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EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Stakeholders' perceptions of the cluster system in a secondary school in Rundu, Namibia

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ABSTRACT

Since independence in 1990, various efforts have been made to improve the quality and management of Namibian schools, including the Basic Education Project (BEP-Project). In collaboration with the Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), the BEP-Project has supported the implementation of important Government programs, such as Lower Primary reform and the cluster system. In 1995 the BEP-Project began to address educational needs in the Rundu education region. It was believed that Rundu had in the past been the most neglected region, especially with regard to education. The school cluster system was devised to facilitate new ways of education service delivery and to address the question of improving education standards.

The purpose of this research is to answer the question: "How do the management and staff of a secondary school in the Rundu region of education experience a school cluster system?" To this end, the research seeks to determine what potential the cluster system holds and how that may be realised, and to also establish whether there is any evidence of change in management practices. A case study method has been employed to gain insight into the cluster system as a management tool. Ten respondents, all of whom have been employed at the school in question for a considerable period of time, were interviewed before and after the implementation of the cluster system.

The research disclosed that disparities and tension in the school were legacies of the colonial education system, but that the cluster system had bridged the gap and enhanced uniformity and cooperation. Sharing of ideas on educational issues and constant interaction created a conducive environment for academic performance. The case study further disclosed that parental involvement in decision making is still a cause for concern and that the cluster system has not yet addressed this issue. The study has shown that decentralisation has taken place and that rural schools are no longer operating in isolation. A lack of

innovative ideas has hampered training as a cluster activity. From the research, it is evident that schools have previously operated on an individual basis, but that the cluster system has created the opportunity for schools to interact on a regular basis.

This study is timely and of national importance. I anticipate that this study will be of use to policy makers in making decisions for the future development of the cluster system.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This chapter discusses the context that necessitated the research on the cluster system, gives reasons as to why I was interested in doing the research and describes an outline of the topic: "An investigation into how the management and staff of a secondary school in the Rundu region of education in Namibia experience a school cluster system". Following this discussion is a brief summary of the research approach. In this regard, I also touch on methods and tools employed to facilitate this research. In the final paragraphs of this chapter, I provide an outline of how this thesis is structured.

My data search suggests that very little research, if any, has been done on the cluster system in Namibia. Since I would like to make a contribution in this regard, I conducted a case study to test the perceptions and experiences of people concerned.

1.1 Context of the research

The Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture (MBEC) of the Government of the Republic of Namibia adopted the broad policy objectives of access, equity, equality and democracy immediately after the independence of Namibia in March 1990 (MEC 1993:19). To achieve these objectives, the Ministry vigorously endeavours to address the inequities, disparities and tensions that are the legacy of the colonial education system (MEC 1993:19). To achieve the broad goal of education for all, the Government has decided to take decision making, administration and the management of schools closer to the people, and by so doing improve the education system and upgrade the quality of Namibian schools (MEC 1993:168).

Namibia has a centralised educational system (Dittmar *et al.* 2002:4). At the top of the ladder is the head office with thirteen education offices countrywide. Each of these regional offices has 3 to 10 circuits and the inspector of schools supervises and serves schools in each circuit. The number of schools in each circuit varies from 25 to 50 schools. A number of factors, such as the diverse responsibilities of inspectors and the long and bad roads to schools, hamper effective service delivery of the inspector. According to Dittmar *et al.* (2002:4), research done in 1995 revealed that, on average, each school was inspected about every two and half years, while some schools had never been inspected. The Namibian education authority, having experienced all these shortcomings, considered a new approach to managing education in Namibia. Hence, the cluster system holds great promise in providing a new way forward.

Since the independence of Namibia in March 1990, various efforts have been made to improve the quality and management of schools, namely the Basic Education Project (BEP-Project). In collaboration with the Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), the BEP-Project has supported the implementation of important Government programs, such as the Lower Primary Reform and Efficiency Programs (BEP 2002:3).

In 1995 the BEP-Project began to address educational needs in the Rundu education region. It was believed that in the past Rundu had been the most neglected region especially with regard to education (BEP 2002:3). The school cluster system was devised to facilitate new methods of education service delivery and to address the question of improving education standards in the Rundu Region (BEP 2002:3).

In their review report, Mendelsohn and Ward (2001:8-9) identified the following four factors as necessitating the introduction of the cluster system:

- The low level of management support given to schools;

- A great need for teacher support;
- An obvious need for greater levels of participation by all stakeholders in making and implementing decisions; and
- Most schools work in isolation.

I anticipate that this study will be of use to policy makers in making decisions concerning the future development of the cluster system. According to Stake (1994:245), a case study can be influential in public policy formulation and practice. Its value for practitioners and policy makers lies in its rich descriptive account to which readers can relate their own experience. Stake found that vicarious experience is an important basis for refining action options and expectations.

1.2 Motivation for this research

By virtue of my appointment as an inspector of education, I am personally involved in the implementation of the cluster system in the Keetmanshoop region of education, and have had to facilitate the implementation of a cluster system and a Circuit Management Committee. The Circuit Management Committee consists of the inspector of education and the principals of cluster centres. My interest was triggered by the following:

- The Keetmanshoop Basic Education Project Team (BEP-Team) was blamed for their reluctance in creating a functional cluster system in the region and I was interested in determining why GTZ insisted on establishing the cluster system throughout Namibia. To this end, I wanted to know what benefit the cluster system offers school management.
- With the recommendation of the Presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Training (119:70) that: "Wherever it is geographically possible, the cluster system should be adopted". The cluster system being so widely advocated in educational circles in Namibia and the

Ministry envisaging expanding the system into other educational regions, I was interested in finding out why the system was so highly rated.

It was due to the accusation of reluctance that the Inspectors of Education in the Keetmanshoop Region of Education decided to travel to Rundu and Katima Mulilo to familiarise themselves with the status of the cluster system. During this visit it was learned that, according to communications with colleagues in the two regions of Rundu and Katima, the cluster system was at an advanced stage and functional. Prior to this visit to Rundu and Katima, many success stories of the cluster system were related in workshops and meetings.

1.3 Research Goal

The purpose of this research is to investigate how the school management and staff of a Rundu secondary school experience their school cluster system. The aim was to determine:

- What the management and staff think of the cluster system;
- What potential they think the cluster system holds and how that might be realised; and
- Whether there is any evidence of change in management practices such as communication and decision making, as well as organisational outcomes such as staff satisfaction, a positive school climate and academic school results since the introduction of the cluster system.

1.4 Research Methodology

The interpretive paradigm provided the research framework for this case study, as I wish to understand the meaning that people attach to the cluster system as a phenomenon (Cantrell 1993:83); I intend to investigate the experiences and perceptions of teachers, heads of departments and the principal at a Rundu secondary school.

Yin (cited in Smith 1999:1) neatly defines the case study as: "An empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context". Smith (1999:3) makes the point that: "In general, a case study is appropriate when one is interested in detailed information specific to a particular case". I confined my research to a Rundu secondary school and employed a purposeful sampling strategy to select information-rich sources, especially among the staff of the chosen school. "The power and logic of purposeful sampling is that few cases studied in-depth yield many insights about the topic" (Schumacher and McMillan 1993:378). The Inspector of Education in the Rundu education region helped me to identify a secondary school in the circuit that was established before the implementation of the cluster system. The principal of the school directed me to other resourceful members of his staff, as well as members of the School Board. The GTZ representative in Namibia and the Director of Education of the Rundu Region were also approached for background information on the implementation of the cluster system.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in order to develop an in-depth understanding of the respondents' experience of the cluster system, in accordance with my research goals. The interviews enabled me to gather descriptive data in the subject's own words (Cantrell 1993:96). All the interviews were conducted on an individual basis to ensure maximum participation by the respondents and were captured on audiotape. Since all the respondents were conversant in English, the interviews were conducted in English.

I also studied a range of documents that would provide valuable information about the introduction and operation of the cluster system, for example reports, files, speeches, policy documents, journals, minutes of cluster meetings and minutes of school board meetings. I asked the Principal and the Circuit Inspector to grant me access to such documents, in order to support, verify, clarify or qualify the data obtained from the interviews (Cantrell 1993:97).

I accurately transcribed the audio recordings and used the interview questions as a guide in coding the content of interviews and documents. The purpose of coding is to: "Identify categories or themes based upon patterns and ideas that emerge from the data" (Cantrell 1993:98).

The purpose of the research was explained to each participant in order to elicit his or her willing co-operation. Other matters, such as the use of an audiotape, were also discussed with the participants. The issue of anonymity was emphasised and respondents were assured that no name or identity would be revealed.

1.5 Thesis outline

Chapter 1 outlines the reasons which attracted me to research the school cluster system. An outline of the context of the research and the research methodology is given. The process that facilitated this research is discussed and the relevance of this research for policymakers in making decisions concerning the future of the cluster system also comes to the fore.

Chapter two presents an overview of literature which is relevant to the research question and topic. This literature chapter informs the reader how the cluster system was applied in different countries, and especially in third world countries.

Chapter three deals with research methodology, here the research paradigm that I have employed to do this research has been addressed and since this research is a case study, the essence of the case study method and the use of semi-structured interviews and documents as research tools has also been discussed. The chapter also notes the validity, ethical issues and the potential limitations of the study.

Chapter four presents the raw data without any comment in terms of theory and literature.

Chapter five analyses the data in terms of the research goal and question. Focus is on the main findings and key threads that have been uncovered. Findings based on data presentation and a comparison with literature claims are discussed.

Chapter six is a summary of the main findings, recommendations and comments based on these findings. This chapter is concluded by discussing the limitations and the potential value of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture (MEC) of the government of the Republic of Namibia adopted the broad policy objectives of access, equity, equality and democracy immediately after the independence of Namibia. To achieve these objectives, the Ministry vigorously endeavours to address the inequities, disparities and tensions that are legacies of the colonial education system (MEC 1993:19). To achieve the broad goal of education for all, the government has decided to take decision making, administration and the management of schools closer to the people, and by so doing improve the education system and upgrade the quality of Namibian schools (MEC 1993:168).

Decentralisation and democratisation theoretically underpin the cluster system approach to school management. It is within this framework that I now discuss these two concepts.

2.2 Decentralisation of education management and government

Dittmar *et al.* (2002:29) argue that the major goals of: "Towards Education for All", such as access, equity, equality and democracy, provide a useful policy context for the Namibian education system within which the cluster system may be considered. The cluster system is in line with current educational management thinking concerning the decentralisation of education services. Decentralisation strengthens the element of democratic participation which promotes the involvement of teachers, parents, school communities and learners in the education process (Dittmar *et al.* 2002:30). Decentralisation is thus taken down to the level of schools and communities and not only to a regional level.

With regard to decentralisation policy, the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture has the following to say (Project Planning Workshop 2002:110):

In the light of decentralisation policy, our planning should be geared toward expansion and orientation in all thirteen political regions. This will then be in line with our decentralisation process. The kind of assistance will be varied, based on region-specific needs.

In trying to define decentralisation, Riddle (1998:4) analyses decentralisation as a policy response based on at least the following four factors:

- Decentralisation as a means of search for more 'efficient' solutions to the provision of educational services implies diversification.
- A reaction to bureaucratisation.
- A move towards increased democratisation and participation.
- A response to conditions of financial austerity.

In developing a framework for understanding educational decentralisation, Sayed (2002:35) argues that the success and efficacy of decentralisation is measured differently according to the following perspectives, which are not mutually exclusive. Nor would a policy of decentralisation be advocated for simply one of these reasons:

- **Public administration perspectives**

For those approaching decentralisation from this perspective, the success will be measured by the extent to which the provision of educational services and goods are more efficient as a consequence of the delegation and decentralisation of educational authority.

- **Political perspective**

For those approaching decentralisation from a political perspective, the success is measured by the extent to which political involvement and participation is enhanced; in other words, the extent to which a state redistributes authority and power.

- **A pedagogic perspective**

A pedagogic perspective would seek to locate the advocacy of the policy in relation to improvements in teaching and learning; in other words, the extent to which the quality of learning is enhanced.

- **Economic perspective**

From the economic perspective, decentralisation is a viable strategy if it generates additional resources and results in an improvement of their allocation.

Sayed (2002:35) concludes that: "A commitment to decentralisation in education is often associated with a broader policy of decentralisation in general in the public sectors. In other words, educational decentralisation normally accompanies decentralisation of most areas of social, economic and political activity".

