

## **CHAPTER 2: EDUCATION DECENTRALISATION: A LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter presents a review of literature on education decentralisation. It begins with the discussions on definitions and basic concepts of decentralisation and continues discussing the arguments for decentralisation of education, the implementation of decentralisation reforms in developing contexts and research evidence about the effects of decentralisation reforms on the quality of teaching. The major part of the literature review focuses on discussing the origin, purposes and models of school clustering and the empirical findings on the implementation of school clustering. The review also provides a synthesis of theoretical perspectives and the findings of previous research on school-based management, the link between school-based management and teaching and concludes with a summary of lessons learnt through the literature review and the justification for the present study.

### **2.1 Definitions and basic concepts of decentralisation**

People have defined decentralization differently. Walberg et al (2000) analyse twenty-two definitions of decentralisation. The analysis includes definitions of decentralisation as obtained from scholarly papers and prominent organisations from late 1960s to late 1990s. The analysis suggests that there have been several shifts of focus over the meanings, definitions and motives for decentralisation (Dyer and Rose, 2005). Some definitions tend to be more general, emphasising shifting decision-making power and authority from central government to local levels, while some definitions specify functions that need to be redistributed from central governments to lower levels of governments. The analysis also indicates that some definitions suggest partial distribution of decision-making authority and power, and specific functions from central government to local levels, while others suggest

total distribution of decision-making authority and power and of specific functions from central government to local levels. The commonly-cited definition of decentralisation, provided by Rondinelli and Cheema (1983) specifies issues such as planning, decision-making, or administrative authority as needing to be transferred from central governments to local units. In his conceptualisation of decentralisation, Zajda, (2004:206) puts emphasis on 'the distribution and the use of resources' (finances, human resources and curriculum) from the central government to local schools. Geo-jaja (2004:309) in his description of what decentralisation entails, refers to a 'process of re-assigning responsibility and corresponding decision-making authority for specific functions from higher to lower levels of government', but the author does not specify which functions are transferred from central government to lower levels of government. McGinn and Welsh (1999:18) tend to be general in their conceptualisation of decentralisation. McGinn and Welsh describe decentralisation as the transfer of authority from central government to provincial, district and schools.

In summary, decentralisation involves the transfer of decision-making powers and responsibility from central government to lower levels of government institutions or private institutions. This could be a transfer of responsibility such as that of distribution of resources, administrative and management tasks, and planning (Dyer and Rose, 2005; Abu-Duhou, 1999). The local entities may be provinces, regional offices, municipalities, districts or schools; depending on the context of a country.

As implied in the discussion above, the concept of decentralisation is complex and may take four degrees of transfer of authority and power, namely de-concentration, delegation, devolution and privatisation. De-concentration involves a transfer of administrative authority and responsibility to lower levels that is to government agencies or institutions

without giving them the final responsibility for decision-making (Rondinelli and Cheema, 1983; Bray and Mukundan, 2004; Abu-Duhou, 1999; Lauglo, 1995; Dyer and Rose, 2005). This implies that the final decision-making function remains with the central authorities, but the workload is shifted to the lower level; for example, district offices or schools are given a certain work load to carry out within the central authority's work line therefore, de-concentration is a weak form of decentralisation which does not allow local autonomy. The argument for this type of decentralisation is to improve efficiency or effectiveness of the administration of public institutions. The concept of de-concentration is important for this study as it provides an understanding of how school clusters relate to head, regional and circuit offices in the Namibian context.

Delegation refers to the transfer of managerial responsibility for specific functions to local units, local government or non-governmental organisations which are not directly under the control of the central authorities (Rondinelli and Cheema, 1983; Bray, 1987). Under delegation, central authorities remain accountable for the decentralised activities delegated to the government or non-governmental organisations, the decision-making powers transferred to the local units can be withdrawn at any time (Bray, 1987). The difference between de-concentration and delegation is weak. Although delegation of powers may imply stronger local autonomy, 'the power still rests with the central authorities which have chosen to "lend" them to the local one' (Bray, 1987:132). The argument for delegation of activities to local level is the same as for de-concentration.

Devolution involves the central state giving full decision-making power and management authority to sub-national levels, which allows local decision-makers to make decisions on their own without asking higher-level approval; the transfer of authority over financial, administrative or pedagogical matters is formalised (Rondinelli and Cheema, 1983; Abu-

Duhou, 1999; Bray, 1987; Dyer and Rose, 2005). Under devolution, local units of governments are autonomous and independent, central authorities exercise only indirect, supervisory control over such units Abu-Duhou (1999:25). Under devolution, decentralisation is justified on the grounds of efficiency and effectiveness in the use of resources and responsiveness of public education to local needs.

Privatisation is a form of decentralisation which involves government giving up responsibility for certain functions and transferring them to certain units, namely private enterprises (Rondinelli and Cheema, 1983; Abu-Duhou, 1999; McGinn and Welsh, 1999; Lauglo, 1995). Privatisation is justified on the grounds of increasing competitiveness and efficiency, which is assumed to be achieved better in private sectors.

The description of the four forms of decentralisation indicates how degrees of decentralisation relate to levels of central control. Where the central authorities wish to exercise control, they may choose a de-concentrated or a delegated system rather than a devolved one (Bray, 1987). De-concentrated or delegated systems make public service systems bureaucratic because central authorities still retain decision-making powers although management responsibilities are spread over different levels (regional offices, district offices, clusters and schools).

## **2.2 Arguments for decentralisation of education**

Overall, the main arguments cited for education decentralisation are based on efficiency, effectiveness, quality and access issues. The advocates of decentralisation assume that shifting authority and management responsibilities to local levels will enhance: (1) the quality of education; (2) effective and efficient use of resources (Ainley and McKenzie, 2000; Bjork, 2004); (3) responsiveness of public education to local needs (Chapman, et al.

2002; Walberg et al., 2000); and (4) teacher and school level professional autonomy (Walberg et al., 2000; Zajda, 2004). As far as the quality improvement argument is concerned, advocates of decentralisation believe that 'schooling quality can be improved by locating decisions to the point where they will be carried out, enabling those with experience and expertise to provide professional knowledge' (Dyer and Rose, 2005: 107). From the above-mentioned arguments, the advocates of decentralisation assume that any form of decentralisation may ensure the transfer of decision-making powers to a local level. One may question whether this can also be true of a delegated or a de-concentrated system where local decision-making power is little or absent.

