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EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

**Education decentralization in the Omaheke Region of
Namibia**

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF EDUCATION
(Education Leadership and Management)**

By

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ABSTRACT

Before the attainment of independence on 21 March 1990, the people of Namibia were engaged in a protracted struggle against colonialism, racism and apartheid, all of which had denied the majority of the people democracy and development. The people of Namibia therefore did not have power to make decisions on matters that affect their lives and were also not able to determine their own destiny (Ministry of Regional Government and Housing [MoRGH]: 1998:1).

After independence, the Namibian government provided for a policy of decentralization under Chapter 12 of the Constitution. After adopting decentralization as state policy in 1996 the government, under the auspices of the Ministry of Regional, Local Government and Housing, embarked upon an implementation process that began in 2003. Education decentralization was included in this process.

As my research investigated participants' experience of education decentralization in the Omaheke Region, I conducted an interpretive case study. I employed semi-structured interviews as my main data collection instrument. The quality of my research lies mostly in the authenticity of my thick descriptions where I rely to a large degree on a high ratio of participant to researcher voice.

The study has revealed that there is a basic understanding of what education decentralization refers to. Education decentralization is also perceived to provide for the democratization of education through the active participation of all relevant stakeholders - parents, teachers, learners and civil servants - in the education process.

However, although there is a basic understanding of what education decentralization entails, there is not necessarily acceptance. The study revealed that many people in Omaheke have reservations about the process of decentralizing education services. Some regard education decentralization as central government "dumping" its responsibility on the Regions. Furthermore, neither the Regional Council, the Regional Education Office, schools, communities nor parents have the capacity to cope with decentralization.

The responsibility for overseeing the implementation of decentralization in the Region lies with the Omaheke Regional Council. Education as a decentralized function ought to resort directly under the Regional Council. However, the Regional Education office does not yet operate under the Regional Council. Instead the Education Director continues to report directly to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education in the capital. In this way an important decentralization structure, the Regional Council, is bypassed and rendered toothless.

The data reveal that there is only partial evidence of psychological and structural readiness for education decentralization. Consequently there is little meaningful participation and therefore no sense of ownership among parents, teachers, learners, community-based organizations and political leaders.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and that all the sources that I have used are properly quoted and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I also declare that this thesis has not been submitted for a degree at any other university.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I introduce my research. I present the context and the reasons why I undertook this research. I also highlight the goals. The methodology is outlined and justified. Finally, I provide an outline of the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Context

One of the basic challenges that faces Namibian society as it emerges from years of colonial subjugation into becoming a sovereign nation is the transformation of society at almost every level of government. To this effect steps have been taken since 21 March 1990, when Namibia attained its independence, to promote what are new concepts for the country such as participatory democracy, justice, equality and fairness. Among other goals aimed at, is the improvement of public service provision through decentralization. The challenge is to get the different communities in Namibia to participate in the self-governance process.

Consequently the Namibian government embarked on a policy of decentralization of government functions as enshrined in the Namibian Constitution which states that “for purposes of regional and local government, Namibia shall be divided into regional and local units, which shall consist of such Regional and Local Authorities as may be determined and defined by Act of Parliament.”

These fundamental principles are embodied in the Decentralization Policy, which was approved by Cabinet in December 1996 and by the National Assembly in September 1997. The policy was officially launched on 30 March 1998. This policy provides a framework for central government to devolve functions, responsibilities, powers and resources to lower levels of government. This policy was legalized as the Decentralization Enabling Act of 2000 (Act 33 of 2000) and was meant to “provide for and regulate Authorities Councils of functions vesting in line Ministries, and provide for incidental matters” (p.2).

The Namibian government thus attaches great importance to the process of decentralization. Education provision, as one of the most important core functions of central government, was also affected by the policy of decentralization.

John Mutorwa (2001), the former Minister of Basic Education, Sport and Culture in Namibia, when reminding delegates at the third bi-annual congress of the Association of Regional Councils about the education context prior to 21 March 1990 recalled that:

The backlogs, disparities, inequities and divisive effects of the former education system, are still visible today, especially in the former Bantustans or homelands. As the former divisive system of education, which was fundamentally based on race, ethnicity and colour, was not and is not acceptable in an independent, free and democratic Namibia, it was therefore, logically decided to establish a single centrally located Education Ministry and a singly unified system of education. The purpose of decentralization of the education system is to establish a decentralized management system that must effectively and efficiently support the Ministry's broad national goals or objectives of access, equity, quality, lifelong learning and democracy.

After independence, Namibia was divided into thirteen political Regions, headed by Regional Governors, but seven education Regions, headed by Directors of Education. However, in compliance with the central government policy of decentralizing central government functions to the thirteen political Regions, the original seven education Regions were sub-divided into thirteen education Regions, to align with the thirteen political Regions. Each education Region is headed by a Regional Director of Education. These thirteen education Regions reside under the thirteen Regional Councils. The Ministry of Education provides its services via these thirteen Regional offices. While the Ministry of Education is responsible for the overall running of the education system, it is the Regional education offices that shoulder the bulk of the implementation of education programmes and policies on a day-to-day basis by working closely with schools and communities in their respective regions. This is in line with the Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Education (2001: 13).

According to the Ministry of Education's Strategic Plan (2001: 13), initially certain Ministerial functions will be delegated to Regional Councils, with the Ministry

retaining overall accountability. Once the Regional Council is sufficiently competent in the delegated tasks, full responsibility for such tasks devolves to the Council. Appelt and Dube (1997: 14) state that this consensus was reached because of the fear that a possible lack of professional capabilities on the part of Regional Council in the educational area may endanger the proper provision of education.

From the above it can be seen that in order for education decentralization to be successful, key personnel tasked with the provision of education will need new skills in leadership and management. In this connection Kamupingene (2006) states:

Although in Namibia we have not travelled long enough down the road of decentralization, it is expected of the regions to assume responsibility over the administration and management of education. In the regions, we are thus expected to be accountable for what is happening or not happening in the education sector. We have to analyze our local and regional needs so as to know how best to address these needs. We are compelled to improve the utilization of regional and local resources. We need to build-up local and regional institutional capacity. (p.4)

Education decentralization also requires the restructuring of regional and institutional education structures. The management of education has been brought closer to communities with the establishment of Education forums and School Boards. Education decentralization in Namibia mostly manifests itself in these statutory bodies that operate in regions and schools respectively.

According to the Namibian Education Act (2001: 9-10) the Minister must establish a forum to be known as the Regional Education Forum for a region and local areas in a region. The functions of the Forum are to:

- Advise the Minister, the Regional Council and Local Authority Councils in that region on matters concerning education in the Regional and Local Authority areas in that region.
- Advise School Boards regarding educational matters and the functions of the School Board under the Act.
- Initiate and facilitate educational development in the region.

The Ministry of Education has also introduced the concept of clustering whereby geographically proximate schools are grouped together in order to share resources, experiences and expertise with a view to improve their teaching and learning. According to Dittmar, Mendelsohn and Ward (2002: 21) the cluster system operates on the basis of circuit and cluster management committees. These committees are intended to strengthen circuit and cluster management by involving a variety of people in making decisions and recommendations about cluster activities. More importantly, decisions and recommendations are made speedily and have local relevance and ownership. The flow of information between different management levels is also improved (Dittmar *et al.* 2002: 22).

This is in line with the Ministry's goal of promoting the democratic participation of all stakeholders in education. Vision 2030 (2004: 207) aligns itself strongly with the decentralization policy by stating that:

Local communities and regional bodies are empowered, and are fully involved in the development process. They actually formulate and implement their respective development plans, while the national government-working hand-in-hand with civil society organizations provides the enabling environment (laws, policies, finances, security, etc.) for the effective management of national, regional and local development efforts.

In recent years the intention is to attempt to introduce the decentralization process at all levels of education in the Omaheke Region of Namibia.

1.2 Motivation for this research

In many countries, the establishment of democratic principles within government structures has brought about a democratisation of the education system. The political leadership in Namibia has chosen the path of decentralization as a means to achieve democratic participation by the majority of the people at grassroots level as well as to achieve sustainable development.

The decentralization process has thus as its aim the development of an education system that requires the involvement of parents, teachers, communities, donors and government. The intention is that societies develop a sense of ownership of their education system. These sentiments are echoed in the then Ministry of Education and Culture's development brief for education, culture and training entitled *Toward Education For All* (1993) where it states:

As educators, we often focus on decisions and programmes at the national level. But in practice, it is our teachers, along with learners and their parents, who make our schools and other education programmes what they are. To improve our education system and to upgrade the quality of our schools requires a good deal of work in our schools and communities. To achieve that, and to maximize the local contributions to our education system, we shall need to decentralize both responsibility and authority.

Decentralization is regarded as an essential part of current education management thinking. It rests heavily on the principles of democratic, participative and collegial management. Education decentralization aims at enhancing local communities' autonomy in order to enable them to benefit from decentralized decision making (Sayed 1997, Kamat 2000, Pillay 2005).

However, education decentralization is not necessarily the best solution to the education problems facing governments. To this effect Gaynor (1998: 4) notes "While the view of decentralization of education continues to attract considerable interest and support, there is an increasing demand to extract lessons from experience and to critically challenge assumptions about decentralization."

In the context of developing countries Rondinelli, Nellis and Cheema (1984) argue:

Despite its vast scope, decentralization has seldom, if ever, lived up to expectations. Regardless of its modest success rate however, government planners, donor institutions and observers of development process continue to promote it. Why? Part of the reason is that decentralization often serves as an instrument for achieving political objectives. (p. 27).

My personal experience as an employee of the Ministry of Education in the Omaheke Region as well as the diverse opinions on education decentralization in the literature,

have prompted me to investigate education decentralization in my region. I am curious to investigate how the decentralization process has influenced the provision of education in the Omaheke Region of Namibia. I also want to know how role players in the education decentralization process experience the process and what their perceptions of decentralization are.

I expect my research to contribute to the understanding of education decentralization in the region. This will in turn assist regional education policy makers to give direction and hopefully impetus to the decentralization process.

1.3 Research goals

The goals of my research are to:

- Gain an understanding of how the education decentralization process in the Omaheke Region is understood and managed by key role-players.
- Explore developments in education provision since the inception of the decentralization process.
- Identify problems experienced in the implementation of decentralization.

1.4. Research methodology

As my research investigated participants' experience of education decentralization in the Omaheke Region, it was conducted in the interpretive paradigm. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000: 22-23) the central endeavour in the context of the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience as well as to understand people's interpretation of the world around them.

As I focus on decentralization in a single region I have selected a case study method. Case studies are usually conducted to gain an understanding of something in a particular context, i.e. one aspect of the context, in the case education decentralization, is studied in order for individuals to deepen their understanding. According to Stake (1995), "a case study is expected to catch the complexity of a single case" (p. 11).

As I was interested in the research participants' perceptions and experiences I employed semi-structured interviews as my data collection instrument. Interviews nicely accommodate the human element, which is vital in research of this nature. Where people have to interpret the influence of a phenomenon that has a direct bearing on them I was guided by Cohen *et al.*'s (2000) advice:

Interviews enable participants to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view. In these senses the interviews are not simply concerned with collecting data about life, it is part of life itself, its human embeddedness is inescapable (p.267).

