

## **CHAPTER 7: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGE**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the experiences of teachers on the teacher support structures introduced by cluster-based school management reform to improve teaching in schools. It analyses the extent to which teacher support structures relate to improving teaching and concludes with a comparison of the findings from this study with the literature on the relationship between decentralisation reforms and improving teaching.

### **7.2 Teacher support structures**

It is assumed that cluster-based school management reform would create opportunities for schools to: (1) share good teaching practices and teaching resources, (2) create a culture of sharing and mutual support among teachers; (3) enhance teacher involvement in decision-making processes; and (4) provide opportunities for teachers to meet within groups and learn from each other.

The advocates of cluster-based school management reform identify the following as teacher support structures to improve the quality of teaching: cluster management committee, cluster-based subject group committees, and cluster subject facilitators.

#### **7.2.1 Teacher support through cluster management committee**

Cluster-management committee is the management level which is responsible for planning, organising, guiding and monitoring activities in a cluster. As indicated in chapter 4, formal cluster-management committees were established in Hendrich and Otjime clusters, while Makalani cluster established an informal cluster management committee. The cluster management committee consists of the cluster-centre principal and the satellite school principals. It is assumed that the cluster management committee would: (1)

monitor the quality of teaching and learning; (2) improve the management of satellite schools; (3) empower teaching staff, parents and communities; (4) improve efficiency in rendering educational services; (5) improve staff utilisation and (6) support staff development activities. The following section discusses the experiences of the teachers about cluster management committee as a teacher support structure in the three primary school clusters.

### **How did teachers in the rich urban cluster experience the cluster management committee?**

A teacher in the Makalani cluster said:

*'The cluster-centre principal does not influence the management of our school ....our principal knows a lot and support us very well' (a teacher from a resourced school).*

This teacher experienced support from her own principal and not from the cluster management committee. From the point of view of this teacher, her school works independently from the cluster-centre principal. From the teacher's point of view the school management reform did not influence the management of her school or the support she received.

Another teacher in the same cluster holds similar sentiments regarding the support of teachers from the cluster management committee:

*'The CCP and my principal do not manage the cluster together... I know there is a cluster management committee.... but I don't have any idea what they discuss in meetings'...*

*'Our principal helps us with our teaching....the cluster-centre principal organise meetings and told us how important to attend cluster- subject meetings' (a teacher from under-resourced school).*

This teacher claims that she does not have any idea about the functions of the cluster management committee. From the point of view of this teacher, her principal plays an

important role in teachers' professional development, while the cluster centre principal seems to be concerned with administrative issues in the cluster. Teachers in this cluster did not experience any benefit from school management reform, which could support their teaching. The fact that teachers do not know how the cluster management committee functions, strengthens the argument that teacher involvement has been weak, although it is one of the dimensions of cluster-based school management which seems to relate cluster-based school management to teaching.

One could also argue that the values and attitudes needed for shared and collaborative leadership are not upheld in this cluster. School principals chose to operate on their own rather than collaboratively and therefore established an informal cluster management committee. In this cluster, the cluster management committee, as a teacher support structure did not have any significant influence on the improvement of the quality of teaching.

The schools in this cluster are competitive and individualistic oriented, though the school management reform assumes that school principals would work in collaboration to improve teachers' teaching practices. It is evident from the case study that school principals believe that their schools are quite strong in terms of leadership and teacher quality and therefore perceive that the school management reform has an insignificant role to play in the improvement of management of their schools and the teaching practices of teachers.

### **How did teachers in the poor urban cluster experience the cluster management committee?**

While in Makalani cluster, individual principals are the ones who support their teachers; in Hendrich cluster the cluster-centre principal had been instrumental in providing support to teachers; although a cluster management committee has been established in the cluster.

*'The cluster-centre principal guides us....she selects a team who guide others during cluster meetings' (a teacher from the satellite school).*

*...'Our principal attends our cluster meetings with us and provide us ... with some ideas' (a teacher from the cluster school).*

*'I have not seen them coming together principals from various schools, our principal from the cluster in my area does help, I don't see any other principal, except our own principal who is attending the cluster-subject meetings with us' (a teacher from the cluster school).*

*'Only cluster-centre principal organise cluster-subject meetings, like today we have a cluster meeting at our school, I don't know whether our principal is aware..... I think the cluster-centre principal knows what to do, I don't know our principal' (a teacher from the satellite school).*

Though the cluster management committee is established in this cluster, as a teacher support structure, the school principals have not been working in collaboration to support teachers improve their teaching practices. Teachers in this cluster experienced the support from the cluster-centre principal. Although the school management reform advocates shared and collaborative management, school principals did not uphold the values and attitudes needed for shared and collaborative leadership. The cluster-centre principal chose to work in isolation from other principals in the cluster and seems to possess no skills on how to manage the reform in a shared and collaborative manner; equally the satellite school principals chose not to support the cluster-centre principal because they interpreted the school management reform as a threat to their power and authority over their schools. Schools in this cluster could not work in collaboration to support teachers improve their teaching practices, the cluster centre-principal used centralised and bureaucratic management styles in facilitating the implementation of the reform, while the satellite school principals resisted the reform and paid little attention to the implementation of the reform.