Drawing on the experiences of the implementation of decentralisation in some developed countries, Caldwell (1990) (in Govinda, 1997) identifies six factors underlying the rationale for decentralisation of educational management: (1) 'the perceived complexity of managing the modern education system from a single centre and the government's acceptance of decentralisation as a practical means of improving the efficiency of the system'; (2) the concern to 'ensure that each individual student has access to the particular rather than an aggregated mix of resources in order to meet the needs and interests of that student'; (3) 'findings from studies of school effectiveness and school improvement have been mentioned as justification of decentralisation'; (4) 'increased autonomy for teachers and fewer bureaucratic controls have been included as elements in the case for the enhancement of the status of teaching as a profession; (5) 'popular demand for freedom to choose schools according to varying perceptions of quality of education by the general public'; and (6) 'the education sector should follow the developments in other fields which were earlier presumed to be the concern of the central government exclusively'.

However, the critics of decentralisation argue that 'decentralisation alone does not make sense, but a decentralisation process combined with a clear government role in setting standards, provision of materials, support, training and supervision' (Govinda, 1997: 281).

Some commentators on decentralisation in education argue that successful implementation depends on strengthening the capacity of local units and the capacity of central governments to facilitate and support decentralisation (Dyer and Rose, 2005).

Other arguments underlying decentralisation are that: (1) 'central governments are increasingly unable to direct and administer all aspects of mass education, decentralisation of planning and programming will result in improved service delivery by enabling local authorities to perform tasks for which they are better equipped'; (2) 'decentralisation will improve economies of scale and will result in better service delivery; (3) 'by engaging active involvement of community and private sector groups in local schooling, decentralisation will generate more representativeness and equity in educational decision-making and thus foster greater local commitment to public education' (Govinda, 1997:13).

The above-mentioned arguments for decentralisation were also criticised. A strong argument against the belief of increasing community involvement is that 'delegation does not automatically lead to stakeholders' empowerment and commitment' (Govinda, 1997: 281). Some critics of decentralisation point out that decentralisation may accentuate inequities or may create new forms of social exclusion in the contexts where inequities and social exclusion had existed before (Sayed, 1999; Soudien and Sayed, 2005). In the context of South Africa and Namibia, decentralisation to local levels has to be implemented with care. Regions or provinces which were less advantaged (during the

colonial period) may need more support from central government in order to be able to stand on their own, than those which were advantaged. If these regions are left on their own, they would continue to be disadvantaged or isolated.

### **2.3 Decentralisation of education: International trends**

Decentralisation has its roots in a neo-liberal view of schooling. This view rejects the role of state over education and favours strong local government, use of market forces, professional autonomy and private provision of education (Lauglo, 1995:10). Neo-liberal policies which advocate decentralisation emphasise that school systems should be reformed in order to be: (1) democratic, efficient and accountable; (2) more responsive to the community and local needs; and (3) empower teachers, parents and others in the community for improving school quality (Ibid).

The implementation of decentralisation reforms can be traced back to the 1960s and were widely implemented in many countries in the 1980s (Zajda, 2004: 203). This wide implementation of decentralisation had led to different models of decentralisation focusing on decentralisation of power and decision-making processes concerning organisation of curriculum, financial management, personnel management and resource allocation (Ainley and McKenzie, 2000; Zajda, 2004).

Drawing on the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) (1999) study, there are variations in the way in which countries have been distributing authority and responsibilities for education management at different levels (McGinn and Welsh, 1999: 51). The study conducted in 10 industrialised and developing countries showed that 'in five of the countries (Zimbabwe; Senegal; Malaysia, France; Namibia) central and (district or) local organisations made most of the decisions about education'. In other words, the study

established that education management in the five countries mentioned above reflects a centralisation-decentralisation notion. The study further established that 'in three countries (Mexico; Nigeria; India), authority was shared primarily between central and regional states' (Ibid: 54). The same study revealed that 'in the United Kingdom, decisions about the curriculum were made by the central government, while in the USA they were shared between state and district organisations' (Ibid).

According to Naidoo (2005: 240) devolution of management responsibilities appears to occur less frequently than de-concentration in most Sub-Saharan Africa countries. Decentralisation reforms in Ghana, Nigeria, Niger, Tanzania and Zimbabwe take de-concentration reform, while in South Africa, Uganda, Senegal and Mali decentralisation reforms put emphasis on devolution of education management (Ibid). Naidoo (2005) further argues that decentralisation reforms tend to focus more on distribution of administrative functions. He identifies the following management functions that are being distributed among the levels of education management in Sub-Saharan Africa:

'organisation of instruction, personnel management (hiring/firing, pay, assigning teaching responsibilities, pre-service and in-service training), planning and structures, resource management, and monitoring and evaluation, while management functions such as curriculum authority, personnel management and financing responsibility remain firmly located at the centre in most countries' (Ibid: 242).

In the Namibian context, the education is managed through de-concentrated structures of the Ministry of Education. As mentioned previously, the national Ministry of Education transfers certain functions to regional directorates, circuits, clusters and school levels, while retaining control over key functions such as curriculum development, financial management, resource allocation, policy formulation, procurement services, pre-service teacher training, examinations, quality determination and setting standards. The regional



offices are given the management responsibilities over personnel management, organisation of instruction, evaluation of school system and teacher recruitment.

## **2.4 Implementing education decentralisation reforms in developing countries**

Many developing countries have engaged in attempts to decentralise the management of their public services with the purpose of making the management of their education systems more efficient and effective. Decentralisation initiatives in most of the Southern African Development Communities (SADC) countries have begun with administrative de-concentration. For example, there is greater de-concentration in Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa at the district level, although schools in South Africa and Namibia have been given responsibilities for routine administrative decisions and substantial powers (Naidoo, 2005). This study is about decentralisation at the sub-district level; the discussion on decentralisation below focuses on the transfer of administrative responsibilities and authority at district level.

Different countries use the term 'district' differently. In some contexts, for example in Zimbabwe and Tanzania, districts are decentralised structures between regional education/provincial education offices and schools (De Grauwe, 2001), while in South Africa, the term 'district' is used to describe 'geographical subunits of provincial education departments that lie between schools and provincial head offices'(Narsee, 2006: 214). In Namibia, the term "circuit' (a decentralised structure between schools and regional educational offices) is used more often than the term 'district'. In Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe districts are de-concentrated units of the provincial education offices/regional education offices. One of the reasons districts in these countries are de-concentrated structures is because the countries did not transform their local education system in a manner that is different from the colonial model, but adopted colonial public

service system, which emphasises the role of central administration while local education structures merely act as agents of central authorities (Naidoo, 2005; Narsee, 2006). As a result of the de-concentrated nature of districts, these units 'did not receive original powers or authority in terms of provincial legislation, and none have been established as tiers of education governance in provincial head office' (Narsee, 2006: 94).

