

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the study

How does school clustering relate to improving teaching in Namibian schools? More especially, what are the effects of cluster-based school management reform on the teaching practices of teachers? This is the central question that triggered the study on the implementation of cluster-based school management reform initiative in Namibia.

The study assesses the relationship between cluster-based school management reform initiative and improvement in the quality of classroom teaching. The study is in part a response to ongoing debates in the literature about the effectiveness of decentralisation reforms in improving the quality of education.

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the implementation of cluster-based school management reform in Namibian schools through the perceptions of the range of stakeholders and to determine the effects of the reform on classroom teaching through the perceptions of teachers. In particular, the objectives of the study are to: (1) determine through literature the meaning of the concept education decentralisation and the relationship between education decentralisation, school-based management and teaching; (2) examine the perceptions and views of the key role players on the implementation of cluster-based school management reform; (3) assess the extent to which cluster-based school management improves the quality of teaching in Namibian schools, and (4) recommend strategies (drawn from the study findings) for improving the implementation of cluster-based school reform in a developing context. The study is guided by the following questions:

1. What are the perceptions of school principals and teachers regarding the implementation of the goals of cluster-based school management reform?

2. How do cluster contextual realities shape the implementation of cluster-based school management in Namibian primary schools?
3. How do the beliefs and perceptions of the key role players influence the implementation of the reform?
4. What are teachers' perceptions of cluster-based school management reform?
5. To what extent does cluster-based school management improve the teaching practices of teachers?

1.2 Rationale for the study

There is little research on the relationship between school clustering and teaching in a developing context. Recent studies (Pellini, 2005; Chikoko, 2007) which investigated the implementation of school clustering in a developing context have done little to investigate the effects of cluster-based school management on teaching. The recent Namibian studies (Topnaar, 2004; Uriab, 2006; Aipinge, 2007) on school clustering focused more on investigating the implementation of school clustering from school management or administrative perspective with little attention given to its effects on the quality of teaching. The only recent study which assessed the impact of school clustering on teaching (as part of its study objectives) was the study conducted by Mendelsohn and Ward (2007). However, that study excluded the perspectives of teachers on the impact of school clustering on teaching; it assessed the impact of cluster-based subject groups on teaching through the perceptions of cluster-centre principals and district education officers and was not able to capture the content and organisation of the cluster-based subject group (an organisational structure, which is assumed to influence teaching). The review of school clustering establishes that little research is available which investigates how beliefs and values held by key role players influence their actions and perceptions of school clustering.

This study aims to contribute to the existing knowledge on school clustering in a number of ways. First, the value of this study lies in the fact that it has given teachers a voice to judge the effectiveness of cluster-based teacher meetings in improving classroom teaching. Second, it provides insight on the content and organisation of cluster-based subject group meetings, pointing out the potentials and limitations of these meetings as teacher development strategies. Third, the study provides insight on how ideology has influenced the way in which school clusters operate in the Namibian context.

1.3 Methodology

The study collected the data through: (1) *survey research* carried out in the 37 primary schools out of the 60 sampled primary schools in the five regions (Caprivi, Erongo, Hardap, Karas and Kunene); and (2) *case studies* were based on semi-structured interviews with two inspectors, ten school principals, eighteen teachers, observations, informal conversations, focus group discussions and document analyses in three primary school clusters in two of the five education regions. The survey research collected information on perceptions of school principals and lower primary teachers on the implementation of cluster-based school management reform in Namibian primary schools and whether from their experiences the school management reform has brought improvement in the teaching practices. The case study methods were selected to enable the researcher to gain in-depth understanding of important issues involved in the implementation of cluster-based school management reform and the subtle aspects of its effects on the quality of teaching.