In his overview of decentralisation literature, Rhoten finds that the most common approaches from the analysis of the education decentralisation are either technical or political in orientation (2000:595). With regard to a technical approach, Rhoten (2000:595) argues that there is a misleading linear assumption that education decentralisation follows a causal model in which an objective policy leads to clear and discernable outcomes. According to Rhoten (2000:596), the technical analytic approach fails to assess decentralisation as a process of social and political change. On the other hand Whirt and Kirt (1982, cited in Rhoten 2000:596) argue that within a political approach, the practitioners and researchers seek to find relationships between public interest in education

and the sources and course of public decisions regarding education policy. Rhoten (2000:596) furthermore states:

Consequently, political approaches to education decentralisation tend to examine the conflict over the decision to decentralise, the sources of such conflicts, the possibility of resolving them, and modes for resolving or, at least, managing them. In this regard political analytic models focus mainly on tensions and negotiations between national government and, large education bureaucracies, and/or well-organized interest groups rather than on individual decisions and actions.

Cohen and Peterson (cited in Rhoten 2000:596) argue that purely political analyses to decentralisation are often guided by the 'naïve assumption' that education is tied into hard-wired, national, socio-political systems comprised of clearly defined interests rather than borne out by local histories representing different expectations and assumptions. Smith (cited in Rhoten 2000:596) argues that decentralisation cannot be a political strategy in and of itself because its outcome necessarily depends on the politics, economics, and sociology of a particular locality.

Sayed (2002:36) argues that decentralisation in an educational context should promote improvement in the quality of learning and educational management. The establishment of democratically elected school governing bodies in a country may be a worthwhile achievement in terms of extending participation and enhancing democracy and learning. Sayed (2002:37) further says that one of the decentralisation arenas is at the institutional level.

Sayed (2002:37) also questions the nature of democracy and the desirability of transforming control of different levels of management and argues that only managerial and administrative autonomy in many cases is granted to schools or parents. This is in line with the Namibian approach to the cluster system as a decentralisation tool.

Rhoten (2000:594) says that: "Without the participation of local society, the institutional centrality of the new sub-national neoliberal state and market was not compatible with democracy and the politics of globalisation", and Sayed (2002:37) goes on to say that educational decentralisation does not always extend participation to all. To this effect, he identified the following two versions of participation and democracy, which have potential contradictory policy implications (Sayed 2002:37-38):

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

Rundu report (1996:2), Rhoten (2000) and MEC (1993) define decentralisation: "As the devolution of authority and power from the centre to the lower tiers of the formal government system or land to other stakeholders in education like parents, school owners, local communities, etc". Policy makers and citizens (MEC 1993:168) should however determine the nature of decentralisation. It is further argued that the improving of the education system and quality of schools are at a local level (MEC 1993:168) and decentralisation is thus the vehicle to reach the local communities for their contributions.

According to the Task Team report of the Ministry of Education in South Africa (Department of Education 1996:16), education management development as the key to decentralisation and transformation requires a broad and more inclusive understanding and further argues that it must embrace the following three important spheres of activity:

- Ethos and practice of management: articulating and operationalising the principles of good management practice in South Africa.
- Organisation development: developing and sustaining effective structures, systems and procedures for improved management.
- People development: empowering managers by building their professional competencies and providing on-the-job support to them.

The Basic Education Project Planning Workshop (2002:12) says that, in order to support policy development and strategic management, it would be necessary to plan capacity building, leadership and management training. In line with this argument, Dalin (1998, cited in Jafta 2002:4) views the overall development of school culture and organisation as a pre-requisite for the success of decentralisation. Therefore Dalin argues as follows (Jafta 2002:4):

What is certain is that decentralisation will never be an effective force unless the individual school culture is changed. Elements such as the annual development plan, internal evaluation and similar exercises can easily become just that: vain exercises, and not strategic tasks for a school in development. If decentralisation is to be experienced and its potential exploited, this must take place in terms of the unique way in which each school functions.

Education in Namibia has been decentralised since independence in 1990, where seven education regions were established. These education regions have now been increased to thirteen to serve the political regions which, in turn, serve the decentralised functions of the central government.

Democratic participation of all stakeholders is necessary if decentralisation should be brought closer to the people. In the following section, I discuss the cluster system as a handy tool to foster better management strategies for the management of schools.

2.3 The cluster system approach to school management

Mendelsohn and Ward ((2001:7) describe school clustering as a system that requires grouping of schools into clusters, normally consisting of between five and seven schools. Nachtigal (1985) sees clustering as a strategy that can be implemented in a wide variety of settings and that can address a range of diverse needs. In support of this view, Mendelsohn and Ward (2001:7) are of the opinion that the cluster system has evolved over the years as a means of addressing the need for better education management at local levels.

In answering the question: "What is a school cluster?" Dittmar *et al.* (2002: 4) give the following description: "A cluster is a group of schools that are geographically as close and accessible to each other as possible".

- Each cluster normally consists of between five and seven schools.
- One school in each group is selected to serve as the cluster centre.
- The cluster centre should be as central and accessible as possible to its satellite schools; it should have adequate facilities and ideally be situated at a development centre where other social and commercial services are available.
- A cluster should set good examples for management and teaching practices.
- The principal of a cluster should be a strong and committed manager, with a vision that can extend beyond his or her school to the needs of all schools and the community in the cluster.
- A member of management structures can or should support the cluster system.

The Minister of Basic Education, Sport and Culture indicates the following on school cluster systems (Project Planning Workshop 2002:112):

The school cluster system would be the core and it would be necessary to look at the relationship that would exist between the circuit education management, the education advisory services and the conduct of activities at circuit and cluster levels.

According to Nachtigal and Parker (1990:1), formal clusters were necessary when undertaking major projects such as developing programs or curricula, redesigning schools, or cooperating with colleges or universities.

The cluster system was developed and is geared towards addressing quality, improvement and change in education management. The clustering of schools has become a world trend in enhancing the quality of education. According to the World Learning Project (2002:1), the purpose of clustering in Cambodia was to assist clustered officials, teachers and community representatives to implement, evaluate and follow-up on basic improvements like helping each cluster analyse and prioritise its own essential needs such as training material, library books and teacher training. The clustering of primary schools in England and Wales, especially in rural areas, was intended to improve the learning experience for pupils and to create and share a larger resource base and improved facilities (Ribchester and Edwards 1989:8). Similarly, in third world countries, the cluster system is also geared to facilitate the sharing of scarce resources more efficiently (Bray 1987:1).

Chopra (1994:37) sees clustering as a peer support group system. He further elaborates by saying that: "Under the cluster plan, principals are grouped according to shared concerns and philosophies rather than by arbitrary assignment. The principals are cross-geographically clustered to help principals not only identify the challenges and opportunities in a particular attendance area, but also from a district-wide perspective. One should understand that clustering is not by accident or arbitrary action, but is a deliberate formula to enhance educational quality". Chopra (1994:38) identifies the following advantages of the cluster approach:

- Participants share concerns and develop bonds with one another, e.g. how to manage conflict, how to effectively involve teachers and how to deal with staff members' reactions to change.
- Members are able to focus on concerns expressed in clusters and may organise joint building in-services to address common concerns.
- Participants feel safe in sharing the results of their efforts.
- The cluster approach allows principals to feel free to exchange ideas.
- The small-group setting allows for open interaction and unlimited sharing.
- The cluster concept can help principals develop a sense of family and create an enhanced trust level with one another.
- The cluster approach can furnish new principals with an effective personal and professional support system.
- The cluster approach provides an opportunity for principals to emerge as catalysts of change and leaders for educational improvement.

Dittmar *et al.* (2002:13) also discuss the implications the system has for management. They are of the opinion that clusters work best when accompanied by decentralised and participating decision-making. The cluster system is theoretically underpinned by decentralisation. The Deputy Minister of Basic Education, Sport and Culture has the following to say with regard to the cluster system (Project Planning Workshop: 2002:110):

We are all in agreement that the Cluster System contributes greatly to the government policy on decentralisation, equally augments our efforts in meeting our four broad goals on democracy, equity, access and quality. We therefore need to harness and midwife this system to ensure its successful implementation.

The cluster system in Namibia was started initially in Rundu and has been extended to all regions under the auspices of the Basic Education Project in collaboration with GTZ (Dittmar *et al.* 2002:4). However, much still needs to be done to make the cluster system an effective management tool.

In the following section, I discuss democratic education systems and management with regard to change in management practices.

2.4 Democratic education systems and management

2.4.1 Educational Democracy

Democracy is one of the four major goals of the Namibian Education System Board. The MEC (1993:41) argues that: "To develop education for democracy, we must develop democratic education". The MEC (1993:41) has created the following framework to achieve this goal:

- Democracy must therefore not be a set of lessons in our schools, but rather a central purpose of education at all levels.
- Our learners must study how democratic societies operate and the obligations and rights of their citizens.
- To teach about democracy, our teachers and our education system as a whole must practice democracy.
- A democratic education system is organized around broad participation in decision-making and the clear accountability of those who are our leaders.
- In democratic education, for a democratic society, teachers must be active creators and managers of the learning environment and not its masters or caretakers.

Educational democracy is regarded as the involvement of teachers, parents, school communities and learners in the education process (Dittmar *et al.* 2002:30). Dittmar *et al.* (2002:30) are of the opinion that this is possible when decentralisation is also focused on local communities. According to MEC (1993) a democratic education system is characterized by broad participation in decision making (p. 41). By means of democratic action, the local schools organised themselves to be active participants in school governance, active contributors to

discussions of school management and administration, and active evaluators of the quality of instruction and learning (MEC 1993:42). Guttman (1990, cited in Kruger, 2000:88) defines democratic education as follows: "Educational democracy aims at the empowerment of free and equal citizens, people who are willing and able to share together in shaping their own society". The Task Team Report (Department of Education 1996:29) states that those who best understand the needs of students and communities should make the decisions.

The core function of the cluster system is to involve local people or to enhance site-based management. According to Chopra (1994:40), site-based management sets the tone for principals to meet in the cluster setting to address circular, instructional and management issues. However, the cluster system may only flourish if the principles of democracy and decentralisation are enforced. To respond to this requirement successfully, the cluster is structured to ensure that information flows from cluster level to circuit level and then on to the regional level so that checks and balances are properly in place. (Dittmar *et al.* 2002:30):

- Cluster management committees are made up of all cluster principals.
- Circuit management committee comprising cluster principals and the inspector.
- School board committees representing clusters.

The Presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Training (1999:55) emphasises the importance of a school board for the management of a school. The commission further argues that a school board is a very important provision and an important aspect of the democratisation of education (The Presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Training 1999:55). The report further suggests that proper training be given to the members of the school board and that where a cluster system is in operation, in addition to the individual school board, a board for the general management of the entire cluster should be established to ensure the efficient management of the cluster.

MEC (1993:42) says that democracy is not only for local communities, but is also for teachers and student unions to play active roles along-side communities in shaping, guiding and accessing it. With regard to democracy and democratic participation, Riddle (1998:4) has the following to say:

Democratisation and increased participation, especially in the wake of the demise of the former command economies, has become a theme promoted both from within developing countries and from outside through international donors. Enhanced school-community relations, collaboration and participation of parents, and in some cases, school self-management, have all been added to the agenda of decentralisation.

The main aim of the cluster system, as supported by democracy and underpinned by decentralisation, is to improve the quality of education and make the schools effective. In this regard effectiveness as an element of educational decentralisation is discussed.

2.5 Effective schools and school improvement

2.5.1 Quality education

"We are all learners. Learning is a lifelong activity. Improving the quality of our schools is a responsibility we share. We all have a vital stake in the success of our efforts" (MEC 1993: 40). The cluster system was developed and is geared towards addressing the quality of education by involving the community in which education is taking place.

Since the 1970's Fujita (2000:1) argues that a new tide of education reform movements have emerged in many countries, including the USA and Japan. He quotes Clune and Whitte (1990) and White (1998) as saying that: "Prior to the 1980s, education reforms were orientated towards the establishment and expansion of the one best system of state-mandated, state-funded and state-provided education, whereas today's reform movements have attempted to move away from that model and created a decentralised, diversified and market- driven

system". Davies (2001:1) points out that Brian Caldwell is one of the original thinkers and contributors to the field of education leadership and management over the last twenty years. His works on self-managing schools with Spinks (200:1), charts the development of the global reform in this field. Educational reform, educational change and educational improvement address the issue of quality of education. Hopkins *et al.* (1996:1) describe school improvement as a distinct approach to educational change that enhances student outcomes as well as strengthening the school's capacity for managing improvement. To emphasise their approach to school improvement, Hopkins *et al.* (1996:12) identify five principles of improving the quality of education for all as follows:

- School improvement is a process that focuses on enhancing the quality of students' learning.
- The vision of the school should be one that is embraced by all members of the school community both learners and contributors.
- The school will see external pressures for change as important opportunities to secure internal priorities.
- The school will see to developing structures and creating conditions, which encourage collaboration and lead to the empowerment of individuals and groups.
- The school will seek to promote the view that enquiry and the monitoring and evaluation of quality is a responsibility, which all members of staff share.