Narsee (2006:214) identifies the characteristics of South African local education, which is relevant to the present study. She describes South African local education as follows:

There is no real system of local education in South Africa. Local education is not governed by common norms and standards. No provincial sub-structure enjoys significant autonomy through the devolution of powers and from provincial education departments. No sub-structure possesses original powers or authority in terms of provincial legislation'.

Narsee (2006) argues that local education in South Africa and Namibia does not have local autonomy, but rather a mere 'taking' over of administrative authority and responsibility from central government. Grant Lewis and Naidoo (2004) make a similar point of reference to the nature of local autonomy in education governance in South Africa by arguing that local participation has been focusing more administrative functions of schools rather than extending democratic participation.

In the Namibian context, it has been difficult to determine the extent to which political administrative authority has responsibility and authority over clusters, because cluster boundaries do not correspond with constituencies' boundaries (the local administrative structures). Therefore the constituencies do not have control over education matters.

District education offices in Namibia, as in countries where district offices are de-concentrated units of central offices, are expected to carry out multiple functions. In

addition to administrative responsibilities, district officers are not only expected to supervise the implementation of policies, but also to provide supervisory and pedagogical guidance to schools (Carron and De Grauwe, 1997; Narsee, 2006). Because of the multiple tasks that district education offices have to carry out; district offices have been facing difficulties in achieving the quality of teaching improvement and efficiency objectives. The difficulties include: insufficient number of officers at district education offices, heavy work load of officers, inadequate resources, lack of management capacities at the district levels, lack of autonomy and authority to make decisions (De Grauwe, 2001; Naidoo, 2005; Narsee, 2006).

In other words, the work of district education officers has been 'involved in a number of sources of tension, which are heightened with decentralisation: administrative versus pedagogical, supervision versus support, and central administration requirements versus the school level priorities' (Naidoo 2005: 260). Since developing countries have inherited the system of controlling schools rather than supporting them, district education officers tend to be concerned with monitoring and policy compliance activities, to the detriment of support (Naidoo, 2005; Narsee, 2006).

A study conducted by the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) in 2001, reported poor supervision of schools and teachers in Namibia. The study argues that 'supervisory staff has too many schools and teachers to cover to be able to visit them all regularly' (De Grauwe, 2001: 143). It identifies a number of difficulties that district education officers in Namibia are facing. The difficulties include: weak supervision and support services to schools; lack of co-ordination between services and regions, coupled with insufficient central guidance; lack of influence over the material aspects of schools and lack of resources (De Grauwe, 2001).

Other challenges that developing countries are facing with the implementation of decentralisation reforms include: lack of commitment and capabilities for building genuine partnerships in decision making; lack of clarity on the roles and responsibilities of key implementers in implementing decentralisation reforms and lack of capacity at the decentralised level (Govinda, 1997).

Bjork (2004) also identifies other challenges that developing countries are facing: insufficient support provided by central authorities to local offices; central authorities being unaware of lack of support felt by local educators; lack of commitment to the ideas that underpin decentralisation; lack of mechanisms to ensure sustainability of decentralisation reforms; incapability of central offices to build the culture of education system to fit decentralisation reforms. Bjork's study (2004) in Indonesia provides an understanding of how schools in Indonesia responded to educational decentralisation reforms, which is relevant to the present study. Bjork highlights the issue of local dynamics as critical to the implementation of decentralisation reforms. He emphasises that if the enabling environment for the implementation of decentralisation reforms is not created, there would be a mismatch between central expectations and local realities (Bjork: 251). He argues that 'delegating authority to local levels required fundamental changes that go against the core values and structures that have anchored the foundation of the education systems' (p.257). All officials (including those working at the central authority offices) should undergo transformations in order for the objectives of the decentralisation reforms to be met (Ibid). Bjork's case study demonstrated a mismatch between central office expectations and the local realities. This means that although the autonomy was given to local administrators and teachers, these local actors continued to wait for instructions from the central authority. Bjork's study also revealed that local actors got fixed in the values

and traditions that served them well in the past and therefore to changes these values and traditions has been a difficult undertaking (Bjork, 2004). In his case study, Bjork found out that 'local educators acted in accordance with the norms that historically governed the Indonesia public school system' (Ibid: 256). In implementing the educational reforms, administrators and teachers showed conformity to the Ministry policy and little attempt was made to challenge the governmental authority (Ibid:257). Bjork (2004) therefore emphasises that 'transforming institutional cultures is an enormous undertaking and that decentralisation reforms are not likely to succeed unless core values and routines are modified' (Ibid: 254).

Naidoo (2005:242) identifies the following issues as negatively affecting successful implementation of decentralisation reforms in Sub-Saharan Africa: limited resources; bureaucratic resistance; lack of consultation and coordination between different levels; lack of adequately trained personnel; overwhelming multiple demands; lack of managerial skills and lack of technical knowledge and skills to implement decentralisation reforms.

Decentralisation has been heavily criticised because the impact of decentralisation reforms on education quality in general as well as on the quality of teaching has not been positive. Some of the reasons for little impact on education quality include: little focus of decentralisation reforms on education quality improvement (Di Gropello, 2006); primary focus on changing governance structures rather than improving classroom practice and pedagogical practices of teachers (Schiefelbein, 2004); focus more on teacher participation and empowerment, which alone does not improve the quality of teaching; lack of educational expertise in parents and community; lack of effective monitoring system (Bray and Mukundan, 2004); lack of capability to rebuild the traditionally isolated work of

teachers (Schiefelbein, 2004); and, absence of clear connection between education management reforms and improved education quality (Schiefelbein, 2004; Naidoo, 2005).

Efforts to create a link between decentralisation reforms and improving teaching in Sub-Saharan Africa have begun recently. Initiatives such as school-based curriculum development, local resource centres, local teacher groups and school cluster networks were established, each aiming at relating decentralisation reforms to learning and teaching process (Naidoo, 2005). However, there is no empirical evidence to show that these initiatives to decentralise in-service training of teachers has any effect on instructional practice (Ibid). Naidoo (2005) argues that:

*..... establishing this connection in Sub-Saharan Africa is difficult, since the experience is relatively recent and uneven and often focused more on resource mobilisation than on improvements in quality. There is little to reason to believe that changes in education management alone will improve teaching practice and student learning' (p.255)*

As mentioned previously, Namibia has introduced school clustering, a sub-district level decentralisation strategy to improve school management, resource distribution and teaching.

