a set of sub-goals, which can be used to identify training needs within the team, encouraging team members’ commitment to overall goal
- emphasise team rather than individual recognition and rewards but recognise individual and team needs, and attend to them in a timely fashion
- create opportunities through which individual team members can build up self-confidence, which in turn contributes to a professional and committed approach

- identify and build on the team's strength by developing the team's capabilities to anticipate and deal with change effectively
- empower teams to accomplish their work with minimal interference by encouraging and supporting team decisions
- inspire and motivate teams toward high levels of performance by providing teams with challenging and motivating work
- develop trust and a norm of teamwork among team members
- streamline obstructive organisational processes, which cause delays in the transmission of information or the implementation of reforms.

Hayes (2003, p. 13) further argues that organisation can go much further in the process of team management, by "building self-managed teams and transforming them into self-leading teams". Self-managed teams can be distinguished from ordinary teams in the sense that they are involved in team learning. According to Heller (1998), self-managed teams are characterised by the "culture of sharing leadership roles, a high rate of autonomy, open discussion leading to democratic decision-making, control over team activities and total self-accountability based on individual and team results" (Heller, 1998, p. 28). Besides speeding up decision-making and innovation, self-managed teams inspire organisation members to connect with the organisational vision in a very special way: they see the organisation as the means by which they can effect key issues and develop their leadership skills. Lussier and Achua, (2001, pp. 251-252) argue that at their best self-managed teams succeed because most people are "goal-directed social beings who gain a feeling of satisfaction from achieving goals with others". Against this background it can be argued that the notion of self-managed teams can be of benefit to the SCS because their practices create a work environment that stimulates people to become self-motivated.

According to Lussier and Achua (2001) the advantages of teamwork include the "achievement of synergy which involves creative co-operation; mutual support and peer evaluation to help teams make better decisions" (Lussier & Achua, p. 253). They further argue that self-managed teams make valuable contributions to continuous improvement and innovations and enhance work satisfaction and job security, by

instilling self-esteem and self-fulfilment among team members (*ibid.*). The self-managed teams' practice of team learning through team sessions is applicable to team leaders in the SCS to organise training and induction workshops for newly appointed cluster members. It could also be of good use to other tailor-made cluster forums where cluster problems can be discussed to reach certain solutions. Other key learning grounds for self-managed teams emphasised by Lussier and Achua (2001) are dialogue sessions, post-activity reviews and team meetings where feedback is shared and used as a tool for improvement (*ibid.*).

As mentioned above better management and leadership occurs in organisations with vision because organisational members are all focused and committed to that shared vision. The development of teams into self-managed teams also allows empowerment and builds meaningful capacities of organisational members in managing transformation. It can therefore be argued that effective teamwork creates opportunities for transformational leadership, to which I now turn.

2.3.5 Transformational Leadership

After nearly three decades since its formulation transformational leadership remains an exciting approach that brings and sustains change in education systems. Lussier and Achua (2001, pp. 285-283) describe it as a leadership that serves to change the “status quo of a system” by articulating to the followers the problems in the current system and “establishing a vision” of what a new organisation could be. According to Hoy and Miskel (1991, p. 403) and Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach (1999, p. 787) transformational leadership theory is based on the critical elements of charisma or idealised influence, inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation that enhance understanding of the leadership phenomenon in educational organisations. According to Lunenburg (2003, p. 9) “educational leaders should communicate a sense of where the organization is going, develop the skills and abilities of subordinates, and encourage innovative problem solving.”

Through idealised influence, transformational leaders articulate a clear sense of vision and purpose, taking into consideration the followers' individual considerations. This practice requires those in management positions to pay attention to the needs and potential of organisational members' development through delegation, coaching, mentoring and giving constructive feedback. Transformational leadership also implies that "the needs of leaders and followers are regarded as more interdependent, involving leadership of mutual trust between leaders and those being led" (April, Macdonald & Vriesendorp, 2000, p. 46). From this point of view leadership should therefore not be seen as a one-man show but rather a collective practice where both the leader and the led (followers) mutually agree and equally contribute to how leadership can be undertaken in the organisation.

Leithwood (1996) emphasises that "Transformational leadership is of significant value in restructuring schools" (in Hoy & Miskel, 1991, p. 396). The essence of transformational leadership is to reform programmes and this is significant because the approach recognises the "importance of shared leadership and the recognition that leadership process are embedded within the culture of each organisation", shaping it and being shaped by it (Hoy & Miskel, 1991, p. 396). Literature on organisational culture claims that any leadership strategy that can influence the culture of an organisation is likely to bring about change

From the perspectives of Hoy and Miskel (1991, p. 393), April et al. (2000, p. 47) and Lussier and Achua, (2001, p. 483), transformational leaders have the following common attributes:

- they define the need for change and regard themselves as change agents
- they are courageous visionaries who have great trust in their intuition, create new visions and muster commitment to the visions
- they are capable of articulating a set of core values that tend to guide their own behaviour
- they believe in people and show sensitivity to their needs
- they inspire people to transcend their own self-interest for the good of the organisation

- they possess exceptional cognitive skills and believe in careful deliberation before taking action
- they are life-long learners, flexible and open to learn from experience, and view their own mistakes and those of others as learning opportunities
- they are able to handle complexity, uncertainty and ambiguity.

These key attributes are applicable to Cluster Centre leaders. The introduction of the SCS in the Namibian education system requires the appointment of principals as CCPs with added responsibilities. According to Dittmar et al. (2002), upon appointment to CCP positions, principals' leadership role "broadens to include general management supervision, co-ordination of cluster activities and other regional development programmes" (Dittmar et al., 2002, pp. 12, 18). In their new roles of managing clusters, CCPs are required to support, guide and supervise the satellite schools and co-ordinate and promote activities in the clusters in collaboration with other school principals.

According to Hoy and Miskel (1991, p. 397), by supervising organisations with subsystems, school administrators deal with a "wide array of problems, situations and people"; therefore they must have a range of abilities and skills to lead effectively. Consequently Dittmar et al. (2002, p. 4) also argue that the SCS framework requires "CCPs to have strong and committed managers; with vision that extends beyond their schools to the needs of all other schools and the community in the cluster", hence the relevance of transformational leadership in the implementation of the SCS. Clegg et al. (2005, p. 245) emphasise that transformational leaders are the ideal people to have during major organisational change because they have the "visionary component of the charismatic leader" and also the "staying power to provide energy and support" throughout the change process.

Furthermore, Cook and Hunsaker (2001) believe that the role of transformational leadership in a period of change is distinguishable from traditional management because whereas the latter "promotes stability" transformational leadership "goes beyond that". They argue that transformational leaders "energise others with visions and strategies of how to refocus and revitalise the larger organisation", therefore they

create significant change in the followers and organisations they lead (Cook & Hunsaker, 2001, p. 508). Leavitt and Burns also refer to them as ‘pathfinders’, because unlike other traditional leaders, transformational leaders “mobilise influence across organisations with faith and authenticity” so that others may follow the path they envision (in Cook & Hunsaker, 2001, pp. 508-509). This style of leadership would be an appropriate one for CCPs and other team leaders in clusters to question the status quo and look at old problems in school management and curriculum implementation in new ways. This may encourage all cluster members to bring about desired innovations in their schools.

Sergiovanni et al. (2003, pp. 193, 208) argue that modern educational managers “have to be transformational leaders who can lead and develop a collaborative work culture that empowers and strengthens schools to invent new approaches that provide management support to schools”. They expect “principals to have strong, technical skills for management tasks, interpersonal skills for organisational culture and collective leadership” (*ibid.*). Additionally it is argued that modern managers need to equip themselves with the leadership capacity that enables them to deal with “abstract concepts and intangible qualities” (vision, shared values and ideas) within the organisation (Daft & Marcic, 2004, p. 431). They further argue that these leadership qualities enable transformational leaders to “build relationships, give larger meanings to diverse activities and find common ground to enlist followers in the change process”. In this respect Dittmar et al. (2002) recommend that “where needed, training should be provided to Cluster Centre Principals in aspects such as management and leadership, office administration, financial management, and education planning” (Dittmar et al., 2002, p. 24).

2.3.6 Learning Organisations

The scope and depth of change brought about by the SCS points to a basic need that I believe is inescapable, namely that clusters can become learning organisations. The SCS represents a radical departure from the traditional hierarchical centrally

controlled system of education governance and it seems fair to claim that clusters which fail to learn continually are unlikely to thrive or even survive.

According to Braham (1996, p. 15), it is important for any organisation or individual to continually learn to keep up with change in their surrounding environment, hence the notion of learning organisations. Garvin (in Schultz, 2003, p. 82) defines learning organisations as organisations that are “skilled at creating, acquiring and transferring knowledge, and modifying their behaviour to reflect the new knowledge and insights”. Cluster Centres and their satellite schools should also be regarded as learning organisations. The implementation of the SCS as a reform strategy in education requires clusters and their satellite schools to interact and learn together nurturing “inter-relationships among themselves and also with their external environment”, to bring about improvement (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004, p. 32).

It is emphasised that learning in organisations occurs in many ways. Dutton argues that organisations learn “when they develop a clear and honest understanding of current reality that is accessible to the whole organisation” (in Senge et al., 2000, p. 552). He further believes that organisations learn when they “use the reality to produce new equally accessible knowledge that helps people to take effective action toward their desired future” (*ibid.*). In their operation the cluster centres and their satellite schools carry out school self-assessments (SSAs), agree on shared visions and statements, and establish Cluster Development Plans (CDPs) as well as School Development Plans (SDPs). The idea of SSAs was introduced by the Basic Education Support (BES) project’s School Improvement Program (SIP) to certain schools and then adopted by all schools to monitor the improvement and progress in curriculum implementation and general school administration. Schools’ SSAs are also used by the IEs, ATs and RTs during school visits to apprise themselves of the situations at schools and advise schools accordingly. This is further strengthened now because according to the Programme Quality Assurance’s (PQA) Circular of August 2006, the SSA is a national requirement by the National Standards and Performance Indicators in Namibia (Namibia, Ministry of Education, 2006b, p. 3). It is through this continuous cycle of self-assessment and re-alignment that clusters exhibit the behaviours associated with the learning organisation. Clusters as learning organisations continually engage themselves in dynamic activities that foster inter-

relationship and continuous learning. Drawing from Lunenburg and Ornstein (2004, pp. 35-36), these activities may:

- create opportunities
- promote inquiry and dialogue
- encourage collaboration and team learning
- create systems to capture and share learning
- empower people toward collective visions
- connect the clusters as organisations to their environment and
- provide strategic leadership for learning.

In *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge (2006) argues that becoming a learning organisation is an ongoing process that requires the input of the whole organisation and its internal and external environment.

2.4 Conclusion

The SCS in Namibia is an example of a successful decentralisation process of democratic education governance in a democratic society whereby decision-making has been effectively transferred from central to local or grassroots level. The SCS as a reform tool has strong components of innovation and change and is informed by emergent non-traditional management and leadership perspectives that are beneficial to the transformation of any education system. The next chapter discusses the methodology used in conducting this study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology and the strategies used to explore the perceptions of Cluster Centre Principals of the SCS's implementation. It explains how I attempted to find answers to my chief research goal, namely to explore key implementers' views of the enabling and inhibiting factors in the implementation of the SCS.

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 Orientation and Approach

The research is a qualitative study conducted in the interpretive paradigm. Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as

an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explores a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting (Creswell, 1998, p. 15).

Qualitative research studies are useful when they employ “rigorous data collection procedures of inquiry” and begin with a “single focus that seeks deep detailed understanding” of a phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 1998, pp. 20-21).

Creswell (1998, p. 24) explains that using a qualitative approach, study designs are based on broad philosophical assumptions, possible frameworks, problems and questions. Creswell (2003) states that qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive. This means the researcher interprets the data by developing descriptions of individuals/settings, analysing the data for themes or categories, and finally making

an interpretation or drawing conclusions about their meaning, personally and theoretically, about lessons learnt and suggesting questions to be asked (Creswell, 2003, p. 182).

Murray (2005, p. 2) describes interpretive research as an orientation that adopts a hermeneutic approach which focuses on the subjective understanding of human experience and the meaning of the phenomenon being studied. Drawing from Cantrell, (1993, p. 84) and Taylor and Bogdan (1998, p. 3), one understands that the interpretive paradigm allows a researcher to understand the situation or phenomenon from the respondents' own perspectives and to interpret the meaning of their experiences within the social and cultural context of the natural setting. This could lead one to "search for deep perspectives on particular events and for theoretical insights" (Bassey in Topnaar, 2004, p. 33).

Ritchie and Lewis (2003, p. 7) emphasise that the interpretive researcher must "understand the meaning of social actions within the context of the material condition in which people live." They explain that an interpretive orientation is seen as integral to the qualitative tradition because its practice provides a holistic understanding of research participants' views and actions in the contexts of their overall lives. It focuses on the importance and interrelatedness of different aspects of people's lives and the recognition that various cultural factors play important roles in shaping people's understanding of their world (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003, p. 7).

In undertaking this study my interest was to understand the perceptions of two Cluster Centre Principals of their experience of the SCS as head principals at their cluster centers. To achieve this I employed several data collection tools within the ambit of a case study.

3.2.2 Method

Creswell (1998, p. 61) defines a case study as an exploration of a case over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information.

Baker (1999, p. 321) focuses on a “single organisation, institution, event, decision, policy, group or possibly a multiple set”. Yin (1989, p. 23) defines it as

an empirical study which 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.

Baker (1999, p. 326) says that case studies are most appropriate in educational research when they use comprehensive strategies in a single social environment to reach theoretical conclusions with widespread implications. Additionally, case study methods allow researchers to retain holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events such as organisational and managerial processes (Merriam, 2002, p. 205; Yin, 2003, p. 2). This implies that by using a case study approach the researcher keeps a sense of “reality”, that is a sense of what really happened with regard to the phenomenon studied.

According to Hitchcock and Hughes (in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000, p. 182), the case study method is used in educational research because of its numerous hallmarks:

- It focuses on individual actors or groups of actors, and seeks to understand their perceptions of events.
- It highlights relevant specific events.
- It attempts to portray the richness of the case in report writing.

I was interested to use a method that focuses on the “rich and vivid description of events” to provide an analysis of the events in the case as they chronologically unfold. The method relies on multiple sources of evidence; therefore data often converge in a triangulation fashion (Yin, 2003, p. 138).

Drawing on Coleman’s advantages of case study in Cohen et al. (2003, p. 184), case studies recognise the complexity and embeddedness of social truths. They carefully present discrepancies or conflicts between the viewpoints held by research participants and are capable of offering some support to alternative interpretations. Cohen et al. (2003) further argue that since case studies make the research process

accessible, they contribute towards the decentralisation of decision-making and knowledge itself, because at their best they allow readers to judge the implications of a study for themselves (Cohen et al., 2003, p. 84).

Other strengths of case studies, drawn from Nesbit & Watt in Cohen et al., 2003, p. 184, are that:

- Results are more easily understood by a wide audience and speak for themselves.
- Unique features are captured that may otherwise get lost in larger scale data such as surveys, this enabling readers to understand the situation studied.
- Case studies provide insights into other similar situations and cases.
- They can embrace and build in unanticipated events and uncontrollable variables.

The factors mentioned above influenced my use of the case study method. Throughout the study process I strived to understand and reflect on what it was like to be a Cluster Centre Principal according to their own experiences of, thoughts about and feelings for the SCS. The purposeful sampling was used to identify the cluster centres where the study was conducted, with the help of the former acting Inspector of Education for that circuit. I was interested in obtaining a range of experiences and hence included a CCP from a rural cluster who had been a principal before the SCS's implementation and a CCP from a semi-urban Cluster Centre who only became a CCP two years after the implementation of the SCS. The other implementers of the SCS involved in the study were the current and former Inspectors of Education for the same circuit, parents, teachers and principals of the schools in the two Cluster Centres. Permission to carry out the study was granted by the Regional Educational Officer (Deputy Director).

3.2.3 Working with Data

This section discusses methods used in data gathering, reports the process of generating the data and finally explains how the data were analysed.

3.2.3.1 Data gathering

Following Creswell's (1998, p. 123) advice that "a case study involves the widest array of data collection as the researcher attempts to build an in-depth picture of the case", a variety of data collection techniques were used, namely document analysis, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. These tools were felt to be appropriate for the interpretive paradigm because they would complement each other and each would compensate for the limitation of the other (Patton, 1990, p. 245). While observation was not initially part of the data techniques to be employed in certain cases it seemed the right thing to do, given the fact that I was a practitioner conducting research in my area of practice. Therefore some observational comment was used in the study to complement evidence from the main data techniques.

I spent one week at each cluster centre, namely 13-17.03.2006 at one cluster centre and 27-31.03.2006 at the other. A site visit programme was used to systematically collect the data in a chronological way. Thus on the first two days of the week document analysis was carried out followed by the interviews with the CCPs and then focus group discussions. However the programme was flexible in terms of choosing times and venues for the interviews and focus group discussions. In the first week the current Inspector of Education was also interviewed. The former Inspector of Education could only be interviewed in September 2007 because of his work commitments. The purpose of sequencing data gathering was to help me to get an understanding of how various sources of data build on and complement each other. This sequencing is discussed below.

(a) Document Analysis

In this method documents in the form of pre-produced texts that have not been generated by the researcher are usually the main source of data (Arksey & Knight, 1999, p. 117). Yin (2003, pp. 86-87) believes that "documentary information is likely to be relevant to every case study" and the strengths of documentation include being "stable, unobtrusive, and exact and offering broad coverage". Documents also have the advantage of saving time and expense (Creswell, 2003, p. 187).

I first orientated myself to the official documents because they were regarded as a valuable starting point in data collection. According to Smith in Topnaar (2004, p. 38), documents provide:

- An excellent source of information about rationales, purposes and history.
- An indication of how people thought about something at a particular time, or under particular conditions.
- The language people used to record, communicate, think etc.
- The frequency with which things happened or were discussed.
- A potential substitute for activities researchers are unable to observe directly; in some cases documents may be the only source to get certain information or be the only form in which it is available.

Numerous documents at the two clusters and circuit were studied to ascertain the type of activities carried out at cluster centres and roles played by the CCPs and other implementers. These documents included:

- Circuit and cluster vision and mission statements
- Cluster Development Plans and need analysis
- Cluster year plans
- Minutes of meetings i.e. cluster subject meetings, cluster management meetings and circuit meetings
- Circulars (cluster, circuit and regional)
- Invitations and responses to meetings (regional, circuit, cluster and partners i.e. RAISON and GTZ-BEP office)
- Reports on cluster activities i.e. Education For All (EFA) event, a cluster Subject Show, Circuit Report on cluster activities, report on school visits at satellite schools and parents' meetings at schools
- Speeches by the CCP at a parents' meeting of a satellite school
- Reflections of the CCP on cluster activities
- General information for CCP from GTZ on the SCS structure.