Educational reform will not serve the purpose if it does not address the academic performance of learners. This can be achieved if the reform takes the community with it. Hopkins *et al.* (1996:27) say: "Success is associated with a sense of identification and involvement that extends beyond the teaching staff". To this effect, Cooperman (1999:1) speaks of collaborative management for shared decision-making among administrators, teachers and parents. In this regard, the task force report echoes the same notion and proposes an integrative and

collaborative education management (Department of Education 1996:30). Integrative in so far as it informs all management processes and outcomes in an organisational setting and collaborative in that it involves all staff and stakeholders (Department of Education 1996:30). Velzen *et al.* (1985 cited in De Jong (1999:52) define school improvement as a: "Systematic, sustained effort aimed at change in learning conditions and other related internal conditions in one or more schools, with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively".

Riddle (1982:2) is of the opinion that the last 30 years have seen dramatic changes in the provision of education in developing countries, although not all such transformation has led to development. He further argues that the political demand of the newly independent countries in the 1960's led to quantitative expansion. This was in reaction to the elite educational systems of the colonial administrations. The philosophy of this earlier period was that quantitative expansion should be tackled first and qualitative improvements will follow once the structure was in place, including buildings and teachers. In contrast to the 1960 approach, Riddle (1982:3) sees the current educational reform efforts as a reaction to quantitative expansion, which did not provide the envisaged solutions to the social and economic problems, experienced by developing countries. He is further of the opinion that locally managed schools should improve accountability to the communities they serve, and such greater accountability should lead to greater school improvement (Riddle 1982:4).

In his endeavour to describe an effective school, Fullan (1985:399) attempts to highlight some of the eight organisation variables that are typical of the characteristics of effective schools. These variables are district support, clear goals and high expectations of students, a system for monitoring performance and achievement, ongoing staff development, parental involvement and support, and an orderly and secure climate. However, Fullan (1985:400) argues that such

a list indicates neither how the factors (variable) operate nor how to implement them in a particular school.

Quality is one of the broad goals of Namibian education. It is therefore regarded as a major commitment to making schools good schools (MEC 1993:37). In his literature review, Jafra (2002:3) is of the opinion that countries adopt strong guidelines and policies to address the issue of quality education. The following are regarded as the framework in which this quality should be achieved to offer high quality, non-formal alternatives to formal schools (MEC1993: 37-40):

- Perhaps the most important challenge in improving the quality of our education system is to ensure that our teachers are well prepared for the major responsibilities they carry.
- It is also essential that our teachers see themselves as contributors to nation building and not simply workers who carry information between curriculum experts and learners.
- For teachers to be effective in structuring and managing the learning process, supervision must be supportive, not punitive. Principals, inspectors, subject specialists, and others must all see their role as using their expertise to improve what happens in the classrooms.
- We need also to reconsider what we mean by high quality education to be sure that we do not unthinkingly carry the values of education for the few into the era of education for all.
- Even at their best, most examinations assess only a limited range of achievements. We shall, of course, work to improve them.

- We must understand quality even more broadly. Access and equity are also measures of quality.
- As we broaden our understanding of high quality education, we must also address the concerns of those who fear that education for all will hold back our most gifted and energetic learners.
- We should look forward to the day when our curriculum experts and teachers can choose among a number of appropriate books, prepared by Namibian authors and illustrators. Our schools must be creative and innovative in producing their own materials.
- Another task in raising the quality of education is to improve the physical facilities.
- We can take advantage of the strategies that are appropriate to the local environment, perhaps using wood in some areas and sun dried bricks in others.

Jafta (2002:3) argues that: "The concern of quality in education has been accentuated by the dictates of a global economy". According to Caldwell and Spinks (1992, cited in Jafta 2002:3), many nations fear that they may fall behind unless their citizens are equipped with the required knowledge, skills and attitudes to compete in the new global reality.

2.5.2 School improvement

The most comprehensive and often quoted definition of school improvement, according to De Jong (1999:52), and also Hopkins *et al.*(1994) is the one based on the empirical work done by International School Improvement Project (ISIP):

School improvement is a systematic, sustained effort aimed at change in learning conditions and other related internal conditions in one or more schools, with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively. (Van Velzen *et al.* 1985:48)

MEC (1993) and Chopra (1994) mentioned good schools in their respective literature. Whereas MEC (1993:37) approached this issue from a quality perspective, Chopra (1994:40) approached it from the perspective of leadership. According to this approach, a good school is the reflection of the attitude and effort of a good principal. Chopra (1994:40) further argues that such a principal serves as a catalyst for bringing together a school's sense of mission, its priority for action, its strategies for meeting student needs and its high level of expectations. To this effect, the principal sees the potential for partnership efforts with parents and the community in a shared commitment for excellence, teacher performance, and student achievement Chopra (1994:40).

Riddle (1998:7) hints that school effectiveness and improvement as well as research and reform efforts are at a turning point, partly in response to an expanding and more comprehensive notions of quality. He further argues that educational reform research shows different ways in which quality has been understood and incorporated in reform strategies (Riddle 1998:7). He cites Botswana and Jordan as examples which shifted towards learner-centred rather than teacher-centred pedagogy (Riddle 1998:7). Similarly, Namibia after independence viewed teacher-centred instruction as inefficient and not consistent with education for all.

Hopkins *et al.* (1994:68) define school improvement as: "An approach to educational change that has the twin purpose of enhancing student achievement and strengthening the school's capacity for managing change". The cluster system is thus the right tool to create the right environment for school improvement strategies to effect change. They further see school improvement

as a long-term goal of moving towards the 'ideal type' of self-reviewing school, which implies that a school should be the centre of change (Hopkins *et al.* 1994:8).

Hargreaves and Hopkins (cited in Preedy 1993:34) share the same line of thinking and say that: "School improvement embodies the long-term goal of moving towards the vision of the 'problem solving' or 'thinking' school". They are further of the opinion that school improvement cannot simply be equated with educational change (Hargreaves and Hopkins (cited in Preedy 1993:68). Central to their argument is that school improvement is an effort to collaborate with schools in finding ways of enhancing student outcomes through specific changes in teaching approaches and the curriculum and strengthening the school's organisational ability to support the work of the teachers (Hargreaves and Hopkins (cited in Preedy 1993:68). They further argue that the roles of teachers, heads, governors, parents, support people and local authorities should be defined, harnessed and committed to the process of school improvement.

The educational change, according to Hopkins *et al.* (1996, cited in De Jong 1999:54) is that the field of school improvement is characterised by an emphasis on implementation strategies. They further suggest that one or more of the following features will be included in the implementation of a significant curriculum or organisational change: "Change in the structure and organisation of the school, for example timetabling or formation of new working group or new additional material, teacher acquiring new knowledge, adopting new behaviours of teaching style". According to Meyer (1996 cited in De Jong 1999:54), the neglect to implement these features was considered to be a primary reason for the failure of many large-scale reform programmers.

The school improvement strategy is also not without criticism. De Jong (1999:64) summarises the main limitations based on the critique of school improvement by West and Hopkins (1996,cited in De Jong 1996:64):

- School improvement initiatives tend to be limited to staff development.
- Not enough emphasis on strategies of change.
- An under-emphasis on the link between improvement strategies and student outcomes, with little monitoring of the latter.
- A rational, technical approach with not enough cognisance of political and power issues.
- An inclination to base strategies predominantly on teacher perspectives and values without taking other stakeholders' values (e.g. students and parents) into account.
- Tendency to take a recipe approach without paying enough attention to contextual features of a particular school.
- Rare empirical evaluations on the impact of improvement initiatives on outcomes.

Hargreaves and Hopkins (cited in Preedy 1993) describe school improvement as about developing strategies for educational change that strengthen the school's organisation, as well as implementing curriculum reforms (p. 234). These strategies are seen as a different way of thinking in contrast to the traditional top-down approach so cherished by the policy-makers. According to this line of thinking, the school is regarded as the centre of change. Hargreaves and Hopkins (cited in Preedy 1993) further endorse the emphasis on curriculum priorities being linked to managerial change within the plan, and would like to see the school operating within a supportive environment (p. 234).

2.5.3 Educational change

Fullan (1985:396) is of the opinion that change at the individual level (Local school level for that matter) is a process whereby individuals alter their ways of thinking and doing. Change is a process of developing new skills, finding

meaning and satisfaction in new ways of doing things. The following aspects are evident from the four case study researches done by Fullan (1985:396):

- Change takes place over time.
- The initial stages of any significant change always involve anxiety and uncertainty.
- Ongoing technical assistance and psychological support assistance are crucial if the anxiety is to be coped with.
- Change involves learning new skills through practice and feedback; it is incremental and developmental.
- The most fundamental breakthrough occurs when people can cognitively understand the underlying conception and rationale with respect to: "Why this new way works better?"
- Organisational conditions within the school and in relation to the school.
- Successful change involves pressure, but it is pressure through interaction with peers and other technical and administrative leaders.

In his argument about change, Hargreaves (1997:1) emphasised the importance of improving internal interactions and relationships of schools. Hargreaves' idea reflects the spirit of the cluster system in enhancing quality and improvement of educational management, by promoting interaction and relationships. A central task in creating cultures of educational change is how to develop more collaborative working relationships between principals and teachers, and among teachers themselves. It is also imperative that this relationship should extend collaboration beyond the school walls (meaning community) and other stakeholders.

To underscore their approach to school improvement, Hargreaves and Hopkins cite the following assumptions on school improvement by ISIP (cited in Preedy 1993: 235):

- **The school as the center of change:**

This means that external reforms need to be sensitive to the situation in individual schools, rather than assuming that all schools are the same.

- **A systematic approach to change:**

School improvement is a carefully planned and managed process that takes place over several years.

- **A key focus for change:**

A key focus of change is the internal condition of schools. These include not only the teaching – learning activities used in the school, but also the school's procedures, role allocation and resource use that support the teaching – learning process.

- **Accomplishing educational goals more effectively:**

Generally speaking, educational goals are what a school is supposed to be achieving with its students and society.

- **A multi-level perspective:**

Although the school is the center of change, it does not act alone. The school is embedded in an educational system that has to work collaboratively and symbiotically if the highest degrees of education are to be achieved. This means that the roles of teachers, heads, governors, parents, support people and local authorities should be defined, harnessed and committed to the process of school improvement.

- **Integrative implementation strategies:**

This implies a linkage between top-down and bottom-up approaches. Ideally 'top-down' provides policy aims, an overall strategy and operational plans; this is complemented by a 'bottom-up' response involving diagnosis, priority goal setting and implementation.

- **The drive towards institutionalisation:**

Change is only successful when it has become part of the natural behaviour of all those in the school.

Fullan (1985:406) identifies the following fundamental factors that underlie successful improvement processes:

- **A feel for the improvement process on the part of leadership:**

Fullan (1985:406) argues that there are two reasons referring to this aspect of "feel". First, the number of factors that leaders must contend with in running and hoping to improve organisations defies step-by-step, rational planning. Secondly processes of improvement are intrinsically paradoxical and subtle. According to Peters and Waterman (1982, cited in Fullan 1985:401): "An effective leader must be the master of two ends of the spectrum: ideas at the highest level of abstraction and actions at the most mundane level of detail".

- **A guiding value system:**

The presence of an explicitly implemented value system is a distinctive factor of an effective school. Fullan (1989:402) argues that high expectations for students, commonly shared goals and a strong sense of community are the specific values according to the effective schools research. He is of the opinion that a set of shared values and rules about discipline, details and execution can provide the framework in which practical autonomy takes place. The rules deal with quality, service innovation and experimentation. This literature on effective schools can be applied both to individual schools and to clusters of schools. It can provide a rationale for clustering, with Organization Development providing the process.

- **Intense interaction and communication:**

Getting people acting and interacting represents a major route to change. Interactive relationships take place with a range of patterns e.g. teacher, principal, parents and external support personnel. According to Peters and Waterman (1982, cited in Fullan 1989:402): "Nothing is more enticing than the feeling of being needed; which is the magic that procures high expectations".

- **Collaborative planning and implementation:**

Researchers like Little (cited in Fullan 1985:403) hold that collegial decision making within the school is strongly related to improvement.

School improvement is about change and change to be effective needs to embrace the idea of collaboration, interaction, communication, planning and implementation. Change to be successful must become part of the institutional behaviour. This means that the cluster system as a management tool, to effect change, must be institutionalised.

2.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the cluster system has evolved over the years in many countries, including first and third world countries. It is also evident that the cluster system is geared towards better education management. It is further argued that the cluster system is aimed at creating a situation where clustered schools could share a large resource base and to improve facilities for better management of schools.