To analyze the data I coded the raw data into themes and patterns that addressed the goals of my research. The patterns formed the basis of my final write-up.

The quality of my research lies mostly in the authenticity of my thick descriptions where I rely to a large degree on a high ratio of participant to researcher voice.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

Chapter Two is a review of selected literature on the topic of education decentralization. This both provides the theoretical grounding for my research and nests it in the field of education leadership and management. In Chapter Three I justify and explain my research methodology. Chapter Four is devoted to the presentation of the data and in Chapter Five I discuss the data. I conclude the thesis in Chapter Six, where I summarize the main findings and highlight the potential value of my research. Recommendations are also contained in Chapter Six as well as what I regard as potential issues for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Decentralization has captured the interest of many scholars, researchers and policy makers. Authors are in agreement that decentralization is an integral part of current international policy formulation, programme development and management planning. For example, according to McGinn (2002: 11), since 1960 the clearest trend in government has been the global spread of the concept of “decentralization”. Decentralization provides a meaningful alternative to and paradigm shift from the more traditional centralized systems of governance that have been the norm in many countries.

Randinelli, Nelson and Cheema (1984: 09) characterize decentralization as the transfer of responsibility for planning and management resource acquisition and allocation from the central government to subordinate units of government, semi-autonomous public authorities, regional authorities and voluntary non-governmental organizations.

The World Bank (1989: 71-72) provides four reasons for decentralization:

- Demands for local public services vary, from place to place. Only a decentralized provision of local services will cater to these demands.
- Efficiency - It is argued that locally financed and produced services will cost less.
- Political - Local government is an important training ground for democracy. Stronger regional and local governments can control the tendency of central government to become all powerful.
- Institutional - Co-ordination of services at a local level is necessary. A local government can do this more easily than a centralized authority.

Many countries have experimented with downward transfers of authority. If originally decentralization was seen as a special policy instrument to remedy serious ills in a system, today it may be regarded as a standard component of the process of modernization through which all systems seek to pass.

Decentralization is also regarded as a social practice for taking government to the people for maximum participation in government by the people. This is in line with the argument of Lunenberg and Ornstein (1996: 103) when they argue that decentralization makes greater use of human resources, unburdens top level administrators, ensures that decisions are made closer to the firing line by personnel with technical knowledge, and permits a more rapid response to external changes.

Wolman, (as cited in Bennett 1990: 32) says that decentralization, by placing government closer to the people, fosters greater responsiveness of policy-makers to the will of the citizenry and it is argued, results in a closer congruence between public preferences and public policy.

Rondinelli et al. observe that decentralization can only succeed if lower levels of government are given authority and have the capacity to deliver services that would normally be the prerogative of central government. This trend calls for a careful approach towards decentralization.

2.2 Education Decentralization: A Global Trend

According to Sayed (1997: 1) decentralization is currently the stated policy of most educational systems throughout the world and is the core of major international efforts aimed at restructuring education systems.

According to Kamat (2000: 2), in current education reform discourse, decentralization has become a common rallying point for such diverse actors as non-governmental organizations, the state bureaucracy and international aid agencies to work jointly on improving education. It serves as a unifying force because, historically,

decentralization has been equated with democracy in the sense of greater local sovereignty and increased responsiveness to the needs of marginalized groups.

For example Faustor (1995: 2), when describing the decentralization of education in Latin America refer to serious social, political and economic crises that have served as catalysts for the paradigm shift towards education decentralization.

In line with Sayed (1997), McGinn and Welsh (1999: 7) believe that “decentralization is arguably one of the most important phenomena to come on to the educational planning agenda in the last 15 years.” They (1999: 9) point out that in many cases, decentralization is a result of the process of political democratisation. People want to be consulted and involved in decisions that concern them directly. Community participation in education decentralization can only be sustained if greater democracy filters through to lower levels of society.

This argument is supported by McGinn (2002: 12):

Over time we have learned that a reform is more likely to be implemented and to be sustained over time, if the process involves a critical mass of those groups with interest in the process and outcomes of the reform.

However, Hanson (1998: 117) points out that, “Only through collective support and collaborative activities from all levels, particularly, those three or four levels below the Minister, can successful change take place.”

Although many developing and developed countries have adopted a policy of decentralizing their education systems, many authors agree that educational decentralization is unique in each country. It is always implemented against the background of local realities (Hanson: 1998: 113).

Sayed (1997: 2) asserts that in as much as education decentralization should focus on important administrative issues like resource distribution, management and utilization, it should not ignore the equally crucial issues pertaining to the political dimension in

which education systems operate. He points out that these issues include the transfer of power, the functions of different levels of government and the ways in which control is exercised. Sayed questions whether education decentralization constitutes a transfer of power in the true sense of the word. He argues that central government authority for educational decision making is never actually surrendered and that central government still retains policy control over the schools despite decentralization initiatives.

McGinn, Street and Lauglo (as cited in Sayed 1997: 2-3) point out that the political dimension of education decentralization is a complex issue which raises several challenging questions such as:

Who has the right to decide how education will be decentralized? What is the role of the state in educational decentralization? What form of democracy is being exposed when education is decentralized? Issues relating to the privatization of education and the values and objectives that underpin the education system are also brought into sharper focus.

According to Hanson (1998: 11) educational decentralization is a popular reform theme of governments around the world, but with goals, strategies and outcomes that are as different as the countries themselves. These decentralization initiatives can range from arbitrary exercises of coercive power to conscientiously planned interventions driven by national political will. According to Ka-ho-Mok (2003: 348) the Singapore government openly acknowledges the importance to reform its education systems in order to make its citizens more competitive and competent in the open global market place.

Decentralization can take many forms, such as revising the way a ministry of education makes decisions at the top of the system, privatising through the introduction of market forces, and empowering local educators and parents through school-based management. Because so many countries are decentralizing their educational system, there is a growing need to examine the rationale that drives the policy of education decentralization globally.

2.3 The Rationale for Education Decentralization

Sayed (1997) asserts that the political rationale for educational decentralization is to redistribute, share, and extend power as well as to enhance participation by removing centralized control over educational decision making.

Hanson (1998: 113) argues that educational decentralization reforms typically have their roots in the political arena. He stresses that as nations make the transition from autocratic to democratic forms of government, an almost natural outcome is an effort to decentralize the educational system as one important mechanism of establishing citizen participation in government institutions.

According to Nzouanken (1994: 215), decentralization in education extends the work of democracy and fulfils democratic aspirations. Consequently, any education reform aimed at democratising institutions of learning, will only be fully effective as far as it is accompanied by far-reaching administrative reforms which effectively distribute power.

Meeakshisundaram (1994: 16) describes two virtues of democratic decentralization:

It is consistent with the democratic trend and is also technically the most efficient method for the formulation and execution of local projects. In his view, decentralization is democratic in the sense that the central authority from which power is decentralized is democratic and the body to which power flows is also democratically organized.

The administrative orientation must shift completely from making decisions and issuing orders to helping people make decisions through co-operatives and other traditional structures. Education decentralization is supposed to strengthen democracy and will consequently have to possess democratic virtues and characteristics like transparency and consultation as highlighted by Meeakshisundaram.

Kamat (2000: 1) relates the rationale for educational decentralization to the new thinking around the role and function of the state, which he believes has had profound implications on educational policy. He refers, for example, to Latin America and

South Asia where, “Education has gone from being largely a state obligation to being increasingly turned over to civil society and non-state organizations” (p.2).

In analyzing the reasons for the decentralization of education in South Africa, Sayed (1997: 3) discusses the political and ideological reasons that support educational decentralization. One is that educational decentralization allows for greater control of schooling by those who pay for it. He claims further that decentralization can enhance the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of the nation’s schools. Another justification for decentralization is that it is based on calls for community control of schools.

McGinn (2002: 12-14) refers to the increased complexity of education; greater attention and accountability to stakeholders; a wider variety of sources of revenue and the shift from local management to local governance as some of the important considerations that have prompted the introduction of education decentralization. Faustor (1995: 7) classifies the arguments for the decentralization of education into five major categories:

- (a) Ideological- an important part of the overhaul of government and its relations with civil society , with a view to greater democratisation.
- (b) Political - to change the patterns and style of educational governance and to allow community participation in schooling.
- (c) Economic- to raise additional public and private funds for education in order to secure greater economic sufficiency.
- (d) Administrative - to streamline the education system, making it less bureaucratic and more efficient.
- (e) Pedagogical and cultural - to formulate and develop a flexible national curriculum which can better respond better to various regional and local needs.

Mok (2004: 348-349) provides an example of an economic motive in 1990’s in Singapore:

Realizing the fact that there is only one resource in Singapore - human capital - the Singapore government therefore has tried to maximize the

potential of its citizens in the further advancement of its economic modernization. In order to make its citizens more creative and innovative, the Singapore Government openly acknowledges the importance of allowing more autonomy for schools in charting their own courses of development.

Bjork (2004: 248) observes that in Indonesia and in fact in the rest of Asia during the 1980's and 1990's, educational decentralization was introduced in order for the country not to lose out on huge sponsorships for education. It also risked legitimacy in international circles if it did not embrace educational decentralization.

Hanson (1998: 113) points out that increased economic development through institutional modernization, increased management efficiency, redistribution of financial responsibility, democratization, the neutralization of competing centres of power and demands for an improved quality of education are some of the arguments for educational decentralization.

“Toward Education For All” (1993: 170-171), the Development Brief for Education, Culture and Training from the then Ministry of Education and Culture in Namibia states that educational decentralization can permit more flexible, more creative and more innovative administration. In addition, it argues that decentralization of education can permit more effective monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of development projects. When policies are set and programmes are implemented locally, communities are better able to monitor the resulting activities, therefore reducing waste. By involving more citizenry, both individuals and groups in decision making, educational decentralization can reduce inequality and promote greater equity in allocating government resources and access to government programmes.

In Pillay's view (as cited in Mvula, New Era Newspaper, 12 May 2005: 6), decentralization is crucial in the sense that it enhances and improves the delivery of services. He says the impact of decentralization on improving the quality of education depends amongst others, on changing the behaviour of parents and teachers. Decentralization of education services also increases enrolment rates, especially in marginalized and remote areas. Cost could be reduced and efficiency increased.

Walker (2002: 19) is convinced that the recent move toward more local control is motivated by the belief that decentralized control will result in better school outcomes. She emphasizes that central dictates that are aimed at an equal distribution of benefits may oversupply the service in some areas and undersupply it in others:

Local officials have incentives to act on local needs because they are more prone to pressure by their constituents and they also need to compete against other communities to attract or retain residents. In addition, there is a general suspicion that decisions made from the centre are inefficient, given the widespread collapse of centrally planned economies in the late 1980's and early 1990's.

2.4 Challenges of Educational Decentralization

With all its good intentions and massive support, educational decentralization has evoked serious debate. This calls for a careful approach.

Gildenhuis and Knipe (2000) caution against decentralization if there is no firm prospect of increased efficiency and effectiveness. In their view efficiency and effectiveness should play a prominent role in the consideration of decentralization. They state that it is the main purpose of every government institution to deliver public services as efficiently and effectively as possible and if administrative decentralization can contribute to this goal, it is the obvious route to follow. This also means that if efficiency and effectiveness cannot be assured, no decentralization should take place (p. 241).