These were past and recent documents ranging from an invitation to the system's official launch in the Ondangwa West Education region in 2002 to the current Cluster Year Programme of 2006.

Documents were easily accessible in the principals', HODs' and circuit offices. Photocopied documents were filed and thereafter purposefully selected to capture only relevant data for analysis. These documents were reviewed to establish their background and initial purpose, and then studied for their credibility and relevance to the research goals.

(b) Interviews

I conducted formal, semi-structured interviews with Cluster Centre Principals, as well as current and former Inspectors of Education, to capture their individual perceptions and experiences of the SCS. These interviews were scheduled to take place after school hours when both the Principals and HODs were free in order to avoid disruptions to their daily activities.

I conducted semi-structured interviews because they allow for understandings and meanings to be explored in depth. Semi-structured interviews examine the context of thoughts, feelings and actions of the respondents. Interviews are naturally powerful in interpretive case studies; they help respondents to make explicit things that have been implicit (Arksey & Knight, 1999, p. 33). Semi-structured interviews also allow the interviewee to provide answers at length and enable the researcher to probe further and follow-up.

Interview questions with the CCPs focused on

- CCPs' view of the SCS
- roles and challenges as CCPs
- CCPs' views on enabling or hindering factors for the SCS implementation
- strengths and weaknesses of the SCS.

The current and former Inspectors of Education were interviewed on the:

- impact made by workshops given to CCPs on the management of the SCS
- implication of the SCS for management practices at school
- recommendations for better implementation of the SCS.

I first obtained permission from respondents to tape-record the interviews and anonymity was guaranteed. Since all the respondents were conversant with English interviews were conducted in English. Interviews were transcribed and respondents were provided with copies of the transcripts for accuracy and verification of their original views.

(c) Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions are different from group interviews in the sense that they “rely on the interaction of participants within the group, on the topic and on the questions provided by the researcher” (Cohen et al., 1998, p. 288). Ritchie and Lewis (2003, p. 58) explain that the interaction between participants in the group illuminates the research issue, because they involve discussion and hearing from others, and they give participants more opportunity to refine what they have to say. Focus group discussions are therefore suitable for qualitative research. They provide a social context within which a case is experienced by participants’ and they also display the way in which the context can shape people’s views and perceptions, shown in their conversations.

Focus group discussions with some principals, School Board members and teachers in the two clusters were conducted. The discussions enabled the participants to share their views and discuss ideas on the cluster system’s implementation in their clusters as well as benefits or challenges they experienced at their schools. It also enabled both the participants and me to gain insights into pressing concerns of the SCS (Yin, 2003, p. 112).

In collaboration with the two CCPs I purposely selected the participants for the focus group discussion. This was done to achieve a balance of all stakeholders’ views. Ritchie and Lewis (2003, p. 59) argue that the diversity in focus group composition

and the need to come to a common location enhance commonality between people in their relationship to the research topic. The purpose of the research was clearly stated in the invitation letter, to allow participants to make informed decisions from the outset. At the onset of each discussion, participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity in the process of generating data.

At one cluster centre two principals, one HOD acting in a principalship position, two School Board members from different schools and one teacher formed one focus group. The focus group at the other cluster comprised two School Board members from different schools, three teachers, and one head of department. During all the discussions, notes were taken by different non-participant observers and tape-recorded with the participants' consent. At both centres group discussions were held in the vernacular language (Oshiwambo) because some School Board members were not conversant with English. However, all the note-takers understood both languages, thus the notes were written in English.

I chaired and facilitated all focus group discussions at both cluster centres. The tape-recorded discussions were transcribed in the vernacular language first and then translated into English. Notes taken were typed and proofread by the note-takers. For ethical reasons and transparency respondents were provided with transcripts in the language they used to verify the data.

The focus group discussions at the cluster centres were based on:

- how participants viewed the SCS in terms of benefits, successes and challenges
- roles of participants in overcoming challenges
- recommendations.

These questions were well suited to group discussions in this study because all the participants had had experiences of the SCS.

3.2.3.2 Data analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research concerns the “sifting, labelling, ordering and reducing of generated data” in an attempt to organise it for presentation and

interpretation (Durrheim & Kelly, 1999, p. 139). Collected data from document analysis, interviews and focus group discussions were analysed using interpretive analysis. Through triangulation I aimed to achieve a “thorough description and simultaneously generate empathic understanding of the phenomenon being studied” (Durrheim & Kelly, 1999, p. 139).

Notes generated from document analysis, transcriptions of interviews and focus group discussions and typed notes taken by non-participant observers were coded and sorted into categories in relation to the study goals. From categories I developed themes and sub-themes according to the research questions.

Reduced data from all three data collection methods employed were triangulated to find out to what extent the sets of data complemented each other and to see whether there were similarities or variations. This between-method triangulation was employed to increase understanding of the same phenomenon, from different angles. In this way I tried to offset “the rationale behind the weaknesses of one research method by the strengths of the others” (Arksey & Knight, 1999, p. 23).

3.3 Ethical Issues

Social science research invariably involves human participants, in this case CCPs, Inspectors of Education, teachers and School Board members. I considered ethical issues carefully, and ensured at the outset that all participants were well informed about the purpose and objectives of the research. This built a good relationship between me and the participants in the study. It also enabled participants to give informed consent, knowing that their participation was voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw. It created a sense of trust and built participants’ confidence.

To observe protocol, I consulted the Regional Director’s office to seek permission to do research in one specific circuit, and I only proceeded with the research when the Regional Education Officer authorised me to go ahead. The circuit and cluster centres were then informed and the site program was forwarded to them two weeks in advance. The purpose of the study and the methods involved were explained in an

invitation letters to all participants in the focus group discussions and interviews. At the beginning of each interview and focus group discussion I re-emphasised confidentiality and anonymity of participants, guaranteeing their right to withdraw. Data collected in interviews and group discussions, namely transcripts and notes, were verified and edited by participants before analysis.

3.4 Validity

The steps I took to enhance the validity of my findings were briefly as follows: engagement, triangulation, member checking, and quoting from primary sources.

I spent one week at each cluster centre to familiarise myself with the environment and reviewed relevant documents in order to select those I needed to study more closely. Participants were also accorded the opportunity to do member checking, to verify and proofread transcripts and notes taken during data collection. I was granted approval and authorisation by the CCPs and Inspector of Education to annotate and directly quote from documents collected from the cluster centres' and circuit's files. To further strengthen validity and to comply with ethical demands I clearly explained all these formalities to the participants to foster a sense of confidence and trust among them. I assured participants that I was not evaluating or inspecting their work but simply studying it to make meaning of the phenomenon being researched.

3.5 Conclusion

The process of data collection was very exciting to me and a great opportunity for collaborative learning and information sharing. As discussed above, a number of lessons were learnt on the ethical considerations of qualitative research. Throughout these interactive processes, I gained a wide understanding of the SCS and enhanced my research skills. In the next chapter I present the data.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF DATA

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an analysis of data triangulated from various data gathering methods as discussed in the preceding chapter of this study. Four main categories have been established to present findings on the CCPs' perceptions and experiences of the SCSs' implementation. For each category, evidence of findings from all three data sources is presented in a specific manner. The leading data in the presentation will be from interviews with CCPs and former and current Inspectors of Education. These are supported and complemented by data from focus group discussions and document analysis whenever possible. I present data using respondents' own words from interviews and focus group discussions, as well as from notes and documents analysed. Observation was not originally part of the data collection techniques but I realised it would be useful to refer to some key features observed during data collection which support findings. Categories that emerged from the data and that are used for the purpose of data presentation are as follows:

- The SCSs' organisational outcomes
- Personal positive outcomes for stakeholders
- Challenges in SCS implementation
- Recommendations by stakeholders.

I now present the findings for each category in detail below.

4.2 Presentation of Findings

4.2.1 The SCS's Organisational Outcomes

The implementation of the SCS brought about several positive outcomes and improvements in the organisational management and educational leadership practices at local levels. In this section the positive structural shifts experienced by CCPs, IEs,

School Board members and teachers reflect the implementers' views of the enabling factors of the SCSs' implementation.

4.2.1.1 Establishment of new structures and infrastructure

One of the CCPs described the SCS as “a system that makes different groups of schools to form a cluster, where educational matters are dealt with by various stakeholders”. The initial idea of grouping schools and implementing the SCS in the Omusati region are clearly documented in a letter from the Director of Research and Information Services of Namibia (RAISON), dated 19.04.2002, addressed to the two Directors of Ondangwa East and Ondangwa West Educational regions. It reads:

As you recall ... at Midgard, we had planned that I visit Ondangwa to plan new circuit boundaries and also to have a firm framework of inspection circuits in relation to all school clusters. Having these new inspection circuits will therefore lay the way for the launching and implementation of clusters. From the Permanent Secretary ... the allocation of inspectors is expected to be as follows: Oshana 4, Omusati 8, Oshikoto 4 and Ohangwena 6. These are the numbers of posts allocated using the formula of 35 schools per inspector, and a request for the creation of new posts has been sent to the Public Service Commission.

At the formal launch of the SCS in the Omusati region on 20.06.2002 at Outapi Multi-Purpose Youth Centre the system was further expanded. Two new circuits in the Omusati region were added to the six in existence by then; 44 Cluster Centres were established and CCPs appointed, as were two new Inspectors of Education.

Another official notice dated 21.11.2002 also urged IEs to put into place the system's operational structure:

Ondangwa West region would like to start operating on cluster basis from January 2003. In order for the system to work as envisioned, it is important to have structures in place. We ... request your respective offices to see to it that Circuit Management Committees, comprising of the Cluster Centre Principals within the circuit, and the Cluster Management Committees, comprising of the satellite school principals within the cluster are established as soon as possible.

This call was heeded because in a circuit correspondence to the region dated 22.01.2003, the IE for Outapi circuit informed the Regional Director on the establishment of circuit and cluster management committees in the circuit. Another regional document dated 28.02.2003 sent to all Regional Heads of sections, IEs and principals of schools listed all Cluster Centres per circuit and the particular schools in each Cluster Centre in the region.

Documents indicate that structures were also created at cluster level. The minutes of a Cluster Management Committee meeting at one Cluster Centre, dated 04.03.2004, has 3 topics on the agenda namely feedback, establishment of committees and a five-year-plan. Agenda item number 2 reads:

for the cluster centre to function well, numerous committees should be established. Committees established are listed as: Examination and Promotion Committee, Admission Committee, Sports Committee, Cultural and Entertainment Committee, Disciplinary Committee, Stocktaking Committee, Library Committee, Counselling Committee, Development Committee and Finance Committee.

Further evidence revealed that the CCP of another Cluster Centre gave feedback from a Circuit Management Committee she attended. The feedback was on a number of circuit-based committees established and listed them as: Staff Development Committee, Sports and Culture Committee, Admission Committee, Finance Committee, Promotion Committee and Examination Committee. The same minutes of that Cluster Management Committee meeting dated 27.04.2004 showed that members established the Cluster-Based Committees on the same day as follows: Cluster Development Committee, Cluster Academic Committee, Cluster Promotion Committee and Cluster Disciplinary Committee. In an undated document more guidelines were given on the composition structure and frequency of meetings of the aforesaid committees.

The former IE also pointed out that the new circuit offices of Onaanda and Tsandi were built in 2003. During the focus group discussions one school principal indicated

the construction of buildings at the Cluster Centres as a change caused by the SCSs implementation.

4.2.1.2 Devolution of authority to local level

One CCP remarked that in his view the SCS was a very good strategy of the government's decentralisation policy to bring education to the people, particularly when it comes to the management of schools. The CCP further pointed out that in the past, schools were administered from offices located very far away. All meetings were held at circuit offices, materials were collected by schools at the regional head office and distances travelled by the schools were huge. With the SCS implementation things are done mostly at cluster level. The CCP said:

distances have been made shorter because schools have to collect most of their needs at their Cluster Centres, no more at the circuit and regional offices. In some cases delivery and dispatch of goods and some equipment goes through to Cluster Centres. Most information is also channelled to schools via the Cluster Centre. That means services have been brought closer to the schools.

The other CCP said it was now her role and responsibility to coordinate educational activities at the circuit level by visiting other satellite schools, organising meetings such as cluster management meetings, subject group meetings and parent meetings, and to ensure that information channelled to the cluster centre from the circuit and regional office is disseminated to all schools.

In addition, the former IE pointed out that some of the management benefits of the SCS are the strengthening of local decision-making and the speed in implementing decisions taken on issues such as learners' admission, recommendations for teachers' appointments and transfers and planning of infrastructure and structures at cluster level by the CCPs. He remarked that before the SCS such issues normally took longer to take effect because schools had to see the Inspector for them to be resolved. Now they were promptly and efficiently dealt with by the CCPs using the relevant cluster structures. The same applied to issues such as disciplinary hearings and the

establishment of projects: “Cluster Management Committees ... hold meetings or ... disciplinary hearings and they report back to the circuit office”. One School Board member in the focus group discussion also praised the system and said “the system is progressing well ... very effective because it allows independent collective decision making by stakeholders through cluster boards”. She said:

as members of cluster boards, we play a role in the appointment of teachers and principals ... some of us participate in interviews for recruitment of personnel and initiate projects for our cluster. We mobilised communities and collected money which we used to buy a Risograph machine for the Cluster Centre to ensure sound education.

The functions and responsibilities of CCPs are documented in the “Summary points” in the minutes of a Cluster Information meeting dated 6-20.11.2002.

4.2.1.3 Intensified interactions at local levels

With regard to her experiences of SCS’s benefits and successes, one CCP remarked that it was a good system because it made principals of schools work as a team, decide on uniform activities to be undertaken by all schools in the cluster and work together in tackling various educational issues pertaining to their schools. They coordinate meetings of various committees to work together on assigned tasks, such as organising sport events, cultural and commemoration days, setting of examinations and tests and planning cluster-based workshops on several issues.

In support of co-operation at cluster level, the former IE said:

Cluster Management Committees are doing well, their clusters are well-organised, [and] their schools are no more living in isolation. They come up with cluster projects. Like Cluster Centre A, they organised the parents, teachers and learners to come up with fundraising activities for their cluster projects. And when it comes to subjects, they hold cluster subject meetings where cluster facilitators and teachers draw up schemes of work and set or moderate cluster-based exams.

The former IE also remarked that progress made through the implementation of SCS “contributed a lot in terms of interaction among teachers from satellite schools and the cluster centres in terms of activities that require School Boards to meet and discuss issues affecting schools”.

During the focus group discussion one teacher also commented on the intensified interaction as a result of the implementation of SCS: “I support the system because now schools work together and solve their problems”. Another one said “the system brings cooperation; there is no more isolation and schools work together for successful outcomes. They established various cluster clubs and teams and this really brings development to the cluster”. Another also remarked:

it created a good understanding and interest in sport; in the past we wasted time travelling to the circuit for sports events but now we just organise the sport activities within the cluster. This year we already held several meetings where we discussed the importance of sports and planned how athletics will be conducted. These meetings have really influenced the schools’ spirit towards sport and many have paid their learners’ N\$1.00 contribution fee for the sports fund.

A principal in the focus group discussion at the other Cluster Centre was satisfied with the SCS implementation because he felt schools now come together to discuss issues about school administration, subject and examination problems and propose the way forward. He said “Above all the system is very inductive; it allows interaction through sport activities and sharing of ideas among various stakeholders”. A School Board member also pointed out, “we organise parents’ meetings to talk to them about parental involvement, School Development Fund and to change attitudes on these matters”. The current IE confirmed these views:

the common Cluster School Board we had is really doing well, because together they go around satellite schools during parents’ meetings sensitising them to the importance of education, informing on how the parents can actually involve themselves in their children’s education. And they also set up common projects at schools and run projects themselves ... this is a real improvement.

Another principal pointed out that they agreed on and prioritised the needs of schools in the cluster when making Cluster Development Plans. Issues of learner transfer,

enrolment and admission requirements were also discussed. Documents studied confirm these impressions. For instance, a Cluster Management meeting at one Cluster Centre, dated 18.02.2005, discussed grade 1 and 8 enrolment. It also looked at new matters such as cluster subjects and management meetings, cluster year plans, audits of schools' finances within the cluster, five-year development plans and information dissemination during parents' meetings. Another meeting recorded on 26.03.2003 discussed mid-year examinations, curricular projects at schools, staffing norms, leave forms and several housing issues.

At the other Cluster Centre's management meetings held on 02.08.2005, issues such as cluster teachers' conference, lines of communication within the regional structures, amendments to the cluster development plan and staff members' transfer within the cluster were agenda topics discussed. A Cluster Management meeting held before my data-collection visit to the Cluster Centre on 02.03.2006 also indicated discussions on auditing of 2005/2006 finance books, submission of current needs analysis at schools, election of new School Boards, training on the National Standards and Performance Indicators, examination and administration fund, as well as Window of Hope and AIDS Awareness Clubs.

Reports from Cluster Facilitators on their cluster subject meetings and other correspondence, such as an invitation to a constituency councillor and notes from a former teacher who addressed learners and teachers on the Cluster-based celebration of Education For All (EFA) day, all testify to intensified interaction among stakeholders at the cluster level.

4.2.2 Personal Positive Outcomes for Stakeholders

During the implementation of the SCS a number of personal positive outcomes were experienced by various stakeholders in education at grassroots' level. These outcomes are presented here as sub-categories to indicate the perceptions and experiences of stakeholders, i.e. CCPs, HODs, IEs, Teachers and School Board members.

4.2.2.1 Professional development workshops and training

According to the former Inspector of Education, various regional, circuit and cluster-based workshops held for CCPs, Principals, HODs and chairpersons of School Boards on the implementation of the SCS greatly contributed to the professional development of managerial and leadership skills. This argument is supported by information from some documents studied, such as circulars and workshop invitation letters. For instance, on 20.05.2002 a regional invitation from the Director of Ondangwa West Education invited all regional management members, IEs and CCPs to the formal launch of clusters of schools and new circuit offices in the region at Outapi Multi-Purpose Youth Centre. It reads: “During the launch, the Cluster Centre Principals will be introduced to their respective functions, roles and responsibilities in the envisaged new system. New circuit offices will also be formalised”.

Documentation also confirms that numerous workshops on the SCS were continuously offered by BEP for IEs, ATs and CCPs at regional and circuit level after the formal launch of SCS in the region. These include workshops for all principals in each circuit conducted in November 2002, workshops for all CCPs at Outapi Multi-Purpose Youth Centre on 20.05.2003, a week long training session for all CCPs, ATs and IEs at Ongwediva Teachers’ Resource Centre from 09-13.04.2005 as well as one-day workshops for CCPs in all circuits, meeting at three different selected circuits on 01-03.02.2006.