The analysis of data for this study was based on quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative data analysis involved coding of the numerical and non-numerical raw data from the survey research. SPSS software was used to run frequency procedures for

checking data entry errors and making summary statistics and statistical analysis. Qualitative analysis of data was informed by the Miles and Huberman (1994) framework for qualitative data analysis. The qualitative analysis involved coding a set of field notes and transcribed data collected through case study methods. Three levels of coding were used to analyse data. The first-level coding focused on identifying first-order categories, the second-level coding involved connecting first-order categories with each other to produce higher-order categories (core categories) and the third level coding involved integrating and condensing core categories into a central theme in the data (Punch, 2005). The three levels of coding enabled the researcher to: (1) conceptualise data; (2) connect concepts with each other in order to produce a set of propositions and (3) develop central conceptual themes of the study.

1.4 The context for the study

Namibia gained its independence in 1990 after many years of political struggle against South Africa's illegal occupation and apartheid policies. Namibia is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the west, Angola and Zambia to the north and north east respectively, and Botswana and South Africa to the east and south respectively. It is very sparsely populated; the country spreads over an area of 824, 469 kilometres marked by big contrasts of landscape with the Namib Desert along the entire west coast and the Kalahari Desert along the central eastern border with Botswana, making it the driest country south of the equator characterised by frequent droughts.

The Namibian economy has both a modern market sector, which produces most of the country's wealth, and a traditional subsistence sector. Namibia's gross domestic product (GDP) per capita is relatively high among developing countries. In 2006, real GDP growth

measured an estimated 4.6 percent. About 80 percent of the country's 2 million people are literate, and 90 percent of children of school age are enrolled in primary schools.

1.4.1 Brief historical overview of education management in Namibia

The education system in Namibia was administered and managed by different authorities before independence. Before the German occupation, missionaries (Finnish and Rhenish missionaries) were the providers of education to the blacks and coloureds in Namibia (Cohen, 1994). After the German occupation in 1884, missionaries continued to control the coloureds¹ and blacks, while the education system for whites was state-controlled (Ibid). However, 'the colonial government was involved in the education for blacks and coloureds largely by awarding grants to mission societies whose schools satisfactorily taught the German language' (Ibid: 69).

After the South African government occupied Namibia (then called South West Africa) in 1915 there was a change in the education administration for blacks, coloureds and whites in Namibia. When South Africa was given an official mandate to 'take care' of South West Africa in 1920, attempts were made to centralise education control in South West Africa (Cohen, 1994). The centralised management of education for whites, blacks and coloureds came into being with the issuing of Education Proclamation no.55 of 1921 which provided for the creation of a Department of Education with a Director of Education who was given the responsibility to 'supervise all education in South West Africa falling within the Police Zone' (Ibid: 83). However, the issuing of Education Proclamation no. 55 of 1921 did not significantly influence the management of the education system for blacks and coloureds. Schools for blacks and coloureds continued to be in the hands of the missionaries. Another education proclamation, Proclamation No. 16 of 1926, repealed Proclamation No.55 of 1921. The proclamation attempted to introduce separate management of the

¹ In the context of South Africa and Namibia, the term 'coloured' has been used as an official language of racial differentiation between white and black racial groups

education system for blacks, coloureds and whites. However, as in the case of Proclamation No.55 of 1921, the missionaries continued to have direct control over local management and supervision of black and coloured schools (Ibid: 85-86).

Two changes were introduced in the education management for whites, blacks and coloureds in the 1950s. During the early 1950s, 'the education administration for whites, blacks and coloureds in the central and southern regions of Namibia was brought under a single controlling body, the Department of Education of the South West Africa Administration' (Cohen, 1994:91).

In 1958, the South African government appointed a commission known as Van Zyl Commission to 'look into the black and coloured education in South West Africa with a view to establish separate systems of education for the two groups' (Ibid:95). Van Zyl Commission recommended separate education systems for whites, blacks and coloureds.