## **2.5 Origin, purposes and models of school cluster**

The concept school cluster has originated largely from the developments in educational planning. Advocates of micro planning argue that 'even in the smallest country it is impossible to know the specific circumstances of every school and community' (Bray, 1987:10). Micro planning has been considered as a tool for 'integrating all plans into a national framework, while treating each locality as an entity in itself' (Ibid). School mapping is used as a valuable instrument for micro planning to identify how schools relate to each other geographically, distribution of resources and major development gaps in a country

(Bray, 1987; Dittmar et al., 2002). Micro planning implies a degree of decentralisation of decision making and participation at local level of education system.

School clusters were first established in Great Britain and India as early as the 1940s to enable rural schools to pool resources for education (Giordano, 2008). In developing countries, school clustering has been regarded as a strategy for pulling together limited resources and improving access to materials and equipment. The term 'school cluster' refers to a grouping of neighbouring schools to form a cluster or network. One school in a cluster serves as the lead school or 'core', 'cluster centre' or central 'institution'. Usually, a lead school is the one which is large and better equipped (Giordano, 2008). The head of the core school is responsible for coordinating the activities in the cluster (Dittmar et al., 2002; Giordano, 2008). The schools which are linked and networked to a cluster centre are called 'satellite schools'. Cluster size varies depending on the geography and accessibility of the schools, but the usual size includes 2-15 schools (Giordano, 2008). It is assumed that school clustering brings supervision and support one step closer to the school level (Ibid).

In the Namibian context, the term 'school cluster' is similar to the above description. It refers to the grouping of schools in the same vicinity or neighbourhood for the benefit of sharing available resources (Dittmar et al., 2002). School clusters are *administrative units* of district education offices and responsible for managing resources, school supervision and promoting democratic participation.

Cluster schemes have been implemented in developed and developing countries for various purposes. For example, in England and Wales school clusters have been established in rural Local Education Authorities (LEA) to support small and isolated

schools or learners with special education needs (Ribschester and Edwards, 1998). In Pakistan, a cluster model was developed to improve the imbalance in resource access in schools by sharing resources, information and expertise and to develop a competitive culture among schools (Assefa, 2001: 27). In Philippines, Nepal and Indonesia school clustering was set up ‘to share resources and carry out school evaluation and staff development for both teachers and principals’ (Ibid, p. 28). In Cambodia, school clustering was developed ‘as an organisational means of coordinating central government support, strengthening school management, managing scarce school resources, increasing capacity of local staff and enhancing teaching and learning’ (Pellini, 2005: 207).

In African countries such as Botswana, Lesotho, Kenya, Uganda and Egypt, school clustering was intended to improve in-school supervision and conduct school-based professional development for teachers and school principals (Assefa, 2001). In Mozambique, school clusters were established as pedagogic units aimed at improving teacher competencies and dissemination of pedagogical experiences (Carron and De Grauwe, 1997).

As mentioned previously, school clusters have been established in many countries for administrative, political, economic and educational purposes (Bray, 1987; Chikoko, 2007; Dykstra and Kucita, 1998; Dittmar et al., 2002; Giordano, 2008). The purposes of school clustering are discussed below in detail:

#### *Administrative objectives*

As administrative units in the administrative hierarchy between the districts and the schools, clusters are responsible for collection of school statistics, distribution of school materials, coordination of personnel and curriculum issues. School clusters are also



responsible for supervising and monitoring schools (Giordano, 2008; Bray, 1987). It is assumed that school supervision improves, because school clustering makes the administration and supervision of school more efficient. The district education officers no longer deal with every school, but work through the cluster heads. Under the context of decentralisation, school clusters serve as de-concentrated units of district education offices, responsible for administrative tasks which were centralised at the district level.

### *Political objectives*

Clusters are assumed to promote the involvement of teachers, parents, school communities and learners in the education process (Bray, 1987; Dittmar et al., 2002; Giordano, 2008). Advocates of this approach assume that school clustering reduces regional and social inequalities between schools by encouraging the well-endowed, prosperous schools to share their resources with the less fortunate ones (Dittmar et al., 2002; Bray, 1987; Giordano, 2008). It is also assumed that school clustering improves the quality of and access to education through participatory education management (Ibid). As sub-district units, clusters are assumed to foster *local decision making, collaboration and community participation* in the education process. In the Namibian context, structures such as circuit management, cluster management and cluster subject committees have been created to promote local decision making and participation and collaboration.

### *Economic Objectives*

School clusters have been developed to enable schools to share facilities, resources and staff. It is assumed that grouping of neighbouring schools can enable schools to share costs and use of resources more effectively (Bray, 1987; Dittmar et al., 2002). Advocates of school clustering argue that the ordering and distribution of school books and materials can be more efficient and cost-effective when carried out by the cluster centre rather than

by individual schools (Dittmar et al., 2002). It is argued that in countries with limited resources, clusters can improve cost-effectiveness, by supplying resources to a core school instead of distributing them to individual schools (Giordano, 2008). Resource sharing is one of the goals of school clustering, because it is assumed to promote equitable distribution of resources. In a country like Namibia, which has a history of inequity, school clustering is assumed to promote greater equity, by providing resources to the cluster school so that every school in the cluster can have access to resources.

### *Educational Objectives*

Advocates argue that school clustering can improve educational quality through *teacher development, curriculum development, pedagogical supervision and support*. It is assumed that cluster meetings can foster *co-operation* among teachers as well as promote more autonomy and professionalism (Bray, 1987; Dittmar et al., 2002; Giordano, 2008). It is also assumed that cluster meetings enable teachers to share ideas and solve problems and therefore such meetings act as a form of in-service training for teachers (Bray, 1987; MacNeil, 2004).

Advocates of school clustering believe that a cluster can provide a network of support for curriculum workshops at which new materials are tried out (Bray, 1987; Giordano, 2008). It is argued that district or regional education officers are often overloaded with administrative activities or are too far removed from schools; therefore supervision at the cluster level allows for close-to-school support because supervisors at cluster level may have a better understanding of issues faced by cluster teachers and cluster heads (De Grauwe and Carron, 1997; Dittmar et al., 2002). It is assumed that localised teacher support and in-service teacher professional development improves the quality of teaching and learning.

In summary, the goals of school clustering are to promote: *community participation, collaboration, collaborative teacher development, local decision-making and equitable distribution of resources*. The implementation of these goals requires education district offices and schools to have a different understanding of how power is distributed at the district and school levels. Participation and empowerment assumes that implementers (schools) have authority without having to get approval from district offices or head offices. It is also assumed that schools work in a collaborative manner to try out new ideas, because they have the authority to make decisions on new ways of managing schools. These are the themes that this study is concerned with.