Other official correspondence also shows that training needs for these workshops were solicited from the participants through their supervisors who then submitted them to BEP. The following requests were submitted on 14.03.2003 by the former IE to the Chief Inspector for training during May school holiday in 2003:

- School visit techniques
- Coaching skills
- Meeting organisation and management

- School needs assessment techniques (physical infrastructure, staff development, community)
- Educational programme planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation (staff, physical infrastructure, establishment of new schools and curriculum extensions)
- Roles and responsibilities of a cluster head
- Roles and responsibilities of Inspectors of Education in the cluster system.

On the professional benefits and usefulness of these workshops and training one CCP said:

the ministry is also planning and organising workshops and training for Cluster Centre Principals. It is during those meetings, where a number of new skills, information and knowledge are given or dished out to Cluster Centre Principals in order to run their clusters effectively.

The other CCP also said “these workshops are very helpful; it is whereby we are well informed on how to go about certain activities”.

On the same issue, a chairperson of the School Board in one cluster remarked:

we got to understand how it works ... after attending a workshop ... As School Boards, we used to come together in our cluster, attend workshops, go through educational policy documents and discuss issues related to the problems we face in our duties and responsibilities ... then share ideas without fear.

The former IE also pointed out:

you remember ... when the chairpersons of School Boards were all invited to the workshop that will assist them to improve their skills as School Boards ... It is like a cascades system, they have to come back to the clusters and convey or transfer their skills, the same information and knowledge of what they learn to their counterparts at cluster level.

From professional development workshops at regional and circuit level, more cluster based skills' development workshops and interactions as well as information sharing meetings were born. These will be presented next.

4.2.2.2 Cluster based interactions and meetings

The SCS allowed for increased interaction and co-operative learning activities at cluster level. One CCP pointed out that before the implementation of the SCS, the April examinations were mainly set at individual schools but now

the April examination is set at the Cluster Centre; it is where the facilitators for a number of subjects come together and set question papers for the whole cluster. This means the learners within the cluster write a uniformly kind of questions.

The current IE also indicated that there was subject co-operation among schools in the cluster:

when it comes to subjects, they hold cluster subject meetings where ... cluster subject facilitators and teachers of same subjects meet and draw up schemes of work, come up with the same tests, quizzes and even lesson preparations, they do it together.

Some teachers in the focus group discussions at both cluster centres shared the same sentiments. One said:

subject related meetings are held where teachers come together e.g. Physical Science, to evaluate their objectives. It assists us in teaching our subjects better and benefits learners to have common formal tests, exams and other subject related materials.

Another teacher said “we have the chance to come together more often as teachers of the same subject to review our teaching methods” while another said “the system brings more co-operation among teachers to share ideas on designing teaching aids,

use common schemes of work ... much work and effort are on teaching skills' development".

Perused documents on cluster-based activities support these views. Both clusters have minutes of various cluster subject meetings, reports of various cluster-based workshops held with attendance noted and a year plan and schedules where dates for activities to take place, especially meetings, are agreed upon beforehand and sent to all schools in time.

A paragraph taken from a cluster subject meeting for social studies and humanities for grades 5-10 at one cluster held in the afternoon of 03.04.2003 reads:

we read from the booklet on the cluster system in Namibia on the roles of subject facilitators. After reading we discussed that a new scheme of work is too demanding and a bit difficult, it needs more time, we therefore agreed to gather further information on specific topics and themes and suggested to have it done early next term. We selected our cluster facilitator Ms X and tasked her to get some information from the circuit facilitator for the next meeting. We also talked about the examination committee that should coordinate the setting of exams in our cluster. We agreed that the committee should be chosen next term after sharing this information with the cluster head and getting clarity on some issues.

Further evidence is in the form of a letter from the regional AT for Mathematics at Upper primary dated 02.02.2002 informing IEs, school principals, HODs for Mathematics and Science Departments and Mathematics teachers on how advisory and support services will be provided, as well as moderation dates of examinations and schedules by all Mathematics Cluster Facilitators at circuit level for the academic year.

In both focus group discussions other interactions among stakeholders at cluster level were highlighted, such as sports and fundraising activities as well as good teacher-parent relations and links with other stakeholders in education. One School Board member remarked: "the system is advantageous to parents as well as teachers. It strengthens the teacher-parents relationship. In the past there was a gap between parents and teachers but now they work together".

Echoing this view, a chairperson of the School Board at one Cluster Centre pointed out that “there is now improvement because School Boards have created good relationships between schools and home environment”. As School Board members “they often visit schools, address learners at morning devotion and talk to the teachers about the problems they experience which can be brought to the parents’ attention”. Identified problems are further discussed at parents’ meetings but some of the Board members are assigned to go into the community to see parents in connection with specific problems of certain individual learners.

When asked to give practical examples of problems and issues tackled together by School Boards in one cluster, a School Board member answered that mostly it was disciplinary cases of learners and teachers, late arrivals of teachers, teachers’ transfers and absenteeism of learners and teachers. Moreover, the School Board member further pointed out that absenteeism among learners was now decreasing, because of good interaction and co-operation between teachers at schools and with parents at homes encouraged by the School Board members.

One teacher explained that to cope with the situation of inadequate teaching materials, teachers contacted former learners from their various schools who were now prominent and influential people in society and pleaded for their financial assistance. Another teacher added “we try our innovative ideas in order to generate income through fundraising activities e.g. cluster-based beauty pageants, cluster bazaars etc.”.

A School Board member also found cluster-based sports activities and competition interesting and constructive to the unity of the community. Most learners were now very keen and interested in attending sports events and participate freely. Minutes and reports on sports activities also indicate that teachers shared coaching skills and work together to prepare cluster teams for circuit and regional sports competitions and tournaments. In one meeting dated 13.04.2004, minutes taken revealed that two cluster management members sponsored cluster floating trophies to boost participation of schools and learners in netball and volleyball.

In one Cluster Centre teachers, learners and parents were brought together by Cluster Cultural Competitions and Cluster Subject Shows organised to showcase various

skills and compete for some prizes and awards while at the same time learning from each other. Participants indicated that co-operation and the need to work as a team guided them to relate their work towards their common objectives.

4.2.2.3 Perceptions of CCPs' managerial and leadership roles in the SCS

According to both CCPs their roles were mainly coordinating, planning and organising all educational activities within their clusters. When asked to elaborate on the actual work of coordination, CCPs pointed out that they served as powerful communication officers for their schools in the clusters, and as catalysts that provide favourable links between schools in the clusters and various stakeholders in education, NGOs with an interest in education and the society at large.

One CCP said “when it comes to communication of all types needed from school level to higher level, I am serving in the centre, transmitting information from schools within my cluster to either the circuit office or to the regional office and vice-versa”. He added:

as a CCP you should have initiatives [sic] ... [to] approach other stakeholders e.g. a person with specialised knowledge and skills or particular influence from outside or within the cluster to talk to your teachers and learners on a particular topic. That enhances good results of the educational outcome.

Another CCP had this to say on how they access educational materials:

we talked to the parents, with the assistance of our School Boards we mobilised them and convinced them to understand our predicament. ... at least through contributions from individual parents and approval of satellite schools' budgets, we managed to buy a Risograph machine for our cluster.

The CCP further pointed out that through her negotiation skills and pleas for financial assistance, the Cluster Centre had secured five sets of computers and a local businessman had pledged to pay the monthly salary of a computer instructor hired by

the cluster to provide basic computer skills to learners and teachers for a period of five months.

At one Cluster Centre, letters dated 03.11.2004 and 22.02.2005 show evidence of financial requests written to various NGOs and individuals. On the organisation of Cluster Teachers' Conferences, I was personally invited to address teachers at one Cluster Centre on how schools could improve their learners' English skills, together with some other individuals who were given various other topics identified by the satellite schools in the clusters. The conference was originally scheduled to be held in the first term but was later postponed to 17.06.2006. At another Cluster Centre a topic I prepared on how to create a conducive learning environment at schools was presented by a principal in my absence.

CCPs also indicated critical understanding of self-assessment of their roles and the support received through local capacity building engagements. One CCP pointed out that

a cluster centre head to me is not a person born with all the required skills to run a cluster, but ... should be a person who regards him / herself a student. You've [One has] to always consult other leaders and be a person who loves to read things.

I observed that one CCP's office wall displayed definitions of what an effective principal is. Here are some examples:

an effective principal is a good administrator, good time manager with leadership skills, open-minded, open for communication, flexible ... democrat with a sense of responsibility, ... good planner, organiser and controller, creative thinker, ... professional, trustworthy, resource person [resourceful] ... and a committed person.

Some personal positive outcomes that emerged from the interviews with both CCPs were the interpersonal and coaching skills they gained that helped them to perform their duties efficiently and effectively. Both CCPs indicated that they often visited satellite schools in the cluster and offered professional advice, officiated at several events at other schools by invitation and inspired others to work hard and influence

the effective implementation of curricular activities and educational programmes. One CCP said: “I make use of my free periods to conduct classroom visits at my school and school visits to other schools within the cluster, and for my own administrative duties I sometimes work after hours”. Another CCP reflected:

The purpose of visiting other schools ... is to see to it that education is taking place and that we produce the required standards ... as a CCP you are going to ascertain yourself of whether what is taking place at that school will lead to attainment of quality education and if you come across weakness on certain issues then you advise the relevant people at that school.

Views of both the former and current IEs consolidate the above perceptions of CCPs on their roles and responsibilities in the SCS. According to the former IE, adequate training and on-site coaching provided to CCPs had enabled them to gain necessary skills and competence to perform their duties effectively. He further said the assumed responsibilities and roles had built the CCPs’ capacity in terms of decision-making and had equipped them with certain authority. The former IE pointed out that “CCPs are now provided with a platform to handle some issues by themselves without the inspector getting involved, they just need to consult with relevant people and do much on their own”.

The former IE also said that CCPs were also now enabled to get to know their catchments or feeding schools better and were guaranteed to make sure that satellite schools provided quality education that more effectively prepared learners to face the challenges of their next grades through feedback given after school visits and reports, among others. He further argued that CCPs could now give feedback directly to other principals and HODs during meetings and workshops: “[in] school A your learners have problems in A, B, C ... but with this kind of supervision and support, you can make desired improvements”. However, the former IE also pointed out that further support was still required to enhance the CCPs’ capacity to correspond and communicate in a more efficient manner.

Minutes of several meetings indicated that opening remarks were usually made by the CCPs during their Cluster Management Committee meetings. The year plans of 2006

for both Cluster Centres also indicate that roles such as chairing, minute-taking and praying during meetings were rotationally shared and equally allocated among committee members. An invitation letter from one satellite school, dated 05.06.2006 informs the CCP about the election of school Board members to be held on 23.07.2006 and at the same time invites the CCP to be the Presiding Officer during the elections.

There was also evidence of reports on several school visits and parent meetings attended by CCPs, with the speech delivered at one of the occasions attached. A report on one emergency Cluster Management Meeting held on 14.04.2003 reads:

In his opening remarks, the Cluster Head reflected on his official visits to satellite schools. He mentioned that three schools are so far visited. He expressed his profound appreciation on what schools are doing. However, Mr X reiterated that punctuality, cleanliness and mutual respect should be treated with maximum care. He cautioned that teamwork should be maintained in all our endeavours; in order to avoid divisions among our teaching personnel.

Another extract from a CMC meeting of another Cluster Centre dated 09.02.2006 reads:

The chairperson read the appreciation statement by the Regional Director for Education on schools' performance in 2005 academic year, particularly in grades 10 and 12 where a significant improvement in exam results was noted. Mr X further informed the house on regional and circuit resolutions taken on target setting ... Regionally every stakeholder in education is requested to improve their performance in any kind of duties she performs with 10%. The Circuit Management Committee has also set up symbol C as the circuit target symbol. He therefore requested all participants to work very hard in their capacities so that learners can achieve this symbol or above average.

The current IE was convinced that CCPs were highly confident and well motivated by teamwork and collective decision-making as well by the massive support they received from colleagues. The current IE further pointed out that those CCPs handled most crucial disciplinary cases of teachers and other issues successfully without fear because they did it together with other school principals of satellite schools, using uniform procedures.

A practical example mentioned by the current IE was of an attitude of tardiness of a certain teacher at a satellite school in one Cluster Centre which was well handled by the CCP in collaboration with the Cluster Board members and the principal of that particular school. The teacher was cautioned and then monitored regularly by both parties and as a result the person improved and became more committed. During a two-day panel visit at the particular school I also observed the changes in the teachers' attitude on the effective use of time during periods and arrival time as recorded in the school's staff attendance register.

The current IE further pointed out that because CCPs worked together with other principals, they felt the burden of responsibilities shared among them. The current IE said "they do not feel isolated ... they share ideas together with others and advise each other on how to be effective managers ... any problem is regarded as a problem for all to tackle together". In a circuit report of 2003 CCPs' positive achievements were highlighted as circuit accomplishments reading "Cluster Centre Heads assumed leadership and managerial responsibilities and tasks ... Cluster Centre Heads presided over the new School Board election in accordance with the Education Act 16 of 2001".

CCPs at times were also delegated to act in the capacity of the IE in his / her absence. The current IE strongly felt this practice positively contributed to the capacity building of the CCPs:

a CCP can be delegated to act in the Inspector's capacity to learn more on the administration of the circuit. ... they are on leadership capacity, they are leading clusters and are viable for the possibility of being appointed also as Inspectors of Education. Like me, I was a CCP before; I used to be delegated by my Inspector of Education to run the circuit office in his absence. Now that I am appointed, it is not difficult. I am used to the work.

One CCP remarked that the practice of delegating CCPs to act in the IE's capacity is good and constructive: "I have learnt and gained experiences. I got a technical know-how on how other clusters function and assisted where necessary. I copied the good practices I learnt from other clusters and use it in our Cluster Centre".

Other views expressed by both former and current IEs and most participants during the focus group discussions were on the support and motivation of CCPs with regard to their workload. One School Board member emphasised that their CCP was voluntarily working harder under very challenging conditions and that inspired them to assist and be co-operative. The current IE commented that it was “human culture [nature] to be encouraged through incentives”; therefore she felt that CCPs’ work was worth some kind of acknowledgement to motivate them further. The current IE further outlined; “just something to show that they are recognised ... even with some few incentives and then they will be encouraged to work harder, be committed and come up with activities”.

The former IE also agreed with the current IE’s view and argued in favour of CCPs remuneration for the workload:

looking at the challenges of using their own transport to visit other schools and how they had been doing it, I expect these people to have some entitlements in terms of transport, at least incentives for transport. They spend a lot of money on petrol, just to make sure that their clusters are okay.

CCPs also felt that their managerial roles were welcomed and appreciated by other stakeholders. When asked about other principals’ view on their visits to their schools, one CCP said other principals appreciated these visits because they were aware that it is a better way of uplifting the standard of education. The CCP described the courtesy received during school visits in this way:

wherever you’re paying a visit, you are being accepted so warmly.... They need your advice so that they can compete with other schools in the circuit that are outside our cluster. They want to know how they are doing this and that, so that when the examination results come, they will like to compare their school’s results with other clusters in the circuit. Thus why I said, the visits are always very much welcomed.

Another CCP pointed out that school visits to satellite schools encouraged healthy competition among schools in clusters and enhanced improvement through schools’ self-assessment. The same CCP said:

other schools want to be aware of their weaknesses so that they can improve ... they want to be sure of things which will bring them up where other, better schools are ... they always ask advice on how to increase past achievements. So whenever I visit them I always point them to these questions; if we do this and that in our cluster how will our performance in December exams be? Will our cluster reach the top ten during August examination if our schools do certain things in this way or that? I ask them questions to raise awareness towards our cluster goals and encourage them to commit to them, because I can say we just do not want our cluster to be behind in terms of the quality of education.

School visit reports by one CCP dated 04.04.2003 and 28.03.2003 indicate that other principals and teachers welcomed the visit because they were provided with a platform to ask questions and be given prompt answers on-site.

In the next section I present the challenges posed by the implementation of the SCS.

4.2.3 Challenges Experienced

The implementation of the SCS is not without its problems and challenges. Numerous challenges and inhibiting factors have been experienced at regional, circuit and cluster level. I will now present these challenges as perceived by the CCPs, IEs, Principals, School Board members and teachers who are key implementers of the system at grassroots level.

4.2.3.1 Provision of resources and infrastructure

Inadequate resources emerged as a major problem. One CCP highlighted the lack of facilities such as offices, conference halls, classrooms and government vehicles at cluster centres as a major hindering factor to the smooth implementation of the SCS: “It is a challenge, because you cannot go ahead nicely ... having an insufficient number of teaching staff or ... learners that are taught in poor classroom conditions. So these are challenges from the higher offices”. The other CCP shared similar sentiments: “My school is a Cluster Centre but in terms of facilities like buildings it is

not equipped, it does not have space for holding the meetings or the workshops”. The CCP further said there were no secretaries for clusters to do cluster administrative chores such as typing cluster-based examinations and minutes of meetings. They had to rely on a few school secretaries. “We also do not have duplication machines,” she added.

The views of the former and current IEs complement what was said by the CCPs. The former IE said that provision of resources to Cluster Centres in terms of infrastructure was not adequately done and there were not many improvements. Sometimes buildings were provided, like a library room, but equipment for it to function properly, like shelves, computers, tables and books, were not provided. He argued, “I cannot say it has been effected [improved] in terms of personnel, because all Cluster Centres that have been without secretaries and equipments, are still without secretaries and equipments”. He added that the SCS was not yet fully implemented when it came to finances because CCPs ran the Cluster Centres using their own cars to visit satellite schools. He believed that Cluster Centres were really working hard to access resources such as riso machines and photocopier paper through fundraising activities. He stressed:

all Cluster Centres were supposed to be given Riso machines, photocopier paper, this and that, but now the schools are struggling on their own to come up with the cluster budget, and the schools cannot manage on their own unless the government does something.

Views emerging from the focus group discussion confirmed this. One teacher said “challenge number one is rooms for us to our meetings, as you can see we are now in the library. We need rooms to put our machines, teaching aids we produce”. One School Board member said: “besides lack of adequate facilities, another main challenge is money. Our budget is not enough to cover the needs of the schools, we need to maintain the photocopy machine, buy duplicating papers amongst others”.