In line with Gildenhuis and Knipe, Hanson (1998) warns that:

Dropping a decentralization reform into a weak regional management infrastructure is like dropping it into quicksand. Countries with weak regional management infrastructures are generally driven by the informal system (e.g. personalism, ignored rules, politicized decision making). In contrast, countries with relatively strong regional infrastructures have a much better chance for success because, for example, policies and rules are normally obeyed, promotion is based on what rather than who you know, the political/technical balance is maintained, and prior planning is taken seriously (p. 188).

“Readiness” has been identified by McGinn & Welsh (1999:76) as one of the foremost challenges in the implementation of educational decentralization. According to them most decentralization programmes have failed to reach the objectives set for them, because the enthusiasm for the changes is shared by a limited number of stakeholders. Reforms that involve local communities, for example, fail if community members lack experience and skills in collective decision-making and organizational management. This means that in order for educational decentralization to be beneficial, those involved in reform must be capable of carrying it out.

Hanson (1998: 113) notes that educational decentralization must avoid the problem where responsibility is decentralized but without the necessary authority, training or financing to execute the tasks. He further comments that decentralization in education can only work if community members are prepared to put in the time and energy necessary to make the reform work. If the local communities distrust, do not take seriously, do not participate in or do not want to assume the added responsibility, then the opportunity for successful change through decentralization is seriously limited. In sum, the greater the vision of decentralization is accepted within and between the distinct centres of power, the greater the chances of success.

Because decentralization initiatives tend to be launched from within the political arena, passive resistance from civil servants within Ministries of Education often emerge and become a major barrier to the implementation of decentralization. While the Minister of Education and his/her immediate lieutenants are frequently politicians themselves and typically support decentralization, lower-level officials are often less than enthusiastic because it means a loss of personal power and of the comfortable perquisites and privileges they have managed to create for themselves (McGinn & Welsh 1999: 80).

Coupled with the above, there is the potential danger that regional and municipal systems may go their own way to the extent that inter-system continuity and articulation are significantly compromised. For example, different regions can develop distinct salary structures, with better educators gravitating towards the higher paying areas; algebra can be taught in the Seventh Grade in one region and the Ninth

in another; and the school calendar across the country can vary significantly (McGinn & Welsh 1999: 87).

According to “Toward Education For All” (1993) it would be difficult to operate a national education system, for example, if each community determined the age at which children began school. In Namibia’s current circumstances, it would be impossible to ensure that schools had sufficient textbooks if each community had to negotiate directly with local publishers in order to produce them (p.171).

However, Namibia is a unitary state and no amount of education decentralization will be an excuse for the state to abdicate or shift the burden of its responsibility for basic education from the central to local authorities completely. Gildenhuys and Knipe (2000), when describing the relationship between a unitary state and the distribution of responsibility, power and resources, say:

The essence of a unitary state is that the sovereignty of the government is undivided. The authority of the central government is unrestricted, for the constitution of a unitary state does not allow for any law-making body other than the central legislature. The central government may, at its sole discretion, delegate some legislative authority to provincial and local governments. This delegated authority may, however, be overruled and legislation of the lower tiers is still subject to the supremacy of central legislation.

To counter what Weiler (1993: 70) refers to as “an erosion of the state’s legitimacy”, Hanson (1998: 126) proposed the following to guide the successful decentralization of educational systems without negating the role of the state:

- The more decentralization initiatives involves the centre, transferring positive opportunities to the regions (win-win) rather than simply unloading problems and burdens (win-lose), the greater the chances for successful change.
- The greater the accepted vision of decentralization between the distinct centres of power (e.g. political parties, unions, bureaucrats, religious institutions), the greater the chance for successful change.

- Devolution rather than delegation of authority and responsibility has a greater chance for long-term success.
- When decentralization initiatives die, it is usually for political rather than administrative/technical reasons.
- The stronger the management infrastructure at the regional level, the greater the opportunity for success.
- It is better to transfer authority to individual regions only when they meet specific tests of readiness, rather than to all the regions at once regardless of readiness.
- Decentralization in incremental stages has a greater chance of success than an “out-with-the- old and in-with- the-new “approach.
- Understanding the motivation behind a decentralization initiative is the key to understanding the specifics of the strategy.
- The people who have been part of an organizational culture that has managed a centralized system are not very effective in managing a decentralized system.
- A decentralized organization should function as parts of a whole rather than simply independent parts.
- It is easier to initiate a decentralization initiative during times of political, economic and social stress or turbulence, than it is during times of relative stability.
- Once decentralization has taken place, the central ministry must still have the tools to ensure that regions follow national education policy.
- Education policy on decentralization should be developed through debate rather than through disguised manipulation of the national budget.

“Toward Education For All” (1993) cautions that “educational decentralization is important, but not equally important in all circumstances. It bears repeating that there is no level or degree of decentralization that is best” (p.172).

2.5 Types of Decentralization

Mahwood (as cited in Reddy and Sabelo 1997: 576) in characterizing decentralization, says that the word “decentralization” is indicative of the presence of something at the centre, from which it may be dispersed. Most individuals and

governments favour the concept of decentralization as it implies the hope of cracking open the blockages of an inert central bureaucracy, curing managerial constipation, giving more direct access for the people to the government and the government to the people and stimulating the whole nation to participate in national development plans.

Winkler and Cohen (2005: 20) describe education decentralization as the process by which decision-making power over at least some of the functions and resources entailed in the delivery and finance of public education, are transferred to institutions and actors located closer to the point of service delivery. A country where a high percentage of educational decisions are made by the national government is said to be “centralized”, while a country where a high percentage of decisions are made at the sub-national level is said to be “de-centralized”.

Winkler and Cohen (2005: 21) identify three types of processes of education decentralization:

- Deconcentration shifts the authority for implementation of rules, but not for making them. Used most frequently in unitary states, this form of decentralization redistributes decision-making authority and financial management responsibilities amongst different levels of the central government. This requires the establishment of regional and possibly district offices for the central government. Deconcentration is the process by which those sub-national offices of the education ministry are given additional decision-making responsibilities.
-
- Delegation is the administrative transfer of some decisions about personnel and budgets to a government agency, usually a school or school district and holds that agency responsible for delivering instructional services in a manner that complies with national government policies and directives. This often entails the popular election of school councils, which may be delegated management oversight responsibilities by the government. Delegation of significant responsibilities results in “autonomous schools”.
-

- Devolution is the legal transfer of important education management, governance and finance decisions to lower levels of government. While deconcentration and delegation can often be undertaken by administrative decree, devolution is always the result of constitutional and legal changes. Devolution almost always includes the transfer of authority over several sectors, not just education, to sub-national government.

Privatisation is another type of decentralization that is regarded as important. It is regarded as a form of devolution. The fundamental difference between the two is that with privatisation responsibility and resources are transferred from public to private institutions (Rondinelli as cited in Hanson, 1998: 113), whereas with devolution responsibility remains in government institutions. According to Cruz (1992: 70) privatisation has as its aim increased efficiency by focusing on reducing bureaucratic stagnation, centralized inefficiencies and corruption.

Sayed (1997: 2) claims that one of the primary objectives for administrative decentralization has to do with how educational goods are provided and distributed. Public claims for education decentralization in post-apartheid South Africa, that is shared by Namibia, is thus based on the importance of the administrative function and the way that educational resources are distributed, managed and utilized. According to Sayed (1997: 1-2) this is driven by the following key questions:

- (a) How can education be most efficiently and effectively provided?
- (b) What are the most responsive and flexible structures for meeting local and recipient needs?

In dealing with these key questions on administrative decentralization Sayed (1997: 02) concludes that a focus on administrative decentralization efforts may shed light on the ways that an educational system is structured and consequently how educational goods will be provided and distributed, but it ignores the ways in which power is distributed within the system.

Sayed (1997: 10) concludes that decentralization moves decision-making authority to lower levels of government, or to the school itself. These include the regional (provinces, states, regions, departments), sub-regional (districts, communes, or countries), and the local (municipalities, villages, or communities) levels. In most education decentralization processes, decision-making authority is redistributed from the central government to multiple levels of sub-national government.

2.6 Education Decentralization in Namibia

In “Toward Education For All” (1993: 168) the then Ministry of Basic Education and Culture argued for the decentralization of education services in Namibia by noting that the most important influences on the quality of the country’s education and many of the most significant resources for improving it was located at the local level. Educators often focus on decisions and programmes at the national level, but in practice it is our teachers, along with learners and their parents, who make our schools and other education programmes what they are. To improve an education system and to upgrade the quality of our schools requires a good deal of work in our schools and communities. To achieve that and to maximize the local contributions to an education system requires decentralization of both responsibility and authority.

After independence, Namibia was divided into thirteen Political Regions, headed by Regional Governors, but seven Education Regions headed by Directors of Education. By creating seven Regional offices shortly after independence, the then Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture recognized early on the importance of deconcentrating responsibility for schools to the regions wherever possible. The mandate was to carry out a number of responsibilities for the management of schools and other institutions in the regions. In the Namibian context of education decentralization, democratic participation has been realized through the creation of statutory bodies like the Education Forums and the School Boards, both of which comprise representatives from various stakeholders in education (Education Act No.16 of 2001).

According to the then Ministry of Basic Education and Culture's Position Paper on the Decentralization of Education (1999: 5-6) the purpose of the decentralization of the education system was to establish a decentralized management system to support educational goals and objectives. The Paper continued to discuss the process of decentralization in terms of the Ministry of Education's broad goals of access, equity, quality, democracy and efficiency. These broad goals were to be accommodated by the decentralization process by addressing the following challenges:

Access - The challenge under decentralization is to ensure that marginalized groups are not left out. This is particularly the case for children on commercial farms and for San and Himba children.

Equity - It is imperative that decentralization should not be permitted to become an entrenchment of inequities. To this end, there should be no decentralization before a sustainable staffing norm for schools has been approved and formulas have been devised to ensure a systematic approximation in all regions to the equitable allocation of teachers and the equitable allocation of funding for teachers.

Quality - All children should have access to schools which are competently managed and where genuine learning takes place. Decentralization should ensure a minimum level of quality for schools and the capabilities to deliver education of quality.

Democracy - Stakeholders, through their representatives, should participate in decisions, which affect the running of their schools. Decentralization is intended to promote democratic participation in the education process. It is important that this process should be focused not only on the region, but also on the school community. Since the country is still in "training" in this regard, efforts already under way to improve the level of community participation need to be extended. Legislation, which clearly sets out the rights and responsibilities of School Boards, needs to be strengthened. The challenge is to ensure that mechanisms for democratic participation continue to be available or are introduced at regional and school level.

Efficiency - All educational services should be delivered in a cost-effective manner. It has been stated that it should not be more costly to operate a decentralized system

than to operate one which is centralized. The education sector is already drawing 27% of the national budget and cannot expect significantly more. This means that efforts to improve efficiency must continue including the implementation of specifically designed actions and careful monitoring.

In compliance with the Namibian Government's policy of decentralizing central government functions to the thirteen political Regions, education was equally decentralized to the Regions in 2003 to be aligned with the thirteen political Regions in the country. The Ministry of Education provide its services via these thirteen Regional offices. While the Ministry is overall responsible for the running of the education system, it is the Regional education offices that shoulder the bulk of the implementation of education programmes on a day to day basis, by working closely with schools and communities in their respective regions.