### **Models of school cluster and cluster typology**

Giordano (2008) identifies four models of school clusters: the national cluster model, the teacher group, the network and the rural cluster model. Each of the four models is discussed below.

#### *The national cluster model*

In this system, school clusters are established as part of a national reform strategy set up by ministries of education, with high levels of financial and technical support from the donor organisations (Giordano, 2008). Under this model, school clusters are organised as 'intermediate structure between the district (region) and the school level' (Ibid: 47). The feature of this model is similar to Bray's intermediate model, in which schools are formally grouped together by higher authorities (Bray, 1987). School clusters serve as a means for disseminating information from the district to the school as well as distribution points of materials and information, supervising and providing support to schools (Giordano, 2008). Clusters also serve as units for in-service training for school managers and teachers. Education district offices are expected to render assistance and support to the cluster activities. Cluster heads are selected on the basis of strong management and leadership

skills. Cluster schemes in Namibia, Zimbabwe and Cambodia are some of the examples of national cluster models.

### *The teacher group model*

Teacher groups are regarded as a core activity in school clusters. Teacher groups are not formalised but they can serve as informal exchanges or project-based work (Giordano, 2008). Examples of teacher groups in other countries are *microcentros* in Colombia and Chile; head teacher groups in Kenya, and *micro groups* in Ecuador. Advocates of school clusters assume that these groups help break isolation of teachers in small schools as well as give professional recognition to teachers (Giordano, 2008). Cluster-based teacher professional development programmes are characterised by a model of networking and inter-school collaboration, whereby teachers working together in groups can share experiences and resources with each other within their schools as well as with teachers from other schools in the cluster (MacNeil, 2004). In Namibia, the school clustering system provides a framework for different cluster groups or committees. There are cluster groups for school principals and for teachers. Namibian teacher groups or cluster-based subject groups are considered to have potential for improving the quality of teaching and learning. Cluster-based subject groups are assumed to foster a culture of sharing, openness and mutual support; provide a framework for in-service training and a point of contact for advisory teaching services (Dittmar et al., 2002). The concepts of *collaboration* and *collegiality* are central to cluster-based teacher professional development.

### *The network model*

This model is a new form of co-operation between schools. The model has emerged in several countries 'based on voluntary participation, peer exchange and absence of hierarchical relationships (Giordano, 2008: 68). The difference between school clusters and networks is that the development of networks is not initiated from the top and

networks can involve schools that are geographically disperse (Ibid). A network is based on three main components: the people, teams or institutions involved, are called 'nodes'; a shared purpose or set of goals – often based on improving performance; and the exchange among members, interaction, communication and co-operation (Ibid). Examples of networks are Education Action Zones (EAZs) in the United Kingdom, which are set up with Local Education Authority (LEA), and Redes in Latin America (Ibid). As in the case of teacher group model, networks are established to promote *collaboration and collegiality*.

### *The rural cluster model*

The model has been developed to address the issues of access and quality of education in rural areas. Rural clusters have been set up to share resources for education and to save costs in managing isolated, rural and small schools (Giordano, 2008). The goal of efficient expenditure and distribution of resources is behind this model. This study examines how a rural cluster is similar and different from an urban cluster.

### **Cluster typology**

Giordano (2008:88) identifies two major types of school clusters:

*those which are part of a heavily aided project initiated by the education ministry and donor organisations requiring the participation of schools in a cluster as part of larger education reform effort; and those which are initiated at the local level to exchange information and solve problems using limited resources and including schools that have expressed a desire to work together.*

Clusters which are established by education ministries and donor organisations tend to be top-down, financially supported by an outsider, integrated into the education administration, mandatory, high-intensity, tool for external control and therefore set up as a national reform strategy. Under this arrangement, school clusters become district sub-units established on the assumption that supervision and support would be brought closer to the

school level (Giordano, 2008). The Namibian model of school clustering is similar to this type of school cluster.

Clusters which are set up and initiated at the local level tend to be voluntary, selective coverage, financially autonomous and low-intensity. Under this arrangement, schools may collaborate with one another on specific projects, but remain independent for daily pedagogic and administrative purposes (Ibid).

## **2.6 Existing knowledge base on the implementation of school clustering**

This section establishes the existing empirical evidence on the implementation of cluster schemes in terms of improving school management; sharing resources and school collaboration; teacher and parental involvement; and improving the quality of teaching. The themes were chosen because they relate to the objectives of cluster schemes discussed previously and to the purposes of cluster-based school management in Namibia.

### **Improving school management**

The research evidence on the effect of school clustering on improving school management seems to be inconclusive. Some studies have found that school clustering improves school management. In these studies, improvement in school management is attributed to the fact that school clustering has created opportunities for school heads to share experiences and find solutions to common school management issues (Herriot et al., 2002; Mendelsohn and Ward, 2007). School clusters have been credited with improving information, statistics and materials flow between schools and district offices in Namibia (Mendelsohn and Ward, 2007). Other studies found that school clustering has done little to improve school management competences (Topnaar, 2004; Uriab, 2006; Chikoko, 2007).

## **Sharing resources and school collaboration**

In a review of studies on school clusters and resource centres, Giordano (2008) found that sharing of resources has been taking place in rural clusters in Britain and France. This has been made possible by providing additional resources to rural schools. Some studies in a developing context also found that sharing of resources and information has taken place in some clusters in Namibia (Uriab, 2006; Mendelsohn and Ward, 2007). Chikoko (2007) found out that sound cluster leadership is critical in managing resources in school clusters. He argues that due to apparent dearth of sound leadership, available qualified staff who could share their expertise in the school cluster were underutilised in the Zimbabwean cluster case study. In her review of studies, Giordano (2008) found that sharing of resources has been difficult in school clusters due to transporting difficulties or poor co-ordination among cluster members. Transportation, limited resources and co-operation among cluster members are some of the factors that have contributed to unsuccessful implementation of school clustering in developing countries (Pellini, 2005). Bredenberd and Dahal (2000) (in Pellini, 2005:209) indicate that the following are pre-conditions for successful implementation of school clustering policy in a developing context: (1) political commitment to decentralised management of schools; (2) a reasonable transportation and communication network; (3) a reasonable level of population density; (4) a previously existing culture of cooperation and /or mutual support; (5) sufficient personnel in schools; and (6) availability of locally generated resources or state support.