The ongoing efforts of educational reform is the world trend, where issues like quality of education, democratic participation in education, educational decentralisation and more widespread community involvement top the agenda. In the next chapter, a discussion of the methodological approach that has been applied to conduct this research takes place.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research is to investigate how the school management and staff of Greenpeace Secondary School experience their school cluster system. In this regard, the epistemology and ontological approach of interpretive research have been discussed. Following this discussion, I focus on the methods applied to do interpretive research. I also look into the validity, ethics and limitations of this research.

In the next section, I discuss how the nature of reality and the nature of knowledge unfold themselves or are viewed from different research perspectives.

3.2 Research paradigm

3.2.1 Epistemology and ontology

There is a difference in the way the nature of reality and knowledge unfold themselves in research. TerreBlanche and Durrheim (1999) argue that:

Paradigms are all-encompassing systems of interrelated practice and thinking that define for researchers the nature of their enquiring along three dimensions: ontology, epistemology and methodology. (p. 1)

The interpretive paradigm is in direct conflict with the positivistic approach, which perceives human beings as complex physical systems, differing from the rest of nature not in kind but perhaps in degree (Cantrell 1993:82). Consequently, these differences between interpretive and positivist approaches create different epistemological and ontological conceptions. To this effect, Dilthey (cited in Cantrell 1993:82) argues that knowledge is derived differently from humanities and natural sciences. According to Husein (cited in Cantrell 1993:82) the humanities (interpretive) aim at understanding (Verstehen) and the natural

sciences (positivist) aim at explaining (Verklaren) In Comte's view (cited in Cantrell 1993:82): "Social science, by adopting the forms of explanation, observation and so on of the natural sciences, would eventually gain a similar intellectual and practical mastery of its subject matter..." However Dilthey (cited in Cantrell 1993) claims, contrary to this approach, that the two areas (interpretive and positivist) require different approaches because they deal with significantly different subject matters. According to this argument, social objects and events can only be understood and constructed by human minds and since the meaning of social objects can only be understood by examining them within their context, the approach to these "objectifications" of our minds must be hermeneutical or interpretive (Cantrell 1993:82-83).

Against this background of basic differences discussed above, events in the interpretive approach are understood through the mental process of interpretation which is influenced by and interacts with social context. The nature of knowledge in a positivistic approach is based upon knowable facts, real causes or simultaneous effects and lawlike regularities (Cantrell 1993:83). In addressing this question of epistemology, the interpretive paradigm views the researcher as dialogically interacting, whereas the positivist views the researcher as independent and dualist.

Similarly, the interpretive paradigm views the nature of reality (ontology) as multiple and constructed through human interaction and therefore the approach is holistic and divergent. On the other hand, the positivist views it as a single event, fragmented, tangible, measurable and convergent (Cantrell 1993:83). "Due to differences in perception, in interpretation and in language, interpretive researchers are not surprised that people view reality differently" (Bassegy 1995:4).

In the next section, I discuss the methods that I have used in my research.

3.2.2 Interpretive Approach

Since I want to understand the meaning that people attach to the cluster system as a phenomenon and as a management tool, I worked within the interpretive paradigm as the research methodology. Bassey (1995, cited in Jafta 2001:2) points out the significance of interpretive research:

To the interpretive researcher the purpose of research is to describe and interpret the phenomena of the world in attempts to get shared meanings with others. Interpretation is a search for deep perspectives on particular events and for theoretical insights. It may offer possibilities, but no certainties as to the outcome of future events.

Cantrell (1993:87) claims that: "The complex nature of education entangled in interrelationship, replete with social, political and economic context and laden with values demands that an alternative paradigm drive educational research". For Conole (1993), there are different realities in interpretive research, which require multiple methods to uncover the meanings thereof. The interpretive paradigm is an umbrella for a host of different approaches that includes, for example, naturalistic, ethnographic, hermeneutical, humanistic, phenomenological, subjective and action research (Cantrell 1993:87).

By using this paradigm, I intended to understand the participants' feelings, ideals, thoughts and actions and by so doing capture the subjective perceptions of individuals and try to understand how they interpret the cluster system within their social and cultural context of the natural setting (Cantrell: 1993:84). The interpretive approach will further enable me to interact dialogically with my respondents: the principal, senior staff and the teachers of the school, in order to uncover what people think and believe, as well as to render meaning concerning their actions and intentions. The interpretive approach also enables me to probe for in-depth data and understanding. "The interpretive approach accepts the inseparable bond between values and facts and attempts to understand reality, especially the behaviour of people within a social context" (Cantrell 1993:84).

In the following section I discuss the case study method and the modus operandi that was employed to investigate the perceptions of the management and staff of Greenpeace Secondary School about the cluster system.

3.3 Method

I used the case study method to investigate the perception of the senior management and staff of Greenpeace Secondary School about the cluster system. This enabled me to understand and interpret school clustering as an educational phenomenon. I became part of the management and staff, listened and tried to make sense of their perceptions and experiences.

Smith (1999:1) neatly defines the case study as an: "Empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context". Smith further says: "In general, a case study is appropriate when one is interested in detailed information specific to a particular case" (1999:3). In this same spirit, Huysamen (1994:168) emphasises that: "Case studies are directed at the understanding of the uniqueness and idiosyncrasy of a particular case in all its complexity". He further argues that the objective of case studies is to investigate the dynamics of single bound systems, typical of a social nature, for example, a family, group or institution (1994:168). According to Schumacher and McMillan (1998:375): "Case study design, because of its flexibility and adoptability to a range of contexts, processes, people and foci provides some of the most useful methods available in educational research". The case study is also appropriate for most education issues because of the human complexities of the educational situation, complexities that are generally not susceptible to quantification by way of a survey, for example.

The following three aspects deserve special mention as far as the conducting of case studies are concerned (Huysamen 1994:169):

- Case studies should be defined or demarcated, i.e. the boundaries should be determined. If a single individual is involved, this decision is obvious.

In other examples, the researcher may during the course of the study find it necessary to adjust the boundaries which had been initially been determined.

- Whichever technique is used for purpose of data collection, the concern is not merely with a description of what is being observed, but to search in an inductive fashion, for recurring patterns and consistent regularities.
- In discerning these patterns, triangulation is frequently used. Because the number of cases can be limited, the very purpose of case studies is to extensively examine those cases which are indeed available.

Winegardner (cited in Jafta 2002:3) contends that whilst case study methods can be utilised within various research paradigms, the epistemological orientation of most case study researchers is interpretive, because interpretive researchers believe that reality is accessed through social constructions such as language, conscience and shared meanings with others. Through this case study, I investigate how the management and staff of Greenpeace Secondary School view the cluster system and what prospects it holds for the future.

I contacted the director of the Rundu educational region and was granted permission to contact any school of my choice. Consequently I phoned the inspector of the circuit and explained to him that I was interested in a school principal who was at a school before and after the implementation of the cluster system. The circuit inspector assisted me with the identification of three secondary school principals. From these schools, the first principal to whom I spoke was so accommodating that I decided to stick to that school (Greenpeace Secondary School). My reasons for selecting this school were that it had been involved in the cluster system and the principal was involved in the system since its inception.

I followed up all my contacts like the director, inspector and the principal with a letter in which I explained the purpose of my research. I visited the school during

the week of 10-14 March 2003. The principal further directed me with regard to whom to talk to.

The principal also explained the purpose of my research to the members of the staff and by so doing, greatly assisted me in the initial stage of my research, especially for confidence-building with the respondents.

I also contacted the country GTZ representative, who initiated the cluster system in Namibia, for background information on the implementation of the cluster system.

3.4 Data Work

3.4.1 Data Gathering

I used interviews and documents as main sources of data gathering in this research.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used as it was like an informal conversation between me and the respondent. Haralambos (1980:507) states that the interviewer has the freedom to phrase the questions as he likes, ask the respondent to develop his answers and probe responses which might be unclear and ambiguous.

I have used semi-structured interviews in order to help develop an in-depth understanding of the respondents' experience of the cluster system, in accordance with my research goal, "To investigate how the management and staff of Greenpeace Secondary School experience their school cluster system". I refer to section 3.1 where I have addressed the purpose of my research. The interviews were mainly focused on:

- What the management and staff thought of the cluster system,
- What potential they thought the cluster system holds and how that might be realised, and
- Whether there is any evidence of other organisational outcomes such as staff satisfaction, positive school climate and academic school results since the introduction of the cluster system.

I employed a purposeful sampling strategy to select information-rich sources, especially among the staff of Greenpeace Secondary School. The target group comprised the most information-rich samples, such as the principal, heads of department and other staff members, who would shed more light on the cluster system. In this regard I interviewed nine teachers, including the principal and the senior staff of the school. "The power and logic of purposeful sampling is that few cases studied in-depth yield many insights about the topic" (Schumacher and McMillan 1998:378).

I made use of the "snowball sampling" strategy as a type of purposeful sampling by contacting the principal and he further directed me to the other respondents. According to Lincoln and Guba (cited in Cantrell 1993:90), the advantage of snowball sampling is that one sample leads to another, in order to extend, test and fill in information.

The interviews enabled me to gather descriptive data in the subject's own words (Cantrell 1998:96). All the interviews were conducted on an individual basis to ensure maximum participation of respondents and also to foster the assurance of confidentiality. I discuss the issue of confidentiality in the section of ethical implications. The interviews were taped with the consent of the respondents and transcribed verbatim. I provided the respondents with the copies of the transcripts for them to check their accuracy and also to ascertain whether they still maintained their original views. Since all the interviewees were conversant in the English language, the interviews were conducted in English.

Documents

According to Schumacher and McMillan (1993:43): "Documents are records of past events, and the researcher interprets these facts to provide explanations of the past and clarifies the collective educational meanings that may be underlying current practices and issues". Documents are regarded as a valuable starting point before collecting new data. According to Smith (2002), 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.
- Information about processes, e.g. how decisions were/are made and who made them.
- A potential substitute for activities you 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.

I have made a study of a range of documents which provided valuable information about the introduction and operation of the cluster system. I asked the principal of the school to grant me access to minutes of the cluster meetings, in order to support, verify, clarify or qualify the data that I have obtained from the interviews (Cantrell 1993:97). The principal also referred me to the cluster centre principal to obtain further documents, but my attempts to get hold of him failed.

However, the following documents from the school cluster workshops which I attended, were also studied:

- Review of clusters of schools in Namibia.
- Project progress review mission.
- Project planning workshop 11-15 March 2002.

- Dupa Cluster Meeting, 8 February 2002

3.4.2 Data Analysis

I transcribed the audio recordings and checked and compared the raw data with the notes I made. I used the interview questions as a guide in coding the content of the interviews and documents. The purpose of coding is to: "Identify categories or themes based upon patterns and ideas that emerge from the data" (Cantrell 1993: 98).

In the following section I discuss the issue of validity.

3.5 Validity

The case study is often criticised by many researchers because it is often not representative of other cases. The oft-posed question is: "Can a sample of one be typical of anything besides itself?" (Smith 1999:6). According to Stake (1988:261): "Whether or not a case should be representative of other cases depends on the purposes of the research". Stake (1994:242) further maintains that: "Generalisation from differences between any two cases are much less to be trusted than generalisations from one". He continues to explain that learning from comparison has a separate epistemological function from learning about and from a single case as it fixes attention upon those few attributes being compared and obscures other knowledge. Therefore, the purpose of this case study is to sharpen the focus of the reader on this specific case so that he/she can understand the essence of the cluster system as an educational phenomenon and draw his/her own conclusions.

Smith (1999:5) argues that we learn both propositional and experiential knowledge from case studies. He is further of the opinion that with the narrative nature of the case reports, the writer appeals to one's emotions, but more than that, provides a vicarious cognitive experience. According to Stake (1994:243):

"The methods for casework actually used are to describe the case in sufficient descriptive narrative so that readers can vicariously experience these happenings, and draw their own conclusions". Stake and Trumbull (cited in Smith 1999:6) refer to this as "naturalistic generalisation". Empathetically, the reader experiences some things as if he or she were there and can selectively draw on the story to make sense of his or her own situation and experience, in this case their experience of the cluster system.

I now discuss the issue of ethical implications of case study research in the following section.

3.6 Ethical implications of my research

Stake (1994:244) captures the essence of case study to emphasise the nature of ethical implications as follows:

Qualitative researchers are guests in others' private space. As with most qualitative work, case study research shares an intense interest in personal views and circumstances. Our manners should be good and our ethics above reproach. Poor judgment can affect later researchers' access and undermine the whole research enterprise.

Bassey (1999:77) advises that: "In order to sustain the concept of respect for person and, indeed, in order to obtain their cooperation in providing data, it is usual to negotiate the extent to which data taken from them can be used in writing the report". The purpose of the research was explained to each participant in order to elicit their willing co-operation, I also discussed the use of audiotape with each participant and emphasised the issue of anonymity. I gave my word to the respondents that no name or identity would be revealed (Patton 2002:405-406). To prevent any possible inferences, I also concealed the name of the school, by using a pseudonym, as an additional measure and by so doing respected the anonymity of the school and the identity of the respondents.