Further changes in the administration of education for blacks, coloureds and whites were affected with the establishment of Education Ordinance No. 27 of 1962 and the recommendations of the Odendaal Commission of 1962 -1963. The Education Ordinance No. 27 of 1962 was established to deal with the management of blacks, coloureds and whites, while the Odendaal Commission extended the development of 'homelands' policy in South West Africa (Ibid: 104-106). As per recommendations of the Odendaal Commission, the management of the education of coloureds and blacks was transferred to corresponding ethnic departments in South Africa via regional offices in Windhoek. In other words, the administration for coloured education was transferred to the Division of Education within the South African Department of Coloured Affairs, while the administration for blacks was placed under the Department of Bantu Education of South

Africa as per Education Act No. 39 of 1968. The administration for white education in Namibia remained under the management of the South West Africa Administration. However, in the late 1960s the management of education for whites was also transferred to the South African government under the auspices of the South African Department of Education in Pretoria (Ibid: 112-113).

During the 1970s separate education systems for blacks, coloureds and whites continued, with departments in South Africa administering each system independently via regional branches in Namibia. Though the creation of 'homelands' assumed transfer of responsibilities for education management to the so-called education departments of the various 'homeland administrations', these departments of education were still dependent on directives from the Department of Education and Training in Pretoria (Ibid: 127).

In 1979, the Directorate of National Education was established as an attempt to unify three major ethnic groups within one structure and shift control from South Africa to Namibia. During the early 1980s the Directorate of Education was converted to the Department of National Education. In addition to the Department of National Education, decentralised ethnic directorates were established under three pieces of legislation, namely: the Representative Authorities Proclamation (Proclamation, AG 8 of 1980); the Government Service Act, No 2 of 1980, and the National Education Act. No. 30 of 1980 (Cohen, 1994).

The Proclamation AG 8 of 1980 established ten ethnic authorities. They were authority for the Rehoboth Basters, Bushmen, Caprivians, Coloureds, Damaras, Hereros, Kavangos, Namas, Ovambos, and Tswanas, plus Whites, with each ethnic administration given the responsibility for establishing its own Directorate of Education and Culture to 'administer its

educational matters from pre-primary to teacher training for lower primary including Standard II' (Ibid: 198).

The Government Service Act No. 2 of 1980 'aimed to create an "independent" government service in Namibia which led to the abolition of ten directorates including the Directorate of National Education' (Ibid: 199). Education management was decentralised into 16 departments including the Department of National Education (D of NE). The D of NE was given the responsibility to 'administer all primary and secondary education which did not fall under a representative authority' (Ibid).

It is clear from the brief historical overview of education management in Namibia that education was administered along centralised lines during the South African occupation. Centralisation of the management of education has been inherited by different generations and therefore its influence is still significant in Namibia.

In 1991, one year after the Namibian independence, the Department of National Education and the separate ethnic education authorities were absorbed into a single ministry of education, with its head office in Windhoek, and six regional offices (Ibid: 386). In other words, at independence, the ministry of education known, as the Ministry of Education and Culture, was organised in six departments and six regional offices. However, the organisational structure of the Ministry of Education and Culture was rationalised between 1991 and 1993. As a result of the rationalisation of the organisational structure of the Ministry, the structure consisted of two Departments, ten head office directorates and seven regional directorates, which included within their spheres of operation one, two or three of the thirteen new Regional Authorities.

Thus, the process of the rationalisation of the organisational structure of the ministry also led to the process of decentralisation of the education management through de-concentrated structures.

1.4.2 The legal framework for education decentralisation in Namibia

The Namibian Constitution establishes Namibia to be a democratic and unitary state. Namibia, like other democratic countries, has adopted decentralisation policy as a means to enhance and guarantee democratic participation by the majority of the people at grass roots level as well as to achieve sustainable development (Ministry of Regional and Local Housing, 1997). Chapter 12, Article 102 of the Constitution of the Republic of Namibia, provides the basis for decentralisation by providing for establishment of regional and local governments. Article 102 (1) specifically provides for structures of regional and local governments. It states that, 'for purposes of regional and local government, Namibia shall be divided into regional and local units which shall consist of such region and local authorities as may be determined and defined by an Act of Parliament' (Republic of Namibia, 1990: 54). Various legislations were enacted for establishing the legal framework on decentralisation: Regional Council Act (Act 22 of 1992); Local Authority Act (Act 23 of 1992); Trust Fund of Regional Development and Equity Provision (Act 22 of 2000) and Decentralisation Enabling Act (Act 33 of 2000).