According to the Education Act (2001: 11), the Minister must, on the recommendation of the Commission, which is responsible for the appointment of public servants, and after consultation with the Advisory Council, which advises the Minister on educational matters and the Regional Council or a Local Authority Council, who are the principal Regional and Local governing bodies, establish a Regional Education Office for each Region. He must also designate a staff member to be the Regional Director who will administer, manage and control the Regional education office, and oversee the implementation of educational programmes under the supervision of the Permanent Secretary.

Education decentralization in Namibia also manifests itself in statutory bodies that operate in the respective regions and schools. These are the Education Forums and the School Boards.

According to the Namibian Education Act (2001: 9-10) the Minister must establish a Forum to be known as the Regional Education Forum for a region and local areas in the region.

The functions of the Forum are to:

- Advise the Minister, the Regional Council and Local Authority Councils in that region on matters concerning education in the region and local authority areas in that region.
- Advise School Boards regarding educational matters and the functions of the School Boards under the Act.
- Initiate and facilitate educational development in the region.

A Forum consists of the Regional Director of Education, as an ex-officio member who has no vote, and twenty members appointed by the Minister on the grounds of special knowledge, skill and expertise in education matters.

The Namibian Education Act (2001: 15) also makes provision for the establishment of School Boards for state schools. It states that every state school must establish a School Board to administer the affairs and promote the development of the school and learners of the school (p.15).

In line with the Education Act, Education Forums and School Boards have been established in all thirteen education Regions and at every school respectively. All the thirteen Regions have functioning cluster systems. The education decentralization process in Namibia is thus supported at all levels of the education system, and therefore capacities to implement education decentralization are strengthened. The established and consolidated cluster system, School Boards and Education Forums are aimed at increased efficiency and quality of education services in Namibian schools.

2.7 Conclusion

In this Chapter, I have covered some of the theory and debates surrounding decentralization in general and education decentralization in particular. I have largely limited my focus to an overview of what decentralization is, including its virtues and possible pitfalls. I discussed the rationale for education decentralization together with its challenges. In order to contextualize this literature I have also touched on the decentralization of education in Namibia.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this Chapter I highlight the research paradigm in which the research has been conducted. I further discuss the case study as the method that I have chosen to use to investigate perceptions of experiences of education decentralization and provision in the Omaheke Region of Namibia.

I also describe the tools used for data collection and how I analyzed that data, as well as the ethical considerations. I will further critique the methodology and discuss the validity of the data. Finally, I will conclude the Chapter by linking it to the next Chapter.

3.2 Methodology

3.2.1 Orientation

As my research investigates participants' perceptions and experiences of education decentralization in the Omaheke Region, it is located within the interpretive paradigm. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000: 22-23), the central endeavour in the interpretive paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience. They say interpretive researchers "begin with individuals and set out to understand their interpretations of the world around them" (p.23).

Kamupingene (2001: 94) adds that interpretive research will normally be framed by meanings given to phenomena by both the researcher and those participating in the study. They are not based on the interpretation of the researcher alone.

3.2.2 Method

I have selected the case study method. Mcmillan and Schumacher (1993: 375) state that qualitative researchers often use a case study design, meaning that the researcher focuses on a single phenomenon that he or she selects to understand in depth regardless of the number of sites, participants or documents involved in the study. As my research is focused on decentralization in a single region and investigates participants' perceptions and experiences of how decentralization has influenced the provision of education in the Omaheke Region, I found the case study method to be the most appropriate for my research.

Kamupingene (2001: 96-97) lists the following in favour of case studies:

- A case study design is used to describe a situation, event or process. It provides an opportunity for research participants' voice to be heard.
- Case studies are also employed to describe policy issues. They provide a more complete understanding of the complexity of policy, identify unintended consequences and examine the process of policy implementation.

Education decentralization in Namibia is public policy. This case study provides a description and understanding of participants' perceptions and experiences of education decentralization in the Omaheke Region.

3.2.3 Research participants

The research participants that I have selected for my study all work within the decentralized system in the Omaheke Region. They are: a Cluster Centre Principal, the Director of Education, an Inspector of Education, a Subject Advisory Teacher, the Chief Regional Officer, the Regional Governor and the Regional School Councillor.

I selected the participants purposively and for convenience on the basis of their experiences and participation in the decentralization process. Cohen *et al.* (2000: 103) and De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2005: 202) state that in purposive sampling, researchers handpick the cases to be included. This type of sample is based entirely on the judgment of the researcher, in that a sample is composed of elements that contain the most characteristic representative of typical attributes of the population. Schumacher and Mcmillan (1993), in arguing for the value of purposive sampling, say “The power and logic of purposeful sampling is that few cases studied in-depth yield many insights about the topic” (p.378).

Participant selection was also convenient as I selected participants to whom I had easy access. In addition all of them are well-known to me, most of them being colleagues with whom I am working. This matches the description of convenience sampling provided by Cohen *et al.* (2000: 102-103), namely that:

Convenience sampling involves choosing the nearest individuals to serve as respondents and continuing that process until the required sample size has been obtained... The researcher simply chooses the sample from those to whom she has easy access.

3.3 Data-gathering

3.3.1 Interviews

As my goal was to investigate participants’ perceptions and experiences I employed interviews to generate data. Cohen *et al.* (2000: 267) claims that:

Interviews enable participants - be they interviewers or interviewees - to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view. In these senses the interview is not simply concerned with collecting data about life: it is part of life itself, its human embeddedness is inescapable.

In the same vain, according to Cantrell (1993: 96) interviews enable the researcher to gather descriptive data in the subjects’ own words. Interviews nicely accommodate

the human element, which is vital in research of this nature, where people have to interpret the influence of phenomena that has direct bearing on them.

I used semi-structured, open-ended interviews because they were best suited to explore in-depth the experiences and perceptions of my participants on education decentralization and the provision of education in the Omaheke Region. In Field and Morse's (1995: 67) view, open-ended interviews enable the researcher to explore new territory with the participant and they believe this type of interview is ideal for obtaining comprehensive and comparable data.

With the permission of the respondents all the interviews, except for one, were tape-recorded. The respondent who refused to be tape-recorded said he did not feel comfortable being recorded and would rather prefer to be given the questions to complete.

Though none of the respondents (myself included) use English as a home language, all the interviews were conducted in English. I judged the participants' command of the English language as adequate as all of them are professionals who use English daily in their work setting. They were thus able to express their perceptions and experiences adequately and competently in English.

I explained to the participants that I would take notes during the interviews. I also promised to provide the respondents with copies of the interview transcripts as an ethical consideration and for feedback. All respondents as promised, were given copies of the transcriptions to check. None of them made any changes.

3.4 Data analysis

De Vos *et al.* (2005) describe data analysis as, "The process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. Qualitative data analysis is a search for general statements about relationships amongst categories of data" (p.333).

After the interviews were completed, all of them were carefully and accurately transcribed by myself. I analyzed the raw interview data through coding by looking for regular patterns and themes that addressed my research goals.

According to Cantrell (1993: 98) and Mcmillan and Schumacher (1993: 479-483) the purpose of coding is to identify categories or themes based upon patterns and ideas that emerge from the data rather than being imposed on the data prior to data collection.

I used the following general principles and common practices as outlined by Mcmillan and Schumacher (1993: 482-484) in analyzing the collected data:

- Analysis began as soon as the first set of data was available. Data was segmented and divided into relevant parts and chunks of meaning.
- Data segments were categorized according to an organizing system of topics derived predominantly from the data themselves through colour coding.
- All the data was studied for their content, categories were identified and all the material that belonged to one theme were assembled in one file.

Throughout the analysis of data, I kept comparing and contrasting in order to identify similarities and distinctions between categories to discover more patterns and to rearrange the categories. This, according to De Vos *et al.* (2005) is to allow “ongoing fine-tuning” (p.335).

At the end I had seven files, each holding the data relative to a particular theme. These themes and the literature I had been reading throughout the study formed the basis of my final write-up.

3.5 Validity

Marshall and Rossman (1995: 143-145) observe that all research must respond to canons that stand as criteria against which the trustworthiness of the research can be evaluated:

- How credible are the particular findings of the study? By what criteria can we judge them?
- How can we be reasonably sure that the findings would be replicated if the study were conducted with the same participants in the same context?
- How can we be sure that findings are reflective of the participants and the inquiry itself, rather than a creation of the researcher's biases or prejudices?

Denzin and Lincoln (1985: 290) refer to these questions as establishing the “truth value” of the study, its applicability, consistency and neutrality.

To achieve this I did the following. Participants' voices are used throughout my data analysis in order to avoid losing the rich and descriptive nature of my research data. The recorded interviews, transcribed data and the themes and patterns which emerged from the data form part of my case archive. This is meant to safeguard my research against any accusations of untruthfulness and inconsistencies. Bassey (1995:16) states “In principle, it should be possible to work backwards through the archive from the conclusions of the research report to the raw data and thereby be able to verify the conclusions.”

To enhance the quality of my research I tried to avoid the following causes of bias (Oppenheim 1992: 96-97):

- Biased sampling. My sampling covered the entire spectrum of managers in the decentralization process in the Omaheke Region. It is representative.
- Poor rapport between interviewer and interviewee. My respondents were put at ease through creating a relaxed atmosphere and I avoided questions of a personal nature. I also kept strictly to my scheduled appointment times.
- Poor probing and biased probing. To avoid poor and biased probing, my interview questions were piloted in order to identify pitfalls that might compromise validity.

- Inconsistent coding of responses. During the analysis of data I employed consistent coding by using different colours to identify responses which were similar.

Finally, I also gave the participants the opportunity to verify the transcripts and preliminary findings, neither of which resulted in any changes.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

According to Grasso and Epstein (1992: 118) all researchers should use ethical guidelines to evaluate his or her research conduct. Bulmer and Warwick (1983: 316) take the argument for ethical practice further by advocating that ethical principles be internalised into the personality of the researcher to such an extent that ethically guided decision making becomes part of his or her total lifestyle.

As I indicated earlier, all the participants are well-known to me and all except two are colleagues who work with me in the Ministry of Education in the Omaheke Region. I am thus also professionally involved in the decentralization process in Omaheke. I am aware of my bias but, communicating with respondents by means of semi-structured interviews has mitigated my bias as researcher, as I made use of their own words in my data collection and presentation.

The following ethical issues are fundamental to any social research.

3.6.1 Informed Consent

According to Best and Kahn (1993: 45) the recruitment of volunteers for research should always involve their complete understanding of the procedures to be employed, the risks involved and the demands that may be made upon them. Whenever possible, they should also be informed of the purpose of the research.

Similarly Diener and Crandall (cited in Cohen *et al.* 2000) describe informed consent as “The procedures in which individuals choose whether to participate in any

investigation after being informed of the facts that would be likely to influence their decisions” (p.51).

In the view of Loewenberg and Dolgoff (1988: 70) and Corey, Corey and Callanan (1993: 230), not to do so can be constituted as deception.