One of the potential threats that could have jeopardised the validity in this research is my position as the inspector of education. The fact, that I introduced myself as an inspector of education, could have created a potentially ethical dilemma in the sense that the respondents would not normally divulge sensitive information in the presence of a senior person. However, being from a region, almost 1000 km to the south ameliorated this potential threat. During my interviews there were no indications that participants were withholding information because of my position.

Since this research was not without its shortcomings, I discuss the limitations in the following section.

3.7 Limitations

The school where my research was conducted was far from my home town, a distance of 700km. Due to this, the exercise was very costly and I could not stay as long as I initially planned. I originally planned to do data transcription and eventually check the correctness of the data with the respondents while I was on site. The donor agency representative, who initially agreed to partially sponsor the trip to Rundu, withdrew. They wanted me to cover the wider Rundu region which was not in the scope of my study, the other limitation was that I could not get hold of the cluster centre principal to obtain the necessary documentation, such as the minutes of cluster meetings that was needed for my research.

CHAPTER FOUR

Presentation of data

4.1 Introduction

I have identified eight themes that best describe the perceptions and experiences of the respondents. Many of these themes have been consolidated since they do overlap. I present the data in this chapter without any comment or discussion except for a conclusion at the end of each section.

4.2 The introduction and selection of a cluster centre

Respondent one (R1) stated that the cluster system had not been implemented in Rundu for a long time. R1 was of the opinion that the cluster system was implemented by the Minister of Basic Education, Sport and Culture after he had visited the Scandinavian Islands a few years ago. According to this respondent, the Minister, together with his delegation of educationists, learned about this system in the Scandinavian Islands and introduced the system to Namibia. Since then, the cluster system has been introduced to the schools in the Rundu region of education.

With regard to the structure of the cluster, R1 noted that one of the principals serves as the cluster centre principal. The principals of schools in that cluster form the Cluster Management Committee.

R1 says that the cluster centres should be formed according to curriculum and grades. He further explains that effective clustering of schools is hampered as some schools' curricula go up to Grade 9, while others start at Grade 5 or 10. R1 further noted that: "If one selects a secondary school as a cluster centre, one does not accommodate the primary schools, and if one selects a primary school, the secondary school is not accommodated". According to this respondent it is,

however, difficult if one secondary school is surrounded by a cluster of primary schools. The schools are clustered on the grounds of the geographical position. This further means that a school in the geographical middle must be the cluster centre. One of the reasons for schools to be in close proximity to each other, is the consideration of distances the representatives of different schools have to travel.

It seems as if difficulties are also experienced with the implementation of the cluster system. Respondent two (R2) reports that the cluster system brought added responsibilities, especially for the cluster centre principal. He is of the opinion that the cluster centre principal should be supplied with more support staff to ease these extra responsibilities. Another respondent, respondent four (R4), is of the opinion that the cluster centre, which is supposed to have extra resources, like photocopy machines and fax machines, lacks these facilities. This respondent suggested that the regional education office should consider the availability of resources before a cluster centre is established. To this end, the respondent argues that communication systems, like telephones and fax machines, should be upgraded. The result of this, according to the respondent, is that the original facilities of the cluster centre are used for all the schools in the cluster.

R2 maintained that the cluster system has become a financial burden on the school which is acting as a cluster centre. In this regard, R2 continues that limited school development funds are used for cluster activities and other schools unfairly benefit without contributing to the fund.

R2 suggested that secondary schools must be grouped together in one cluster to prevent their dominance over primary schools. He/she further suggested that efficiency of services rendered must be encouraged to prevent delays, for example in setting examination question papers. R2 also expressed concern about meetings that are being held during school times. He further suggested

that these meetings should be scheduled in the afternoon to avoid class disruptions. (R4) also blamed the fact that representatives were given short notice regarding cluster meetings, which seriously disturbed the planned programmes of their school.

It has been observed that the cluster system has added responsibilities, especially for the cluster centre principals. The perception is that secondary schools and primary schools should form separate clusters to delineate cluster activities. In the next section, I give the respondents' perceptions of uniformity and cooperation as transpired from the data.

4.3 Uniformity and cooperation

The general view of the respondents is that the cluster system is used to encourage schools to work uniformly. R1 said: "At the end of the day, school A is doing the same like school B". He further argues that teachers at school A know exactly where they will be at the end of the term with regard to syllabi and schemes of work. R2 is of the opinion that the cluster system helps to cover the same material for the examinations.

The cluster centre principals, according to the respondents, come together in the beginning of the year to set up a program for the year, with regard to cluster activities. In supporting this argument, he mentioned that discussions of lesson preparation, discussion of question paper formats and discussions on how sports activities will be conducted are issues that top the agenda in these meetings.

R1 holds the view that uniformity also has some negative effects on school performance. In this regard, he refers to former white schools that conducted their tasks differently, but now have to toe the line of uniformity. He further noted that the former white schools had a culture where the parents were utilised to teach whenever there was a need. This was in contrast to the rural and former black schools where the teachers are the sole contributors to the performance of

the learners. R1 is consequently of the opinion that the former white schools do not perform the way they did when they were without the cluster.

R1 further declared that uniformity does not create the necessary competitiveness needed to outdo each other with regarding the standard of education provided. According to this respondent, the result is that, while performing schools are being held back, the formerly disadvantaged schools are being pulled up to come to the same level as performing schools. This situation may create quarrels among the teachers. The respondent said: "We have to work on consensus to maintain the necessary uniformity".

The general view of the respondents is that the desired cooperation has not yet taken place because the cluster system has not yet properly taken root. As an example of this effect, R1 mentioned that a school with high pass rates found it hard to work with a school with lower pass rates. He further argues that the tendency of the schools with high pass rates is to say that: "We don't have any problem, why must we do what they want us to do?" According to this respondent, the schools with lower pass rates, on the other hand, feel inferior when brought into proximity with representatives from other schools. All respondents maintain that this feeling of superiority and inferiority hampers desired cooperation among schools. They argue that the performing schools have a negative perception about schools that are not performing as well and do not write the question papers being set by these schools. They all note that these types of inequalities hamper the realisation of the ideals of the cluster system. They also maintain that schools delivering the same standard of education would find the cluster system attractive and interesting.

Another aspect of cooperation, according to R1, is the discussion on lesson preparation, for example, who should be responsible for setting the question papers and deciding how sports events are going to be conducted? The system tries to help teachers, principals and heads of department to cooperate to reduce

the workload. Instead of each teacher setting a question paper for his class and school, one teacher is assigned the task within the cluster to set a question paper for the whole cluster, R1 claimed. By this type of cooperation, the respondent continues, they help reduce the workload.

The conclusion one can make is that there is much to be done before the cluster system can achieve the desired effects of uniformity and cooperation. However, the necessary ground work seems to have been done for these aspects to take root. In the next section, I present the perceptions of the respondents with regard to the cluster system's contribution to the academic performance of the learners.

4.4 Academic performance

R1 is of the opinion that the performance of the learners is not addressed at cluster level. However, he made the statement that the setting of uniform question papers is a concerted effort to help address the performance of the learners. He further maintains that unless the performance of schools is addressed in the cluster set up, rather than at school level, the cluster system will not serve the purpose of being the catalyst for improved learner performance.

All the other respondents unanimously maintain the opposite view. They maintain that there has been an improvement in the academic performance of learners since the implementation of the cluster system. The cluster principals confirmed this notion during their cluster meeting. The centre head expressed his delight with the achievement of better academic results from grades one to nine. According to the minutes, he further expressed his satisfaction that the cluster managed to score more than sixty percent. He also encouraged his colleagues to work hard to achieve the maximum pass rates.

Sharing of ideas on educational issues and the setting of one examination paper per subject surely contributes to the academic performance of the learners and

affects the standard of academic achievements. The general response of the respondents is that cluster-based committees, such as an examination coordination committee, have been established in the cluster to regulate all external and internal examinations. The establishment of a preparatory examination committee assists teachers to prepare learners for external examinations. According to the respondents, the committee consists of a Head of Department or Deputy Principal, whichever the case may be, who serves as the chairperson of the committee. The other members of the committee consist of subject heads and selected teachers from each phase.

In order to assist schools in their endeavours to address academic performance, the cluster principals adopted objectives that would help individual schools achieve better results. These objectives, according to the minutes of the Dupa cluster meetings, are as follows:

- To improve their results through workshops, subject meetings and that they need to score 80% pass rates from grade 1-9.
- To achieve 60% pass rates for schools with grade tens.
- To combat indiscipline among teachers and learners.
- To encourage the use of the official language among learners at schools.

Another respondent, respondent three (R3) firmly attributes the improved academic performance to the cluster system. This respondent says that: "If I compare the results of my subject last year with the past three years, then I would say that there is definitely an improvement every year. Last year my subject scored more than sixty percent, whereas the score was below fifty percent the previous year".

The general argument of the respondents is that cluster efforts on the sharing of ideas concerning how to improve the results of feeder schools, also affects the performance of senior secondary schools. They further noted that these efforts

are worth pursuing, because many of the learners coming from feeder schools cannot speak English, which is the medium of instruction and also the medium through which examinations are conducted. To combat this problem of reading in the English language, the cluster principals adopted an objective, according to the minutes of the cluster principals, to encourage the learners to speak English as the official language on the school premises. The respondents agreed that learner's handwriting was also very poor.

The respondents concurred that the issue of automatic promotion (where the learner should only fail once in a phase) was also discussed at cluster level to help address issues like reading, writing and arithmetic to better the performance of the schools. One respondent, respondent 6 (R6) explicitly stated that: "The causes of poor performance, where it comes from and how it can be addressed, is discussed at cluster level". R6 maintains that the issue of performance could have been properly addressed if the primary and secondary schools could have formed separate cluster groups.

The general view of the respondents was that grades ten and twelve examination results serve as a yardstick to determine the level of academic achievement. These types of measurements, according to these respondents, did not apply to primary schools where they do not care if the learners could not read or write properly. They further argue that the cluster system has greatly contributed to the betterment of results at their school. R1, however, argued that there were small changes with regard to academic performance, because: "If the tree is the same old tree, it is hard to effect changes, especially if the manager has been the same one". By this, the respondent meant that many of the principals are old and not disposed to effecting change.

Many of the respondents maintained the view that the cluster system has a positive effect on learner performance, but believed that new blood was needed

to effectively respond to the demands of the cluster system. The following section presents data about parental involvement in the cluster system.

4.5 Parental involvement

The general view of the respondents is that the cluster system has not yet addressed the issue of parental involvement. R1 expressed himself as follows: "To be honest, I don't know whether the parents know about this system, although the teachers are very familiar with the system". He further noted that the parent meetings did not change in any way and that the attendance of the black parent community in school activities was still very poor. This opinion was also shared by the principals of the Dupa cluster. They were of the opinion that the lack of parental involvement in the academic and extramural activities of the schools seriously hampered the examination results. Needless to say that learner absenteeism could not be properly addressed due to the lack of parental involvement in school activities. To this effect, the cluster principals redoubled their efforts to obtain maximum involvement of parents in schools' activities.

The first respondent maintained that the involvement of parents in decision-making at school is through parent meetings. He/she further observed that, during these meetings, the parents are informed of the year's program of activities, the respondent also argued that the parents are invited, through letters, to attend the upcoming events, for example: extra mural activities such as bazaars and cultural festivities. In explaining the lack of parental involvement in the cluster activities, respondent six (R6) stated that: "The cluster system is not yet devolved to the level of the parent community".

R4 blamed the Cluster Management Committee for the inefficiency of parental participation in school activities. The respondent was of the opinion that much could be done to make parents aware of the existence of the cluster system. The respondent further noted that the Cluster Management Committee should develop initiatives that would enhance parent participation in school programs.

The training programs should include, inter alia, the roles and responsibilities of school boards with regard to school management and administration. The respondent claimed that if school boards were trained, they would further enhance parental involvement. By so doing, the cluster and schools in the cluster would be linked with the broader parent community. R3 noted that effective parental involvement would be a necessity to help address learner performance and discipline. Another respondent felt that when parents become involved in the instructional process, their children are more likely to achieve better results academically.

It is clear from the respondents that parental involvement has not yet come into its own and that this shortcoming is being placed on the shoulders of the management of the cluster. I will now present the views of the respondents on the effect of decentralisation.

4.6 Decentralisation

Some of the respondents view the cluster system as a decentralisation effort. R3 saw decentralisation as a means to give power to school managers to run the schools effectively. This respondent further noted that decentralisation gives access to learning and teaching material. According to R3, rural schools which were far away from the regional office could not get information, stationery and textbooks on time. Information dissemination becomes the function of the cluster and greatly benefits the remote rural schools which have no access to information on a regular basis. The respondent further claims that remote rural schools still did not have telephone connections, and roads were sometimes inaccessible.