On the matter of transport the former IE said that in some cases Cluster Centres were not close to their satellite schools, therefore CCPs had to travel seven to fifteen or twenty kilometres to some schools at their own expense. During my two-week stay at the two different Cluster Centres, I observed that both centres had new laboratories

that were under-equipped and were used for other purposes. At one Cluster Centre the laboratory room where junior secondary learners and teachers were given computer instruction was equipped with five computers. The store room meant for chemicals was also used for agricultural implements, sports attire and balls. At the other Cluster Centre the laboratory was used as a school library, a workshop venue or meeting place and an examination office. The storeroom was used to store physical science as well as craft and technology equipment. During the three days I spent studying documents, I shared the laboratory with an official from the Ministry of Gender and Children's Welfare who was registering orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) for government support and benefits. At the same time I shared it with three cleaners and a secretary stapling and arranging examination papers for collection by schools. I was later relocated to the HOD's office since some of the documents I was working with were confidential.

4.2.3.2 System support

One CCP reflected that there were many challenges because the system was new and a lot of adaptation was taking place. The CCP also pointed out that she found it difficult to cope with being a CCP and manage time properly. She explained:

as a Cluster Centre Principal you are a coordinator of other schools in the cluster ... the manager of your own school and also a teacher. To me, time is playing a big role in my challenges because it is really difficult for me to succeed well in all these activities ... the free period allocated to me as a principal to do administration work at my school and attend to something of my learners like marking their books, I use them now to conduct cluster visits to satellite schools.

The former IE commented on the implications of the SCS for management practices in school. CCPs as middle level supervisors of other principals worked harder than their satellite school principals. With the additional supervisory role they had to spend more time on tasks like management and administration, attending meetings and workshops at all levels and visiting other schools. As a result they might be neglecting

their primary duties, including the teaching load they also carried as subject teachers. He emphasised that

what it means is that they really have to do more work for their schools and other satellite schools, conducting school visits to familiarise themselves with the situation so as to be in a better position to assist teachers and advise other principals better, ... and also to plan accordingly for the larger learner population in the cluster.

One principal in the focus group discussion explained that managing Cluster Centres with limited resources was putting a strain on CCPs' work. The CCP said "it is a burden to the cluster head. She has to run the school ... the cluster, without transport" A teacher also said "we are asked to set and run exams at cluster level with no duplication machines".

A HOD at one cluster said that the lack of conference rooms prompted the cluster to hold cluster subject meetings at different venues within the cluster where there were spare rooms and supportive materials. He argued that when meetings could not be relocated to other venues, teachers and learners were sometimes disturbed because some classes have to be combined or teachers and learners may not have access to certain rooms for their study materials or equipment.

I also experienced this the afternoon I conducted the focus group discussion in the library. Grade 8b could not do their Geography group project on vegetation. They needed to use the encyclopaedias in the library but a notice on the door put there by management just before the discussion read "Interviews in progress, please, do not enter". The former IE also gave a similar testimony:

some schools are still operating in shacks or unconventional buildings ... when it comes to meetings, they are either held under a tree or learners are sent outside for meeting participants to occupy the room or run a workshop in a so-called conducive environment.

He said that because some Cluster Centres operated under circumstances of poor classroom conditions and lacked facilities and accommodation for teachers; they were at a disadvantage in attracting capable teachers. He added that a decrease in learners'

enrolment in some schools, caused by parents transferring learners to schools with better performances, not only affected the particular school but disadvantaged the whole cluster, because the government's quota in allocation of resources was determined by and influenced by the population it is meant to benefit. He argued:

it is wrong and 'quite taxing' for CCPs and cluster personnel to 'travel to come and just duplicate an examination or to come and make an invitation for their clusters at the circuit office simply because there are no such resources at their cluster or in some cases, where duplicating resources are available, there is no electricity.

Another crucial point raised by the former IE was that the concept of the SCS and heading clusters was not well outlined to the public and at times advertisements for CCP positions did not clearly indicate so. He argued "there is nowhere in the advertisement where it says I am looking for a Cluster Centre Principal, only Principal T 4 level 2 etc." According to him many candidates to these positions were not made aware well in advance that the position being applied for had the additional responsibilities of heading a cluster. Many candidates only discovered this during interviews. The former IE viewed the absence of the SCS's formalisation as a challenging or hindering factor to the effective and efficient implementation of the system:

the Cluster Centre Headship is not yet mainstreamed in the system of Public Service; currently you cannot take the CCPs to task based on the failure to deliver because there is no mechanism or system to make them accountable. Hence by virtue of their appointments they are simply principals and not Cluster Centre Principals.

4.2.3.3 Inadequate capacity of the SCS implementers

According to one CCP some principals who were members of the Cluster Management Committee were under-prepared and did not understand the current trend of co-managing Cluster Centres. The CCP argued,

Some of the members do not have a good level of understanding on educational issues such as the SCS and that is a challenge, you need to

educate your principals so as to push the cluster together in the direction where it is required.

The CCP further said that School Board members who were co-opted after others had been trained also found it difficult to cope and experienced problems in co-planning with other Cluster Board members or assisting their own schools in prioritising during planning. The same CCP was also of the opinion that poor co-operation and negative attitudes experienced among some stakeholders in education at both regional and cluster level was a threat to the effective management of Cluster Centres.

Another CCP thought that the Cascade system used to introduce the SCS to teachers, learners and School Boards through workshops and meetings was not effective. Some teachers did not really take ownership of cluster-based activities when allocated certain responsibilities because it was not well explained to them. The CCP argued, “when I visit satellite schools, I think teachers there, didn’t find anybody from outside to come and explain this system to them, except their principals and cluster subject facilitators”. She said it was difficult to manage the centre because she had missed workshops given at the initiation and early implementation stages of the SCS before she had been appointed. The CCP argued “It is really difficult to let your colleagues accept that the School Clustering System is here to stay; sometimes they think it is only the principals who want them to do certain things”. These situations prevailed despite the fact that several circulars and information on the SCS had been disseminated and were accessible to teachers at each school.

A School Board member in a focus group discussion at one Cluster Centre said there was a little confusion among parents on the application of the SCS. Some parents were not convinced money collectively raised to buy the cluster equipments would benefit all learners like those at satellite schools. Another teacher, a School Board member, said that they experienced a number of misunderstandings of how the School Clustering system worked because it was new and they are still in the process of change.

Stakeholders did not only point out challenges experienced. They also suggested some ways to improve things and these recommendations are presented below.

4.2.4 Key Implementers' Recommendations

Various key implementers interviewed recommended several mechanisms to be established so as to make improvements to the SCS. These are presented below. They mainly concern strategies in terms of strengthened co-operation, provision of resources and other general developments.

4.2.4.1 Continuous support system

A CCP at one Cluster Centre said more workshops on the SCS were still needed to support teachers in subject matters:

ATs, IEs and others should come to Cluster Centres from time to time to give workshops for all teachers in the clusters in order to re-enforce what cluster facilitators and principals have given, this encourages the teachers in their subjects, said the CCP.

Another CCP explained that they needed continuous support from parents through School Boards to fund their needs or mobilise parents to approve their school budgets when they needed to buy equipment.

One principal in the focus group discussion said they needed workshops and training on the School Development Plan at cluster level. A CMC meeting at one Cluster Centre dated 09.02.2006 recommended a coaching clinic in netball at cluster or circuit level to assist teachers in that sport and to harness their skills in the sport code.

4.2.4.2 Strengthened co-operation at all levels

A CCP at one Cluster Centre felt that in order to run the cluster properly and effectively, they needed both the circuit and regional support of supervising officials

when they knocked on their doors with their cluster centres' needs. The same CCP argued that co-operation among various stakeholders at grassroots level was what was required if the system was to yield results. He said:

there should be co-operation between Cluster Management Committee members, parents and the teaching population within the cluster ... co-operation and mutual assistance between circuit office and Cluster Management Committee members ... and co-operation between the Regional office and the Cluster Management Committees.

During the focus group discussion at one Cluster Centre, one School Board member said "it is recommended for all stakeholders to come together often and evaluate our own work together and encourage all parents to share responsibilities". A teacher in the same focus group discussion said, "We need to work as a team, be enthusiastic enough and work towards producing common results". Another School Board member also stated that co-operation between parents and teachers at schools provided links in the system. He said "To strengthen this relationship, parents should be committed to attend school meetings whenever they are invited".

4.2.4.3 Provision and development of resources

a) Infrastructures and educational resources

One CCP said they needed to have enough facilities, such as an office or a hall where the Cluster Management Committee and other teachers could conduct their meetings and organise their cluster activities. Sharing the same sentiments, the former IE said, "If we have to review the system, my recommendation will be on infrastructure development at cluster centres, whereby facilities for meetings, workshops and even accommodation must be provided". He argued that improvements in infrastructure should not just be in terms of buildings, classrooms and houses for teachers but also in terms of electricity and clean water. He said that

other materials for teaching, such as photocopier machines, televisions, radios, audio-cassettes, more computers etc., should be provided and be stationed at the Cluster Centre, where learners and teachers from satellite schools can use them weekly according to an agreed cluster programme.

During the focus group discussion one teacher underlined this by saying that “All Cluster Centres need conference halls, laboratories and libraries if they have to accommodate cluster activities”. A teacher at a different Cluster Centre said they needed enough store rooms and production or resource rooms at the Cluster Centre where teachers could make and store teaching aids and other materials as models for others, or to be borrowed and shared by other schools.

A School Board member said all schools should be provided with electricity so that teachers could use teaching materials and equipment such as overhead projectors (OHP), computers and satellite dishes. The same School Board member emphasised that schools could hardly develop without electricity. A sport organiser at one Cluster Centre said they also needed sport fields and equipment to cater for sport development activities in various sports and cultural activities.

A yearly report reflecting on educational activities in one cluster centre, dated 22.12.2003, recommended the building of an administration block that could cater for all activities taking place within the cluster. At another Cluster Centre a document, dated 08.12.2003, showed a list of resources needed and recommended by the Cluster Management Committee; among them duplicating and fax machines, a conference hall and storeroom, an overhead projector, a mini-resource centre or library, furniture, electricity, a strong room and a proper road linking satellite schools to the Cluster Centre and other institutions.

One teacher in the focus group discussion also explained that modern communication technology equipments such as satellite dishes for DStvs and cell phones should be installed in the clusters so that satellite schools and teachers could link with other schools as well as the outside world more easily.

b) Recruitment of human resources

“The ministry should provide each and every Cluster Centre with a secretary, just for the cluster ... that will be a good job”, said one CCP. The former IE strongly emphasised that the SCS could only be effectively applied or implemented if CCPs

were given more support in the form of human resources, especially for the cluster centre. The IE said “let us give them support ... give them two or three Head of Departments who will run the administration at the school level and assist the CCP to keep the SCS functioning”. The former IE went on to say, “give CCPs more school secretaries, for example two, so that they will then have the capacity to correspond and communicate in a more efficient manner because they will have all the necessary personnel to do the work”.

During a focus group discussion at one Cluster Centre, a satellite school principal said “we are requesting additional personnel to assist in running the cluster activities”. A HOD in another focus group discussion also stated “clusters need extra staff especially on administrative tasks like handling and stapling end of term examination rather than the cleaners which are currently used”. A teacher also said a cluster secretary was needed to perform the cluster duties that come from satellite schools.

A recommendation to the circuit regional office by the cluster management committee listed ‘No 5’ in one Cluster Centre document dated 08.12.2003 read, “Our cluster should have more than one school secretary to type and handle both the cluster centre’s own needs as well as the needs of the whole cluster”.

c) Transport

“Cluster Centres Principals should be provided with vehicles”, stated one CCP. The CCP expressed the need for at least a government car or two cars stationed at the circuit office to be used by CCPs when visiting other schools. The current IE also said CCPs should be given a vehicle to use which would enable them to go on regular visits to other schools far from the cluster centre.

The former IE shared similar sentiments on transport: “I expect these people to have some entitlements in terms of transport, because all public servants are entitled to claim money for transport, when using their own vehicles to do government work”. An HOD at one Cluster Centre also recommended that there should be a vehicle for each cluster to be used by the CCP and to ensure that teachers attend cluster activities and learners were also catered for when they go to circuit or zonal competitions. A

School Board member said they needed to be reimbursed for the travelling expenses made for meetings or carrying out their duties in the cluster.

d) Budget

“We need something for us, a specific budget for Cluster Centres”, said one CCP. The same CCP was of the opinion that the region should have an independent budget for the SCS that can also accommodate Cluster Centres. The CCP added “The budget has to be equally divided according to the clusters, and request clusters to give their prioritised needs and use it according to the clusters needs”. These views were supported by that of the current IE who said “the ministry should ... fully implement and fund clusters, come up with the budget for the cluster centres”.

A School Board member at one Cluster Centre said “we really need an allocated budget in order to solve our cluster problems”. A teacher also said a budget was needed to purchase teaching equipment and learning aids that could not be made by teachers themselves, and also to develop other facilities within the cluster. A sport organiser said a budget for each cluster was highly recommended, because it would enable clusters to get the necessary sports equipment and facilities.

4.2.4.4 Improved system structure and implementation

a) Establishment of Cluster Boards

The current IE said that for effective implementation of the SCS there was a great need to establish common Cluster Boards for each Cluster Centre. He also said “Cluster Centre Principals together with the School Board Chairpersons should hold meetings in which members of the common School Board in each cluster can be elected”.

b) Full implementation of the SCS

One CCP said the SCS was a very good system to improve education in the region if it was fully implemented. The CCP said “the ministry should improve on the implementation of the clustering system to see good outcomes, right now is like it is in a piloting stage”. The current IE added “I would like to emphasise that ... this School Clustering System is really important and our ministry should fully implement this, then we will see a lot of improvement in our schools”.

c) Formalisation of the SCS and remuneration of CCPs

The former IE strongly argued for the SCS to be formalised and made part of the Public Service under the teaching structure. He added that formalisation of the SCS would enable the creation of the position of the Cluster Centre Principal in the teaching structure. “Currently the teaching structure does not cater for this, I really believe that the issue of raising their remuneration or giving them extra salary can be addressed if it is formalised in the Public Service”, the former IE explained. The current IE also said if the SCS were formalised, “then you will be able to make people accountable”.

One teacher in the focus group discussion said CCPs would work harder if their salaries were adjusted in accordance to the work they did. A School Board member also said CCPs did a lot for the cluster voluntarily and should be given some salary increment. One principal said it would be fair for the CCPs’ salary to be revisited because they did a lot more than other principals.

d) CCPs’ workload

One CCP suggested, “the Cluster Centre Heads should be relieved from certain activities at their own schools so that they can have enough time to carry out the cluster functions”. The other CCP said that currently CCPs were overloaded with work at their own schools plus other responsibilities as Cluster Heads. Therefore some needed to be relieved. The CCP reiterated “the job load for the Cluster Centre Head should be reduced, so that the person can do the job properly and effectively”.

The former IE added, “You completely remove or take them [CCP] from the teaching responsibilities, so that they completely concentrate on the work for their schools and their clusters”. A principal of a satellite school in a focus group discussion also suggested that “there is a need to reduce the burden or overload on our Cluster Centre Head to enable her to visit other schools” A teacher in the same focus group discussion also suggested that “one can only simplify the CCPs’ work by limiting her responsibilities, especially the teaching load in the classroom”. These views were supported by an HOD at another Cluster Centre who said “I also supported the idea of reducing the number of teaching periods of the Cluster Head so as to carry out cluster duties effectively”.

e) Curricula and certification of a CCP position

The former IE argued that for improved implementation of the SCS and for the implementers such as CCPs to be competent and capable in running cluster centres, there should be a curriculum either in colleges of education, universities or any other institution in which the concept of school clustering is catered for. He explained:

I know at UNAM [the University of Namibia] some teachers did a module on School Administration and Organisation ... there is such a module, it should also touch on the issue of school clustering, because it is part of School Administration and Organisation.

He added that “alternatively we can come up with a course ... on leadership and management offered locally, [and] then we may have a module incorporated in the course about leading and managing clusters of schools”. He suggested that a principalship certificate should be explored, whereby principals or HODs aspiring to be CCPs should undergo specific training that prepares them for that position. The certificate should be one of the major requirements for those applying for a CCP position: “Since the appointment will be from the ranks of HODs and principals, it should be a must for them to have completed a course or module on school clustering, just to be kind of certified”. He also argued, “If teachers are licensed, you can also

license principals, so that those who have the licence can then be allowed to run the Cluster Centres”.

f) Decentralisation of functions

The former IE said that in implementing the SCS, there was a need to consider decentralisation on the basis of functions and not just on buildings and infrastructures. He explained that a good example of decentralised functions was when grassroots people in education such as CCPs have access to regional planning platforms such as the Education Forum and when resources like money are easily accessed at local levels. “We should really look at the functions, like who is budgeting for those functions, who is supervising those functions and by then it will be the ideal practice of decentralisation”.

4.2.4.5 General Recommendations

a) Staffing norms

One School Board member suggested that the staffing norms should be revisited and brought in line with the allocation of human resources at Cluster Centres. This would bring about change and efficiency in educational service delivery.

b) Recognition and acknowledgement of School Board’s work

Another School Board member recommended that since their work was voluntary, they needed acknowledgement of their work in the form of testimonials for School Board members. “The ... cluster should take this up with the Ministry of Education, for us to get some kind of recognition, something so we can feel that we have accomplished duties assigned to us”, the School Board member explained.

c) NGOs' support

One School Board member called for NGOs and other institutions to first consider Cluster Centres when they donated goods to education. The member reiterated that “NGOs and other companies need to support clusters with equipment which the government fails to deliver to schools in order to improve schools”.

4.3 Conclusion

This chapter presented categorised data from various sources using the four main categories identified. The next chapter focuses on the interpretation of the data in light of relevant literature.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses and interprets the findings of the study in terms of themes developed from the data presented in Chapter 4 arising from the research questions. I draw on appropriate literature to make sense of the findings.

Drawing on the categories presented in Chapter 4, I was struck by several key issues. One was the sense in which CCPs perceived their roles as exceeding ‘official’ roles as described in BEP’s *The school cluster system in Namibia: Framework for quality education* and the MEC’s *Guidelines for school principals*. Another was the sense in which the SCS brought about leadership and management practices that are perceived as participatory in contemporary theory. This resonates with the notion of organisational learning which is made possible through democratic and participatory leadership practices. Finally the data highlighted significant challenges to the future development of the SCS. Although there has been much progress and a sense of achievement, there are also areas that need improvement. Hence this discussion of findings is framed by the following themes:

- Administrative guidelines for CCPs’ operational framework
- Participatory management and leadership practices
- Further development and sustainability of the SCS.