In the Namibian context, financial constraints, limited or no resources, lack of incentives, lack of advisory services, communication problems and lack of support from head office are issues which have been cited as hampering the implementation of school clustering (Mendelsohn and Ward, 2007).

### **Increased teacher and parent involvement**

Empirical evidence on the effect of school clustering on teacher and parent involvement in local decision-making processes has not been compelling. In her reviews of studies on school clusters, Giordano (2008) found out that school clustering has increased community involvement in education issues. Mendelsohn and Ward (2007) found positive influence of school clustering on teacher and parent involvement in Namibia. However, some studies found little evidence of increased parental involvement due to the implementation of school clustering (Topnaar, 2004; Pellini, 2005). Topnaar (2004) and Pellini (2005) argue that the legacies of the past centralised and hierarchical education systems have led to limited community participation in Namibia and Cambodia respectively.

### **Improving quality of teaching**

The research findings on the effect of school clustering on teaching have not been conclusive. A review of studies conducted by Giordano (2008) on school clusters and resource centres, offers mixed messages on the impact of school clusters on teaching. The review points out that school clusters can have positive impact on teachers' classroom practice because teacher groups, in-class support and needs-based training can motivate teachers and enhance their professionalism (Giordano 2008). It seems that improvement in the quality of teaching is attributed to the fact that teacher groups have motivated teachers and enhanced their professionalism. However, the same review points out that the study conducted in Zambia found teacher groups to be ineffective because they were irrelevant to teachers' immediate needs and there was not enough time to hold fruitful meetings (Giordano, 2008). The review also points out that cluster-based teacher development can influence teaching when combined with in-class follow-up support and feedback (Ibid).



An example of a teacher professional development program which combines in-class follow-up support is the whole-school improvement program (SIP), implemented in Namibia, Kenya and Uganda and funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The whole-school approach to teacher development seems to be a promising model for improving teacher quality. A pilot study conducted in Namibia by Leu and van Graan (2006: 80) indicates that *'school improvement program (SIP), which is a school-based, whole-school oriented program, has made a positive difference in the way teachers think about teaching and practice it'*. Whole-school approach to teacher development is underpinned by a theory of learning communities or communities of practice which provides teachers with opportunity to 'explore collectively ways of improving their teaching and support one another as they work to transform their practices' (Leu and van Graan, 2006: 32).

School clusters (teacher groups) are considered to be learning communities, because teachers are provided with opportunity to engage in professional dialogue and collaborative problem solving in issues related to teaching and learning (USAID, 2004; Dittmar et al., 2002). Within the context of clusters as learning communities, it is argued that clusters (cluster teacher groups) have positive influence on teaching.

Mendelsohn and Ward (2007) found out that school clustering has improved the quality of teaching through collaborative interpretation of syllabi and subject policies; joint preparation of schemes of work; sharing of materials, teaching techniques and experience. However, chapters 6 and 7 of this study bring a different picture of teacher collaboration and its influence on teaching practices of teachers.

It is clear that there is little substantial research evidence on the impact of school clustering on teaching. The empirical evidence that is available is not compelling as reflected in the discussion above. In the Namibian context, cluster-based subject groups

are considered to be mechanisms for professional dialogue, teacher support and collaborative problem solving. However, there are questions outstanding about the content and organisation of cluster-based subject groups and the extent to which these subject groups support teachers to improve their teaching practice. The recent research that evaluated the implementation of school clustering focused on dimensions such as school leadership, parent involvement, school climate, decision-making processes and administration and management related issues (Topnaar, 2004; Uriab, 2006; Aipinge, 2007). 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, the study excluded the perspectives of teachers on the impact of school clustering on teaching. The study assessed the impact of cluster-based subject groups on teaching through the perceptions of cluster-centre principals and district education officers, and no other method was used to assess the impact of cluster-based subject group on teaching as well as examine how cluster-based subject groups operate in the Namibian context. This study aims to fill this gap by assessing the impact of school clustering on teaching from the perspective of teachers, through survey research and case study methods.

Shared and participatory leadership, equitable distribution of resources, collaboration and community participation, local decision-making, teacher involvement underpinned decentralisation reforms such as school clustering and school-based management. Reviewing the literature on school-level decentralisation provides an understanding of the link between school clustering (a sub-district level decentralisation strategy) and school-based management (school-level decentralisation reform).

## 2.7 School level decentralisation reforms

### The concept school-based management

People define SBM differently. School-based management or site-based management is defined by various authors as: ‘an externally-driven effort to change the organisational structure of schools from a traditional hierarchical bureaucracy to a form of collaborative or participatory democracy’ (Stevenson, 2001); a system ‘involves the transfer of decision-making power on management issues to school level’ (De Grauwe, 2004:); ‘school-level autonomy and shared decision-making’ (David, 1989:46); ‘a system involves shifting authorities from central offices to local schools’ (Dee, et al., 2002:36); ‘a systematic decentralisation to the school authority and responsibility to make decisions on significant matters related to school operations within a centrally determined framework of goals, policies, curriculum, standards, and accountability (Caldwell, 2005:1). Caldwell’s definition is a modification of earlier definitions of school-based management, because it touches on the issue of centralisation-decentralisation, but still does not specify what should be decentralised at school level.

The concept ‘school-based management’ has many variations, namely school-site management, school-site autonomy, shared decision making, shared governance, school improvement, school budgeting and administrative decentralisation (Summers and Johnson, 1996: 76). Various countries use different terms to describe SBM, for example, site-based management is used mostly in the USA, while ‘local management of schools’ is mostly used in Britain and Scotland. In Australia terms such as ‘self-governing school’, ‘self-determining school’ and ‘school-based decision-making’ are used to describe this form of decentralised school management. In Sub-Saharan Africa, ‘school-based management’ includes a variety of initiatives that enable school- or community-based

structures to assume powers related to school and educational decisions more broadly' (Naidoo, 2005: 243).

Naidoo (2004) clarifies the differences between school-based management (SBM) and school-decision making (SDM). He points out that school-based management involves structural and vertical decentralisation of decision making authority from the state to the school level, while shared decision making represents horizontal devolution of authority within the school from the principal to members of the school community (p. 70).

### **Assumptions for school-based school management**

School-based management or 'site-based management' is based on the rationale that 'those who are closest to the primary business of schools will make the best-informed decisions' (Summers and Johnson, 1996: 76). However, the literature argues that simply shifting responsibility to local level does not make sense without developing the capacity of those involved in decentralised management. School-based management is adopted to increase school autonomy and to devolve decision-making to teachers and sometimes to parents, students and community leaders (Behrman et al., 2002: 25). School is seen as the central locus of control in decision-making, 'because it is the place where teaching and learning ultimately takes place, and hence SBM is thought to hold the key to improving the education system by engaging those closest to the action in key decisions' (Ibid). However, critics have identified that decentralisation does not automatically lead to community or teacher empowerment and commitment (Ibid).