Lack of collaboration in Hendrich cluster can also be explained by the fact that the cluster centre principal perceives herself as the only one with strong leadership and therefore ignored the contributions from the satellite school principals. It could also be explained that the cluster-centre principal lacks clarity on how schools could work together to support teaching in schools.

As in the case of Makalani cluster, the cluster-management committee, as a teacher support structure did not influence the teaching practices of teachers in this cluster significantly.

### **How did teachers in the rural cluster experience the cluster management committee?**

Turning to Otjimue cluster, though the cluster management committee is established in this cluster, cluster management committee meetings were not being held regularly and some times there were no meetings at all. Therefore, teachers perceived that they have little information on how the cluster management committee functions:

*.....'I know that they go to meetings... may be they discuss things in education' (a teacher from the cluster school).*

*.....'I know that school principals attend meetings together sometimes... but don't know what they discuss' (a teacher from a satellite school).*

*'Our principal informs us that they discuss about common exam that all schools should write' (a teacher from the cluster school).*

The fact that teachers have little information on how the cluster management committee functions, makes it is clear that they did not experience any support from the cluster management committee. Other teachers in the satellite schools have not even mentioned the cluster management committee may mean to these teachers that the cluster

management committee does not exist. They only talked about the cluster-centre principal and indicated that they did not receive any support from the cluster-centre principal:

*'The cluster-principal did not visit my school....we are just on our own'* (a teacher from the satellite school).

*'There is no encouragement from cluster centre principal except own principal'* (a teacher from the satellite school).

The teachers in the satellite schools in this cluster indicated that they did not receive any benefits from the school management reform. As in the case of the Makalani cluster, they only received support from their principals. Though the schools in this cluster seem to uphold the values and attitudes needed for shared and collaborative leadership, schools were limited in engaging in collaborative activities due to limited resources.

When the cluster-centre principal was asked whether she visited schools in her cluster, she indicated that: *'I am aware of that, but I don't have time and money to travel to schools. There are now allowances to do so, but it takes time to get the money when you claim'*.

It is ironical to expect rural schools to have more resources in order to implement the reform while limited resources were provided to schools. The school management reform puts unfair demands on under-resourced schools situated in impoverished communities. This confirms the argument of the critical-political economic theorists that 'devolution of authority to schools places unfair burdens on schools in instances of resource scarcity' (Walker, 2002).

This case study provides us with the insight that though the schools in this cluster respond to the implementation of cluster-based school management reform positively, the cluster could not implement the reform as intended due to limited resources. It also provides insight that the reform creates the structures to support teaching, but the structures lack resources to implement that support.

Drawing on the data from the three clusters, the cluster management committee as a teacher support structure introduced by cluster-based school management reform did not provide significant support to teachers to improve their teaching practices. The schools in the rich urban schools felt adequate and therefore did not take cluster-based school management reform seriously. Though the resourced school in the poor urban cluster supported the satellite schools, there was little collaboration in the cluster, because the satellite school principals felt that their contributions to the management of the cluster were not valued. Although the rural cluster responded positively to the introduction of the school management reform in their schools, the school principals could not attend cluster meetings regularly due to limited resources at their disposal.

### **7.2.2 Teacher support through cluster-based subject groups**

Cluster-based school management reform assumes that teaching would improve when teachers engage in collaborative learning during cluster-based subject group meetings. The following sub-section discusses the experiences of the teachers about cluster-based subject groupings as a teacher support structure in the three primary school clusters.