These types of isolation barriers have been cut by bringing education services closer to the people concerned. The respondent further argued that, with this decentralisation effort, circuit offices for the Inspectors of Education had been built in the circuit to coordinate the activities of the cluster. It is now possible for

remote schools, especially in the rural areas, to get information and have access to the circuit inspector easily.

R3 further argued that the Circuit Management Committee had also been established to facilitate the process of decentralisation. The respondent further elaborated on the structure and functions of this Circuit Management Committee:

The Circuit Management Committee consists of the Circuit Inspector and the principals of the cluster schools. The Circuit Inspector is the convener and the chairperson of the committee. In addition to what I have stated about the Circuit Management Committee in section 4.2, R3 was of the opinion that this committee meets once a trimester and discusses and resolves issues referred by the regional office. The committee also exchanges ideas and experiences relating to the administration of schools with a view to improving efficiency and effectiveness. The respondent further noted that the committee also makes recommendations on the allocation of staff within the cluster. The Circuit Management Committee also advises the clusters on the establishment of various cluster committees. It is hereby understood that the Circuit Management Committee links the regional office with schools in the circuit.

Respondant 2 (R2) also viewed the cluster system as a useful means to decentralise regional education services. In this regard, the respondent noted that a Cluster Management Committee had been established for their cluster centre. The cluster centre principal is the convener and chairperson of the committee. The respondent further saw the committee as promoting the sharing of experiences and resources in the cluster. The Cluster Management Committee is also responsible for the promotion and establishment of cluster groups to improve teaching, learning and assessment. The scope of this committee, according to R2, includes the personnel, disciplinary and community-related issues. The Cluster Management Committee is also expected to encourage community participation in the activities of the schools and ensure that school boards function properly.



Respondent 5 (R5) was of the opinion that the cluster system is a sort of decentralisation. The respondent further noted that, due to decentralisation, schools which did not have access to other labour-saving devices, such as a photocopier and fax machines, now had access to these facilities. Respondant 7 (R7) argued that the cluster system was a decentralisation effort, where the dependency of schools on the regional office had been minimized optimally. The circuit office now mediates between the regional office and the cluster centres through the services of the circuit inspector.

The overall view of the respondents was that the cluster system serves as a means to decentralise educational services closer to the people. In the next chapter, I present the data on staff satisfaction and training within the framework of a cluster system.

4.7 Staff satisfaction and training

R3 believes that the responsibility of setting examination papers for the whole cluster is a positive thing, in the sense that it involves teachers. The respondent further noted that teachers were empowered which enhanced positive self-image. R3 further claimed that this action also helped teachers to improve their skills in setting standard question papers which could lead to their becoming experts if they did it on a regular basis.

R4 is of the opinion that teachers are really involved in the cluster activities through the establishment of different subject-coordinating committees.

According to this respondent, subject-coordinating committees were appointed by the cluster management committee, which consists of the principals in that particular cluster, in order to coordinate the activities of different subject teachers. Duties and functions of coordinating committees, according to this respondent, were as follows:

- To coordinate meetings at cluster level.
- To give support, guidance and assistance to teachers and subject heads.
- To work closely with subject heads.
- To stay abreast with new changes and developments in specific subjects.

This respondent further said that the cluster system created opportunities for teachers to come together and consider the problems they experience and claimed: "The sharing of problems makes us own the system". The respondent further noted that, not only problems, but activities like sport and other social events like culture festivals, created opportunities for their involvement as teachers in the management of the cluster.

R3 maintained that they were being empowered by the cluster system to do things and to make decisions on behalf of the school. The respondent further said that they were delegated by the inspector of schools or by the advisory teachers to conduct workshops on their behalf for the cluster. R3 said that it gave motivation and self-confidence, he/she also said: "This type of empowerment goes beyond the cluster to the regional level as well".

With regard to training in the cluster set-up, R1 was of the opinion that the cluster system had not yet addressed this issue. However, R1 said that the clusters were organising other programs that were launched by the head of the Ministry of basic Education and Culture. According to this respondent, most of the programs coming from the Ministry are used to discriminate among schools. They are either directed to the secondary or primary schools. In this regard, he argued that no activities were really launched at cluster level. All other respondents shared the perception that no significant training programs were being organised by the cluster itself.

One can come to the conclusion that the teachers are happy with their involvement in the cluster activities; however, the aspect of training still needs

more attention. The following section presents data about communication and interschool relationships.

4.8 Communication and interschool relationships

The general claim of the respondents is that the cluster system has paved the way for communication. According to R1, there could not be a better system in place to enhance education in a deprived region like the Rundu region. It enhances education and is helping to open communication channels among teachers and pupils in the cluster.

The issue of 'sharing' features strongly as a key aspect of communication throughout this interview. According to all the respondents, the cluster system created a positive environment for schools to exchange views and experiences. R1 argued that the cluster system breaks the barriers of isolation. He/she was further of the opinion that even the barrier between former white schools and black schools has now become something of the past.

R5 said that the clustering of schools is better than individual schools. He was of the opinion that compared to other regions there was a shortage of qualified teachers. He further argued that since human resources, especially in terms of qualified teachers, were so scarce; they needed to learn from each other and that this possibility was created by the clustering of schools. The respondent further mentioned the setting of examination papers as a difficult issue and noted that the sharing of expertise, for example, the reading and interpretation of syllabi, helped the teachers to catch up with new ideas and approaches and contributed greatly to the quality of teaching and the management of subject areas.

R6 said: "Since the implementation of the cluster system, we try to work as a team, especially in classes from primary to secondary school". This respondent further argued that teachers teaching the same subjects could come together and share difficulties experienced in particular subjects. In this cluster set up, the

respondent noted that groups of schools are coming together for workshops, meetings and sporting events. They are consequently breaking the barrier of isolation that was evident among the schools before the cluster system was introduced. According to this respondent, the schools operated in isolation before the cluster system was introduced and each school had its own way of doing things. The sports activities were conducted intra-school and did not reach out to other schools. The fact that these schools are now part of the bigger family of schools can be attributed to the cluster system. The respondent further noted that there is constant communication among schools in the cluster.

R6 also elaborated on the issue of interschool relationships. According to this respondent schools were cooperating provided proper planning took place. The respondent further noted that the schools were interacting through extramural activities. Respondent 9 said: "We have made families among schools". The cluster system, according to this respondent, contributed to the social relationships that exist among schools, teachers and principals. The respondent noted that: "Our relationship grew to such an extent that we have a soccer team with in the cluster".

R7 mentioned that interschool relationships were promoted by teachers. The teachers worked together and the schools became interrelated through this cooperation. The respondent further said that elements like the sharing of resources expertise and extra mural activities laid a sound foundation for good interschool relationships. Respondent 10 (R10) argued that the distance between schools hampered the effectiveness of the cluster system in building good relations, he/she maintained that many decisions taken were not fulfilled due to the long distances between schools and the inaccessibility of roads.

Despite this, the general view of the respondents was that the barrier of isolation had been broken and that there was a new chain of communication that fostered good interschool relationships.

4.9 The management of discipline

R1 was of the opinion that after the independence of Namibia, teachers and learners expressed the attitude of 'who cares?' This attitude, he/she continued, was the root of the indiscipline in the Namibian schools. R1 further noted that the abolition of corporal punishment, which was so prominent in Namibian schools, had also seriously contributed to the discipline. The respondent further argued that there was no immediate replacement for corporal punishment and that the teachers were not trained to deal with discipline problems effectively. The respondent further said: "The former white schools maintained order and discipline, where as the former black schools still celebrated their independence, long after 1990". He felt that teacher discipline had been seriously addressed in the cluster set up, while the individual schools dealt with learner discipline. He also argued that the indiscipline negatively affected the academic performance of the learners.

R2 noted that the cluster system fostered good working relationship among schools in the cluster. He said: "The cluster system makes us know each other from school to school". He further argued that the cluster system created a positive environment for schools to deal with learner indiscipline. R2 also noted that: "Teachers from other schools can be my reference if a learner from their school gives problems". He argued that this type of reference was easily maintained in the cluster system. In the cluster it has been agreed to launch action against indiscipline by keeping learner profiles and making this information available to the student's new school. The respondent noted that: "This action alerted learners that they could no longer behave badly at one school and simply run to another". This type of vigilance has effectively improved the discipline in the cluster.

R4 related that discipline was still quite a problem at their school. "When we come together in clusters we discuss and share experiences on how to deal with

learner discipline". As an example, the respondent referred to learners coming to their school after suspension from another. When it becomes known that a suspended learner has joined a particular school, the school where he/she comes from is contacted for more information, and sometimes learners can be rejected. In explaining this phenomenon the respondent said: "Last year, learners of one school went to another school and cheated on grades not passed". The respondent said that a group of teachers had been established to guard against these things.

There are diverse perceptions regarding the management of discipline within the cluster. The assumption is that the cluster system is the vehicle to achieving good learner discipline.

4.10 Conclusion

What is depicted in this chapter are the perceptions and experiences of the senior management and staff of Greenpeace Senior Secondary School of the cluster system. In chapter five I discuss these data.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion of findings

5.1 Introduction

During this chapter I establish whether my research question: "To investigate how the school management and staff of a Rundu secondary school experience their school cluster system", has been answered. In regard to this I would like to know:

- What the management and staff think of the cluster system,
- What potential they think the cluster system holds and how this potential might be realised; and
- Whether there is any evidence of improved school results since the introduction of the cluster system.

I focus on the main findings and key threads that I have uncovered. I discuss these findings based on data presentation and compare them with what the literature claims. I now discuss the introduction and the selection of a cluster in the following section.

5.2 Introduction and selection of a cluster

The school cluster system is the grouping of schools, normally consisting of between five and seven schools. One school in each group is selected to serve as the cluster centre (Mendelson and Ward 2001:7). In Namibia, the cluster centre must be the school that occupies the geographical centre, or the cluster system becomes impractical because of the distances between schools.

R1 stated that the cluster system had not been operating in Namibia for a very long time. This statement is supported by (Mendelson and Ward 2001:7), who

said that: "The cluster system has evolved over the past five years as a means to meet the need for better education management at local levels". According to this information, it transpires clearly that the cluster system is a new approach and still needs to be nurtured. One cannot detect from the data that there were any consultations with the interested groups before the system was implemented in the Rundu region. The data suggested that the implementation of the cluster system is based on the experiences drawn from the Scandinavian Island's model by the Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture. However, Dittmar *et al.* (2001:36) are of the opinion that the emergence of the cluster system in Namibia was a local development, and that it was not driven by any advisor seeking to introduce a system that worked elsewhere. According to the literature, there are similarities between cluster functions in Namibia and other countries, for example Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique and many Latin American countries (Dittmar *et al.* 2001:36).

The data points out that there is a linear type of understanding as far as school clustering is concerned. According to some of the respondents, primary and secondary schools should be grouped separately. At the time of this study this was not the case, as some of the schools were primary schools, with a secondary phase attached to it. In this specific cluster, according to the data, only one secondary school was in the cluster of primary schools.

The general view of the respondents was that the cluster system had brought along extra responsibilities for the schools, especially for the cluster centre principals. The respondents argued that financial assistance was not forthcoming from the Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture. The data is very clear that cluster centres had been established without necessary material support for the school which serves as the cluster centre. Another concern that arises from the data is that the activities were not coordinated properly. For example meetings were conducted during school hours and disrupted normal teaching time.

The success of a cluster depends, to a large extent, on the cluster centre becoming the focal point. A relationship of trust and confidence between the cluster centre principal and the circuit inspector is necessary for the development of the centre as the clustering of schools is a powerful tool to achieve school effectiveness. In the words of Schmuck and Runkal (1994:127): "Trust is the confidence that the other person will not take unfair advantage of one, either deliberately or accidentally, consciously or unconsciously".

In the following section I discuss what management and staff think of decentralisation, staff satisfaction and training with regard to the cluster setup.

5.3 What do management and staff think of the cluster system?

5.3.1 Decentralisation

The following quotation depicts the meaning of decentralisation as defined by Töttemeyer (2002:12):

Decentralisation is often equated with maximum grassroots participation, equality of opportunity, and reform. It is defined as a means of ensuring wider representation of legitimate interests and accountability to local communities, and should instil the feeling that ordinary citizens have a stake in the Government.

It is in line with this definition that Dittmar *et al.* (2002:30) regarded decentralisation as: "Underpinning the element of democratic participation, which promotes the involvement of teachers, parents, school communities and learners in the education process". Decentralisation creates a democratic environment where decisions are made by the people concerned. Decisions should be made by those who best understand the needs of learners and the local community. Once they are empowered by decentralisation to take part in the education

process, the people are likely to be aware of the consequences of the decisions they make.