In my letters to the participants to obtain permission to interview them, I made it clear that their participation would be entirely voluntary and that the option to participate or not rested upon them. I also disclosed the purpose of my research and assured them that I would provide them with the opportunity to scrutinize the preliminary outcomes of the research. The preliminary outcomes were provided to each participant and all of them were satisfied with the content and no objections or additions were added.

3.6.2 Anonymity and confidentiality

Cohen *et al.* (2000: 61) highlight the essence of anonymity as meaning that:

Information provided by participants should in no way reveal their identity ... in the case of a participant agreeing to a face-to-face interview ...the issue of anonymity becomes irrelevant and that participants cannot expect that. For my purposes anonymity refers to participants remaining anonymous to readers.

The issue of confidentiality is embedded in the following statement:

Although researchers know who has provided the information or are able to identify participants from the information given, they will in no way make the connection known publicly, the boundaries surrounding the shared secret will be protected. (Cohen *et al.* 2000: 62)

I have maintained confidentiality of sources and used pseudonyms for my participants.

3.7 Critique

Generally the research process went well. I had easy access to all my respondents and the negotiations for entry were not difficult.

Although all the respondents were comfortable with being confronted with the interview questions at the time of the interview, a few felt that questions could have been given to them in advance to allow them to better prepare their responses.

A practice that might help to generate rich data is to tailor the interview questions to the respondent's level of involvement in the phenomenon which is being studied. To ask the same questions to all participants, as was the case during my investigation, can become monotonous and possibly limit the variety of data that could emerge.

The decentralization of education in Omaheke and elsewhere is informed by the broad policy of decentralization. I realized, in retrospect, that in my interviews I did not investigate the participant's broader understanding of decentralization. This might result in a weak linkage between the broad policy of Decentralization and Education Decentralization although I could not detect it with my research.

3.8 Conclusion

In this Chapter I gave the rationale for the methodology applied as well as how the research methodology is structured.

In the next Chapter I present the data.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF DATA

4.1 Introduction

In this Chapter I present the data that was related to me by the respondents. The contents are largely descriptive, capturing the respondents' subjective and real-life experiences.

Neumann and Kreuger (2003: 487-488) and Mcmillan and Schumacher (1993: 606) when referring to qualitative data presentation remark that researchers often integrate the voice of the participants in the report to help the reader gain a feel for the respondents' subjective world thus transporting the reader directly into the world of the study. According to them, a hallmark of most qualitative research is the narrative presentation of data. Data are often presented as quotations of participants' voices. Field notes and interview transcripts are cited as sources.

The respondent's interpretations, understandings and experiences of the education decentralization process in the Omaheke Region are presented near-verbatim with little comments from me. I have occasionally intervened to clarify meaning. To maintain anonymity, the respondents' names are all pseudonyms.

In order to contextualize the data, I present them under headings pertaining to my research goals. The headings are directly related to the research questions which I posed to the participants, since I asked the same basic questions to all of them. The issues covered in the questions concerned participants' perception and experience of:

Education decentralization as a concept.

How education decentralization is managed in the Omaheke Region.

Positive developments in education decentralization in the Omaheke Region.

Problems related to education decentralization in the Omaheke Region.

Where I have quoted verbatim from responses of respondents, I have not corrected language usage. This is done to be as faithful as possible in the presentation of their views.

4.2 Respondents understanding of education decentralization

I asked respondents, "What is your understanding of education decentralization?"

4.2.1. Closer service provision to grassroots people

For a number of the respondents education decentralization was equated with bringing a number of services closer to the point of service delivery. Silvia for example describes decentralization as being about bringing services closer to the people.

Hildegard cited the example of the establishment of statutory bodies such as School Boards that have been created to run schools. According to her this brings governance closer to the learners and to their parents.

In Rayno's view education decentralization is: "To bring services that the Ministry of Education are supposed to render to our schools, to bring them closer to our schools, especially the very remote schools."

Gerhard considers education decentralization as taking education development to the doorstep of the people, reaching out to the people and allowing them to take decisions concerning services they need in the areas where they are.

Sylvia argued that bringing education closer to the people by decentralizing the entire education structures and administration, for example by bringing the services of inspectors closer to schools, could enhance schools' academic performance.

4.2.2 Ownership and participation

Respondents felt that education decentralization would be meaningless without allowing the people for whom it is intended to participate in and take ownership of the process.

Hildegard advocates participative democracy. She is of the opinion that the people, even to the extent of including learners, should participate in the decentralization process. According to her, allowing participation at the lowest levels is to allow people to decide on and design their own education destiny that will address their specific and local needs.

Sylvia argues in the same way, "Decentralization is all about creating that ownership within our communities to take charge of their own destiny." For Frans, education decentralization means participation and the empowering of communities in the affairs of education.

4.2.3 Transfer of functions and responsibilities

The transfer of functions and responsibilities, according to the respondents, is the essence of education decentralization. Hildegard cites the example of the Director that has been appointed in the Omaheke Region to steer the decentralization machinery at Regional level, including enhancing service delivery. Sylvia observes that decentralization is the transfer of specific functions, responsibilities and resources to sub-national government.

4.2.4 Sharing of accountability

Frans feels that, despite education decentralization being aimed at enabling people to partake fully in the affairs of education, it also has to do with the sharing of

educational responsibility between the government and the different communities in the country. This, he says has to do with the sharing of costs and the sharing of accountability for what is not happening in education.

4.2.5 Improved performance and quality

Hildegard regards education decentralization as being geared towards improved school performance. Likewise Simon argues that education decentralization is meant to enhance teaching and learning in schools. The Region is therefore responsible to see that this happens.

4.3 How education decentralization is managed in the Omaheke Region.

The respondents provided different responses, but all were in agreement that education decentralization needs to be managed in a more efficient and better organized way in the Omaheke Region.

4.3.1 Regional Education Management Structures

According to Frans, education in the Omaheke Region is spearheaded by a skeleton staff only. This is because the human resources structure has not yet been finalized. However, in his view it is functioning well:

There is now a clear focused unit in Omaheke that is operating as a team that is now spearheading educational matters in the region. The small staff is not operating far from the schools and there is a clear direct communication between administrators here and the parents.

He indicated that the management of education in Omaheke is geared toward the inclusion of all the stakeholders in order to ensure greater participation by all. School Boards as elected statutory bodies are co-managers of the region's schools. School Boards are regarded as the custodians of their respective schools.

Rayno commented that the management of education decentralization is not executed according to the Regional structures as set out by the decentralization policy of the Ministry of Local Government and Housing:

Decentralization had to fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Local Government and Housing. My opinion is that I don't think anything has been mobilized yet, because we are still falling under the Ministry of Education. We still function as the Ministry of Education and all the functions which we run ourselves are still falling under our Ministry and provided for by our own budget. Up to now I have got no idea or nobody even informed me that we are falling under the Regional Council.

Sylvia confirmed that the management of education operates independently of regional education structures, a development with which she is not comfortable. The Regional Office of Education still reports directly to their Head Office in Windhoek, instead of to the decentralized structures of the Regional Council. She said the management of education, especially the line of reporting, exists only on the organogram of the decentralized structures, not in practice:

In Omaheke Region, the administration of education is mainly run from Head Office. Teachers having problems are not going through the Regional Council but it is still done through the Head Office of Education, which I think, in a way, is a disadvantage.

Sylvia is anxious that the regional education structures and their management be fully decentralized to the Regional Council. She feels the sooner this happens, the sooner there will be a quality educational system in the region. This will include the improved utilization of resources at a local level. It will also enable decisions to be taken in the region regarding the provision of educational services. She added that the education staff establishments need to be incorporated into the Regional Council, in order for education to be managed as it is supposed to be, by the Regional Council. Frans described the situation as follows:

The Regional Director of Education, who is the head of the Regional Office of Education at this stage is not answerable to the Chief Regional Officer, the Chief Regional administrator of Regional Council in the Region, or the Governor, who is the head of the government in the

Region, but is directly answerable to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education (in Windhoek, the national capital). Since all of us involved in the decentralization process are based here in Gobabis, the Regional capital, there are many instances of cooperation where the Regional Council invites the Director of Education or his officials to her offices and meetings to serve on existing structures. I think we cooperate, but it is merely to give the Regional Council feedback in regards to what we do in education. But they are not directly supervising us.

Nevertheless, he said that the regional education management structures require considerable involvement from all stakeholders. He cites the existence of the Education Forum, Cluster Management Structures and the Circuit Office as important structures through which education and the decentralization of education services are managed in the Omaheke Region. Although they are not operating as effectively as they are supposed to, these structures are visible:

People now tend to refer to the Cluster System, tend to refer to the Education Forum. We have a Circuit Office that can operate. We have centres where the clusters can operate. These are visible today. So I think it is a clear indication that, somehow people are seeing education as having come nearer to their areas through these structures.

Hildegard notes that the regional education structures need to be aligned with regional government structures in the region. A move to address this is the Regional Council's (the region's governing body) decision to attach a member of the Regional Council to the Regional Education Forum. This Councillor is expected to serve as a communication channel between the Regional Council and the Regional Education Forum. She observes:

The decentralization process does allow the Regional Council's involvement in education administration and there is no way that the Ministry of Education would want to embark on a project without the involvement of the Omaheke Regional Council. This then means any project of the Ministry of Education is going to be part and parcel of the Regional Development Plan which forms part of the National Development Plan and of course Vision 2030, the Policy Framework for Long-term National Development.

4.3.2 Capacity building, empowerment and participation

The general view of the respondents is that the decentralized system in Omaheke Region is strongly geared towards bringing all stakeholders into the management of schools in the Region.

Rayno regards the support of principals and their schools with regards to managerial and organizational issues as crucial. Education decentralization, according to him, has resulted in many services, such as the inspectorate, advisory personnel, special education and procurement being more readily available to serve the schools. The Regional Management of Education, he says, is geared strongly towards in-service training and capacity building, and ultimately the participation of everyone involved in education provision in the Omaheke Region. He cited the training of School Boards as an example:

The principals, teachers and community members identified the need for School Boards to be trained in order to understand their roles. We could train all our School Boards and it has now become a continuous process. Decentralization is very helpful in the sense that you are actually helped to help yourself.

Another aspect of capacity building is the involvement of the principals in the management of education in the Omaheke Region. This idea resulted in the establishment of the Omaheke Principal's Association. According to Rayno, the aim was to allow principals to take responsibility for academic activities on an organized basis. For example "cluster-centre principals are also involved in the annual planning of academic programmes with staff from the Regional Office".

He comments as follows on the co-management of education decentralization in the Omaheke Region:

The principals could actually take the responsibilities of monitoring the academic activities of the schools through the clustering of schools. Within a clustering system we can disseminate responsibilities to cluster-centre principals. From there activities like subject groups, central based

examinations and tests could be organized within the cluster centres. I think we have succeeded in allowing our managers within the region to operate on their own.

Simon noted that in terms of capacity building and empowerment the division of special education, within the decentralized system of education has undertaken service delivery through empowering the teachers, thereby building their capacity:

We have established counselling support groups in all schools in Omaheke. We have trained teachers in basic counselling skills. In all schools workshops are conducted, teachers are trained and more importantly, those teachers are trained to handle any situations as they may arise at school level.