#### **What teachers from the rich urban cluster said about cluster-based subject groups?**

In the Makalani cluster, teachers in the resourced schools perceived insufficient support from cluster-based subject meetings in helping them improve their teaching practices:

*'I am not really picking up something new, we repeat the same thing.'*

*'We need to learn new ideas, discussion alone is limited, we need help with actual teaching skills.'*

*'We don't really do much during cluster meetings, we do planning or make sure that we know what should be included in the subject file....one needs to get something new and bring it into your classroom.'*

*'Some issues are policy-related that teachers cannot solve without the support from central authority'.*

*'The system did not change my teaching, because I am a good teacher (laughed)..... you cannot copy from others and just implement in your class... just like that.'*

Teachers' experience was that the cluster-based subject meetings focus more on discussions and administrative issues than on teacher professional development activities. Teachers argue that the meetings are not planned to help teachers learn new teaching skills. Cluster-based subject meetings lack proper structure and guidelines on how to support teachers learn new teaching skills. Teachers also argue that sharing of information and discussions is limited and does not contribute much to teacher learning and therefore is limited in improving teachers' teaching practices. Teachers also argue that though they try to support each other to solve classroom related problems, some of the problems they encounter in classrooms are policy related. Teachers cannot solve the problems by themselves without the support from policymakers.

Although teachers in the resourced schools feel adequate, they also argue that some of the problems that they face in their classrooms are policy-related issues and therefore the support from the central authorities is essential. Support from the central authorities is identified by De Grauwe (2004) as a key factor in the implementation of SBM reforms. He argues that the 'absence of an efficient and supportive state is risky not only for the individual schools, but also for the system as a whole' (De Grauwe, 2004:5).

As in the case of teachers in resourced schools, teachers in under-resourced schools stated that insufficient support from cluster-based subject meetings:

*'Cluster meetings should take place more regularly and subject facilitators must be knowledgeable to help us learn more...we need to understand how we can implement the new syllabus in our classrooms.'*



*'There are no guidelines on how facilitators can assist teachers during cluster subject meetings'.*

*'Teachers may become motivated to attend cluster meeting if they can influence policies and can see improvement in classroom conditions'.*

*'What is happening in cluster meetings is not really 'teaching' or 'learning' it is just question and answer.'*

*'We can get some good ideas from cluster meetings, learners are from different socio-economic backgrounds'.*

Teachers in the under-resourced schools argue that subject meetings are not planned properly and facilitators lack sufficient pedagogical knowledge as well as facilitation skills on how to support teachers learn new teaching skills. Teachers contend that teachers have low motivation to attend cluster-based subject meetings because they do not have power and authority to influence policies. Though the school management reform assumes that teachers would be empowered, teachers feel that they cannot influence policies. Teachers also argue that discussions and sharing of ideas at cluster-based subject meetings would not matter so much if 'there is no improvement in classroom conditions' and no additional resources are provided to schools to cater for learners from different socio-economic backgrounds.

It can be surmised from the experiences of the teachers in this cluster that cluster-based subject grouping did not improve teaching practices of teachers. As a teacher support strategy, it lacks structure and clarity on how to support teachers and that the school management reform cannot be implemented in isolation from existing policies, which may compete or contradict the school management reform policy.

### **What teachers from the poor urban cluster said about cluster-based subject groups?**

Like in the case of teachers in Makalani cluster, the teachers in Hendrich cluster perceived that they received insufficient support from cluster-subject group meetings:

*'We expect to get information from other teachers in other schools, we need cooperation from others; we are the only ones who give information to others and who have expertise in some subjects, we are not receiving anything back'.*

*'We don't get support from subject advisors, we need to learn new ideas, and discussion alone is limited. We need more help with actual teaching skills. Sharing of exam papers and information is not enough'.*

*'Some teachers feel poor when working with others, and therefore resist attending meetings, if they come to meetings they do not bring subject files, they do not contribute'....*

*'We need to learn new ideas concerning teaching and learning'.*

*'The quality of the improvement in my own class is not as a result of knowledge that I gained from the cluster teachers, but because of my own commitment. I always shared with the others, but they never implement that in their classes'.*

*'I am doing the same things in my classroom as I used to do before the introduction of cluster system'.*

Teachers in the resourced school contend that there is no collaborative learning takes place during cluster meetings. They feel they are the only ones who provide information to the colleagues from satellite schools, but do not receive anything back. They experience cluster-based subject group meetings to be more exploitive than beneficial to them. It is clear from the views of the teachers in the resourced school that they feel self-sufficient and therefore do not value the contributions from teachers in the satellite schools.

As in the case of teachers in Makalani cluster, teachers feel that there is no clarity on how cluster-based subject groups can be utilised to support teachers improve their teaching practices. The teachers in this cluster also feel that they are compelled to attend cluster meetings from which they are not benefiting at all. They argue that they would not benefit from cluster meetings if they were the only ones who attend the meetings without the support of the subject advisors. Teachers feel strongly that they are not learning new teaching skills, what they do during cluster meetings is limited to discussion and sharing of exam papers which do not help them improve their teaching practices.