5.2 Administrative Guidelines for CCPs’ Operational Framework

The study established that there is no specific policy on the SCS except the draft policy of April 2005 which is still under review. However in the absence of a regulated policy on the SCS, the BEP project provides a guiding framework that has been incorporated into the ministerial handbook (*Guidelines for School Principals*, December 2005) on how CCPs could operate. These guidelines on how CCPs should manage cluster centres are discussed

below to indicate and create an awareness of what is expected of CCPs and how CCPs view their roles in line with the ministerial expectations.

Overall CCPs are mainly responsible for the co-ordination and promotion of all cluster activities in collaboration with other principals of satellite schools in the cluster, and should form stronger links between schools and the circuit and regional education office (Dittmar et al., 2002, p. 24). In addition to this overarching responsibility, Dittmar et al. (2002, p. 24) and the Ministry of Education (2005b, pp. 195-196) outline other functions of the CCP as to:

- Provide general leadership and supervision of all activities in the cluster
- Visit schools in the cluster to offer support and solutions
- Promote the formation of subject groups to improve the teaching and examination of all subjects
- Act as deputies to the circuit inspectors, filling in during their absence
- Organise the functioning of the cluster management committees
- Ensure that staff throughout the cluster follow correct channels of communication
- Promote efficient and cost-saving approaches to the ordering and distribution of supplies, including helping to collate, submit and follow up on orders
- Distribute, explain, collect and discuss statistical questionnaires
- Promote the efficient and equitable allocations of teachers
- Advise schools on how class groups should be arranged so that teachers and classrooms are used effectively
- Pass on training that they receive to all principals in the cluster
- Promote community participation, by ensuring that School Boards function properly, that community members value schooling and that communities respond to discipline problems at their schools.

From the document analysis in this study it emerged that CCPs and other stakeholders had been made aware of the functions a CCP should perform. A former IE interviewed in the study also testified that job interview criteria for CCPs were based on these responsibilities and qualities. In a handout of summary points presented by

Ndopu (2002) at various Cluster Information Meetings in several circuits of the former Ondangwa West Education region, a CCP is described as someone who has a vision and pre-set goals, good managerial skills, open communication with staff and community, and good negotiation skills. The CCP should be creative, self-motivated, committed, flexible, patient and tolerant, able to accept change, able to meet deadlines and well organised. They should also lead by example and delegate duties to staff members.

The data show that the CCPs in this study and other satellite school principals carried out their duties in line with the prescribed guidelines for school principals. The SCS implementation varied from one region to another. The data established that there were both differences and similarities in the way cluster centres operated and CCPs carried out their cluster functions on a daily basis. For example, all CCPs in the study normally conducted school visits to satellite schools to monitor curriculum implementation and offer professional support to these schools. Both year programmes of the two cluster centres studied also indicated the number and frequency of Cluster Management Committees meetings per term, but the dates differed from cluster to cluster, as did time of day, duration and agendas for meetings. This is because those were primarily determined by the specific cluster's unique needs and circumstances.

This study also found that each term's cluster progress reports were submitted to the circuit office in which CCPs reflected on their roles and activities carried out by the clusters, citing the successes and challenges experienced.

An interesting finding in terms of the research question(s) on CCPs' perceptions and their roles in the SCS implementation was the perception that their duties exceeded the 'prescribed' working guidelines. CCPs perceived their roles as:

- Powerful communicating officers providing a corporate link from the cluster to satellite schools and other sub-structures within the cluster, and with various stakeholders in education including NGOs, line ministries, other schools within and outside the region and across the country

- Initiators of change within the clusters and their substructures by creating platforms that enhance positive professional development of teachers and also prospective academic outcomes of learners as well
- Visionary leaders who exert influence on satellite schools and various substructures within the cluster to stay focused on the attainment of the common goal through better service delivery
- Instructional leaders who provide professional advice and managerial support to other principals, HODs and teachers to effectively implement the curriculum
- Life-long learners who are continually learning from their daily experiences and people around them.

Looking at the summary description of CCPs' perceptions of their roles, it is obvious that they play a multi-functional job in being leaders and managers of their cluster centres and their own schools. The literature claims that leading and managing organisations such as schools and cluster centres is not easy because of the complexity and ambiguity of these organisations and their systems and subsystems. Therefore researchers such as Sergiovanni et al. (2003, p. 200) suggest that

today's principals should find better ways to manage the complexity, ambiguity and expansion of their roles, exceeding their traditional instructional leadership and school management skills identified as core elements of their principalship role.

This observation is even more applicable to CCPs. The key questions here are what makes the SCS functional and why and how do the CCPs cope with the complexity of the SCS implementation? These questions are further discussed in the next section where I explore the enabling ingredients of the SCS implementation in relation to contemporary educational leadership and management thinking.

5.3 Participatory Management and Leadership Practices

Earlier in the study (Chapter 2), I drew on literature to provide a rationale behind the SCS as one of reforming the previously segregated education system into a unified democratic education system. I provided an overview of educational management and leadership theories that inform the SCS operational framework. The framework enables integration of the education system and its subsystems while at the same time provides for envisaged systemic organisational change and renewal.

Views of the respondents involved in the study suggest that a number of democratic leadership and management approaches practised by stakeholders constitute key ingredients of the SCS's success that are beneficial to practitioners. These include the development of new supportive structures, site-based management at cluster level, democratic approaches to educational leadership, capacity building and empowerment of stakeholders in the clusters, teamwork, co-operation and collaboration at local levels and organisational learning in the SCS. There is thus a high degree of correlation between participants' perceptions of the SCS and key issues in contemporary management and leadership thinking. While these are closely connected and interrelated in many ways, their contextual application varies from situation to situation. Interestingly, respondents cited that the participatory approach to the SCS's implementation and operation serves as a cornerstone for its reported success and benefits so far.

I now discuss the practices in detail highlighting examples of where findings resonate with theory.

5.3.1 Development of New Supportive Structures

As mentioned in Chapter 4 new circuits and cluster centres were established to provide support and a mandate for change in schools. The CCPs in the study believe that circuits provide technical assistance through the circuit-based workshops and meetings of all principals and HODs. During Circuit Management Committee meetings, general issues pertaining to the Cluster Centre developments are discussed and matters are collectively resolved or direction is secured as to how individual CCPs should go about resolving specific matters within the clusters. Moreover, cluster centres are also places where implementation of educational policies and non-educational policies linked to learners interests take place. As Dittmar et al. (2002, p. 23) put it, Cluster Centres are the “focal points for contact and co-ordination between the schools in the cluster”.

Various committees were also formed at Cluster Centres to oversee the implementation of the SCS and simultaneously offer support of the particular needs experienced by schools within clusters. The key ones are the Cluster Management Committees, the Cluster Examination Committees and the Subject Committees (Dittmar et al., 2002, p. 25). According to Van der Westhuizen (2002, p. 103) “organisation structures are designed and implemented to fit their particular goals, strategies, environment, people and technology”. The creation of these cluster committees thus indicates a particular focus on the task at hand, as well as the realisation that cluster work is complex and hence needs distributed attention.

The data show that cluster-based subject groups’ meetings serve as platforms where teaching and learning problems in specific subjects in schools are shared and addressed. Cluster Management meetings of principals, HODs and co-opted members are like ‘local parliaments’ where managers exchange experiences and information on educational issues in the cluster and map out strategies on how to develop their clusters. Van der Westhuizen (2002) also argue that the establishment of such structures ensures that people focus on getting the job done and specification permits

a higher level of individual expertise and performance (*ibid.*). In these cluster-based committee meetings, individual school problems are discussed and where necessary action plans are designed or smaller sub-committees are constituted to steer a specific intervention at an affected school.

From the focus group discussion it appears that school managers and teachers alike view these platforms as helpful for providing local support and sharing of expertise, resolving problems amicably and enabling mistakes to be corrected by people with insight into the specific problems or environment where they occur. Since the committees are established locally and constitute smaller number of people from each school within the cluster, they enable or create an opportunity for participative management to occur in which close collaboration and co-operation of schools take place out of common interest.

5.3.2 Site-Based Management at Cluster Level

In Chapter 2 I presented a definition of SBM in relation to the SCS in Namibia, drawing from Ortiz and Ogawa (2000, p. 487) and Lunenburg and Ornstein (2004, p. 56). They referred to it as a decentralised approach that facilitates change in organisational structures within the school by dispersing decision-making authority among school or cluster members and in the process replaces bureaucratic regulations with professional responsibilities (*ibid.*). To give a brief overview, SBM is a high involvement management strategy derived from a philosophy of Total Quality Management, a corporate management theory where organisational members are “deeply involved in the ongoing improvement of the organisation and are committed to its success” (Vincent, 2000, p. 1).

According to Vincent (2000) “SBM is a significant reform initiative that promises to place more authority in individual schools through the adoption of a more democratic decision-making process”. Vincent further explains that although the forms and methods in which SBM takes place may vary from one system to another, its typical goal remains the same. It aims to “shift authority away from the district administrative

hierarchy into the hands of school groups (such as teachers and parents) that are more closely connected to the school and, theoretically, better equipped to meet the specialised needs of students” (Vincent, 2000, p. 1).

As reported in Chapter 2, SBM is suited to the SCS operation, because “it is interested in relationship structures between districts (i.e. circuits) and schools (i.e. clusters) sites in a manner that places much power, authority and accountability in the schools” among the clusters (Vincent, 2000, p. 1). The creation of new supportive structures at cluster level discussed in the preceding section provided an environment conducive to practising site-based management, an approach that proclaims shared decision-making and collaborative problem solving. Matthews and Crow (2003, p. 176) explain that SBM involves organisational members’ participation and collaboration towards a collective goal. Adapting Matthews and Crow’s view of participatory management in SBM, the various cluster-based committees and structures formed operate in a sense that everyone in the cluster is involved and works together to solve the cluster’s problems while at the same time establishing a collective vision. Using the data in the study, I will give examples of how the SBM theory underpins the SCS implementation and operation.

The site-based management (SBM) approach in the SCS enables both the broader participation and democratic involvement of all educational stakeholders of the cluster centres. The study has found that CCPs and Cluster Management Committees played a major role in managing clusters, but also that almost everyone within the cluster belonged to a committee that had a specific role to play and different tasks to carry out. This, according to Cunningham and Cordeiro (2000, p. 182), is a means to disperse power to a broader range of stakeholders.

In some clusters there was a democratic devolution of power where more open and participatory relationships with parents and school communities were exercised in the cluster sub-committees, encouraging bottom-up innovation and changes within the cluster. The example reported in Chapter 2 is of one cluster in the study where both the sport and cultural committee had co-opted some parents with interests and skills in some sport codes and cultural activities, and they were fully involved in the planning

of activities to be carried out. There was a high level of stakeholder representation and participation through various structures and activities at the cluster centre level.

Although these committees had their own work plans, they could also be tasked by the Cluster Management Committees to perform certain tasks if the need arose. One cluster, for example, was informed at short notice that it would host a Ghanaian delegation on a School Improvement Programme (SIP) learning exchange visit in their cluster. Immediately the CCP disseminated information to organise and coordinate the cultural, musical and other entertainment groups within the cluster to perform during the visit.

Bauer and Bogotch (2006) explained that the purpose of the SBM is “to unleash the energies of the staff, empower them with the ability to make key decisions and give them flexibility to use resources as they see fit” including human resources (Bauer & Bogotch, 2006, p. 448). From my perusal of documents it was clear that in one cluster centre the CMC was able to resolve the internal transfer of teachers and successfully swap teachers from one school to another to alleviate the problem of shortage of qualified teachers in languages and at the same time correctly allocate teachers to their specific subjects and areas of specialisation, within the cluster. This task was co-ordinated by the CCP in collaboration with the CMC and Cluster Board. Teachers and learners of all schools were informed through their representative structures i.e. the Namibian National Teachers Union (NANTU) for teachers and Learners’ Representative Councils (LRC) for learners. They were made to understand why such a move was needed or beneficial to the schools and cluster in general. This is a good practical example where a site-based approach enables structures in a cluster the decision-making flexibility to respond to local needs as argued by Bauer and Bogotch (2006, p. 448).

Dempster (2000, p. 56) also argues that SBM results in increased innovation, where stakeholders value their power to make autonomous decisions. Documented data indicated that most of the innovations, decisions and initiatives in various cluster committees were autonomously carried out by members of the specific sub-committees. At one cluster, for instance, English teachers in the cluster decided to establish a debating club for junior secondary learners while Business Management

teachers organised a Cluster Business Quiz competition for grade 10 learners. From my experience as an Advisory Teacher who visits various schools in various clusters across the region, some of these innovations are rarely found in other clusters or are practised differently in some.

Cluster Boards which include School Board members from satellite schools of which many are chairpersons play a major role in the management of clusters. Many respondents also viewed school-based management in the SCS as an approach that allowed networking and collaboration among schools with both their internal and external environments. One of the parents in a focus group discussion said, “As Cluster Boards we come together in our cluster ... discuss issues and together we tackle issues of learners’ discipline, late arrival of teachers to school, absenteeism and others”. The minutes of the CMC meetings indicated that broader managerial issues were dealt with by the Cluster Management Committees including learners’ enrolment, staff allocation, curriculum extension, planning for new infrastructure and identification of site-based training in various curricular issues among many others, and were discussed and resolved by the CMC.

Other managerial tasks carried out by the CMC and Cluster Boards were the roles they played in the recruitment and appointment of teachers as well as promotion of staff to new positions within the clusters. It is a ministerial requirement for members of the CMC and Cluster Boards to sit on interview panels and recommend suitable candidates for positions in the cluster to the Regional Office via the circuit office for appointment. One CCP said, “Any interview transcripts with no School Boards’ view or recommendation cannot be considered by the ministry for appointment and in those cases the positions have to be re-advertised.” This again shows a participative dispersal of power throughout the cluster’s stakeholders, leading to increased decision-making and the development of co-managing skills at grassroot people. At the same time, this practice places individuals of differing power and social influence i.e. CCPs and School Board members on “an equal footing in the shared-decision making paradigm” (Johnson and Scollay, 2001, p. 63).

Dempster (2000, p. 56) believes that aspects of school-based management related to planning and communication help shape some of the conditions which indirectly

influence classroom practice. Equally important in the SCS operation, the cluster facilitators for numerous subjects plan and conduct workshops in their specific subjects. The subject facilitators co-ordinate the identification of training needs for cluster-based workshops during their termly meetings. The idea is to take into account the needs of every school's classroom situation, so as to give workshops that will be helpful in transforming the classroom practices of teaching and learning in the cluster.

The broader participation of everyone and the site-based management practices by these committees has created an atmosphere for democratic leadership to flourish at cluster level. It has created an opportunity for cluster members to access new skills and knowledge on an ongoing basis, and has therefore empowered staff to facilitate their cluster improvement, innovation and continuous professional growth (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2000, p. 182). Through such participatory management, decision-making is more decentralised, multiple cluster responsibilities are shared and greater collaboration is also likely to occur. This occurrence has to do with the influence of a SBM philosophy in the SCS. It is also influenced by various democratic approaches employed by those in the driving seat of the educational management and leadership of clusters as organisations. The following section looks at that.

5.3.3 Democratic Approaches to Educational Leadership

Clusters Centres are formally headed by CCPs and co-managed with other site-based committees in a broad participatory manner. The data in the study show that there are signs of instructional, transformational and distributed leadership among stakeholders in the clusters, which are all features of contemporary leadership thinking in education. The notion of democratic leadership is a very broad one, and I will be drawing on the work of Woods (2005) to provide a brief overview. Woods (2005, p. 131) claims that democratic leadership is characterised by principles of “ethical, discursive, decisional and therapeutic rationality, and social justice”. Some of the principal aims of democratic leadership outlined by Woods (2005) are to create an environment in which people:

- Are active contributors to the creation of institutions, culture and relationships they inhabit

- Are empowered and enabled by the institutional, cultural and social structures of the organisation
- Promote respect for diversity and reduce cultural and material inequalities.

The kind of leadership practised by CCPs, subject facilitators and various site-based committees and subject groups is strongly underpinned by the notions of democratic leadership as captured in contemporary theories leading to what Woods (2005: xvii) calls “a multiplicity of leaders”. For instance, the CCPs oversee the activities in the clusters and provide instructional leadership to chairpersons of cluster committees i.e. on issues such as examinations. These subject facilitators and chairpersons also attempt to impart the same kind of leadership to other cluster members in their specific committees. This practice is referred to by Marks & Printy (2003) as “shared instructional leadership” because it involves the active collaboration of principals, HODs, subject heads, cluster facilitators and teachers in matters of curriculum, instruction and assessment (Marks and Printy, 2003, p. 371). Through various subject groups at cluster level principals, HODs, and teachers share responsibility for staff development, curricular development, and supervision of instructional tasks (Marks & Printy 2003, p. 371). From this perspective CCPs are not the sole leaders of Cluster Centres but “leaders of other instructional leaders” in the cluster (Glickman in Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 371). Practically, CCPs conduct school and classroom visits in their own schools as well as satellite schools to “provide the intellectual direction through innovation while empowering and supporting” principals, HODs and teachers as colleagues in decision-making on curricular issues within the cluster (Marks & Printy 2003, p. 371).

The leadership function at cluster level is widely shared by individual and cluster-based structures. Bennis, Spreitzer and Cummings (2001) argue that besides splitting responsibilities between individuals in a broader sense, shared leadership means empowering individuals at all levels and giving those individuals opportunities to take the lead in a decentralised way. This promotes “agility, pro-activity, and autonomy” (Bennis et al., 2001, p. 140). The data illustrated that CCPs saw themselves as facilitators of change through innovation and initiatives that aim at enhancing good educational outcomes in the clusters. Perusal of documents in this study revealed that

the need to hold Cluster Teachers' Conferences emerged from the cluster subject meetings and the post-observation discussion held with teachers and principals where cluster members felt that there were certainly common problems experienced that needed to be addressed at a common forum. This rests well with the principle of democratic leadership where individual leaders should listen to the majority and where the majority take initiatives in participatory decision-making forums, such as subject meetings, to initiate debate (Woods, 2005, p. xvi).

It seems clear then that CCPs do practice what the literature describes as instructional and transformational leadership in their day-to-day headship role of Cluster Centres. The CCPs in this study regard themselves as agents for change and life-long learners who are visionary about the quality of education in the clusters they head. As mentioned in Chapter 4 of this study, one CCP advocated that learning through practice on how to lead clusters was essential knowledge for CCPs to be able to develop other cluster members' leadership capacity.