Gerhard understands education decentralization as empowering and compelling schools to work together within their clusters. He says that schools can come together, take decisions together and share information and resources. With regard to his position as a cluster-centre principal he states:

Being a cluster-centre principal empowered me to come to know more about education management. I just feel like, with one foot I am a school principal and with the other foot I am in the Regional Office. It just feels like on the one side I am a school inspector, on the other side I am a school teacher or a school principal. So, I think it really empowers me to know more.

4.4 Positive developments of education decentralization in Omaheke Region

In an attempt to assess the respondents' understanding of positive developments that have been brought about by education decentralization in the Omaheke Region, I posed the question: "What positive impact has education decentralization had on education provision in Omaheke?" The following emerged from the responses.

4.4.1 Improvements in examination results

The respondents stressed that one of the immediate things that they can clearly associate with education decentralization is the improvement in examination results, especially for external exams.

Rayno remarked that it is not something that changes overnight, but closer monitoring, being involved as managers of the Region and having the Regional Office personnel closer to the schools have contributed a lot to the improvements in results.

Frans stated:

We have noted, especially at the beginning of last year (2005) as well as at the beginning of this year (2006), a clear improvement in terms of the results. I think this is actually due to the fact that the small staff the Regional Education Office have, operates not far from the schools themselves. That one, for me is just like a pole above the surface of the water.

Simon observed that Grade Twelve and Grade Ten results have improved drastically, especially in Omaheke, compared to before decentralization. The Region has moved from eleventh position out of thirteen to become the second best Region nationally.

4.4.2 Community participation

According to a number of participants, a positive development resulting from education decentralization in Omaheke is the participation and involvement of the different communities in education.

Frans remarked that previously people thought of education as being run from the top, referring in most cases to central government in Windhoek. But now they take notice of the different structures that have been created. People see education as having come nearer to their areas, hence their perception that today they have a direct say in education.

Simon observed the following in terms of the involvement of the communities in education that he attributes to education decentralization:

The School Boards have become the masters behind their own schools. They are running the schools day to day. They are handling the school finances and they are chairing the School Board meetings. They are making recommendations to the Regional Office for the appointment of teachers.

Echoing the same sentiments, Steven remarks that education stakeholders in education, like the parents are more involved in education and are visiting education centres more often compared to the past.

Hildegard concurs “I would want to say, it seems things are changing. Where we come from before independence and where we are now in terms of the parental activeness and involvement, one would say yes, the communities are now definitely more involved.”

4.4.3 Breaking of isolation

The issue of closer cooperation, especially amongst the different schools in Omaheke came up prominently in responses from most of the respondents. The respondents felt that education decentralization diminished isolation and brought the schools as well as the different stakeholders closer to each other.

Hildegard referred to education decentralization as a useful system, which tries to combine schools together. This makes it easier for them to share experiences and to share success stories. She notes that some schools are better off than others in terms of materials, equipment and teacher qualifications. In her opinion, these schools are thus able to help other schools with materials and expertise. She concludes by stating: “It looks new, but its working.”

Simon, in referring to the breaking of isolation and closer cooperation emphasized the role of the clustering system:

This clustering system is assisting teachers, especially in sharing knowledge, sharing of expertise. The clustering system has made everything possible, because where there is an effective clustering system, the idea of schools operating in isolation becomes irrelevant.

Gerhard also hailed the clustering system as an important initiative of the education decentralization process in Omaheke, especially in terms of breaking isolation and empowering educators:

When this system of clustering came in and our school was selected to be a cluster centre and I was selected to be the cluster-centre principal, the isolation was there. It came to be replaced with the system where I have now been linked up to come to know other schools, other school principals, new ideas, teachers of other schools and also knowing what is happening in the other schools.

He elaborated on the breaking of isolation through the system of education decentralization in the Omaheke Region by noting that there are new ideas of sharing, competitiveness, excellence, collaboration and sharing of knowledge. “These concepts are new ideas that developed because we came together to work together, otherwise we had been in isolation and we worked in isolation without learning from each other.”

4.4.4. Improved service delivery

Another positive development that was articulated strongly by the respondents was the issue of better and improved service delivery from all divisions of the decentralized education structures at the Regional Education Office in the Omaheke Region.

According to Simon, education decentralization in the Omaheke Region has allowed him to be closer to the point of service delivery, and unlike in the past he can deliver special education service more easily and timeously:

There was no way in the past that pupils could be screened, judged and evaluated. Now that the services are on the ground, people are eager to come. They can find where we are and we can reach them more easily, and place the learners according to their abilities in our schools.

According to Rayno, education decentralization in the Omaheke Region resulted in the provision of resources, procurement and the ordering of textbooks and stationery going directly through the Regional Office. This avoids delays as was the case in the past. According to him, education decentralization also resulted in a more speedy dissemination of information, which comes from having an office which schools and principals can easily contact.

Gerhard has found that education decentralization takes education development to the doorstep of the recipients, the schools. It reaches out to the people and allows them to take decisions concerning the services they need in their areas.

4.5 Problems and challenges experienced with education decentralization in the Omaheke Region.

To gauge respondents' views of the challenges that have to be addressed by education decentralization in the Omaheke Region, the following question was posed to them: "What challenges are experienced in education decentralization in the Omaheke Region?"

4.5.1 Financial constraints

Hildegard noted that the main challenge is the financial constraints. Due to a limited budget, the Regional Council is not able to provide every school with what an optimum school system should have, like proper facilities. She also cites financial constraints as the main reason for the lack of meaningful parent involvement in schools. Parents find it difficult to reach schools, as they sometimes cannot afford the transport costs.

Sylvia said that due to financial constraints the Regional Council is unable to successfully implement the functions that have been transferred to it, in terms of the decentralization policy. She points out that the Regional Council are still not responsible for their own budget and this is a critical factor when it comes to the proper implementation of decentralization, education included.

Frans said that budgetary constraints are a massive issue that needs to be addressed. The national budget does not take account of the peculiarities of the Omaheke Region, like the vast distances between places that need to be served. He thinks that Regional Administrators should think of ways to top up the government budget.

In Rayno's view:

I would say decentralization is a brilliant idea, but then you need budgeting. Then you need to provide the physical facilities that are needed. In order to render a service you need the tools to do it. Like in our case, I think the biggest burden in terms of decentralization is to bring services closer to the people in the area. In order to bring the services, you need to buy the services. Budgeting, I think, is the biggest problem we need to overcome.

Simon, when articulating the various challenges being experienced in the Omaheke Region in terms of education decentralization said, "Point number one, the budget allocation to the Region in terms of stationery and writing materials, books and so on, is very low." Gerhard stated that the clustering system would only run smoothly if cluster centres are supported logistically. This, he says, is presently impossible because of the limited financial resources.

Steven is of the opinion that the unavailability of funds for transport, meals and accommodation for Subject Advisors seriously hampers these officials because they are unable to reach remote schools.

4.5.2 Inadequate provision of human resources

Many respondents noted that the human resources allocation has so far not been implemented in education in the Omaheke Region. The skeleton staff at regional level is compelled to attend to both their own job and those of posts not yet filled. This they feel compromises quality, since due to a lack of time and skills, some functions are neglected.

Frans pointed out a worrisome picture when referring to the shortage of staff in the different divisions of the decentralized education structure in the Omaheke Region.

For example, there is not yet a fully-fledged section to deal with subject advisory services:

We have only today two key positions, the one of an English Advisory Teacher and the one of a primary level position. We actually ought to have someone to deal with key areas, especially Mathematics and other key areas such as commercial subjects. I think that one is one big challenge.

He pointed out that another challenge is the absence of a finance division. He emphasized that it is difficult to run a system of education without someone who can play the role of financial advisor, someone to have the full responsibility for the finance division. He regarded it as one of the key shortcomings. In terms of the personnel division he stated “Even the personnel section, which has just started as of a month ago is still limping, because many services that have to be covered by that division are still rendered from the centre in Windhoek.”

Simon stated that, although central government has a clear decentralization policy, services are affected due to a lack of manpower. He feels that the human resources shortcomings hamper the effectiveness and smooth running of schools. “It is a matter of increasing the number of human resources, so that we can be effective.”

4.5.3 Readiness and ownership

Since education decentralization is primarily focused on getting service delivery closer to the recipients, (Mvula 2005: 6) a number of the respondents felt that readiness and ownership of the schools and community participation remain clear challenges, despite the great progress already made.

Hildegard felt that although education decentralization structures are in place, the majority of the people in the Omaheke Region do not understand, are not ready for and have not taken ownership of the decentralization process:

What is decentralization without people participating? Today you find people, that if you ask them what decentralization is they are not able to tell you what it is, because they have never heard about it, they don't

know what it is. There has never been a platform where they would have learnt what decentralization is all about. Therefore, if that is not taken care of and given attention, we might be preaching decentralization without participation.

Sylvia added that many people are left behind. She argued that people could see that a school has been built, but that they regard it as part of national government's service delivery. They do not place it in the context of education decentralization. It is a slow process to bring everyone on board.

Frans also felt that ownership and readiness are not easy to accomplish and that it needs time because decentralization is a process. In his view, communities need to be thoroughly sensitised. Government expects communities to take full responsibility. They in turn think that government is running away from its responsibilities.

4.5.4 Plight of marginalized groups

Respondents agreed that the marginalized groups like the San should benefit fully from education decentralization in Omaheke. They felt that if education decentralization does not improve the socio-economic status of marginalized groups then it has not fully reached its objectives.

Frans was vocal in stating that one of the goals of education decentralization in the Omaheke Region should be to address the plight of marginalized groups especially the San:

There is a group amongst the San whose culture still inhibits learners to attend school. So, I think that is a big challenge, at least to bring the San group to their senses when it comes to the importance of education in their lives. They should actually be made to understand that there is no other way today if you want social mobility in life, if you want at least to be employed or whatever. You must be employed through education. So, that perception amongst the San needs to be addressed.

Rayno mentioned that San learners would drop out of school if they do not get the special attention they need as a marginalized group.

4.5.5 Provision of Quality Education

The respondents view the provision of education of equal quality in all schools as a challenge. In Frans' view:

We need to make sure that at all our schools in Omaheke we provide quality education. That is very, very important and that is something that is evasive today. There are schools in Omaheke that we need to focus on, in terms of good teaching and learning. I think that is what I see as my priority in terms of education provision in Omaheke.

Rayno and Simon felt that quality education could be achieved if more special classes and vocational centres are created. Rayno expressed himself as follows:

Education decentralization should also provide for special facilities in terms of needy learners in general. Our current situation provides a main stream for all the learners in our Region, and then you find there are learners who really suffer. They are called slow learners and would better fit into a more technical atmosphere of teaching and learning. Currently these learners are referred to other regions far away. We have to make space available for these learners, like a technical institute as part of education decentralization.

Simon strongly felt that schools must have facilities that can be used by learners who have learning impairments. He proposed that schools be upgraded to provide the infrastructure needed by learners with different impairments, like having one leg. He believes decentralized education should be inclusive education, hence his appeal too for vocational training centres.

4.6 Conclusion

The data as presented in this Chapter largely explored participants' understanding of education decentralization in the Omaheke Region vis-à-vis the specific issues that emerged from the research like ownership, readiness and service provision. The data

as presented portrays a sense of how education decentralization in the Omaha Region has evolved and highlights some important characteristics.