There are differences in perceptions among teachers in under-resourced schools on the support they received from cluster-subject group meetings. Some of the teachers in the under-resourced schools stated that insufficient support was received from cluster-based subject meetings:

*... 'there is no year program... there are no specific topics for cluster subject meetings'.*

*'Sometimes we come together everybody is quite, sometimes those who have problems don't turn up'.*

*.. 'we don't do a lot during the gathering, we don't know how to make cluster subject meeting effectively'.*

*'We need input from subject advisors to make subject groups more worthwhile.'*

*'There are no specific facilitators for cluster-based subject meetings.'*

*'No follow up at classroom level after cluster meetings'.*

*.. 'During cluster meetings, we don't really learn much, we only share ideas, I don't remember learning something new.'*

As in the case of teachers in Makalani cluster, teachers in the under-resourced schools argue that cluster-based subject group meetings are planned poorly and lack clarity on how to support teachers improve their teaching practices. They also argue that there is a need for the support from subject advisors during cluster-based subject group meetings as well as the need for facilitators to have sufficient pedagogical knowledge and facilitation skills. Teachers argue that discussions and sharing of ideas during cluster-based subject group meetings would not improve their teaching practices if 'there are no follow up at classroom level after cluster meetings'. As in the case of the teachers in the resourced school, teachers in the under-resourced school argue that they do not learn much during the cluster-based subject meetings, because the cluster meetings are limited to sharing of ideas and information. However, some teachers stated that they received support from cluster-based subject meetings:

*...we advise each other on various methods, for example methods of teaching reading. 'I think my teaching can improve, if I follow what others told me'.*

*...I am now sure what to do in my classroom, especially how to deal with reading problems because I got help from strong teachers'.*

*'Teaching practice can improve if we try out ideas from cluster subject meetings in our classrooms'.*

Some of the teachers in the under-resourced schools stated that they learned new ideas from cluster-based subject group meetings and were optimistic that their teaching practices could improve if they implement the advice of their colleagues. However, none of the teachers has provided evidence of an aspect of their teaching practice, which has improved because of attending cluster-based subject meetings.

As mentioned previously, there are differences and similarities in the ways in which teachers in this cluster view cluster-based subject grouping as a teacher support strategy. The differences in the perceptions could be attributed to the fact that teachers experienced cluster-based subject grouping differently. The similarities could be attributed to the fact that cluster-based subject meetings have become a routine and teachers have observed a particular pattern in the manner in which cluster-based subject meetings have been conducted most of the time.

### **What teachers from the rural cluster said about cluster-based subject groups?**

As in the case of teachers in the two clusters, the teachers in Otjimue cluster stated that they have received insufficient support from cluster-based subject group meetings. Cluster subject meetings in this cluster were not held regularly or not at all. In order for cluster subject meetings to take place regularly, teachers need additional time and resources to enable them to carry out their teaching duties as well as attend cluster-subject meetings regularly:

*...‘the meetings took place, may be once a year or even not at all and we need to share learning and teaching problems’.*

*‘We do not come regularly to meetings because of distance and transport problems’.*

*‘We learned things during the cluster meetings, but we do not implement the ideas as they are, we have different needs, different learners’.*

*‘There is no follow up support for teachers to master new teaching strategies’.*

Teachers point out that their attendance of cluster-based subject meetings are constrained by distance and transport problems. They also argue that though teachers may learn new ideas from cluster-based subject group meetings, teachers emphasise that there is a lack of follow up at classroom level, which they argue to be an important aspect for supporting teachers improve their teaching skills.

It is evident from the available minutes of cluster subject meetings that cluster subject meetings are not held regularly or not at all. I could not attend one cluster subject meeting in this cluster, because meetings were cancelled most of the time.

However, teachers in this cluster are quite optimistic that cluster-based subject group meetings can improve their teaching practices:

*‘I know what others are doing, what I should concentrate when I am teaching’ .... I learned how to use learner-centred methods and how to integrate my subjects when I am teaching’, but when I come to my classroom.... I do different things because the needs are not the same’.*

*‘We share ideas on how to do things in the classroom....but I don’t do everything we discuss....you know what you can do with your learners, according to your understanding’.*

Though teachers are optimistic about the potential of cluster-based subject group meetings in improving teaching, they assert that they do not implement the ideas from cluster-based subject group meetings uncritically. They argue that the needs of their

classrooms dictate the extent to which the ideas they receive from cluster-based subject group meetings are implemented in their classrooms.