Two pieces of legislation instituted the introduction and implementation of decentralisation in Namibia: Regional Council Act (Act 22 of 1992) and Local Authority Act (Act 23 of 1992). The two acts form the legislative basis for regional and local government system in Namibia (Ministry of Regional and Local Government and Housing², 1997);

² The Ministry of Regional, Local Government and Housing (MRLGH) was given the responsibility to spearhead the development and implementation of the decentralisation policy in Namibia.

Both Acts provided for the determination and establishment of councils; qualifications and elections of councillors; management committees of councils; chief executive officers and other officers/employers of the councils; powers, duties, functions, rights and obligations of councils and financial matters in respect of both regional and local authorities councils (Ministry of Regional, Local Government and Housing 1998: 7).

The preferred decentralisation model in Namibia is that of devolution of power to lower tiers within the context of the overall authority of a unitary state (Ministry of Regional and Local Government and Housing, 1997). However, Ministry of Regional and Local Government and Housing stipulated that the decentralisation process was to take place in three phases: immediate, medium term and long term. The fundamental principles of decentralisation are embodied in the Decentralisation policy, which was developed in 1997. The following are some of the fundamental principles of the decentralisation policy:

- (1) That devolution of responsibility will go hand in hand with availability of resources;
- (2) The pace and content of devolution shall be determined by political and technical feasibility, system and individual capacity, as well as the national macro-economic and fiscal environment, public sector and economic reform policies and activities’;
- (3) ‘For effective implementation of decentralisation there will be institutional and organisational change at national, regional and local levels’,
- (4) ‘Decentralisation will be cost effective, because the assumption behind participative decentralisation is that when people manage their own resources, there will be less wastage and more responsibility, while cost recovery will be more feasible’;
- (5) ‘For the policy to be effectively implemented, a level of individual, organisational, institutional and system wide capacity building has to be developed across the board’.
- (6) ‘Functions to be decentralised are to be divided into immediate, medium term or long term’.

Based on the principles above, the Decentralisation policy (1997) identified functions to be decentralised in different phases to Regional Councils and Local Authorities. The policy also put down implementation guidelines, resource strategies and the choice of the form of decentralisation the country was going to take.

Another decentralisation policy document was developed in 1998, which clarified how decentralisation was going to take place. The policy outlined that decentralisation would take place through the following process: in the first step, line ministries would delegate functions to either Regional Councils or Local Authorities, together with the necessary human and financial resources. The policy stated clearly that ‘under delegation, the Centre shall continue to provide the funds for the delegated functions, both recurrent and development funds’ (Ministry of Regional, Local Government and Housing, 1998: 19). Regional Councils and Local Authorities would be responsible for operational management and delivery of the decentralized services, acting as agents of central government.

In the second step, the functions would be devolved to the Regional Councils and Local Authorities. Devolution of functions to Regional Councils and Local Authorities would give them full responsibility and public accountability of certain functions. The policy further states that ‘under devolution line ministries’ activities shall change significantly and be limited to the issuance of policy, guidelines, the determination and establishment of national standards of service delivery, inspection and support supervision, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation’ (Ibid: 12).

To facilitate the implementation of the decentralisation policy, the following legislations were enacted in 2000: the Decentralisation Enabling Act (Act 33 of 2000), and the Trust

Fund of Regional Development and Equity Provision (Act 22 of 2000). The Decentralisation Enabling Act regulates the decentralisation of functions vested in line ministries to Regional Councils and Local Authorities and stipulates terms and conditions under which decentralised functions could be withdrawn. In other words, the Decentralisation Enabling Act states the terms and conditions for: delegation and withdrawal of delegation of functions; devolution and withdrawal of devolution of functions; and the use of the funds paid to regional councils or local authority councils. The Trust Fund for Regional Development and Equity Act provides for the establishment of a special fund aimed at ensuring the development of the regions.