When CCPs do school and classroom visits they not only wear their supervision hats but also focus on identifying problems that are impeding curriculum implementation and collaboratively solve the identified problems with the cluster members with the aim of improving the cluster performance. In Chapter 4 one CCP is reported as saying that during his visits to satellite schools he raised awareness of their cluster goals and encouraged cluster members to commit to them. This behaviour is characteristic of transformational leadership which has moral and democratic purposes (Allix, 2000, p. 7). In this interactive process CCPs develop the collective capacity of the cluster and its members to achieve the national curricular goals, raise awareness of all cluster members' level of commitment to the cluster goal(s) and national standards, and encourage cluster members to reach their potential "while offering support for them to accelerate their individual self-interest as well" (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 372).

My observation during the period of collecting data at the two clusters and my experience as an education officer, often in interactions with clusters and cluster members, confirm the presence of democratic leadership in most clusters, which might be one of the underlying causes of the success of the SCS. In addition to the instructional and transformational leadership approaches, there is also a social

distribution of the leadership role in the SCS. In the cluster centres studied, the leadership function is stretched over the work of a number of individuals where the leadership task is accomplished through the interactions of multiple leaders, their followers and their given situations (Harris, 2005, p. 11; Spillane et al. in Coles & Southworth, 2005, p. 37).

Fidler (2002) argues that if clusters and circuits are divided into organisational structures such as various committees and groups with different functions, then each of these will need leadership for its area of operation if it is to do more than follow orders (calendar of activities or work plans) from the CCPs, Cluster Management Committee and Inspectors of Education (Fidler, 2002, p. 36). As proposed by Dittmar et al. (2002, p. 26) on possible roles for subject facilitators, the study established that various subject facilitators managed and co-ordinated subject activities at the cluster level independently of the CCP. They were guided by mission statements and commitment to achieve cluster visions and by being accountable to educational stakeholders in the cluster community. Harris (2005, p. 11) says that in a practical sense, distributed leadership is concerned with engaging many people in the leadership activity, and it implies interdependence rather than dependency, embracing how leaders of various kinds and in various roles share responsibilities. Similarly, Cluster Centres' year schedules and calendars of activities also indicate that leadership roles such as those of chairing meetings, chairing provisional/steering committees on cluster issues and organising events were to be equally distributed among principals, HODs and teachers from various schools to carry out, and not necessarily carried out by the CCPs alone. Goleman in Harris (2005, p. 11) claims that this is a practice where every person at entry level acts as a leader. It offers fundamental and powerful ways of "complex patterns of interaction, influence and agency in organisational leadership" (Harris, 2005, p. 11).

This approach of dispersing leadership to others at Cluster Centres enables shared leadership in the SCS among chairpersons of School Boards, principals of satellite schools, HODs, subject facilitators and teachers alike in the existing clustering structure. However, Harris (2005, p. 11) also warns that it should not be regarded as a "shorthand way of talking about shared leadership" because unlike the latter, it draws on cluster members' skills and subject expertise or leadership capabilities. Cluster

subject facilitators are democratically chosen during cluster subject meetings by people with common subject knowledge and only on rare occasions recommended for the position by Subject Advisors (regional-based Advisory Teachers) because of their higher level of expertise in the subject. Nevertheless, the Cluster Management Committee has to endorse each recommendation and get views from other teachers in the cluster before they can appoint such a person as a Cluster Subject Facilitator.

Distributed leadership also promotes accountability among committees and leaders (chairpersons) of those committees because they are aware that their leadership tasks influence other committees' leadership functions by nature of their organisational practice. For instance, a cluster cultural committee could not successfully fulfil its leadership task in organising an event or in participating in a cultural event without the involvement of a Cluster Finance Committee. Instead these committees would have to collaboratively calculate the financial income and expenditures of the cultural committee during the exercise of their tasks. Spillane et al. in Coles and Southworth, (2005, p. 39) referred to this as "collaborative leadership" because "the interdependency of leaders and committees is shaped by the practice where different leaders require input from one another to produce a particular leadership practice." In the SCS multiple leaders collegially examined the common challenges and problems encountered in their specific cluster groups or committees, and collectively commit to evolve strategies to solve them. They also informed each other of their activities or plans via minutes of meetings, cluster reports, staff announcements and other cluster platforms, which maximised transparency in their conduct and openness to each other, building trust and accountability to cluster values and mission.

According to Mel et al. (in Riley & Louis 2000, p. 33) this type of dynamic and decentralised approach to leadership where CCPs and Inspectors of Education relinquish real authority to others and help them to use this authority wisely is viewed as the vehicle for empowering others. Mel et al. further argue that even in institutions of education like Cluster Centres where goals are agreed upon, it is not always easy to trust others to use their own knowledge and skills to bring about change (*ibid.*). However, the core principle of the transformational leadership approach, which features strongly in CCPs' leadership, is grounded in trust, to support leadership capacity of other leaders in the cluster and facilitate the dispersal of leadership across

the vertical cluster structure. This trust in others' leadership capacity and the skills to facilitate leadership distribution to cluster structures was observed during the data collection stage as well as on other formal school visits and through professional engagement with schools and clusters on a continuous basis. It links with the idea of Mel et al. in Riley and Louis (2000, p. 34) that "trust is the essential link between the leader and the led; vital to people's job, status, function and loyalty, vital to fellowship".

In the next section I discuss how richly democratic leadership approaches have built cluster members' capacity and empowered them in their organisational life.

5.3.4 Capacity Building and Empowerment of Stakeholders at Cluster Level

The greater involvement of cluster members in cluster activities via cluster committees and other structures has provided opportunities to acquire new skills and to discover their potential. Additionally the kinds of democratic leadership practised in the SCS and the spirit in which CCPs and other leaders shared their leadership power within the cluster (members) has had an impact on the capacity of cluster members. Respondents indicated that they had gained skills through workshops conducted at regional, circuit and cluster level as well as other interactions within the cluster structures. CCPs also said they felt empowered with information, knowledge, and skills on how to handle matters regarding the management of schools and implementing the curriculum.

In spite of its shortcomings as mentioned earlier, the decentralised cascade approach to training and information sharing is embedded in a participatory approach to leadership and management. Regional and circuit workshops are organised for CCPs, chairpersons of School Boards and facilitators of various subject and other committees, where these cluster leaders and managers are coached in how to carry out their cluster management and leadership functions. According to De Grauwe (2006, p.

4) people in organisations implementing change or any kind of reform need support and advice to strengthen their competence and autonomy.

It is normal practice in the SCS that feedback from regional and circuit-based meetings, workshops, and training would be given to cluster members for similar initiatives to be replicated to pass on the skills learnt. The respondents in the study also felt that to a certain extent, cluster members, teachers, School Board members and principals had been empowered with skills to do things on their own, such as run workshops, feedback meetings and training at the cluster centres. Mahshi (2006) refers to this as the readiness for “going it alone” and explains that “it means that those receiving support can perform the tasks, solve the problems, set and achieve their objectives without outside technical intervention or assistance” (Mahshi, 2006, p. 3). For instance, in May 2006, regional training sessions were held at all parallel circuits in which CCPs satellite school principals and some HODs were trained on the National Standards and Performance Indicators for schools in Namibia. In return these CCPs, satellite school principals and some HODs who are all CMC members, trained all cluster members at their cluster or school level. According to Mahshi (2006, p. 3) imparting skills to individuals and coaching personnel involved in educational activities has to be an on-the-job training through workshops within appropriate institutional structures, since learning-by-doing at your institution or work or local environment is the best method of acquiring skills. In spite of shortcomings identified in the previous chapter, the fact that CCPs and cluster facilitators had attended numerous regional and circuit workshops, seminars, conference and meetings, suggests that they have been ‘developed’ to coach and advise fellow principals and teachers through site-based mini-workshops, school visits and subject meetings.

The interaction among the cluster based management committee and the prevailing collegiality among cluster members have created a sense of self-esteem and control, and have enhanced collegial interest and determination in cluster activities and curriculum. Respondents in the focus group discussion explained that they now had skills to initiate opportunities to learn from each other such as subject shows, teachers’ conferences and internet clubs, and fundraising activities. As mentioned in Chapter 4, one cluster in the study holds a unique subject show annually where teachers and learners show their talents and skills with regard to the understanding

and accomplishment of the basic competencies and learning areas for specific schools. During this annual show innovations are displayed, skills shared and both teachers and learners exchange knowledge. The top schools, teachers and learners are awarded motivational prizes for outstanding work accomplished. The most improved schools are also recognised and encouraged with tips to maximise their efforts.

The Cluster Teachers' Conference referred to in Chapter 4 is another good example of empowerment and creativity among cluster members. These conferences are good platforms where teachers identify topics in the subject areas of their curriculum or policy issues relating to education, with which they have had trouble or perhaps just need more information. They would then propose to be addressed by people with expertise, and discuss the topics at a cluster platform. The Cluster Management Committee and facilitators or members of the professional development committee then prioritise topics for such a conference and propose to the CCP potential speakers and presenters at the conference. The conferences are facilitated by teachers within the cluster and are opportunities for professional growth.

These are examples of innovative and good practice encouraged by the distributed leadership and facilitative and interpersonal skills of CCPs, as a result of which cluster members are more empowered to initiate and sustain change and are able to respond to structural reforms. They are also able to “cope better with complexity and work intensification” (Woods, 2005, p. 31).

Cluster members are also given the opportunity to deal with certain management functions formerly done at circuit or regional office. For instance, one respondent indicated that the statistics of learners' enrolment, OVC, ordering of textbooks and so on, are first analysed and discussed at cluster level by the Cluster Management Committee and some other local committees designed to fulfil particular tasks. Planning for new buildings, curriculum extensions, programmes, workshops etc., is also mainly done by various teams or subject groups who then present the plan to the cluster management committee to prioritise and strategise according to cluster needs.

This collaborative management experience has empowered CMCs to take decisions for the clusters' future when they plan, organise, direct, or control cluster-based

activities. These democratic engagements of cluster decision-making bodies in the cluster activities make them more responsible for their implementation. Indeed, participatory leadership and delegation of new responsibilities and additional authority to various clusters has empowered cluster members to be committed and accountable to the Cluster Development Plans and to other cluster activities. It has also created room for teamwork, cooperation and collaboration, to which I now turn.

5.3.5 Teamwork, Cooperation and Collaboration at Cluster Level

Findings show that there has been an increase in co-operation and collaboration at cluster level. Many stakeholders involved in the study expressed contentment with this development and rated it as a great achievement signalling the effective implementation of the SCS. This is partly attributable to the influence of a team-based leadership approach employed by CCPs and other cluster team leaders (i.e. facilitators) in managing cluster activities.

Co-operation and collaboration were noted at management as well as teaching and learning levels. On the subject level for instance, subject teachers teaching the same subjects co-operated in setting local tests and exams, holding meetings, discussing and evaluating local, regional and national examination results and sharing ideas or appropriate actions. There was also sharing of expertise on how to teach their subject better, design suitable teaching and learning materials and appropriately interpret the curriculum.

Managing the complexity inherent in clusters – especially coordinating activities of multiple committees within the clusters – requires a practical approach such as the team-based model of leadership. Katzenbach and Smith in Davies and West-Burnham (1997, p. 141) suggest that in any complex situation or ambiguous tasks requiring the real-time combination of skills, experiences and judgments, teamwork usually brings in better results than a collection of individual groups operating within confined job roles and responsibilities. The teamwork spirit in cluster centres has provided an opportunity for all cluster members to experience a sense of worth and recognition.

Through collaboration in various cluster committees members believe that all have something to offer in a wide range of situations, and that there is no longer a situation where one person knows all.

The intensified collaboration of cluster members has helped to decrease the sense of isolation among schools, their principals, teachers and learners that had hitherto normally operated on their own. When asked to describe the SCS in terms of benefits and success one CCP in the study pointed out that “[The] SCS is a good system, it makes principals of different groups of schools to work as a team and through this system we can ... reach the National Standards of education”. It emerged from the data that co-operation and better communication channels forged by Cluster Management Committees as well as other cluster committees were identified as the factors that were helping clusters to succeed and bring about improvements.

High attendance at cluster-based meetings and commitment to cluster activities were also noted as benefits gained from the increased co-operation and interaction. There was also a decrease in learners’ absenteeism and positive improvement in teachers’ and learners’ discipline. As reported in Chapter 4, a positive improvement in change of attitude observed among some individuals testifies that the SCS can have the effect of ‘reculturing’ behavioural attitudes of some educational practitioners.

Enhancing the external relationship between Cluster Centres and their external environments or with stakeholders or NGOs with an interest in education, has also paved the way for Cluster Centres to acquire valuable resources and learning materials through donations and sponsorship. Apart from that, clusters also collaborate in fundraising activities for the needs of the clusters, and managed to buy Risograph machines and other equipment needed by their school.

Cluster Teachers Conferences and Cluster and Circuit Management Committees as well as other sub-committees discussed in Chapter 3 provide good forums in which people from a variety of backgrounds but with common interests can meet face-to-face to discuss experiences, and work together towards shared solutions (Macbeath & Mortimore, 2001, p. 204). Reflecting on my observation at one Cluster Teachers’ Conference where I presented a paper on *‘What schools and teachers should do to*

improve the learners' English proficiency', a resolution was taken on what all the schools within that Cluster Centre should do.

Additional, cluster-based workshops provided by this setting, where cluster members collaborate on various topics, are “seen as moments of collegial interaction” strengthening collaboration between clusters (De Grauwe, 2006, p. 4). Since many of these workshops were held by local cluster facilitators, it allowed for an adaptation of their content to the diverse needs of each school in the cluster.

5.3.6 Organisational Learning: Clusters as Learning Organisations

Launched as a reform intervention, the SCS seems to have brought about significant improvement in many schools as well as in the education system since its introduction. One can argue that perhaps the SCS was introduced at the right time when change in the education system was already an accepted fact. As discussed in Chapter 2 the intentions behind the SCS aimed at improving the quality of education in schools through a systemic approach, opposed to the traditional bureaucratic and hierarchical management structures within educational institutions. Earlier discussions in this section have emphasised that due to the democratic leadership approaches applied to empower cluster members and intensify their interactions with each other in their clusters, organisational learning had taken place. This was due to a range of interventions, adaptations to change and continuous learning in clusters and among cluster members.

The SCS enables organisational learning at all levels: circuits, cluster centres, cluster committees, satellite school principals and cluster members. This study has found that clusters possess a number of learning organisation features in the way they operate. Fundamental management tasks are entrusted to CCPs and other cluster committees. According to Senge (2006, p. 130) this enables the democratic governance of schools by grassroots people through shared vision and team learning. In section 5.3.4, it was indicated that all cluster members were empowered to make decisions and learn from their successes and failures. Clusters have adapted the networking approach across all schools and function in a collaborative way pooling human and infrastructural

resources in order to expand knowledge. For instance, team-learning happened in various cluster committees such as subject and management meetings and conferences, where cluster members in these designated teams shared ideas and continuously learnt how they could optimise each others' contributions to realise their cluster goals in an open and honest communicative manner. Meyer and Botha (2000, p. 260) argue that this is very beneficial to any learning organisation because team members gain insight into complex issues and act in ways that complement each other's actions.

Organisational learning can also lead to innovation. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the cluster centres studied created *cluster* development plans and a cluster mission and goals. The *school* development plans I studied, though different from each other as well as from the *cluster* plans, nevertheless shared the unique fundamental purpose of the cluster vision, especially where the lower primary curriculum was concerned. This is an example of how team learning can result in uniquely different yet strongly related planning.

Team learning was also a key feature of the teachers' conferences and subject shows. The CCPs were responsible for developing programmes for these events in collaboration with the relevant committees. Putting together these programmes thus presented excellent opportunities for CCPs to hone their organisational and communications skills and develop their relationships with other educational stakeholders. These events thus benefited both cluster leaders and their members, who also gained from being exposed to debates on current educational issues.

Cluster-based training and mini-workshops were also very beneficial opportunities that enhanced learning and staff development. They were good platforms for transferring training and skills in the workplace. Meyer and Botha (2000, p. 263) explain that staff training provides opportunities to "apply skills immediately and efficiently in order to achieve envisaged improvements in teaching and learning". In fact, most of these workshops and school projects revolve around learning more about learners' needs and implementing better teaching approaches that improve the attainment of learners' needs. Meyer and Botha (2000, p. 262) also say that learning organisations are technology driven: they use the most advanced technology to

improve educators, teaching and learning and members are continually being trained to use the latest technology. As reported in Chapter 4, clusters were able to enlist the help of their communities to raise funds for technological teaching and learning aids.

Braham in Meyer and Botha (2000) emphasised that the learning organisation regards the whole system, project, process and all its members including learners and other stakeholders as a potential source of learning (Meyer & Botha, 2000, p. 263). In another cluster centre, six computers were acquired through a government initiated computer piloting programme with School-Net (a company that provides computers to schools). Teachers in the cluster with an interest in using ICT in lesson planning had grouped themselves to form a computer club where they learnt how to search for information for their subjects on the Internet. As discussed in Chapter 4, a businessperson in the cluster offered to pay for their training in basic ICT. The computers were based at the Cluster Centre and were able to be used by teachers and learners from other schools too.

This discussion illustrated that in a significant way clusters exhibit the features that typify learning organisations. Senge quoted by Meyer and Botha (2000) describe a learning organisation as

organisations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspirations are set free, and where people are continually learning to learn together (Meyer & Botha, 2000, p. 254).

As the data indicated, clusters continue to learn more about their schools, do self-evaluations about their work, plan together and collaborate to create better learning opportunities for both learners and their staff. However, like any other organisation, clusters also have their unique share of obstacles and challenges that inhibit them from functioning fully as modern learning organisations. In the next section, I look at those as stepping stones for cluster development.

5.4 Further Development and Sustainability of the SCS

Any transformation in an organisation undergoes ‘hiccups’ in the process of change or renewal. The SCS implementation is no exception. What matters though is that key implementers were able to identify what inhibits development of their clusters and how to deal with the obstacles to prevent lifetime blockages to the clusters’ growth. In Chapter 4 respondents cited specific challenges experienced in the SCS implementation and suggested possible ways these impeding factors could be dealt with. At this point I discuss these challenges from the respondents’ perspectives relating them to the organisational development view of change and transformation, in an attempt to build an underpinning rationale for the SCS. I look at the formalisation of SCS, the strengthening of cluster capacity and an understanding of the SCS in the context of decentralisation.

5.4.1 Formalisation of the SCS

To date the SCS is not regulated by policy and operates informally throughout Namibia, despite recommendations by the Presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Training of 1999 and the Research and Information Services of Namibia (RAISON). The latter was very instrumental in providing an operational framework for SCS, currently used by practitioners as a guiding document in the absence of a national policy.