As in the case of cluster-based management committee, the strength of cluster-based subject grouping as a teacher support strategy depends heavily on the availability of resources, which is problematic in rural schools. The school management reform imposes unrealistic demands on teachers in rural schools which they cannot cope with. Teachers in this cluster like teachers in the other two clusters need additional time and resources in order to cope with their teaching load and the expectations of the school management reform.

It is evident from the study that cluster-based school management reform has not alleviated difficulties that rural schools have been experiencing. The cluster-based school management reform has rather created more difficulties to rural schools. The finding from this case study supports the argument of De Grauwe (2004:2) that 'the introduction of decentralisation reforms such as SBM has led to deterioration especially in the weakest schools'.

It is also evident that cluster-based subject meetings have little or no significant influence on the teaching practices of teachers in this cluster. Teachers cannot attend cluster-subject meetings regularly because of limited resources. Teachers in this cluster experience difficulties accessing resources at the cluster centre due to lack of transport.

The following sub-section presents the evidence from the observations of cluster-based subject group meetings. The sub-section attempts to analyse the extent to which the

evidence from the observations of cluster-based subject group meetings is consistent with the teachers' experiences of cluster-based subject group meetings.

To demonstrate how qualitative evaluation of cluster-subject group meetings was carried out; an example of an in-depth observation of one of the cluster-subject group meetings is presented below:

*Cluster-subject group meeting observations (14h30-16h30): General Overview*

The cluster meeting was attended by teachers from the satellite schools and those from the cluster school. The cluster-centre principal also attended the meeting. The meeting was held at one of the satellite schools in the cluster. Some teachers came to a meeting without any notebooks or subject files. The meeting started with a prayer. The chairperson (one of the teachers) indicated that it was expected from teachers to provide him with agenda items for the meeting, but he did not receive anything. He invited agenda items from those who were present. There was no response. It was quiet for a while. The cluster-principal suggested that the focus of the meeting should be the 'lower primary reform'. There was silence for five minutes. The chairperson read the minutes of the previous meeting. After the chairperson read the minutes, there was again a moment of silence. The chairperson asked the teachers whether there were experiencing problems with the implementation of the revised syllabuses. The cluster-centre principal encouraged teachers to share experiences with one another regarding the implementation of the revised syllabuses. One of the teacher suggested that cluster meetings should be held according to the grades, not all lower primary teachers attended the same meeting. The meeting struggled to have a focus. Some teachers came late (10-30 minutes). One teacher indicated that she experienced difficulty to find teaching aids for some themes in the Environmental Studies subject. Another teacher also indicated that she found difficulties to find pictures and stories on the topic 'social groups' in the Environmental Studies subject and also talked to others that she also struggled to teach in a thematic approach and would like other teachers to assist her. The cluster-centre principal explained that the library at the cluster has some books and is accessible to teachers at the cluster school. The meeting followed a 'question and answer pattern' whereby one teacher asked a question and other teachers provided answers. The cluster-centre principal was dominating the discussions most of the time. The meeting continued in a haphazard way. The cell phone of the cluster-principal rang and she went outside. There was quietness again. When the cluster-centre principal came back, the discussions continued following the same pattern of 'question and answer'. Some teachers did not participate in the discussions; they sat quietly, appeared bored and didn't take any notes from the meeting. The teacher who indicated in the interview that she did not learn anything from attending cluster-subject group meetings; did not say anything throughout the meeting. The meeting ended and the chairperson thanked all who came to attend the meeting.

*Cluster-subject group meeting evaluation*

1. Cluster subject meetings were supposed to be venues for teacher professional development. There were no specific activities organised to enhance teachers' teaching skills. The discussions during cluster meeting followed a question and answer pattern.
2. There were no activities organised to engage teachers in professional discussions of their own practice. Though teachers discussed classroom practice related issues, the discussions were done in a haphazard way.
3. There were no materials or resources used in the discussions. There was no planning and preparations done for the cluster meeting except a list of agenda items.
4. The interaction among teachers was weak. Only a few teachers paid attention to what others said and contributed to the discussions, most teachers were not interested.
5. There were teachers who indicated (through their non-participation and body language) that the discussions were not worthy of their attention.
6. The meeting focused on sharing problems and ideas. There were no structured professional development activities, whereby teachers were actively involved in order to learn new teaching skills.
7. Most of the teachers did not seem to see the relevance of attending cluster meetings to their classroom practice and therefore were not paying attention to what was discussed.
8. From the observation of what was going on during the meeting teachers, did not learn new teaching skills. There was little effort from teachers to make contribution to the discussions during cluster meetings.