According to Cheng (1996:51-58) school-based management is assumed to promote collegiality, activities which are school-based to enhance the quality of education; flexible planning; development of teachers and administrators; *participatory decision-making*;

multi-levels of leadership; the use of a variety of managerial skills; self-budgeting which provides schools the opportunity to use resources effectively according to their own characteristics and needs and different roles and responsibility for schools, central authority, administrators, teachers and parents. In school-based management, central authority serves as a supporter or adviser which helps schools to develop their resources and specialities to carry out effective teaching activities. As in the case of school clustering, advocates of school-based management are concerned with issues such as democratic participation, collaboration and equitable distribution of resources.

Leithwood and Menzies (1998: 325) identify four forms of SBM: *administrative control*, *professional control*, *community control*, and *equal control*. Administration control focuses on increasing accountability to the central district or regional office for the 'efficient expenditure of resources'. Leithwood and Menzies (1998) point out that the advocates of this form of SBM argue that such authority, together with an efficient use of resources, enables schools to get more resources into the direct service of students.

*Professional control* (teacher control) focuses on the use of teachers' knowledge in making key decisions in areas such as budget, curriculum and personnel (Leithwood and Menzies, 1998). This form of school-based management is based on the assumption that professionals closest to students have the most relevant knowledge for making such decisions. It is argued that teachers' knowledge and experience should be included in key school decisions and therefore 'teachers are expected to play a key role in staff development, mentoring, and curriculum development and become key partners in schools' (Behrman et al. 2002:26). It is assumed that increasing *teacher involvement* in school decisions would improve the quality of education.

*Community control* focuses on increasing accountability to parents and the community at large (Ibid). The basic assumption underlying this form of SBM is that the curriculum of the school should reflect the local values and preferences of parents and the local community. The advocates of this form argue that power to make decisions regarding curriculum, budget and personnel should be in the hands of parents and community members (Leithwood and Menzies, 1998). Equal control (balance control) includes both community control and professional control forms of SBM. From the point of view of the advocates of this form of SBM, balance control aims at making 'better use of teachers' knowledge for key decisions in schools, as well as to be more accountable to parents and the local community' (Leithwood and Menzies, 1998:333).

Administrative, professional, community and equal control, are the concepts used by the advocates of SBM to justify that decentralisation reforms improve efficient use of resources and promote democratic participation of stakeholders in the education issues.

### **Dominant theoretical perspectives on school-based management**

The philosophy that supports school-based management originated in industry and business. The ideas of empowering factory workers to change their work roles became prominent during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Cromwell, 2000). This industrial model of giving employees a greater role in decision-making was transplanted into school systems. The approach was named site-based or school-based management (Ibid). Site-based managed schools have been hoping to mirror positive results, such as participatory decision-making techniques, which have been implemented in corporations over the past 30 years (Vincent, 2000).

SBM is based on the premise that 'flattening the decision-making process and bringing it closer to the site where client needs are met, the effectiveness of the organisation is improved, as employees based on their knowledge and interactions with clients can reshape their products and services based on an understanding of client needs' (Walker, 2002). This premise is related to the social democratic principles of egalitarianism, which 'emphasises the need for local communities to have a voice in institution building and operation' (Ibid). The re-conceptualisation of decision-making and governance would call for the creation of democratic decision-making structures, which would result in a significant shift in the realignment of a power relationship (Ibid). While advocates of school clustering regard school clusters as structures which promote democratic participation of stakeholders, the advocates of SBM see the school as a structure for encouraging community participation and local decision-making.

Theoretical assumptions underlying SBM as a decentralisation reform are that: (1) schools are given power and responsibility to solve problems effectively and therefore make a greater contribution to the effectiveness of teaching and learning activities (Cheng, 1996:47) and (2) SBM increases school effectiveness through improvements in the quality of teaching and learning (Levacic, 1995: 19).

Other theoretical assumptions underlying SBM are drawn from political economy and organisational theory perspectives. From the perspective of political economy, SBM is seen as a means of ensuring optimal *efficiency in resource distribution*. The advocates of this view contend that 'centralised budgeting with relatively uniform allocations to schools and a minimal opportunity for re-allocation impairs the achievement of equality and efficiency' (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988: 6). The advocates argue that 'centralised budgeting frequently fails to foster diversity through more efficient and effective

approaches to teaching and learning which may be identified' (Ibid). They also argue that 'by bringing the decision-making process closer to the site where client needs are met, it improves the effectiveness of the organisation' (Walker, 2002, section1, par.3). While the proponents of SBM advocate that SBM is a tool for sharing power, organisational theorists say sharing of power is a complex issue. The evidence from the three case studies in this study indicates that district offices and school principals have been battling to cope with the issue of power sharing (see Chapters 5 and 6).

While the advocates of political-economy emphasise the decentralisation component of SBM, the organisational theorists argue for an appropriate balance of centralisation and decentralisation (Ibid). They point out that educational services are complex and there is no one way of dealing with educational issues. They argue for a 'centralised determination of broad goals and purposes of education accompanied by decentralised decision-making about the means by which goals and purposes will be achieved, with those people who are decentralised being accountable to those who are centralised for the achievement of outcomes' (Caldwell and Spinks, 1988:7).

From the point of view of both conflict theory and critical social science, site-based management cannot be seen as an unproblematic democratic educational reform. The critical social scientists argue that SBM is viewed as a form of participative decision-making occurring in a context of power inequality (Chapman, 1990:36). Conflict theorists argue that, 'power inequality in education tends to be disguised by the rhetoric of school-based management, because it assumes that equal participation is offered in an educational arrangement which is legitimate, neutral and free from power' (Ibid: 40).



Critical-political economic theorists such as Ball and Smyth argue that devolution of authority from central government serves to legitimatise state agencies in the following ways: (1) central government seems to be sensitive to the local needs, (2) by shifting decision-making responsibilities to schools, state agencies can distance themselves from failed policies by blaming schools for poor management and flawed decision-making (Walker, 2002). The critical-political economic theorists also argue that 'devolution of authority to schools places unfair burdens on schools in instances of resource scarcity (Ibid). Some analyses on the implementation of school-based management indicate that SBM has placed a heavy burden on the principals and teachers; and that teachers feel that their energy is distracted from classrooms, which matters mostly for them.