There was a common perception that the status quo in which the SCS functions limits its operational potential in many ways. Commenting on this aspect, one CCP said, “right now is like it is in a piloting stage”. Firstly, respondents argued that if the system were formalised and incorporated into the Public Service under the teaching structure, it would enable the creation of a formal job position of a Cluster Centre

Principal with a suitable salary and benefits aligned to a CCP's current duties and responsibilities. Respondents in the focus group discussions called for salary adjustments for CCPs, acknowledging that they were currently doing a lot for clusters voluntarily and in reality their workload was just not equal to that of satellite principals. In support of the CCPs' salary increment, the current IE explained that by nature human performance was triggered by extrinsic motivation; it was therefore demotivating for CCPs to work without appropriate remuneration. There was a feeling among respondents that the provision of incentives to CCPs would "encourage them to work harder and be committed", and to develop more meaningful activities in the clusters.

Secondly, key implementers in the study said that regulating the SCS would also make CCPs and other Cluster facilitators more accountable in their work, because there would be fixed terms of references to comply with. The former IE argued that in the absence of a formal SCS in the Public Service structure, it was difficult for IEs or regional officials to reprimand CCPs for failure to deliver because there was no regulating mechanism or system to make them accountable. Legally they were just school principals with additional responsibilities — heading Cluster Centres.

Thirdly, under a formal structure of the SCS in the Public Service, government would be able to properly address the teaching workload of CCPs to enable them to create a balance between their leadership and managerial roles and their own teaching. Respondents including CCPs themselves called for a reduction in CCPs' classroom teaching load, so that they could do justice to their own schools and to their supervision of satellite schools. Currently the MBESC Circular 13 of 2001 prescribes 25% percentage of teaching time to all principals across all phases whether they are CCPs or not. One principal (not a CCP) in the study argued that this practice was not fair because CCPs did a lot more than other principals; besides, this could negatively affect their teaching resulting in learners not getting proper attention. This is because with their CCP role, principals perform more management roles. The general perception of respondents in the study was that a reduction of the CCP's classroom teaching would enable CCPs to teach effectively as well as concentrate on the work of their school and their clusters.

From the document analysis and the views of a former IE it emerged that issues of cluster formalisation and the CCPs' remuneration have been brought to the attention of regional personnel and national policy-makers via meetings, workshops and research findings. Both Mendelsohn and Ward (2001, p. 63) and Dittmar et al. (2002, p. 21) argue that if the SCS were to be sustainable the system would need to be both formalised and institutionalised. Dittmar et al. (2002) argued further that "although there may be merits" for the SCS to operate informally, its formalisation would make it "sustainable and save a good deal of money in the longer term" (Dittmar et al., 2002, pp. 38-39). An attempt in this regard was made by the MBESC in 2005 by drafting a national policy on the SCS that would regulate the system. Stakeholders' opinions were sought; one CCP said, "We gave our recommendation last year on this draft policy but we never heard anything about it".

I telephoned the Programme Quality and Assessment (PQA) director in the Ministry of Education to get clarity about the progress of this draft policy on the SCS formalisation. It emerged that the ministry had taken a different route from the preceding one of seeking stakeholders' opinion, as mentioned above. The PQA director explained that the ministry had assigned GTZ (the influential German-sponsored NGO involved in the introduction and support of SCS) to conduct a national survey on how the system was doing and that the findings of that survey would then inform the national policy on the SCS. To date the SCS has been adopted nationally in the Namibian education system but its formalisation remains work in progress.

Reviewing the SCS implementation and suggesting a useful framework application for improved efficiency, Mendelsohn and Ward (2001, p. 59) explained that expectations for increased salaries and/or other concessions for CCPs had been raised in some clusters. It is therefore appropriate that levels of remuneration for different principals be established under a formal structure of the SCS. Quoted by Dittmar et al. (2002, p. 33) the Namibian Presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Training also raised the issue of grading CCP posts, on the basis that CCPs had additional responsibilities towards their clusters on top of their normal responsibility as school principals. Dittmar et al. (2002) conclude that "a system stratifying salaries

or providing other incentives should be adopted to compensate both the CCP ... in accordance with their different levels of responsibility” (Dittmar et al., 2002, p. 38).

The respondents’ call for the full implementation of the SCS and remuneration of CCPs echoes what other researchers have referred to. It is also significant because it emanates from participants lived experience. In this study, insiders within the system who are key implementers of the system, including those who are in supervising positions as well as grassroots people (teachers and School Boards), have made their voices heard.

Opposing views do exist. Nandi (2004, p. 21) argued that although CCPs had more work on their hands, formalising their positions as promotions posts with extra remuneration may create imbalances within the Cluster Management Committee triggering ‘leave them to do the job’ feelings among other principals. Nandi (2004) also feels that promotion and extra remuneration may result in increased centralisation within a decentralised system (*ibid.*). Interestingly none of the CCPs in the study called for extra remuneration but other colleagues – parents, teachers, other principals and both the former and current IEs – felt strongly on the issue. It could not be established whether the CCPs were not interested in extra remuneration or whether they thought that under current circumstances it was not worth mentioning.

Offering ideas on formalising the CCP position, respondents suggested the establishment of a tailor-made in-service training programme for serving CCPs to equip them with the necessary conceptual knowledge and skills of leading and managing cluster centres as modern organisations of learning. Alternatively, it was also suggested that the existing courses of education offered by UNAM could create and incorporate a component of the leadership and management of a SCS as an optional area of specialisation. It was believed that if the concept of clustering were catered for in the curricular of higher instructions, it would prepare satellite school principals aspiring to be CCPs to learn more about leading and managing clusters of schools.

Another suggestion was to introduce a cluster principalship certificate to serve as a ‘licence’ to those who want to run cluster centres. The Public Service Commission

(PSC) could also use this cluster principalship certificate as a major requirement for the promotion post of CCPs in the teaching structure if institutions of higher learning such as UNAM offered it with accreditation by the Namibian Qualification Authority (NQA). Perhaps this recommended principalship certificate for CCPs would also be an answer to Topnaar's critique on the way CCPs were appointed to their positions. Topnaar (2004, p. 7) argues that CCPs are handpicked for their position.

Respondents also felt that formalisation of the SCS would require government to create a specific budget for Cluster Centres. Schools, who should feed the cluster fund, were already finding it difficult to cope with the ever-insufficient School Development Fund (SDF) due to the socio-economic factors of their population and the regulations regarding SDFs in practice. With no specific budget from the government, respondents felt that clusters could not cope.

Making the CCP position part of the Public Service structure would also ensure transparency in terms of employment criteria and conditions of service. As reported earlier, applicants only found out about the nature of the job from the interview question. This might not be the most suitable practice because people should be academically, physically and psychologically prepared for the job they are applying for. The current practice may therefore be detrimental to government as well as prospective employees.

5.4.2 Strengthening the Capacity of Clusters

Besides the SCS's formalisation, there is a need to strengthen other aspects of capacity at cluster centres, especially in support mechanisms (e.g. training and skills development), existing physical structures (poor classroom conditions) and budget allocation, infrastructure and resources (both human and physical). In Chapter 4, the data singled out provision of resources and infrastructure, system support and inadequate capacity of key implementers as major challenges to the ongoing functioning of the SCS. Participants made several suggestions.

There was agreement on the need to provide and maintain buildings and other infrastructure at the cluster centres. Although both cluster centres in the study had 'clean' tap water, electricity and telephone lines, they needed more buildings to meet the needs of the clusters such as classrooms, meeting rooms, a mini-resource centre or library, teachers' houses and proper equipment. Currently clusters and their satellite schools experienced telephone cuts due to unpaid bills, hampering communication among schools and clusters and their external environments. In rural clusters, some schools did not have telephone lines and even the use of other telecommunication devices such as cell phones, satellite links and the Internet were limited in the absence of a proper network infrastructure. Road conditions during the rainy season were another inhibiting factor to communication. When I was collecting data for this study, one potential interviewee missed the focus group discussion meeting because her car got stuck in a muddy Oshana pan on her way to the cluster centre.

Other resources needed for teaching – such as photocopy machines, televisions, radios, audiocassettes, OHPs, computers, sports and laboratory equipment – were also sparsely provided to schools and many were not functional due to overuse. Respondents also expressed concern over the maintenance of this equipment, especially if they were donor-funded or bought on 'contract'. Furthermore, maintenance expenses were higher when private experts had to be involved. A call for a specific budget allocation for cluster centre needs was then justifiable because it would enable cluster centres to solve their 'cluster problems' by purchasing prioritised teaching and sports equipment and learning aids, as well as maintaining learning facilities as discussed earlier.

Clusters with a lack of facilities and accommodation for teachers were additionally challenged in attracting capable teachers and other personnel. Inadequate learning opportunities due to unavailability of certain curricular subjects or a shortage of teaching equipment often caused a decrease in learners' enrolment. Parents and guardians transferred their learners to schools in clusters that offered subjects of their choice, thereby affecting the budget allocation to schools in clusters.

As reported in Chapter 4, it was evident that cluster members had learned to pool resources and share them equitably within their clusters. However, the inadequacy of

resources such as transport or the unavailability of sports equipment had serious implications for the smooth operation of clusters, adversely affecting sports practices. Besides putting a strain on the CCPs' work, it brought unwelcome disturbances and changes in school routines, which can be very frustrating to all concerned. As the former IE argued,

It is wrong and quite taxing for a CCP or other cluster members to travel all the way to the circuit to do simple administrative tasks such as making few copies for cluster activities or making a telephone call because the cluster lacks the resources or the supportive facilities that enable their equipment to function.

Respondents also felt that a vehicle could be provided for each cluster to enable better mobility of CCPs and other subject facilitators within the clusters. In cases where CCPs did not have cars, or when their cars were in the garage, it was difficult to perform their cluster duties. This affects communication between clusters and their circuit or regional offices. For example, delivery of workshop invitations or circulars needing immediate implementation would be delayed, resulting in many problems. One CCP therefore emphasised that there should be at least a government car or two stationed at each circuit to be used by CCPs to conduct school visits and other duties. Other respondents also felt that a vehicle for each cluster would enable both CCPs and other cluster members to participate in cluster activities. A suggestion for transport incentives or entitlements to be paid to cluster members using their own vehicles when performing government duties was also made.

Another comment was to strengthen existing structures and to create suitable structures seen as useful for the SCS operation. For instance, one of the clusters in the study did not have a 'formal' Cluster Board comprising members from other schools, which meets regularly. The other did. Members only met when there was an issue to discuss. The current IE said it was something she had noticed in more than one cluster centre within the circuit since her recent appointment. Participants in the study felt that strengthening the existing structures would sustain growth.

The allocation of human resources such as HODs, school secretaries and other institutional workers to support the administration of the clusters was also seen as an

investment in cluster development. A former IE explained that recruiting skilful personnel would allow clusters and CCPs to respond and communicate in a more efficient manner, while at the same time enabling the cluster centres to function effectively and better handle the needs of all schools.

Participants acknowledged and praised the existing professional support offered in the form of cluster-based and circuit workshops and training. These had done a great deal to improve individual and organisational capacities. However, respondents explained that cluster members needed continuous support and advice at a cluster level in order to cope with changing demands. There was also a need to address the disparities in the management and leadership skills of various principals, HODs, subject heads and facilitators as well as in levels of qualification among cluster members. Cluster members felt that they needed regional personnel to make use of their schools and clusters as active learning environments where they could offer continuous professional support through training and visits to address and improve the educational prospects of former disadvantaged cluster members.

Further training and skills development in subject areas, financial management, the use of ICT in teaching and the maintenance of resources were needed on an ongoing basis to enhance cluster members' co-managing and peer-teaching skills. Respondents also requested the induction of newly appointed SB members, CCPs and various facilitators to be conducted earlier so that they could catch up, adapt to the job, and help them alter their roles and duties accordingly.

Another general view shared was the need to strengthen team building and evaluation among cluster members, including parents and officials at regional levels. One CCP said that regional officials such as ATs and IEs needed to reinforce what cluster facilitators and principals had provided. The CCP explained that team evaluation would build the morale and encourage a sense of working towards the same purpose. It would also build solid relationships of critical friendship between clusters of schools and regional personnel. In addition, co-operation and mutual assistance between cluster communities and regional and circuit personnel would enhance links in the system, encouraging everybody at micro and meso level to take ownership of

the system's challenges and play a role in working towards finding common solutions to the problems experienced in schools.

5.4.3 Understanding the SCS in the Context of Decentralisation

In Chapter 2, I mentioned that due to the complexity and ambiguity of clusters and their different needs and practices, educational practitioners implemented and experienced the SCS differently. 'Mixed feelings' or 'fear of the unknown' are always experienced with any reform or change intervention.

Some of the participants revealed that they did not understand how the system worked. One parent said, "this is new to us, we rely much to the teachers to help us ... and [we are] still adapting" to its operation. CCPs felt that some cluster members needed "someone from outside to explain this system to them". Sometimes cluster members did not understand how prioritising in planning for the cluster should work. The CCPs cited that it was a challenge to work with people who had only a little understanding of how this SCS functioned. The CCP said, "First you have to educate them ... so as to push the cluster in a required direction". It was even more problematic when members were co-opted or appointed after induction and training had already been given to the rest of the group.

This lack of understanding of how the SCS worked in context contributed to the negative attitudes and confusion experienced by some cluster members as well as by some circuit and regional personnel. Some teachers did not take ownership of cluster-based roles or activities assigned to them. Some parents also did not believe that a cluster fund could directly benefit their children individually. CCPs emphasised that it was difficult for them to make cluster members adapt and change their attitudes towards the SCS's operation. They stressed that this situation prevailed despite several circulars and other information on SCS implementation having been disseminated or being accessible to cluster members at schools. The absence of continuous training for new members was a major problem for the continuous development of clusters and in coping with change.

There was also a strong feeling about the decentralisation of certain functions at cluster level. Respondents felt that much of the decentralisation in the SCS was focused on buildings and infrastructures. There was not much happening with regard to important functions such as CCPs' access to influential regional platforms such as the educational forum, where they could make their voices heard. A former IE explained that the ideal practice of decentralisation was to empower the people at grassroots level to perform functions that worked for them and were important for the future. The former IE further argued that there was hardly any merit in centralising certain functions such as budget control, citing that "if they [schools] can take care of SDF, surely they can also handle their own budget".

Another point raised as a challenge was donor-funding requests to NGOs. Respondents felt that support could be channelled to cluster centres rather than individual schools. They acknowledged that government had limited capacity to support the SCS implementation and emphasised that other stakeholders such as NGOs could support clusters with educational equipment and tools which government could not deliver.

One teacher in the cluster that had a private school said that on many occasions, most events or workshops in their cluster had to be moved to the private school which happened to be well funded, better equipped and that had proper infrastructure. Although it was beneficial to the cluster to have such a school, most teachers did not feel comfortable with some of the norms and practices at the school and expressed uneasiness with the practice, citing that it was contrary to the purpose of the SCS. Nandi (2004, p. 21) cautioned that such imbalances in the provision of resources enabled some schools within the clusters to develop at the expense of others, and that such schools would eclipse others, defeating the SCS goal of equitable resourcing.

5.4 Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter engaged the findings of the data against a backdrop of **contemporary theories of leadership and management** that are seen to underpin

the SCS, to interpret the perceptions of CCPs and other key implementers of the SCS. I looked at the stakeholders' experiences of the SCS in terms of its benefits and challenges as a reform intervention.

It emerged that clusters are flatter than traditional educational organisations whose operations and management practices are driven by team-based structures. The system is informed by principles of democratic leadership and participatory management that empower school communities to engage with each other to improve their teaching and learning conditions. This enables organisational learning to take place, transforming schools and clusters into learning organisations.

Challenges affecting the smooth operation of the SCS were also discussed, uncovering issues that need to be explored further to ensure the development and sustainability of the system.

The next chapter concludes the study.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I provide an overview of my findings in this study. I begin by discussing the key issues arising from the findings, and then move on to considering the significance of the study. Next I critically look at the strengths and limitations of the study, and provide recommendations for practice and further research in the field with consideration of the research methodology I employed in this study.

6.2 Summary of Findings

From the findings it emerged that contemporary leadership and management thinking has influenced the implementation of the SCS by CCPs and other stakeholders. These influences were observed in the SCS' operational 'philosophy', chiefly in the interactive way in which clusters function and in the manner in which CCPs and other stakeholders regard the importance of their roles in the SCS development. The national policies of education governance based on principles of democracy have clearly also shaped the SCS operation, allowing for organisational learning to take place. As discussed in the previous chapter, stakeholders' perceptions of their own practice within the SCS were of critical importance. Cluster members in the study were able to describe the system's strengths and benefits, and identify challenges threatening its development.

6.2.1 Leadership and Management for Educational Improvement

Just as education in Namibia is in transition, so are the systems we use to manage and administer it. We must learn how to operate them effectively and efficiently even as we reform them. We will surely find that some

patterns ... seemed appropriate ... so we must re-think how we manage and administer the education system, both nationally and locally. For both learning and its management the benchmarks are our major goals (of education) – access, equity, quality and democracy (Namibia, MEC, 1993, p. 174).

The words above describe the rationale for the SCS as an approach seeking educational improvement in schools through better management and democratic leadership practices by leaders and managers and other practitioners at school level. The words caution managers that educational reform is a continuous process which involves organisational learning for all individuals in the system. Most importantly it implies that the leadership capacity of those in influential management positions needs to direct the reform process while at the same time managing the change. Basing this study mainly on the perceptions of CCPs who are ‘gate-keepers’ at the cluster level, I wanted to understand how these key implementers think and re-think their experiences of leading and managing clusters. I was also intrigued by the differences between the way clusters function in different regions (the region I worked in before and the current one) and this apparently varying ontology further prompted me to further investigate how other stakeholders understand the system in terms of benefits (if any), successes and challenges. For me (in a middle managerial capacity) the key question was: How do the system implementers cope?

This study suggests that the leadership and management approaches employed by those at the helm of cluster management have had a significant effect on the clusters’ functioning. CCPs were found to possess traits of both instructional and transformational leadership in their practice. The CCPs and subject facilitators in the clusters provide professional and academic support to other principals and teachers through school/classroom visits, cluster-based subject workshops, cluster conferences and meetings with the purpose of improving teaching and learning. At the same time cluster members collaboratively set cluster mission statements and visions, which articulate uniform cluster goals and main activities to be carried out through cluster development plans. It has been noted that overall CCPs play a key role in co-ordinating and organising cluster activities, yet it also emerged that there is intensified collaboration and co-operation among cluster-based committees and other structures, resulting in co-management and team leadership. According to Harris (2002), the

existence of collaboration and mutual support amongst staff is an underlying feature of highly successful educational improvement, because it builds the capacity of organisational members and intensifies the commitment to innovation and change within the organisation (Harris, 2002, p. 112).