Drawing on the data from the observations of cluster-based subject group meetings, teachers learn very little from cluster-subject group meetings that may contribute to improvement in teaching practices. It seems that teachers do not regard cluster-based subject meetings as professional development activities, but rather routine activities that they are forced to attend.



It is evident from the example above that cluster-subject group meetings have done very little to support teachers improve their teaching practices. The fact that teachers come to cluster meeting with no notebooks and files, indicate that teachers do not regard cluster meetings as having a significant role in their professional development. The above example of a cluster-based subject meeting shows that the meeting lacks structure and focus as how to support teachers improve their teaching practices. It is clear that the meeting was more about listening to those who brought up issues/problems, and getting responses from a few who tried to support others, while the rest of teachers sat quietly and showed no interest in what was going on in the meeting. It is also clear from the example above that cluster meetings are unorganized and take place in a haphazard manner. Cluster meetings become routine activities and therefore teachers are not interested. There were no demonstrations of good teaching practices.

From observations of cluster meetings, it becomes clear that cluster meetings follow the so-called 'meeting procedures' where there is the chairperson and a secretary of a meeting; meeting agenda is adopted; minutes of the previous meeting are corrected and so forth. As indicated in the evaluation of the example of a cluster-subject meeting above, discussions during cluster meetings follow a question and answer pattern, in other words, the chairperson of the meeting invites teachers to raise their concerns and those who have information provide explanations. It is clear from the example above that teachers did not learn new teaching skills during the cluster-subject group meetings.

In another cluster meeting observed, the chairperson was the cluster subject facilitator. She came to the meeting with a list of agenda items. These were subject file, scheme of work, assessment, lesson planning and teaching of Handwriting. The chairperson asked the teachers to add other items on the agenda. This meeting also followed the so-called

'meeting procedures' and 'question and answer' pattern. However, in this meeting, the chairperson was the only one who provided explanations, while some teachers were listening and others were not interested in the discussions. Though the chairperson was the subject facilitator, the meeting also lacked structure and focus on how to support teachers improve their teaching skills other than verbal explanations to questions posed by some teachers. Teachers who claimed that they experienced problems with the implementation of the revised curriculum repeatedly interrupted the meeting. Though the chairperson provided explanations, interruptions from the teachers continued. Although the facilitator tried to respond to some concerns raised, teachers were not satisfied with theoretical explanations.

Like the case of the example of a cluster meeting provided above, this meeting also shows that cluster meetings lack structure and focus to support teachers improve their teaching practices; they are unorganized and conducted in a haphazard manner. Teachers were not interested in cluster meetings, because cluster meetings are routine activities that teachers are forced to attend even though they are not benefiting from attending the cluster meetings. The weakness of cluster-based subject group meetings is that these meetings are run based on a self-organised model, which assumes that teachers would work together and share resources and experiences without proper structures and resources in place.

The evidence from the interviews with teachers as well as evidence from observations of cluster-subject meetings shows clearly that cluster-subject meetings have little or no influence on the teaching practices of teachers. The school management reform introduces cluster-based subject group meetings as opportunities for teachers to learn teaching skills, but subject meetings are very poor to improve teaching.

### 7.2.3 Teacher support through subject facilitators

It is assumed that cluster-based school management reform would improve the teaching skills of teachers through the support of cluster subject facilitators. Teachers in Makalani cluster pointed out that they did not receive support from cluster subject facilitators:

*'The teacher who is our convenor does not have time... you know she is also a teacher.... where does she get time to go around many primary schools in our cluster.'*

*...'We have our convenor, she can help where she can, she is also a teacher...she does not have time'.*

Teachers state that though subject facilitators are appointed in the cluster, they are limited in the amount of support they can provide to teachers. They need additional time and resources to visit all the teachers in eight primary schools. The facilitators already have their teaching load and therefore do not have time to support teachers at classroom level. The school management reform has created an extra load on teachers who are appointed as subject facilitators. It is unrealistic to expect teachers who are fulltime teachers to visit all lower primary teachers in eight primary schools. Apart from the teaching load, these teachers have to deal with issue of power relations. Teachers in this cluster are well qualified and the subject facilitators might see themselves as poor in dealing with teachers who are at the same level as they are or who are better qualified or experienced than them.