In parallel with local and regional councils, several ministries including the Ministry of Education had adopted a de-concentrated form of management and established regional directorates across the country to manage education system at the local levels. The following section discusses the decentralisation of education management in post-independent Namibia.

1.4.3 Decentralisation of education management in post-independent Namibia

As mentioned previously, in 1991, one year after independence, the Ministry of Education and Culture was organised in six Departments and six regional directorates. The regional directorates were established as early as 1991. The establishment of the regional directorates was the first step towards decentralisation of the education management, which took a form of de-concentration. While the regional directorates were given managerial autonomy to some extent, they were operated within the structure and functions of the central Ministry (Ministry of Education and Culture, 1993). The establishment of School Boards, under the Education Act of 2001, (Act no. 16, Section 30) was another step towards decentralisation of education management. The role of the

School Boards is to promote parent and community participation in the management of schools.

In 2002, the seven regional directorates were subdivided into 13 regional education directorates to be in compliance with the central government policy of decentralising functions from the head offices of various ministries to the regional administrations in the thirteen regions as well as to ensure representation in all thirteen regions.³ Until recently, the Ministry of Education has not yet moved from de-concentration phase to delegation phase.

While the central Ministry is responsible for the running of the education system, the regional directorates shoulder the bulk of the implementation of educational programmes and work closely with schools and communities in their respective regions. Figure 1 below, shows the levels of management in the Ministry of Education after the introduction of the decentralisation reforms:

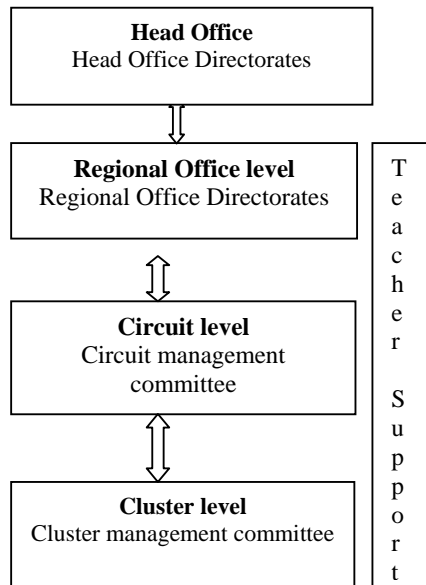


Figure 1: Levels of management in the Ministry of Education

³ The increase of regional directorates from seven to thirteen was meant to transform the management of education from de-concentration structures to delegation form of decentralisation as per intentions of the central government policy of decentralisation.

At the top level, the national Ministry of Education at head office delegates certain functions to the regional education directorates. The regional education directorates are at the middle management level of the Ministry, while circuit offices, clusters and schools are at the low level of education management. At each level, certain functions are decentralised. The national Ministry of Education takes the responsibilities for managing curriculum development; financial management; resource allocation; policy formulation; procurement services, pre-service teacher training; examinations; quality determination and setting standards, while management responsibilities regarding personnel management, evaluation of school system and teacher recruitment are shared between the national Ministry of Education and the regional offices. The responsibilities for school supervision, school administration and in-service training (including teacher professional and leadership development) are shared between circuit offices and clusters, while schools (school boards) are given some responsibilities for advertising and interviewing teachers and making recommendations for appointment and promotion of teachers. Though the authority and responsibilities over some functions of the management of the education system was distributed to regional education directorates, the Head Office retains the power and authority over the budget. Decentralisation of school administration, supervision and in-service training activities at the cluster level is the one with which this present study is concerned.