Equally important, the participatory approach that informs the operational framework of the SCS provided an environment for the system to take off and be structurally accepted by the implementers at grassroots level. The distribution of leadership functions among cluster members through cluster-based committees and other structures involves them in the decision-making processes of cluster activities. This has benefited the cluster members because they feel empowered to collectively take important decisions that matter to them and demonstrate the capacity to solve their own cluster problems. The cluster-based structures also allow responsibilities for decision-making to be allocated to specific committees and groups with specific skills and common interests, resulting in the task being carried out effectively and efficiently.

It was observed that the leadership practices of 'shared' instructional, transformational and distributed leadership have created an environment conducive to organisational learning. It was indicated that through teamwork in their various structures and committees cluster members shared knowledge and skills which helped them to adapt to the changes brought about by the SCS, and to anticipate future development for their clusters. The findings of the study reveal that there is a potential readiness among cluster members which serves as a positive concrete foundation for further development of clusters. However the change process of developing clusters into flourishing learning organisations will require increased capacity that addresses current challenges experienced by key implementers.

6.2.2 Key Issues Holding Back the SCS Implementation

The main factor perceived to be retarding the SCS implementation is not the human capacity of cluster centres. Inadequate system support is identified by key

implementers as a major issue threatening the future of the SCS. Respondents feel that it is an issue that needs urgent consideration because it will provide a framework for a fully-fledged SCS strengthening the current organisational capacity of the cluster centres.

There are several critical concerns that have arisen from the findings as well as current developments in the government's attempt to formalise the SCS. One of the key questions raised is why it was taking so long to formalise a system that has been operational in the education system for a decade now and appears to be working effectively. The SCS was piloted for five years in the Rundu Region, reviewed after six years of operation and recommended for national implementation by Namibia's Presidential Commission for Education of 1999. However, apart from issuing a draft national policy on the SCS in April 2005, and soliciting ideas from the populace, the Namibian Ministry of Education seems to have abandoned this recommendation and has opted instead to carry out a survey preceding the national policy. Whether the idea of a survey emerged from public comments on the draft policy or is just one of the government's own ideas, the point of concern here is whether the survey is really necessary at this stage. There might be merit in commissioning GTZ to carry out a survey of the SCS before the adoption of a national policy, but it raises questions of how and to what extent research conducted on our own practice is being utilised. The review study of the SCS in each region by RAISON and KENSIP on the SCS learning visit to Namibia in 2004 provided basic information that seems adequate for policy formulation. Furthermore, in addition to the Presidential Commission on Education of 1999, both the review study by RAISON and the KENSIP Report were facilitated by the Namibian government through the MBESC in partnership with GTZ. It may be argued that with the survey the ministry is trying to gauge current perceptions, but I believe the survey is unlikely to uncover anything that is not already known.

Without a national policy on the SCS, current factors that limit the development of clusters such as specific budget allocation and transport reimbursement to CCPs and other cluster members will continue to inhibit the organisational growth and capacity of cluster centres. The absence of policy also implies that without a regulated SCS it will not be possible to create a CCP position within the teaching structure of the public service, and thereafter, cater for remuneration of CCPs as suggested by the

study. Additionally it will limit the development of a tailor-made Leadership and Management Programme for the SCS by higher learning institutions, let alone certification of the principalship position by the NQA.

Respondents feel that formalising the SCS will lead to the improved management of clusters which will yield positive benefits for teaching. A clear policy statement could address the workload of the CCPs and financial constraints on clusters' budget, enhancing job satisfaction among cluster members. It may also strengthen accountability among stakeholders towards the system's function and guide those in positions of monitoring the implementation of SCS to nurture measures of accountability among educational members to uphold quality in the system.

Another aspect is the rationale to implement the SCS in Namibia considering the impact of current bureaucratic practices on the system as a whole, the demography of Namibian schools and challenges experienced by policy implementers with the focus to attain major goals of education and decentralisation in practice. Some managerial practices such as those of allocating resources to schools, staffing norms and staff development need to be revisited if they are to enable the facilitation of change and the improvement desired.

The current practice of government allocation of resources to schools on the basis of learners' enrolment is a fair practice in the sense that it ensures the achievement of the educational goal of equity in a non-discriminatory way. In practical terms, however, 'equal' distribution of resources cannot lead to real equity since it is not context sensitive. Schools located in remote areas within former disadvantaged communities still lag behind in terms of resource acquisition despite affirmative action and the rural physical facilities improvement initiative by government. Recent statistics of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Children Welfare (MGECW) reveal that the Omusati region is among the regions top-listed with a high population of OVC (IBIS, 2005, pp. 43-44). Overwhelmed with the 'problem' of looking after OVC, many parents cannot contribute adequately to the school development fund (SDF) on which clusters depend to function. Under the current provision of resources and in the absence of a specific budget for clusters, schools and clusters with the capacity to collect a high

SDF cope better than those with a high-population of OVC, perpetuating imbalances in developing quality education among schools.

Respondents also argue that most NGOs have the tendency of donating to schools that are regarded as 'good schools' based on their performance. Many of these so-called good schools, which are mostly urban, semi-urban or privately owned schools, are actually good because they have the capacity to function given the facilities and financial support. However, this criterion makes it difficult for schools and clusters in the remote areas to attract sponsorship and funding from big companies and NGOs. Another factor is that with limited resources and better working conditions (e.g. lack of housing, better infrastructures, poor road facilities etc.), most primary and combined schools in remote areas and disadvantaged communities with poor socio-economic status find it difficult to attract well-qualified personnel to their schools and clusters. Respondents therefore suggest that NGOs sponsorship should be allocated to cluster centres where 'much-needed' resources will be shared equally.

Stakeholders in the study also feel that although they have learnt a lot since the SCS introduction, there is still a lack of required skills and abilities among some cluster members. It is indicated that some cluster members, especially teachers and parents, do not fully understand the SCS and how it should operate, especially in the context of decentralisation. Respondents also feel that the lack of continuous induction and training, staff development and management learning programmes at cluster level compromises the quality of education in clusters.

The study concludes that there is a need to build the capacity of clusters and their members both intellectually, structurally and physically so as to manage change. Harris (2002) argued that both internal and external supports are needed to ensure change and educational improvement in systems or organisations. Harris argues that in the process of reform and improvement one of the most difficult tasks is to sustain change over time. She therefore emphasised that while it is possible for schools (as learning organisations) to improve, their capacity for learning and full operation are enhanced through external support and drive (Harris, 2002, pp. 44, 57). This implies that the system support needs to be strengthened in order to sustain improvement;

otherwise the benefits and successes gained through the SCS “can be short-lived and fragile in difficult or challenging circumstances” (Clarke, 2005, p. 95).

6.3 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study have relevance for the practice of educational leadership and management in organisations that are in the throes of reform. They give insight into how organisational members experience and regard change brought to them by policies. Based on the perceptions of stakeholders, especially CCPs, the study uncovers important guidelines in terms of responsiveness to change which can be encouraged and emulated in other initiatives. The type of leadership and management thinking in the SCS, the organisational learning that evolved afterwards and the benefits experienced all provide a useful foundation for capacity development and continuity.

In the wake of the publication of the Namibian National Standards and Performance Indicators “aimed at fostering improvement for quality educational delivery, while striving for increased performances”, this study can play a role in providing a picture of how the SCS is unfolding, albeit in a limited case study (Namibia, MOE, 2005a, pp. 1-2). The study points out where the strengths for preservation lie, highlights good practice by cluster members and reveals the potential threats that need to be addressed in order to obtain overall quality of education. Although it is a case study of two clusters only, the study provides potentially useful information to other cluster members and CCPs elsewhere who are almost certainly experiencing similar successes and frustrations.

As a developing country in a global village, Namibia is currently undergoing dramatic reform to keep up with the universally experienced demand of dealing with change. It has set itself a very ambitious target, ‘Vision 2030’, that calls for equitable social development through the Education and Training Sector Improvement Programme (ETSIP). The critical priorities of ETSIP are amongst others:

building system equity, quality and efficiency; strengthening the system delivery capacity; ... strengthening the national knowledge and innovation system; and improving the quality and effectiveness of national knowledge management systems (Namibia, MOE, 2006a, pp. 1, 4).

If these sectoral goals are to be realised, there should be awareness of current management practices and leadership thinking of stakeholders in education towards change, particularly those at grassroots level. This study hopes to contribute towards creating this awareness, allowing both system planners and system implementers a platform to engage in issues which concern them.

The study also hopes to add value to the practice of decentralisation in managing resources together with other line ministries. It adds a voice to current Namibian research in the field of Educational Leadership and Management, with the potential to influence practice by practitioners.

6.4 Limitations of the Study

Given the importance of the SCS in Namibian education, a study covering more centres would clearly be more valuable. The scope of this study was influenced by the fact that this project was driven by the academic imperative of acquiring a Masters degree. Being a part-time student, my responsibilities at work did not allow me time to cover more centres. It is a qualitative case study conducted in two clusters of a particular circuit in the Omusati Region. The Omusati region being a vast region with about forty-six clusters stretched in eight circuits, the findings of this research cannot be generalised statistically.

The focus of this study was to investigate perceptions of the key implementers of the SCS (CCPs, teachers and parents). The contribution of Resource Teachers and Advisory Teachers who are involved in the assessment and monitoring of teaching and professional development through training and workshops clearly would have added some value to the study. Nevertheless, their absence does not detract from the validity and richness of the data I gained from the respondents involved.

By nature qualitative case studies are not generalisable because they focus on specific cases within a given context. Gillham (2000, p. 10) explains that “qualitative case study methods are aimed at the kind of evidence that enables the researcher to understand the meaning of what is going on”. Gillham also argues that the case study method is useful because its “methods can illuminate issues and turn up possible explanations” unique to the situation studied; thus it is essentially “a search for meaning” (*ibid.*). In this study I wanted to view the SCS case from the perspective of those directly involved on a daily basis. According to Yin (1993, p. 79) “generalisation of the results from ... case study design is made to theory and not to population”. The fact that what was uncovered resonates so strongly with relevant literature is therefore significant, and helps to render the leadership and management practices contributing to the effective functioning of cluster centres identified in this study useful for implementation elsewhere.

6.5 Recommendation for Practice

According to Bolman and Deal in Bush (2003),

organisations are complex, surprising, deceptive, and ambiguous; they are formidably difficult to understand and manage. We have to rely on the tools at hand, including whatever ideas and theories we have about what organisations are and how they work (Bush, 2003, pp. 23-24).

It is even more difficult to manage organisations such as schools during times of change, especially when it is at a systems level with external influences. I therefore believe that my study would offer support for educational leaders, managers and practitioners’ participative management practices, and make the following recommendations:

- It is a matter of urgency that a national policy that formalises the SCS and paves the way for its full implementation and optimal function is developed. Formalising the SCS will ensure the sustainability of the good

benefits earned and enhance accountability and efficiency in managing clusters.

- The CCP position should be incorporated into the public service within the teaching structure, as a promotional rank with a salary value higher than that of an ordinary principal. Proper remuneration of CCPs may enhance job satisfaction, increase commitment to work and improve service delivery.
- Allocation of specific budgets to cluster centres needs to be prioritised to ensure proper functionality of clusters and effectiveness in operation.
- Provision of resources, infrastructure and other technical support to cluster centres needs to be strengthened and the mechanism of resource allocation needs to be revisited. The allocation and distribution of resources to clusters and schools should address inequality in the resourcing currently experienced in schools, to achieve real equity and improve the quality of education across the board.
- It is also necessary to establish a clear-cut framework for sponsorship by international donor agencies and local NGOs that guides sponsors to focal locations (clusters) where resources can be equally shared and better utilised. The framework will address and help redress the imbalances in resource allocation by preventing unnecessary overlap in resource distribution and save a good deal of money for other needs.
- There is an urgent need to strengthen the system support on a continual basis by providing professional assistance through cluster-based workshops, training, and developing management learning programmes for all cluster members.
- There is a great need to develop a tailor-made programme for cluster leadership and management in the Namibian curriculum. Alternatively a course component on cluster management and leadership could be incorporated in the existing management courses currently offered by institutions of higher learning such as UNAM. This will provide aspirant CCPs and other educational managers with theoretical knowledge relevant to practice in education. Additionally the programme would also provide

both existing and aspiring CCP and educational managers with managerial skills to resolve practical problems in schools/clusters.

- Leadership is an “observable, learnable set of practices” accompanied by the qualities of building relationships through trust and empowering others (Bennis et al., 2001, pp. 82-85). Hence, in addition to cluster specific training, CCPs need opportunities to develop awareness of ‘self’ and ‘others’ potential leadership. Thus they need courses which engage with current theories of organisational leadership and management as these would help to develop CCPs’ capacity to lead and manage their clusters effectively.
- Proper mechanisms should be put in place to address the teaching load of CCPs. Aligning the number of periods in the classroom with other CCPs responsibilities at their schools and within clusters will ensure that reform strategies are not disadvantaging learners but rather catering for them. It would also create a more balanced workload for CCPs to increase effectiveness in performance and better service delivery.
- Important structures in the SCS, such as those of Cluster Boards, should be established in all circuits, as these structures play an influential role in school and cluster governance and increase parental involvement in education. Proper management skills and support through training should be provided to these Boards continuously.

6.6 Suggestions for Future Research

In order to develop a broader understanding of the SCS concept, further (larger-scale) research is needed to explore the perceptions of all stakeholders at all levels. This could include getting the views of those who plan change programmes (PQA), those who provide support for implementation (such as regional and circuit officials) and key implementers and learners. This kind of research has the potential to provide a broader view of why the system is needed and how it can be implemented, supported, and accepted.

It is also important to explore the impact of peer learning among teachers and learners as well as schools in the clusters.

6.7 Conclusion

The SCS is a very useful tool for change and reform, and it holds the potential for providing the quality education development outlined by ETSIP to achieve Namibia's Vision 2030. The system engages schools with their internal and external environment, creating communities of learning. It emerges as a powerful unifying approach that enables integration of people with diversified perceptions, knowledge and skills to work for a common cause. This study concludes that if current challenges experienced in its implementation are addressed, the SCS can contribute greatly to the improvement of education in Namibian schools.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview questions for the Cluster Centre Principals (CCPs)

1. What are your views on the School Clustering System? (Possible follow up question: what are the benefits of the SCS?)
2. What are your roles as a Cluster Centre Principal?
3. What challenges do you face as a CCP? (Any practical experiences you would like to highlight?)
4. From your point of view, what are the hindering factors for the implementation of the SCS in selected Cluster Centres? (Any particular examples?)
5. Given a number of hindering factors to the SCS as you mentioned earlier, what would you suggest as possible ways to improve the implementation of the SCS?
6. You have been a CCP for about years since the implementation of the SCS in the region.
 - a) What makes the system work?
 - b) What fails the system? or What makes the system not to work?

Appendix B1

Interview questions for the former Inspector of Education in X Circuit

1. Before the implementation of the SCS, a number of workshops were held to train CCPs. What progress has this contributed to the effective management (operation) of the SCS in X circuit more particularly in the selected Cluster Centres? (Possible follow up question if there are differences: Why?)
2. What are the implications of the SCS to management practices in our schools generally and particularly in Cluster Centres
3. What benefits does the SCS have to school principals, management and school boards?
4. What advice or recommendation would you make on the betterment of the SCS implementation?

Or

4. The Ministry of Education is reviewing the draft policy on the SCS; as a former Inspector of Education with experiences in the piloting and implementation of the SCS, what advice or recommendations will you give or add as possible improvement to the SCS?

Appendix B3

Interview questions for the Current Inspector of Education in X Circuit

1. Before the implementation of the SCS, a number of workshops were held to train CCPs. What progress has this contributed to the effective management (operation) of the SCS in X circuit more particularly in selected Cluster Centres? (Possible follow up question if there are any differences. Why)
2. What are the implications of the SCS to management practices in our schools generally and particularly in Cluster Centres?
3. What benefits does the SCS have to school principals, management and school boards?
4. What advice or recommendation would you make on the betterment of the SCS implementation?

Or

5. The Ministry of Education is reviewing the draft policy on the SCS; as a former CCP of a Cluster Centre in Y Circuit with experiences in the piloting and implementation of the SCS, and recently appointed as an Inspector of Education in X circuit, what advice or recommendations will you give or add as possible improvement to the SCS?

Appendix C1

Interview questions for the focus group discussion

1. How do we view the SCS (benefits & successes)?
2. What are the challenges with the SCS and how can they be overcome?
3. What are our roles in overcoming the challenges?

Appendix C2

Focus group discussion plan

Start: Good Afternoon everybody

Introduction:

I am Lydia P. Aipinge, working for the Ministry of Education as an Education Officer in Omusati region. I am also studying part-time with Rhodes University.

Now can we all please introduce ourselves, which is by our names, school and position at school.

What brought us here today or rather why I have invited you all is to have a chat or a discussion on our perceptions of the cluster system since its introduction in 2001/2.

The School Clustering System requires the grouping of schools into clusters, each with 5-7 schools. One school in each cluster is selected as a Cluster Centre such as X for example, and the principal of the school serves as a head of the Cluster Centre.

Basically our discussion will be based on our perceptions of the system.

- a) How do we view the SCS in terms of benefits, success, challenges?
- b) Our roles as teachers, School Board members and Principals in overcoming the challenges
- c) Recommendations

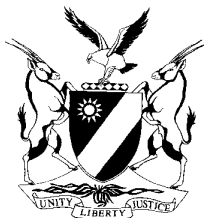
Appendix D

Site Visit Programme at selected Cluster Centres

Days & Dates	Activities
Monday 13.03.2006/27.03.2006	Introduction & Orientation Document Analysis (later)
Tuesday 14.03.2006/28.03.2006	Document Analysis continues Interview the CCP (afternoon or whenever possible)
Wednesday 15.03.2006/29.03.2006	Document Analysis continues Focus group discussion (afternoon)
Thursday 16.03.2006/30.03.2006	Follow-up Verification of data/other information
Friday 17.03.2006/31.03.2006	Wrap up
NB: <i>Flexibility is possible</i>	

Appendix E

Permission letter to do Research in Omusati Region



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION:
OMUSATI REGION

Tel: (065) 242516

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Private Bag 2020

ONDANGWA

NAMIBIA

Enq: E. T. Nghitwikwa

10 January 2006

To: Ms L. P. Aipinge
Ongwediva Teachers Resource Centre
Private Bag 5550
Oshakati

Subject: Permission to do Research in Omusati Region

Your request to do research in Omusati region dated 22 November 2005 refers. We are pleased to inform you that your request has been approved and permission has been granted to carry on with your research activities.

The circuit and the clusters concerned have been notified already via the Inspector of Education. You may contact the Inspector of Education for further arrangements.

Sincerely yours,

E. T. Nghitwikwa
Regional Education Officer