As in the case of the teachers in Makalani cluster, the teachers in Hendrich cluster have pointed out that they have not received support from cluster facilitators:

*'We have a facilitator who is knowledgeable about lower primary, based at the TRC, the facilitator attends cluster meetings, but not really make follow up after cluster meetings, but her own school visit according to her schedule'.*

*'Yes, we have a subject facilitator in our cluster, but does not visit us, she does not have time'.*

In this cluster, teacher support through cluster subject facilitators did not support teachers improve their teaching methods, because cluster subject facilitators could not support teachers at classroom level due to time and resource constraints.

Teachers in this cluster point out that they only have one cluster subject facilitator. As in the case of Makalani cluster the facilitator does not visit teachers, due to limited resources and her own workload. It can be argued that the facilitator has chosen to focus more on her own workload because of lack of clarity regarding her roles and responsibilities in the implementation of the school management reform. From the observations of cluster-subject meetings in this cluster, the cluster subject facilitator did not play any significant role during cluster subject meetings. In this cluster, the teacher support strategy through cluster subject facilitators did not improve the teaching practices of teachers, because the facilitator could not support teachers at classroom level due to time and resource constraints and lack of clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of the cluster-subject facilitator.

Turning to Otjimue cluster, teachers in this cluster also pointed out that they have received limited support from the cluster subject facilitators:

*... 'you know she is also a teacher and a principal, they are only two teachers at their school and the school has grades one to four'.*

*'When we have meetings.....she also attend meetings...because she teaches lower primary and she correct us where we are wrong'.*

Teachers argue that the subject facilitator cannot provide support to teachers due to the workload and limited resources. In the case of Otjimue cluster, the subject facilitator is a school principal whose school has limited teaching personnel. The situation in rural schools is even more complicated than that of urban schools, since schools are isolated and have very limited resources. As in the case of other teacher support strategies, the

support of the subject facilitators for teachers requires additional time and resources. However, the school management reform has not provided the schools with opportunities to create more time and additional resources.

As in the case of the two urban clusters, teacher support through cluster subject facilitators is limited to support teachers improve their teaching practices, due to limited time and resources.

### **7.3 Conclusions**

There were differences in the way in which the three primary school clusters responded to the introduction of teacher support structures. As mentioned previously, Makalani cluster did not view school management reform as a management system. The cluster management committee was not formalised and therefore did not attempt to link it to the work of teachers. Schools in Makalani cluster felt adequate and disregarded the contributions of the school management reform to their schools and to teacher quality.

In Hendrich cluster, though the cluster management committee was established, the principles and values embedded in the school management reform were not realised by the school principals. As a result, the school principals were not working collaboratively to support teachers improve their teaching practices. In particular, the cluster-centre principal perceived her leadership skills to be stronger than that of satellite school principals. She disregarded the contributions from the satellite school principals and therefore the satellite school principals paid little attention to the management of cluster activities.

Although schools in Otjimeue cluster responded positively to the introduction of cluster-based school management reform, they could not plan and manage the cluster in a

collaborative manner due to communication and transport problems. Therefore, teachers in this cluster have only a vague understanding of how the cluster management committee functions.

Teachers in the three case studies stated that they received little or no support from the cluster-management committee. Drawing from the experiences of the teachers in the three primary clusters, there is little or no clear link between the cluster management committee and the work of the teachers. Teachers in the three clusters do not have information on how the cluster-management committee works. What teachers experience is the support that they receive from either their own principal or the cluster-centre principal (in the case of Makalani cluster).

As far as the cluster-based subject group meetings are concerned, the teachers regard the meetings as having limited potential to affect their teaching practices because the meetings lack structure and clarity on how to support teachers improve their teaching practices. Besides the issue of vague focus, attendance at the cluster-based subject meetings requires schools and teachers to have additional time and resources at their disposal.

The perceptions of teachers on the support provided by cluster-subject facilitators were not positive. Teachers stated that they received little or no support from cluster subject facilitators. Teachers claimed that cluster subject facilitators did not provide support to teachers at classroom level because of their own teaching load, time and resource constraints. Besides time and resource constraints, it seemed that roles and responsibilities of subject facilitators in supporting teachers were not clearly defined.

It can be concluded that the teacher support structures introduced by cluster-based school management reform to improve teaching have little or no influence on the quality of teaching practices of teachers. Most of the teachers interviewed did not know about the cluster management committee, while some teachers view it as having an administrative function rather than a professional development function. Besides the fact that cluster management committees have been perceived as administrative structures rather than entities to support teachers to improve their teaching practices, schools have not yet upheld the values and attitudes that are needed for shared and collaborative leadership. Teachers have experienced little or no support from cluster-based subject group meetings because cluster subject meetings lack structure and clarity. Teachers also have experienced cluster-based subject group meetings as focusing more on discussions and sharing of ideas than on teacher professional development in order to improve the quality of teaching in schools. Teachers argue that the support from subject facilitators cannot be realised without additional time and resources provided to schools. In fact, all three teacher support strategies introduced by the school management reform require schools to have additional resources at their disposal.