1. 4.4 Origin and development of school clusters in Namibia

As mentioned previously, efforts to decentralise education management at the regional level had been made. Before the implementation of cluster-based school management reform, the regional and circuit offices were responsible for the management and supervision of schools. Circuit inspectors had been required to travel long distances distributing materials and collecting statistics in schools. The supervision and support to schools and teachers had been difficult because of long distances to schools, budgetary

and transport constraints (De Grauwe, 2001; Dittmar et al., 2002). Consequently, most principals and teachers, especially in small and isolated schools, could not get the support they needed, and therefore have continued to be poorly supported and managed (Ibid). The school clustering system was introduced as a decentralised management and support structure between circuit (district) offices and schools. Every region comprises a regional education office, circuit education offices and school clusters, with a cluster centre and a certain number of individual schools related to the cluster centre.

Cluster-based school management reform was first initiated as a pilot project in the Rundu region, one of the thirteen regional education regions of Namibia in 1996. During the mid-1990s, the Rundu education region was considered as the region with the weakest education delivery services. The project was part of the activities of the Basic Education Project (BEP), funded by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ), a German non-governmental organisation. The BEP's support to the Ministry of Education included educational reform and institutional development; decentralised education management; access to mother-tongue education and curriculum revision (Orth and Pfaffe, 2007). School clustering has been regarded as a means for promoting the Ministry's goals of equity, access and democracy.

School clustering was expanded to other regional education regions upon the recommendations of the Presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Training in 1999 and since then cluster-based school management has become a government strategy for school management in Namibia. However, the cluster system has not been institutionalised by law and there is no policy for school clustering in Namibia in 2008.

During 2000, the Namibian Ministry of Education introduced cluster-based school management as a decentralisation reform, granting authority and responsibility for managing school supervision and in-service training for school managers and teachers to clusters, to be implemented in all the thirteen education regions.

Before the development of school clusters, school mapping exercises and baseline studies were carried out in each region to provide initial recommendations on the grouping of schools into clusters, selecting cluster centres, and grouping clusters into circuits (Dittmar, 2001). In order to coordinate the implementation of the school cluster system, the project had a national project coordinator based at the Ministry of Education's head office and a fulltime advisor stationed in each region.

School clustering requires the grouping of schools into geographical clusters, each consisting of between five and seven schools. One school in each cluster is selected to serve as a cluster centre. A cluster centre is selected on the basis that it has the most resources, is accessible to its satellite schools and also has access to commercial services. Cluster centres act as focal points for contact and co-ordination between schools in that regional entity, the cluster centre. Ideally, cluster centres also serve as in-service training centres and provide examples of exemplary education practice and management (Dittmar et al., 2002).

The objectives of cluster-based school management are to: improve school management; improve supervision and teacher support; promote democratic participation, improve access and equity in education and improve teaching and learning.

It is assumed that cluster-based school management promotes local participation in school decision-making process by ‘involving people close to schools in decision-making’ (Dittmar et al., 2002: 21). It is also assumed that cluster-based school management creates opportunity for schools to be managed, supervised and guided as networks rather than individual entities through shared and collaborative leadership; and to improve the efficiency use of resources, because resources would be shared within clusters and therefore ensure equitable allocation of resources. It is argued that school clustering can reduce waste and save time and transport costs when schools share resources and when distribution of materials and collection of statistics is done through cluster centres (Ibid).

School clustering has been regarded as an organisational means for improving teaching through establishment of cluster-based subject groups, which provide teachers with the opportunity to share ideas, lesson plans, good teaching practices, examination questions and teaching resources.

Cluster-based school management is a decentralisation reform characterised by: (1) a delegation of authority and power from regional education offices and circuit offices to cluster levels, and (2) participatory leadership. Decentralised structures have been created to ensure communication and collaboration between circuit offices, and among schools and teachers. These are circuit and cluster management committees and cluster-based subject groups. A circuit management committee consists of a circuit inspector and cluster-centre principals within the circuit, while a cluster management committee consists of a cluster centre principal, school principals from each satellite school in the cluster and co-opted members, such as senior teachers and school board members. It is assumed that cluster management committees, under the leadership of cluster centre principals, support and guide satellite schools.