The kind of decentralisation suggested in the data refers rather to the delegation of authority from the regional education office to the local schools, or cluster centres for that matter. De Villiers and Kotze (cited in Chaka 2000: 22) define delegation as follows:

Delegation on the other hand means that central government transfers authority to an agent who is required to perform certain tasks, functions and duties, the agent being either official within the same organization or other institutions. The agent thus acts under the scrutiny and supervision of the delegating authority. In other words, the delegate is accountable to the delegating authority on how it performs the task so delegated.

The general feeling expressed by the respondents is that the cluster system is an effort by the Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture to delegate education services. It is also the view of the respondents that rural schools benefit greatly from this system, in the sense that these schools now have access to information, stationery and the timeous delivery of textbooks. Kleinhans (2001:5) claims that information is power and that cluster centres should be turned into information centres. The different management committees in the cluster have the desired information which is vital for the achievement of quality of education. Decentralisation, through the cluster system, should be accredited for its role in creating the platform for a wide range of involvement and participation. It was further noted from the data that functional structures like the circuit management committee, cluster management committee and subject coordinating committees had been established to facilitate the process of decentralisation. Overall respondents expressed satisfaction with their involvement in the cluster structures.

A collaborative and integrative democratic management style is needed for decentralisation to be effective. Since educational decentralisation is still in its

growing stages, training in management-related issues should feature strongly in this process.

The data alluded to the fact that the regional and local level of education services was linked by the Circuit Management Committee. The Inspector of Education, representing the regional education governance, was the chairperson of the committee with cluster centre principals, representing the local schools, as the members of the committee.

The question is: “How do teachers feel about the cluster system?” This question is answered in the following section.

5.3.2 Staff satisfaction and training

All the respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the manner in which they were involved in the activities of the cluster, e.g. sports, academic and social-related activities. They noted that their involvement in setting examination papers for the whole cluster was a positive step towards the development of these needed skills. They further contended that regular involvement in these activities was improving the setting of standard question papers. The data indicates that it is because of the establishment of subject coordinating and examination committees that the teachers felt involved. I also noted from the data that this kind of involvement was empowering the teachers and in so doing, enhancing their positive self-image.

It is evident from the data that teachers viewed the opportunities created by the cluster system as positive steps in bringing them together. In this regard, a respondent said: “Sharing of problems, experiences and interaction make us own the system”. The data further indicated that the teachers were satisfied because they were trusted by the Advisory Teachers and Inspectors of Education to facilitate workshops for the teachers on their behalf. The perception was that these types of opportunities foster motivation and self-confidence on the part of

the teachers. To support this argument, one respondent remarked that this type of trust is not only found in the cluster set-up, but also in the circuit and regional levels.

With regard to training, the general view of the respondents was that the cluster system had not yet addressed the issue. The data indicates that the clusters only give attention to programs launched by the Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture. The data leads us to believe that initiatives were not being originated by the cluster schools.

There is a need for training in the cluster centres. Kleinhans (2001:5) is of the opinion that 54% of schools have ten or fewer teachers which means that training and subject experience at 54% of the total schools are thinly spread. This point makes training of teachers and principals in the cluster an essential aspect. Kleinhans also notes that the provision of assessment and training was mostly done on an individual basis. The erstwhile isolated rural schools have now the opportunity to tap into networking and sharing. However, one sensed a lack of innovative ideas and strategies with regard to training within the cluster management.

According to the data, the only training program that came from the Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture was discriminatory by nature. The reason being, that the programs were either directed at secondary schools or at primary schools and thus there were very few cases where the schools were brought together.

Mendelsohn and Ward (2001:8) stress the need for training to support teachers. They further claim that, although efforts have been made to improve teachers' levels of training, most teachers get little support in either preparing schemes of work, improving their teaching methods or interpreting the curriculum so they know exactly what must be taught and examined. In support of the perception of

the staff and management, the Project Progress Review Mission (BEP: 2002:9) claims that the utilisation of school cluster structures to carry out training activities is still in its embryonic stage.

One of the apartheid legacies is the isolation of schools, especially in the rural areas. The next section investigates whether the gap of isolation has been bridged.

5.4 How management perceive the potential of the cluster system and how it may be realised

5.4.1 Uniformity and cooperation

Uniformity was perceived by some of the respondents as holding the cluster system together. It is clear from the perception of the respondents that the cluster system had brought about uniformity. In this regard, the respondents argued that principals in the cluster came together and set a program for the year that had to be followed by all the schools in the cluster. This aspect denotes the first step towards uniformity. In their review report of the clustering of schools in Namibia, Mendelsohn and Ward (2001:14) state: "Planning of activities and developments is now done in a collective way at the cluster management level". The term 'cluster management level' refers to a structure where principals of schools in the cluster meet for cluster planning purposes. The data indicated that the schools in the cluster strive to maintain uniformity by following the same format for lesson preparation, examination papers and sporting activities.

Although uniformity was perceived as something good by some respondents, others maintained that it had also had a negative effect on the spirit of competition between schools. The idea has been nurtured that formerly affluent schools, like former white schools, had a different culture when it came to education. The parents of these schools contributed generously at all levels for the well-being of the schools. These parents were utilised during class teaching

and extramural activities when needs arose. At the moment, this difference in participation explains why these schools perform so well when compared to former disadvantaged (black) schools, the teachers are the only contributors at all levels.

With regard to the question of cooperation, the data shows that efforts were made to establish the right climate for cooperation amongst schools. However the data also revealed that the desired cooperation had not taken place because the cluster system had not taken root. The cluster system may yield proper cooperation if, firstly, the schools have achieved the same level of performance, and secondly, if there is a more open discussion amongst schools on issues needed to strengthen the efforts of the cluster system.

The disparities and tensions in schools can be ascribed to the legacy of the colonial education system. It is against the background of this colonial education system that the Ministry of Basic Education and Culture vigorously endeavours to address these inequities and disparities by using the cluster system as a management tool to enhance uniformity and cooperation (MEC 1993:168). In fact, the uncooperative nature and negative perception of schools regarding one another can be attributed to the lack of legitimacy of the colonial education. In this regard, the Task Team Report (1996:18) of the Ministry of Education in South Africa sums up the question of the lack of legitimacy of the education system as follows:

In the majority of schools this led to poor management and to the collapse of teaching and learning. In many schools, decades of resistance to apartheid discredited many conventional education practices such as punctuality, preparation for lessons, innovation, individual attention and peer group learning.

These circumstances were also experienced in Namibian schools and is why the issue of uniformity and cooperation features strongly and is addressed in the cluster system.

5.4.2 Parental involvement

The general view of the respondents was that the cluster system had not addressed the issue of parental involvement. To support this argument, the respondents reported that the attendance and involvement of parents had taken place in a manner which was identical to that of the past. It is clear from the data that the lack of parental involvement negatively affected the examination results as the parents were not visible in the school activities of their children. The data revealed that parents were involved only on invitation from the school for parent meetings. The data also stated that parents were informed of the activities, for example, about the yearly program, but they were not involved in making decisions together with the staff.

According to the data, the Cluster Management Committee is to be blamed for the inefficiency of parental participation in school activities. The perception of some of the respondents was that the Cluster Management Committee had not done much too effectively involve parents in the decision-making process. Legacies of the pre-independence style of management were still evident in parent-school relationships. The nature and quality of management is expected to ensure transformation and change in education. To be able to achieve this goal, the Task Team Report suggested the following elements (Department of Education 1996:29):

- A value- driven mission, where a supportive management culture can only thrive in a school where major stakeholders feel ownership of the schools' mission and ethos.
- Participation and collaboration, where the approach to management should be shifted from being an expedient response towards being a value-driven approach, founded upon consent and consensus.

It is clear from these suggestions that the cluster system or school management should redouble their efforts in securing parents as very important stakeholders in the education of their children. One such effort is that training in roles and responsibilities of parents should not be limited to school boards only. Dittmar *et al.* (2002:24) suggests that the Cluster Management Committee should include school board members as well. If that happens, then it is in line with the Ministry's goal of promoting democratic participation of all stakeholders. The general view of the respondents were that, when parents become involved in the academic and extra-mural activities of the school, their children were likely to achieve better results.

Mendelsohn and Ward (2001:14) have a different view with regard to parental involvement in school affairs. They argue that parents are represented in the school boards and that training needs to be conducted in several clusters. They also suggest that some schools be opened each morning by a school board member. According to these researchers, the idea of a joint cluster school board is being explored in some of the clusters. Since the Greenpeace Secondary School staff have claimed that the cluster system has not yet been devolved to the parent community in their cluster, they should look at some of the clusters that have gone far with cluster activities for guidance.

One of the apartheid legacies is the isolation of schools, especially in the rural areas. The next section investigates whether the gap of isolation has been bridged.

5.4.3 Communication and inter-school relationship

With regard to the interrelationships among schools, Kleinhans (2001:3) noted the following:

School clustering is actually meant for isolated rural schools. The assumption is that this type of networking will help them to escape from their

isolation. Schools can be clustered to facilitate training, for communication purposes, to improve the delivery of materials and textbooks and to generally improve school management.

Schools are the information centres, especially for rural areas. If the channel of communication has been linked, the community is likely to benefit economically and socially.

It is evident from the data that schools previously operated on an individual basis, with each school responsible for its own development. The data denotes that the cluster system has created the opportunity for schools to interact on a regular basis to share common issues. The data also notes that some of the respondents were of the opinion that the cluster system bridged the gap between former white schools and black schools. They argued that there is constant communication among schools on issues of mutual concern and interest. The perception of the respondents was that the cluster system had laid the foundation for schools to exchange views and experiences on a regular basis. According to Mendelsohn and Ward (2001: 8), the cluster system is in place to improve the management of schools, especially by improving communication between schools within the cluster, circuit offices and regional office.

The general perception of the respondents is that there was an improvement in communication among teachers. Communication and interaction is needed to help schools emerge from the pre-independence hangover of the feeling of inferiority, superiority and isolation and travel the route to change. According to Peters and Waterman (1982, cited in Fullan 1989: 402): "Nothing is more enticing than the feeling of being needed, which is the magic that procures high expectation".

One respondent maintained that the clustering of schools was better than individual schools. In this regard, the respondent's perception was that many schools lacked essential human resources, especially in terms of qualified

teachers, and that the cluster system had created the opportunity to share expertise and resources.

The data indicates that communication among schools set the scene for teachers to share knowledge on reading and the interpretation of syllabi. It was also the shared perception of the respondents that communication helps teachers to catch up with new thinking and approaches in education and contributes greatly to the quality of teaching and management of subject areas. Teachers teaching the same subjects were able to come together and share their successes and problems.

The data also indicated that in the cluster system, the group of schools came together for workshops, meetings, sporting activities and consequently broke the barriers of isolation that were evident among schools before the cluster system was introduced. Another respondent was of the opinion that many decisions taken in the cluster setup were not fulfilled due to the long distances and, in many cases, the inaccessibility of roads.

In the next section, I discuss whether there is any evidence of improved school results since the introduction of the cluster system.

5.5 Is there any evidence of improved school results since the introduction of the cluster system?

5.5.1 Academic Performance

The overall view of the respondents was that the cluster system has brought about better learner performance. They agreed that this learner performance was addressed at cluster management committee meetings, where the objectives were set to achieve these goals. These objectives were adopted to help individual schools achieve better learner results. The cluster centre principal, according to the minutes, echoed the satisfaction of the cluster principals that the cluster managed to score 60% pass rate. The sharing of ideas

on educational issues and the setting of one examination paper per subject for the cluster was regarded as having a positive effect on academic achievement.

According to The Task Team Report (1996:27) of the Ministry of Education in South Africa: "The task of management, at all levels in the education system, is ultimately the creation and support of the conditions under which their students are able to achieve learning". In my opinion, what is stated here is the function of the Cluster Management Committee. The management committee should create conditions and circumstances that are conducive for learner achievement in all levels of their involvement.

The perception of the respondents about better academic results is the result of the efforts of the cluster on sharing ideas on how to improve the results of the feeder schools. The impression that one gets from the data is that the cluster management had realised that feeder schools play a big role in the performance of senior secondary schools. To this end, they agreed that issues like reading, writing and arithmetic were worth pursuing, especially in the primary schools. The data also revealed a recommendation that English as a medium of instruction and of the examination should get proper attention and those learners should be encouraged to speak English as an official language on school premises. The data also revealed that the management of the cluster schools was against the so-called 'semi-automatic promotion' of learners. According to this semi-automatic promotion, the learners may fail only once in a phase.