Fullan and Watson (2000:12) argue that implementing SBM in developing countries 'represents a radical change, because of the legacy of hierarchical or top-down models of education management from colonial days'. They further argue that implementing SBM in developing contexts may also be difficult due to the fact that 'those in power at central and middle levels of management have to give up control and those at the school and community level have to be willing and capable of operating in new ways' (Ibid: 13).

## **2.8 The existing knowledge base on the link between SBM and teaching**

The literature on school-based management identifies the following variables as having indirect or direct effects on teaching and learning: *professional learning community*, ongoing support for teachers in learning new forms of pedagogy, ongoing support for principals, local capacity building, and establishing a learning culture, (Fullan and Watson, 2000; Brown and Cooper, 2000; Briggs and Wohlstetter, 1999).

The authors argue that the above-mentioned factors are seen as significant to the positive impact of SBM on teaching because teachers' knowledge, teachers' professional

development and the creation of school learning communities, have been considered to be necessary to refocus professional concerns and school-based management on teaching. Training, professional development and ongoing support are assumed to be significant in developing capacity for schools, school leaders and communities.

Even though being a part of a professional learning community is regarded as an important aspect of teacher professional development, most teachers maintain a strong culture of individuality and isolation. For teachers to 'see professional development as a collective rather than as an individual responsibility is a major shift from the way in which they used to do things' (Mohr et al., 1997: 13).

Other variables associated with a link between SBM and teaching are: clarity of roles and responsibilities of those who are actively involved with the implementation of SBM (Odden and Wohlstetter, 1995; Dee, 2002; Walker, 2002); *shared decision-making*, continuous improvement with school-wide training in functional and processing skills in areas related to curriculum and instruction (Wohlstetter, 1995); authority over the budget, personnel and curriculum, and leaders who introduce changes that affect teaching and learning (Wohlstetter, 1995; Holloway, 2000; Briggs and Wohlstetter, 1999); competent principals who are skilled in facilitating and managing change, *professional collaboration and learning* (Wohlstetter, 1995; Briggs and Wohlstetter, 1999); focusing on instructional practices and development needs and support from within schools (Squires and Kranyik, 1999); efficient public authorities, with a wide outreach and a communications network, efficient schools with sufficient resources and qualified teachers (De Grauwe, 2001).

Fullan and Watson (2000: 8) state that external infrastructure has been receiving attention recently as an important variable that might contribute to instructional improvement.

Drawing on the work of both Wohlstetter et al., (1997) and Bryk et al., (1998), Fullan and Watson (2000) point out that provision for access to information and incorporating systems of accountability and control might support and stimulate school-level improvement.

Fullan and Watson (2000:29) further argue that SBM 'is a means of altering the capacity of the school and community to make improvements, it is something that requires training, support and other aspects of capacity-building over a period of time, and it is local improvement in the context of natural goals and accountability'.

Although the SBM literature has built up an extensive list of variables that may have direct or indirect effect of SBM on teaching, the literature has not been able to provide conclusive empirical evidence on the relationship between SBM reforms and improved teaching.

One of the proponents of SBM, De Grauwe has realised the limitations of SBM to affect teaching and learning. Grauwe (2005: 279) states that 'it should be kept in mind that SBM has been seldom introduced as a measure to directly improve the quality of teaching and learning'. He argues that there should be conditions, which can contribute to quality improvement. De Grauwe (2005) identifies the following factors as important in contributing to quality improvement: basic classroom resources and competent teachers; effective school-support system; regular feedback on how schools perform and motivation of school principal on management issues.

The research studies on the effects of school-based management on the quality of teaching have not been consistent. Some studies found little or no evidence of direct links between school-based management and improved teaching (Dellar, 1995; Levacic, 1995; Smylie and Perry, 1998; De Grauwe, 2004; Di Gropello, 2006), while other studies

established discernible relationships between school-based management and improving teaching (Squires and Kranyik, 1999; Mintrop et al., 2001).

The limitations of school-based management to improve teaching are that: 'the changes required to affect classroom level instructional changes are often not the focus of SBM reforms and hence, changes in teaching and learning are absent' (Paqueo and Lammert, 2000); school-based management may have only limited impact on what happens in school unless there is a specific focus to implement it within school change (Ainley and McKenzie, 2000); *teacher involvement in decision-making* processes is not a guarantee for improving teaching practices (Monk et al. 1997; Mohr and Dichter, 2001); unclear focus of SBM on teaching or absence of a clear focus on improving the quality of teaching (Leithwood and Menzies, 1998); absence of purposeful links between capacities associated with SBM and what occurs in the classroom in learning and teaching and the support of learning and teaching (Levacic, 1995; Cheng, 1996).

## **2.9 Conclusion**

This review concludes that the key concepts underlying decentralisation reforms are *community participation, collaboration, equitable distribution of resources, local decision-making, and teacher involvement*. The review establishes that the research evidence on the impact of decentralisation reform such as school clustering in achieving the goals of promoting democratic participation, improving school management through collaborative leadership, and improving equitable distribution of resources and teaching through localised and collaborative teacher development has not been compelling.

The review also establishes that until recently, the research evidence available on the impact of decentralisation, school clustering and school-based management on teaching

has not been conclusive. It is concluded from the review that the literature on school clustering has neglected the voices of teachers in judging the effectiveness of school clustering in improving teaching. It is also concluded that school clustering as other forms of decentralisation reforms, assumes that changing governance structure leads to power sharing, collaboration and democratic participation. The Namibian literature on school clustering has neglected to analyse the influence of ideological issues on the implementation of school clustering.

This study aims to contribute to the existing knowledge on the implementation of school clustering in a developing context by: (1) examining how school clustering goals have been implemented in the Namibian context, through survey research and case study methods; (2) assessing the impact of school clustering on teaching from the perspectives of teachers and other key role players; and (3) examining how the beliefs and perceptions of the key role players influence the way in which the goals of school clustering have been implemented in the Namibian school clusters. In other words, both survey and case study research focused on the implementation of: local capacity building, school supervision and support, shared and collaborative leadership, equitable distribution of resources (resource sharing), teaching involvement, professional collaboration and learning, teacher collegiality and localised teacher development and how these goals relate to improving teaching in Namibian schools. The survey questionnaire was developed based on the eight goals of cluster-based school management, while the case study research methods focused on capturing how these goals were implemented in three primary school clusters. The eight goals of cluster-based school management are referred to as eight dimensions in the survey questionnaires.