The data collected and presented is discussed in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

In this Chapter I discuss the findings in relation to the data as presented in the previous Chapter. The Chapter is mostly an interpretation of and comments on the data, in order to contextualize and make sense of participants' interpretation of education decentralization in the Omaheke Region. Similarly the interpretation and discussion of data is linked to Chapter Two in terms of theoretical references.

Much of the discussions of the findings as presented in this Chapter, are organized around dominant themes that emerged from Chapter Four. The discussion of the findings is largely confined to these themes.

I identified the following themes in my data:

- Understanding and interpretation of education decentralization.
- Ownership.
- Readiness and participatory democracy.
- Service delivery and quality.
- Human resources.
- Budgetary allocation.
- Relevance of regional decentralization structures.

5.2 Understanding and interpretation of education decentralization

The data revealed that participants have a basic understanding of what education decentralization entails, albeit from different perspectives. The essence of their understanding is that education decentralization entails the transfer of the

management of education services to levels that are closer to the beneficiaries, i.e. learners, parents and the community at large. According to the respondents' understanding, education decentralization moves the planning and provision of education away from a traditional centralized approach towards the point of service delivery.

This is in line with what Lauglo (in Bush 2003) says. According to him, decentralization in education means a shift in the distribution of authority away from a central agency in the hierarchy toward lower levels (p.13).

The respondents' interpretation of education decentralization was strongly linked to the idea of taking education services closer to the people through the transference of specific functions, responsibilities and resources to the Regional Offices of Education. This view is consistent with that of Rondinelli *et al.* (1984) who characterizes decentralization as the transfer of responsibility for planning, management and resource raising and allocation from the central government to regional authorities (p.9).

The respondents believe that bringing education services closer to the various communities in the Region potentially becomes a way through which communities can be empowered to have a significant say in matters related to the education of their children. Sayed (1997: 3) argues that one of the reasons for the commitment of communities to educational decentralization was based on their calls to control schools. In Kamat's (2000:1) terms, the provision and administration of education has gone from being largely a state obligation to being increasingly turned over to civil and non-state organizations.

According to the respondents, the response to this and one of the main challenges to decentralization is that people interpret education decentralization to mean central government is shunning its responsibility to provide education and is expecting local communities to shoulder that responsibility. Historically, local communities have expected the central government to do "everything." (Reddy and Sabelo 1997: 578)

Hanson (1998: 116) declares, "If the local communities distrust, do not take seriously, do not participate in, or do not want to assume the added responsibility, then the opportunity for successful change through decentralization is seriously limited."

Another feature of the respondents' understanding of decentralization is that it allows remote schools to be in a better position to share resources and expertise on the same basis as other schools.

Communities realize that, as a result of education decentralization, they now have a direct influence on education such as the appointment of teachers. They realize they can also control school managers who do not do their work satisfactorily through statutory bodies such as School Boards. Turner (2004) remarks, "By decentralizing decision-making and placing responsibility for important policy matters at the level of the individual institution, decisions could be made more efficiently and in a way related to the local conditions experienced within those institutions"(p.349).

Another consequence of local people being given the chance to decide upon their children's education is that teaching and learning may be enhanced through proper control of the management of education at Regional level. To that effect, Winkler (1993: 66) argues that the rationale for this interpretation is that there is a belief that local people can solve educational problems better than the state.

With regard to the time-span in which education decentralization can be implemented, the general understanding is that it is a process. Education decentralization is not something that can be achieved within a short space of time. The respondents concurred with the view that it takes time and that for effective implementation the process should be broken down into phases.

Participants cited the complexity entailed in implementing education decentralization in a vast region like that of Omaheke Region as a further reason for the policy to be implemented gradually. It is imperative that people be accorded sufficient time to understand education decentralization thoroughly. In this regard Mukundan and Bray (2004: 226) said "Logically, decentralization should be seen as a process, an 'isation' - rather than as a static situation."

5.2 Ownership

The respondents believe that this is a crucial factor in effective decentralization but that there has been only partial success in its attainment.

In the respondents' view, education decentralization in the Omaheke Region has given communities substantial control over the day-to-day running of their schools. School Boards have been established through an Act of Parliament. Act no. 16 of 2001 stipulates that "There is for every state school, established a School Board to administer the affairs and promote the development of the school and learners of the school."(Namibian Education Act 2001: 15). In addition, an Education Forum comprising mainly representatives from communities and stakeholders has been established.

School Boards have been created to be the catalyst of development and progress in the schools. This is the reason for the parent representatives being in the majority on School Boards. The Chairperson of the School Board, according to the Education Act (2001), must be from the parent representatives. Among other responsibilities, School Boards are responsible for recommending teachers for appointment to schools, administering the school finances and looking after the welfare of the school in general. All this is aimed at creating ownership and a sense of responsibility towards education within the communities.

Another factor that came strongly to the fore in the interviews is the marginalized status of some communities in the Omaheke Region. For example, the San communities have not yet fully embraced formal education. This is as a result of their poverty and way of life. Nevertheless, through education decentralization they are being taken up in schools. This is done in order to bring them into the mainstream of schooling and to allow them to take ownership of their education. San people are also being recruited to serve as workers and cleaners in schools. Some have become School Board members. According to Mvula (New Era Newspaper; 12 May 2005)

“The impact of decentralization on improving the quality of education depends amongst others, on changing behaviour of parents and teachers” (p.6).

According to the respondents, the cluster system in Omaheke helps facilitate stakeholder ownership of education. Dittmar, Mendelsohn and Ward (2002: 21) state the following in terms of clusters allowing for more ownership:

Decentralized structures, based on the cluster system, have been established in the form of circuit and cluster management committees. The committees strengthen the management of circuits and clusters by involving a variety of people in making decisions and recommendations. More importantly, decisions and recommendations are made speedily, and have local relevance and ownership.

The clustering of schools has resulted in schools taking responsibility for issues such as the establishment of subject groups and cluster based examinations. The system has allowed schools within a cluster to operate on their own, generate their own funds, plan their own academic activities on an organized basis and therefore take ownership of all these activities.

The data points to ownership being a powerful motivating factor in efforts to strengthen education decentralization in the Omaheke Region. Although meaningful strides have been made to enhance ownership in school communities, there is still more to be done.

5.4 Readiness and participatory democracy

Sayed and Jansen (2001: 98) declare that “policies are more effective when they allow for maximum participation, forcing policy to engage with peoples lived experiences and perceived interests at local level. This, it is argued, allows for more effective policy implementation.”

According to Hanson (1998: 113) and McGinn and Welsh (1999: 76) education decentralization will only be efficient if the recipients for whom the process is intended are ready to participate meaningfully in the process.

The data suggest that although some people are ready for the process of education decentralization through being aware of the policy and taking part in opportunities such as School Board elections, more people need to be actively involved. Only a small percentage of the population are aware that they can benefit from the process of education decentralization. In the respondents' view, it is only teachers, government officials, members of non-government organizations, church organizations and the more affluent members of society who have some understanding of the potential benefits of education decentralization.

It is evident from the data that in order for people to participate in the education decentralization in Omaheke, it has to respond to the local needs. UNESCO declared that:

Participation, in its various dimensions, has become recognized as a basic principle of action, an overall development strategy. In the context of basic education, participation implies engaging people, including parents, children, teachers, political authorities and business leaders, widely and actively in defining learning needs, running the school and enhancing resources for education (p.13).

Readiness to participate will be achieved when the people understand why, when and how they can participate. The data show that the implementers of the education decentralization in Omaheke assume that people know about the process, when in fact they probably do not know or have limited knowledge. This limits their participation and their potential contribution in the education decentralization process.

The respondents advise that everyone responsible for steering the machinery of education decentralization in Omaheke should make sure that the public are aware of the process. They believe that once people are aware and the structures are made clear, people will be more willing to participate.

The importance of participation is stressed by Gaomas (New Era Newspaper, 11 October 2006) when he refers to the decentralization process and asserts that decentralization is a people-centred approach to development, aimed at self-initiated

participation by communities as the key to broad based development and capacity building (p.2).

According to the respondents, participation is a prerequisite for democracy. Participation can strengthen democracy in bodies like the School Boards, learner representative councils, Education Forums and other statutory bodies.

UNESCO (1994: 12) states:

Today, the challenge is to broaden and deepen people's participation, heighten the mobilization of the whole society and bring authority and decision-making in support of educational goals closer to communities and families in each country.

5.5 Service delivery and quality

According to Kamat (2000: 5), the process of transferring decision-making powers from the central government to regional and local government is done with the specific reason to improve service delivery and quality.

Evidence from the data about the impact of education decentralization in the Omaheke Region on service delivery and quality is mixed. They reveal that the Omaheke Region now has a focused education unit that is responsible for education. This has resulted in improved service delivery and quality. There is now a more direct and clear communication between the administrators at the Regional Education Office and the schools and parents.

Unlike the situation before decentralization, when all education administration was carried out from Head Office in Windhoek, Regional Administrators are not operating far from the schools. Since the administration and service provision is now closer to the operational levels and to the communities that are being served, communities have now started to have a more direct say in education than before. Mvula (New Era Newspaper 12 May 2005) points out that support from Regional Education Offices is

more streamlined and that remote schools that have marginalized learners and parents are targeted for increased support (p.6).

Since education decentralization has begun, there has been an improvement in the management of schools in the Omaheke Region. This is attributed to the services of inspectors of education and other Regional Education Office personnel being immediately available to schools. There has also been an improvement in the subject advisory services. The two Subject Advisors visit schools more often than in the past for observation, feedback and assistance.

The provision of teaching and learning materials has also improved since the introduction of education decentralization in the Omaheke Region. For example, vital supplies such as textbooks are now reaching schools in good time through the General Services Division that is stationed at the Regional Education Office. The Special Education Division has improved its service. Every school has a counselling support group to address HIV and AIDS. In addition, the quality of these services has improved.

However, despite this progress, the respondents felt that service delivery and quality have not yet reached desired levels. The quality of teaching and learning in many schools is still poor. Due to an inadequate staffing component (see 5.5), services that are supposed to be rendered, such as subject advisory services, are not and quality is therefore seriously compromised as teachers and schools are not given professional services from Regional Office as is supposed to be the case.

5.6 Personnel Provision for Education Decentralization

The execution of education decentralization duties and responsibilities is entirely dependent on the availability of adequate human resources. Amongst the first steps to be undertaken when education decentralization is to be implemented is to ensure that enough “bodies” are available to implement the process successfully.

With the commencement of education decentralization in Omaheke towards the end of 2003, a skeleton staff was appointed to carry out and oversee the work of the Regional Education Office. However, nearly three years after the commencement of the education decentralization, key personnel have still not been appointed. The following key areas in the Regional Education Office are still not staffed:

Subject Advisors for Mathematics, Physical Science, Life Science and commercial subjects.

An Educational Planner has still not been appointed on the establishment of the Regional Office of Education in Omaheke. The Education Planner is crucial, not only for physical planning, but also for curriculum planning, i.e. extension, reduction and general restructuring of the curriculum.

The Finance Division has still not been decentralized to the Omaheke Education Region. The respondents feel this is a particularly serious shortcoming in the education decentralization process in the Region.