The respondents also had the perception that the cluster system was a handy tool in bringing about change in the performance of schools. However, change can hardly be effected with the same old management structure. Change in leadership and management was needed to effect the change that is so vigorously advocated by the cluster system. Hargreaves and Hopkins (cited in Preedy 1993:234) are of the opinion that change is only successful when it has

become part of the natural behaviour of all those in the school. One respondent said: "If the tree is the same old one, it is hard to effect changes".

School clustering was regarded as an effective tool to improve the enrolment of learners. The first step is to identify the feeder schools. The purpose is to improve the flow of learners in that specific area to prevent over-population.

In the next section I discuss whether there is a change in the management of discipline.

5.5.2 The management of discipline

The dawn of independence has greatly contributed to the indiscipline of schools. Corporal punishment was abolished not too long after the independence of Namibia, since it was regarded as against the spirit of human dignity and as an inhumane act. Historically, the cane was used and misused as a means to maintain discipline and order in the schools. However, there was no immediate replacement for the cane, and discipline in schools got out of hand. Teachers were not trained how to handle situations without a cane. The data indicated that this type of indiscipline was not evident in the former white schools, where good discipline was still the order of the day, while the former black schools were still 'celebrating' the independence. According to a respondent, this state of affairs negatively affected the academic performance of the learners. It is within this state of affairs that the cluster system has been implemented and has had to face these affairs as a challenge. However, the data does not indicate that the cluster system has addressed the teacher or learner discipline.

The perception is maintained that the cluster system has created a positive environment for schools to deal with learner discipline. The fact that teachers are in constant interaction and networking makes it easier for teachers to curb indiscipline among learners. Collaborative planning, implementation and acting as Fullan (1985:406) would call it, is needed to seriously and successfully

address the issue of indiscipline. One positive aspect that has emerged from the data is the innovation creating learner profiles, which are shared with other schools in the cluster, and are given to new schools to which learners are applying. The data has showed that this development has warned the learners not to behave badly at one school and run to another.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the management issues that emerged as themes throughout the data. From the ontological and epistemological perspectives, I have come to realise that reality is perceived differently by different people and this was also evident in the research. However, the cluster system is being regarded as the right vehicle to address many of the management issues such as uniformity and cooperation, academic performance of the learners, parental involvement, decentralisation, training, communication and the management of discipline. This research has established that, although parental involvement and training seem to be the important aspects of school management, they have not yet been explored effectively within the cluster system. I realised throughout this research that the cluster system is a new 'in thing' that still has to go a long way before it meets the new demands of educational management, such as effective parental participation and management of discipline.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I give a summary of the main findings of this research. During the discussion of the findings, I try to establish whether my research question have been answered. The research question is: "To investigate the experiences of the senior management and staff of Greenpeace Senior Secondary School". The second half of this chapter deals with the recommendations for practice and research that surfaced throughout this study. I devote the very last part of this chapter to the limitations that I experienced throughout this research.

6.2 Summary of findings

The cluster system has evolved over the passed five years in the Rundu region of education as a means to meeting the need for better education management at local (school) level. It was believed that the Rundu region had in the past been the most neglected region, especially with regard to education. The following four factors had been identified as necessitating the introduction of the cluster system:

- The low level of management support given to schools.
- A great need for teacher support.
- An obvious need for greater levels of participation by all stakeholders in making and implementing decisions.
- That most schools work in isolation.

Against this background, the school cluster system was devised to facilitate new ways of education service delivery and to address the question of improving education standards. The researchers of the Basic Education Project claimed that the emergence of the cluster system in Namibia was a local development,

and that it was not driven by any adviser seeing to introduce a system that worked elsewhere. The study has shown and confirmed that the implementation of the cluster system is based on experiences drawn from the Scandinavian Islands.

The school cluster system is the practice of grouping between five and seven schools. The cluster system is rated as good, but could conceivably be improved if primary and secondary schools could be clustered separately so that the streamlining of cluster activities can take place more conveniently. The study has furthermore disclosed that cluster centres have been established without due consideration of human, material and financial support for the school that serves as a cluster centre.

I deliberately selected the Greenpeace Secondary School as my research site, because the principal and some of the staff members have been at the school since the implementation of the cluster system. I hoped that they would provide answers to my research question, which is to investigate the perceptions and experiences with regard to the cluster system.

Another aspect that surfaced in this research was uniformity and cooperation. It is stated clearly in this research that the planning of activities and development should be done in a collective way at cluster management level. To this end, the schools in the cluster strive to maintain uniformity by following the same format for lesson preparation, examination question papers and in sporting activities as well. However, this is not universally perceived as a positive thing, since some respondents perceive this uniformity as having a negative effect on the spirit of competitiveness between schools. The idea has been nurtured by the respondents that formerly affluent schools, like former white schools, have a different culture when it comes to education.

Efforts have been made to establish the right climate for cooperation amongst schools. However, the desired cooperation has not yet taken place, because the cluster system has not yet taken root properly. The cluster system may yield proper cooperation if the schools have achieved the same level of performance, and there are more open discussions between schools on issues of common interest, which are needed to strengthen the efforts of the cluster system.

Many of the disparities and tensions in schools are a legacy of the colonial education system. It is against this background that the Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture vigorously endeavours to address these inequities and disparities by using the cluster system as a management tool to enhance uniformity and cooperation. In fact, the uncooperative nature and negative perception of schools towards one another can be attributed to the segregation policies of the previous education system. In many schools, if not all former black schools, decades of resistance to apartheid discredited many conventional education practices such as punctuality, preparation for lessons, innovation, individual attention and peer group learning. These are some of the reasons why the issue of uniformity and cooperation features strongly and was addressed in the cluster system.

The academic performance of learners has steadily increased since the implementation of the cluster system. The adoption of goals and objectives helped improve the academic standards. Sharing of ideas on educational issues and the setting of one internal examination paper are elements regarded as having a positive effect on academic achievement. The cluster management has realised that feeder schools play a big role in the performance of secondary schools. Therefore it was agreed that emphasis be placed on the development of reading, writing and arithmetic skills, especially in the primary schools. The so called 'automatic promotion', where learners may fail only once in a phase, was regarded as having a negative impact on learner performance.

Democratic participation of all stakeholders is an issue that has been seriously neglected. It is clear from the research that cluster management has done nothing to ensure parental involvement in the activities of the school. What surfaced strongly is that parents were involved only when invited by the school and were absent from decision-making process, they simply being informed of the school activities.

The study noted that the cluster management committee, which is the engine of the cluster centre, is to be blamed for the lack of parental participation. Legacies of the pre-independence style of management are still evident in the parent-school relationship. The cluster management needs to redouble their efforts to secure full support of parents in the management of the schools. To this end, the possibility of a joint school board of schools in the cluster is considered as a means to ensure stakeholder participation. It is a given fact that when parents become involved in the academic and extra-mural activities of the school, their children are likely to achieve better results.

Decentralisation provides the theoretical framework of this study of the cluster system. Decentralisation is equated with maximum grassroots participation, equality of opportunity, and reform. It is the underpinning of the element of democratic participation, which promotes the involvement of teachers, parents, school communities and learners in the education process.

This study has shown that the cluster system is an effort by the Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture to decentralise the education services in order to bring education closer to the people concerned. It is also clear from the study that the rural schools in particular benefit greatly from this system, in the sense that these schools now have the stationery and textbooks timeously delivered. It is evident from the study that functional structures such as circuit management committees, cluster management committees and subject management committees have been established to facilitate the process of decentralisation.

However, a collaborative and integrative management style is needed for the decentralisation to serve its purpose. Training in management-related issues should feature strongly in this process.

The research established that the staff members were satisfied with the manner in which they were involved in the activities of the cluster, such as sport, academic and social activities. The involvement in setting examination question papers for the whole cluster of schools is regarded as a positive move towards the development of much needed skills. This type of involvement happens through subject coordinating committees and examination committees. The cluster system has created opportunities to bring teachers of different schools together and by so doing, enhance positive self-image. It is through the cluster system that teachers are sharing educational problems, experiences and interaction. The relationship of trust between teachers, inspectors and advisory teachers created other opportunities for teachers to conduct workshops on their own behalf. The perception is that these type of opportunities foster motivation and self-confidence on the part of the teachers.

Training in the cluster system is an extension of programs launched by the Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture. A lack of innovative ideas and strategies surfaced strongly in this research. The ongoing efforts of training should make the schools and cluster of schools learning organisations. Continuous support in terms of training is needed to support teachers, learners, principals and parents to collectively strive for quality in education. Emphasis on capacity-building rather than basic management skills should top the training agenda.

This study has revealed that although some efforts have been made to improve teachers' level of training, most teachers get little support in helping them to prepare schemes of work, or to improve their teaching methods, or to interpret the curriculum so they know exactly what must be taught and examined. These

are the areas of training that need the attention of the cluster. It is evident from the research that schools operated previously on an individual basis, but that the cluster system has created the opportunity for schools to interact on a regular basis. The cluster centre has also bridged the gap between former white schools and black schools so that there is constant communication among schools on issues of mutual concern and interest. Communication and interaction is needed to help schools emerge from the pre-independence feelings of inferiority, superiority and isolation and travel the route to change. Many schools lack essential human resources, especially in terms of qualified teachers, and the cluster system has created the opportunity to share the expertise and the resources. Due to constant communication, the teachers are able to catch up with new thinking and approaches in education and contribute greatly to the quality of teaching.

The study has established that, with the abolishment of corporal punishment immediately after the independence of Namibia in 1990, the discipline in schools got out of hand. This situation also seriously affected the academic outcomes. It is within this state of affairs that the cluster system has been implemented and had to face the affairs as a challenge. The study established that the cluster system has created the necessary environment for schools to deal with learner discipline. It was possible to address learner discipline because of constant communication, sharing of information and networking among schools.

6.3 Recommendations

The need for ongoing training in order for the cluster system to be fully operational surfaced throughout this research. Training is still needed in the following areas of management:

- Training of cluster centre principals on how to manage the cluster centre effectively. The cluster centre work is regarded as an extra workload and the cluster centre principal has to cope with these types of situations.

- School board training, especially in community outreach skills. There is a lack of parental involvement in the activities of the school.
- In addition to the individual school boards, a board for the general management of the entire cluster should be established to ensure the efficient management of the cluster.
- More support for teachers in terms of helping them to prepare schemes of work, to improve their teaching methods or to interpret the curriculum so they know exactly what must be taught and examined.
- Consideration of a budget for the cluster centre to do cluster work. This budget can be used for maximum utilisation of the cluster services. This will also ease the financial burden experienced by the cluster centre.
- The cluster centre needs extra human resources. An extra secretary to do the cluster centre administration and leniency in the application of staffing norms to give extra administrative time for the cluster centre principal, should be considered.
- The cluster centre principal should not be handpicked, but he or she should apply for the position of cluster centre principal. The application should be accompanied by a statement about what he or she hopes to achieve or address in the cluster, and which describes his or her preferred style of operation. This should preferably be a contract post for a short period of time and a stipend should be paid for the successful applicant to ensure the success and efficiency of the cluster system.
- The cluster system should be institutionalised to legalise its operations.
- Research about the perceptions and experiences of the cluster centre principal together with other principals in the cluster is needed.
- A comparative study on the perceptions and experiences of regions about the cluster system. Namibia is a vast country with diverse climatological, demographic and cultural settings. The density of the population in different regions may also have an impact on the type or model of a cluster system that needs to be implemented.

6.4 Limitations

“Educational research is constrained by ethical and legal considerations in conducting research” (Schumacher & Mcmillan 1993:23). The research should not have been limited to a secondary school only and the cluster principal should also have been one of the respondents. I think that this is a serious omission, since the cluster centre is the core of the cluster system. More evidence could have been drawn from the cluster centre principal on the question, “what potential does the cluster system hold and how might that be realised”.

6.5 Conclusion

The primary function of the Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture is to render quality services to the people of Namibia and to ensure quality academic outcomes. It is against this background that the Ministry, since the independence in 1990, made various efforts to improve the quality of academic performance and the management of schools. To be able to achieve this goal, the cluster system has been introduced as a means to help address the legacies of the colonial educational system and to bring education services closer to the people. The study has shown that the cluster system has been in place for a very short period of time only and that shortcomings are experienced. Further research is needed to make the cluster system a viable tool in the development of education.

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[MBESC1]Subheadings not numbered. Why?
[O2]New Paragraph
[M3]Not sure how this last phrase is connected??
[M4],(to the education of their [M4]children.???)
[M5]Is this quotation correct?
[M6]Of or for?
[M7]Definition of abbreviation
[O8]New addition to address educational change.
[M9]Sentence does not make sense
[M10]Insert year!! And page number
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[M12]Year and page
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[M14]is this correct??
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[M31]Reference?
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[M37]Which respondent?
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