Circuit inspectors are, at management level, immediately in charge of clusters; they are required to play an important role in supporting cluster-based school management reform (Dittmar et al., 2002: 4). Circuit inspectors are supposed to manage cluster centres in collaboration with cluster centre principals and cluster management committees. From the point of view of the advocates of cluster-based school management reform, a cluster centre principal is critical in the management of cluster-centres and satellite schools. The cluster centre principal takes a large part of responsibility for co-ordinating activities, management and supervision of the school cluster. He serves as the chairperson of the cluster management committee, and is required to have strong management and leadership skills.

1.4.5 The Namibian general education system

Formal general education is regulated by the Education Act. 2001 (Act no. 16 of 2001) which is established to provide for the provision of accessible, equitable, qualitative and democratic national education service, and to provide for the establishment of: the National Advisory Council on Education; the National Examination Assessment and Certification Board; School Boards; Education Development Fund; schools and hostels; the Teaching Service and the Teaching Service Committee (Education Act no. 16 of 2001).

Administration and management

Since independence in 1990, the general education system falls under a common and unified management. Education has been managed along centralised lines. At the top of the hierarchy is the Ministry's head office, which oversees 13 regional education offices. Each of these regional offices has five to ten circuits. Each circuit or district office is managed by a circuit inspector who supervises about 25-50 schools grouped into clusters.

Cluster-based school management reform is assumed to bring authority and decision-making closer to schools. Circuit inspectors do not longer supervise schools directly. Schools are managed by a cluster management committee composed of a cluster-centre principal and satellite school principals in the cluster. Other structures to promote participation of all stakeholders in the management of education are student representative councils at secondary schools, school boards, and regional educational forums (Angula, 1999).

Organisation of the general education system

The general education system is organised into eight years of primary education (pre-primary to grade 7, three years of junior secondary education (grade 8-10) and two years of senior secondary education (grade 11-12). Education is compulsory from the age of six up to the end of junior secondary phase or up to the age of 16, whichever is sooner.

Learner enrolment

Learner enrolment has been increasing since 2001. There were 528,958 learners in 2001, while in 2007 the number of learners had increased to 570, 623. The average annual growth rate between 2001 and 2007 has been 1.3%, but between 2006 and 2007, the national enrolment has increased by 2.3% (Ministry of Education, 2007).

The school curriculum

The school curriculum for general education seeks to promote core skills and key learning areas, which are essential for a knowledge-based society (Ministry of Education, 2008). The core skills include personal skills, social skills, cognitive skills, communication skills, numeracy skills, and information and communication technology skills. The key learning

areas are Languages, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Technology, Commerce, Arts and Physical Education.

Language in education

At independence, Namibia adopted English as the medium of instruction. The language policy in education promotes teaching in the home language from grade 1 to 3, with grade 4 being a transition year after which teaching should be in English.

Pedagogy

Since independence, different teaching methods and approaches have been implemented. Teaching and learning has been informed by participatory learning approaches that place the learner at the centre of learning. The goal of introducing these teaching and learning approaches was to enhance understanding, problem solving and democratic learning (Angula, 1999).

Teacher Education

At independence, the Ministry of Education and Culture introduced a common teacher preparation program known as the Basic Education Teacher Education Diploma (BETD). The BETD program is offered at the four colleges of education. The program aims at preparing teachers for basic education, while the Faculty of Education at the University of Namibia has been given the responsibility for preparing teachers at the senior secondary level (Angula, 1999). An in-service basic education teacher education program (BETD INSET) for upgrading teachers' qualifications has been implemented since 1995. Various teacher continuous professional development projects and activities have been implemented to update teachers' teaching skills and subject matter knowledge.