Perhaps the most significant appointment of staff to the Omaheke Regional Education Office is in the personnel section. Services such as teacher appointments, retirements, leave, housing, medical aid and social security claims have been fully decentralized and staff has been appointed. Teachers, other staff appointments and related issues are now carried out closer to the points of service delivery.

In addition, these personnel appointments have also resulted in improved monitoring, supervision and performance of schools and hostels.

5.7 Budgetary Provision to Education Decentralization

The data indicate a lack of adequate financial resources for the implementation of education decentralization. According to the respondents, it is imperative that education decentralization be accompanied by financial resources, to avoid the problem of “unfunded mandates.”

The financing of education decentralization in Omaheke according to the data is still done from a national level, and falls far short of the Region's needs. As a result of these budgetary constraints education decentralization is seriously hampered and has led to:

- Inadequate provision for the Region's particular needs such as long distances and the educational backlog experienced by marginalized groups such as the San people.
- Inability to appoint staff in key posts such as Education Planner and Subject Advisors for subjects such as Mathematics, Science and Commerce.
- Unavailability of funds for transport, meals and accommodation for Subject Advisors.
- Too few new teaching posts to do justice to the growing number of learners in the Region.
- Too few new classrooms to cater for increasing number of learners.
- Inadequate supplies of stationary and textbooks resulting in School Development Funds being stretched to fill these gaps. In schools where the School Development Fund is inadequate or non-existent, the situation has reached crisis proportions.
- Inadequate funding for the Cluster System. Clusters do not fall under the Ministry of Education budget and therefore rely on Regional funds. Logistical needs such as transport, duplication facilities, communicating facilities such as telephone, fax, secretaries, and furniture are not provided for Cluster Centres. Cluster Centres have been built with funds from benevolent donor countries but there is no provision for their maintenance.

The Omaheke Regional Council has not yet been able to generate its own resources and therefore cannot provide finances for education. The Regional Council is unable to assume its full educational responsibility. The respondents called for the central government to make funding available in order for education in Omaheke to be on a sound financial footing.

5.8 Status of Regional Decentralization Structures

According to Gaomas (New Era Newspaper, 11 October 2006) the decentralization policy implemented by the Namibian Government in 1998 is primarily geared toward transferring responsibilities and powers to Regional and Local Authorities (p.1-2).

With reference to the envisaged relationship between the decentralized education structures and the Regional Councils, the Strategic Plan of the then Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture (2001) states:

During the initial phase, certain Ministerial functions will be delegated to Regional Councils, with the Ministry retaining overall accountability. Once the Regional Council is sufficiently competent in the delegated tasks, full responsibility for such tasks devolves to the Council. Nonetheless, the Ministry retains responsibility for policy formulation, training of staff and the monitoring of implementation (p.13).

Contrary to this, the Omaheke Regional Office does not yet operate under the Regional Council. The Omaheke Regional Education Office reports directly to the Education Head Office in the capital, Windhoek, totally bypassing the Regional Council. The Regional Director of Education is not answerable to the Regional Governor, but to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education in the capital. The Regional Education Office does however give the Regional Council informal feedback on their work in education

These Regional activities are also still funded by the Ministry of Education budget. The Omaheke education decentralization structure is thus not functioning as a decentralized structure. In my respondents' view, this is detrimental to education development in the Region. They are anxious that the Regional Office of the Ministry of Education operate under the direct supervision and guidance of the Omaheke Regional Council as soon as possible.

The respondents believe that the Ministry of Regional and Local Government, that is responsible for decentralization is not yet ready or able to execute all the decentralization functions. To align the decentralized education structure with the

Regional Council the respondents suggest as a first step that the education staff establishment be incorporated into the Regional Council. In this way, education can be managed from the Regional Council, in accord with the decentralization policy.

5.9 Conclusion

Throughout this Chapter, I have attempted to make sense of the complex data as the respondents experienced it against the realities of education decentralization in the Omaheke Region. The discussion of findings has largely responded to my research goals and questions as contained in Chapter One. I have also referred to literature in an attempt to link the discussion of findings to Chapter Two.

The issues discussed in this Chapter as sub-headings, supplement each other in such a way that they form a coherent unit. For example, one cannot talk about ownership without linking it with readiness, and the quality of service delivery cannot be separated from human resources and budgetary allocation to the region.

Participants demonstrated a basic understanding and knowledge of the term education decentralization. Although all the participants agree that education decentralization has brought in many positive changes and great strides have been made, they also clearly had many reservations. Amongst those were issues peculiar to the region such as marginalized groups, distances and the relationship between the Regional Education Office and the Omaheke Regional Council. Other issues that participants voiced concern about were readiness, financing and staff provision. Participants felt that these were the most important aspects that education decentralization should have in order for it to be lifted to the next level.

In the next Chapter, I summarize the main findings, discuss the potential value of my research and make recommendations for practice and future research.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

6.1 Summary of main findings

The study revealed that there is a fundamental understanding among the research participants of what education decentralization is. They believe that many people in the community are aware that education decentralization is supposed to mean that basic educational services are brought closer to their communities and they are allowed to manage and control the provision of these services. This involvement usually happens through their participation in democratically elected bodies like the School Boards and Education Forums.

At school level, education decentralization manifests itself through their involvement in school cluster activities. Schools are required to move away from what for many are a comfortable isolation to being part of a cluster of schools. The cluster system is meant to end this isolation and enhance school quality. Education decentralization is also perceived to provide for the democratization of education through the active participation of all relevant stakeholders - parents, teachers, learners, civil servants- in the education process.

However, although there is a basic understanding of what education decentralization entails, there is not necessarily acceptance. The study revealed that some people in Omaheke have reservations about the process of decentralizing education services. Some regard education decentralization as central government dumping its responsibility on the Regions. Furthermore, neither the Regional Council nor the Regional Education Office, nor schools, communities and parents have the capacity to cope with decentralization. The data reveal that in the participants' experience, education decentralization was and is not easy to implement. There is only partial evidence of psychological and structural readiness for education decentralization. Consequently, there is little meaningful participation and therefore no sense of ownership among parents, teachers, learners, community-based organizations and

political leaders. Despite the legal structures that have been put in place to encourage public ownership of the process, the outcomes have been far from satisfactory.

Improved education service delivery, ostensibly one of the main motivations for decentralization has, in the view of the participants, improved significantly. Service provision, with the few exceptions referred to below, is now closer to operational levels and the quality of service has improved. However, the provision of staff to take care of these has not yet been completed. The process is also slow and cumbersome. Nevertheless, the small staff that was appointed to carry out the education decentralization process in Omaheke Region is doing its best.

Inadequate financial provision is another shortcoming. This situation has seriously curtailed the execution of certain crucial services such as subject advisory services in the Region. The current budgeting ignores the peculiarities of the Omaheke Region, such as the vast distances and the plight of marginalized people.

The responsibility for overseeing the implementation of decentralization in the Region lies with the Omaheke Regional Council. Education as a decentralized function ought to resort directly under the Regional Council. However, the Regional Education Office does not yet operate under the Regional Council. Instead, the Education Director continues to report directly to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education in the capital. In this way an important decentralization structure, the Regional Council is bypassed and rendered toothless.

6.2 Potential value of the research

This study was undertaken to investigate how education decentralization is understood and managed in the Omaheke Region of Namibia. I also investigated what is perceived to be going well in this process and what the challenges are. I have identified the following as the potential value of my study.

As the process of education decentralization is ongoing and has still got a long way to go to address the Education Ministry's broad goals of access, equity, equality,

democracy and life-long learning, my research can inform the process as it unfolds, at both a policy and implementation level. For example, it could result in:

- A re-definition of management roles and more effective and efficient planning of decentralized services.
- An improved checks and balances system for the monitoring and control of education decentralization in the Omaheke Region.
- The setting in motion of a consultative process between the Regional Office of Education in Omaheke and the Omaheke Regional Council. This process could ensure closer cooperation and hopefully improved service delivery.
- More informed stakeholders that may result in raised levels of readiness to participate in and take ownership of the decentralization process in the Region. Accountability too could be strengthened as stakeholders may move from being bystanders to interested participants.

The inadequate provision of financial and human resources revealed by the study that is hampering the decentralization process, could lead to better prioritisation and the reallocation of these resources.

The study has also shown that, despite all the initiatives toward education decentralization a lot still needs to be done at the point of service delivery. The reasons mostly given for this phenomenon is the discrepancy between policy pronouncement (decentralization of education) and real change on the ground. The unearthing of discrepancies between policy, what is espoused, and what is happening at the point of service delivery, has the potential to stimulate debates concerning education decentralization in the Omaheke Region and possibly improve implementation.

6.3 Recommendations for practice

Education decentralization in the Omaheke Region needs to be judged in the context of the national objectives of the broader decentralization policy. Based on this the following emerge as recommendations for practice:

- Decentralization is a process and it is imperative that the people should be accorded sufficient time to fully understand what education decentralization is about. Continuous sensitisation and awareness raising efforts to support the process should be undertaken.
- In order for a better informed population to take ownership of and to participate in Omaheke's education decentralization, those responsible for steering the education decentralization process need to ensure that stakeholders, including the general public are aware of how they can participate in and influence the process.
- The staffing of vacant positions and the transfer of personnel from the Central Education Office in Windhoek should be treated as a matter of urgency. This will likely result in an immediately visible improvement in service delivery and help to institutionalise education decentralization in Omaheke. More visible benefits are in turn likely to increase the prospects of broader community participation in the process.
- The Regional Council should immediately take up its education administration and management responsibility, as provided for in the National Decentralization Polity.
- The central government needs to solicit funds to be made available to the Omaheke Regional Education Office or the Regional Council in order to facilitate education decentralization, its planning and management in particular.
- Other education stakeholders in the Region such as NGO's, the private sector, parastatals and traditional authorities should be included in an organized way in the decentralization process.

6.4 Future research

My research included only one segment of the role-players involved in the education decentralization process in the Omaheke Region. I anticipate that there would be value in also investigating the experiences and perceptions of other role-players, such as teachers, parents and learners.

A number of my respondents made reference to the threat of the HIV and AIDS pandemic and its implication for education decentralization in Omaheke. This too could be valuable future research.

6.5 Conclusion

As I mentioned in Chapter One (1.3 and 1.4), this small scale study was undertaken to explore the experiences and perceptions of key role-players with regards to education provision and the decentralization process in the Omaheke Region of Namibia. The study also enquired into the positive developments and problems experienced in the implementation of education decentralization.

In my opinion, the research goals have been achieved and I am confident that this research will inform the implementation of education decentralization policy in the Omaheke Region.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Exactly what is your understanding of education decentralization?

You play an important role in the realization of the goals of education decentralization. How do you perceive your role with respect to education decentralization?

What are you doing in term of education decentralization to realize the proper provision of educational services?

What role do you think decentralization can play in the provision of education?

Are there major challenges being experienced with education decentralization in Omaheke Region?

Could you elaborate on any major achievement(s) in this Region that resulted from education decentralization?

Do you think the grassroots (ordinary) people in Omaheke understood education decentralization?

As a custodian of government administration in the Omaheke Region, are there any other issues I did not touch on that could be of value to my small-scale research?