Teacher qualifications

There are 20,333 teachers in Namibia. The number of teachers who have formal teaching qualifications has been increasing since the introduction of the BETD INSET. For example, in 2001, the number of teachers who did not have formal teacher training was 1, 982, while in 2007 only about 894 of the teachers did not have formal teacher training. 15,460 out of 20, 333 have grade 12 plus 3 or more years of tertiary education (Ministry of Education, 2007).

Though there is substantial progress in increasing the proportion of qualified teachers since independence, improvements in teacher qualifications have not yet translated into effective teaching (Marope, 2005). A large proportion of qualified teachers still lack essential competencies such as mastery of their teaching subjects, good English proficiency, reading skills, elicitation skills, curriculum interpretation and setting student tests (Marope, 2005; Leu and van Graan, 2006).

Examinations

There is no certification for completing primary education. However, a national Grade 7 examination was introduced in 2000, to monitor learner acquisition of the basic competencies at the end of the primary phase. The national grade 7 examination will be replaced by national summative and diagnostic tests in Grades 5 and 7 in 2009. Learners write the junior secondary examinations at the end of Grade 10, and at end of Grade 12 learners take the Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate examination. All subjects are available at the Ordinary level of the examination (NSCCO), and most subjects are also available at the Higher level (NSCCH).

Resource allocation

Inequalities inherited at independence still persist and are evident in the distribution of access, learning outcomes and resource inputs. Although resource allocation to schools in different parts of the country is on enrolment basis, schools which were historically privileged have still better facilities than schools which were previously disadvantaged (Angula, 1999). The Namibian general education is also characterised by a shortage of book and instructional materials. There is a dearth of books and instructional materials especially in primary schools. Some schools do not provide a physical environment that is conducive to teaching or learning (Marope, 2005). A large proportion of schools in Namibia do not have toilets, water, telephones or electricity.

1.5 Overview of the thesis

The thesis is organised into nine chapters. Chapter 1 discusses the background context of the study, its purposes, the rationale for the study and brief outlines of the main topics addressed in the thesis.

Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive literature review on education decentralisation reforms, the implementation of these approaches and the effects of the decentralisation reforms on improving teaching.

Chapter 3 discusses the research design, the study sample, the methodologies and procedures used to collect and analyse the data in order to examine how Namibian primary schools implement cluster-based school management reform, and whether the school management reform relates to improvement in the teaching practices of teachers.

Chapter 4 discusses the perceptions of school principals and lower primary teachers on the implementation of cluster-based school management reform in the primary schools and the extent to which cluster-based school management reform improves the quality of teaching in primary schools.

Chapter 5 analyses the contextual features and dynamics of each of the three primary school clusters and how these contextual features and dynamics in each cluster shape the implementation of cluster-based school management reform and the extent to which the contextual features and dynamics influence the quality of teaching in the three primary school clusters.

Chapter 6 analyses how the ideologies of key role players influence the implementation of cluster-based school management reform and the extent to which the ideologies of key role players affect the implementation of cluster-based school management reform and the extent to which these ideologies influence the quality of teaching in the three primary school clusters.

Chapter 7 discusses the perceptions of teachers about the teacher support strategies introduced by cluster-based school management reform to improve teaching and the extent to which the teacher support strategies influence improvement in the quality of teaching practices of teachers in the three primary school clusters.

Chapter 8 discusses the characteristics of the teaching methodologies employed by teachers in the three primary school clusters and the extent to which cluster-based school management reform has brought improvement in the quality of teaching practices of teachers in the three primary school clusters.

Chapter 9 discusses the conclusions drawn from the data on: (1) implementation of cluster-based school management in primary schools and (2) the extent to which cluster-based school management reform improves the quality of teaching practices of teachers. The chapter also discusses the contributions of the present study to the existing knowledge base on: (1) the implementation of cluster-based school management reform in developing contexts and (2) the relationship between school clustering and improving teaching. Also discussed are the areas for future research and the limitations of this study.