In summary, teachers perceive the reform as a burden rather than a means to improve their teaching practices. Teachers clearly pointed out that the reform did not have clarity or focus on how to improve teaching.

It can also be concluded that school clustering, like other decentralisation reforms such as school-based management, lacks clear strategies and focus for improving the teaching skills of teachers; effective monitoring system (Bray and Mukundan, 2004); and capability to rebuild the traditionally isolated work of teachers (Schiefelbein, 2004). It focuses on

changing structures and promotion of democratic participation, which alone does not improve the quality of teaching (Mohr and Dichter, 2001; Anile and McKenzie, 2000).

The data from the three case studies reveal that the school management reform has introduced structures in schools, but these structures lack clarity on how to support teachers in improving their teaching practices. The school management reform does not have a clear focus on how to improve teaching in schools. The advocates of the school management reform did not realise that the implementation of the school management reform would require additional time and resources to be provided to schools if changes are to be affected in teaching practices of teachers.

It is safe to conclude that the school management reform has introduced inefficient and poor teacher support structures to improve the quality of teaching in schools. The reform overlooked *three* important aspects: (1) *clarity and guidelines* of how these structures can support teachers improve their teaching practices; (2) *sufficient resources* to support teacher support structures improve teaching; and (3) *support and effective monitoring system* of teachers' teaching practices at classroom level. It can also be concluded that there is insufficient evidence from the three case studies that teacher support structures introduced by the school management reform have improved the quality of the teaching practices of teachers.

It can be surmised that there is insufficient evidence from the three case studies that the school management reform relates to improving teaching. The evidence from the three case studies clearly illustrates a missing link between cluster-based school management reform and improving teaching. The evidence shows clearly that the school management reform changes structures of managing schools, but does not provide clear guidelines on how these structures support teaching in schools. The evidence also shows that the school management reform sets expectations for school principals to support teachers to



improve their teaching practices, but did not provide support and sufficient resources to improve teaching in schools. As mentioned previously, the evidence from the three case studies shows that the school management reform introduced teacher support strategies to improve teaching, but these strategies lack clarity, guidelines and resources to support and monitor teaching at classroom level. It can be surmised that there is insufficient evidence from the three case studies that cluster-based school management improves the teaching practices of teachers.

## **CHAPTER 8: DID THE CHANGE IN SCHOOL MANAGEMENT IMPROVE THE TEACHING PRACTICES OF TEACHERS?**

### **8.1 Introduction**

The school management reform assumes that teachers would learn new teaching skills by engaging in collaborative learning with teachers from other schools within the clusters. This chapter presents the characteristics of the teaching methodologies of teachers in three primary school clusters as revealed by the classroom observation data.

This study assumes that the teaching methodologies of teachers in the three primary school clusters would be effective if teachers are able to teach according to the following criteria: (1) teacher interacts with learners to promote active learners' participation in learning; (2) teacher stimulates learners' responses and keep learners on task; (3) teacher uses a variety of teaching materials and resources to support learning; (4) teacher uses a variety of teaching strategies to promote learning; (5) teacher assists learners with different learning difficulties; (6) teacher assists learners to make connections between what they know and new material; (7) teacher engages learners in higher order thinking skills; (8) teacher assists learners to see the relationship between different learning areas. These criteria were adapted from the literature on teacher effectiveness and effective teaching (Ndembele, 2005; Campbell et al., 2004; Schreens, 2000; Anderson, 1991; Kyriacou, 1986).

The above-mentioned criteria were used to assess the effectiveness of the teaching methodologies of teachers in the three primary school clusters. The study assumes that

teachers who teach according to the above-mentioned criteria would be regarded as effective teachers. The study also assumes that cluster-based school management reform would have supported teachers to teach according to the above-mentioned criteria.

However, in the eighteen (18) classroom observations that were carried out, the characteristics of the teaching methodologies of teachers, which emerged were dominated by: chalk-talk and teacher dominated teaching, excessive use of group work, limited individual learner instruction and limited mastery of the language of instruction.

## **8.2 Chalk-talk and teacher dominated teaching**

The teaching in the primary classrooms is still characterised by teacher directivity, which is limited to memorizing facts and reciting them back to the teachers. Teachers have limited skills to engage learners in active learning, which facilitates creative and challenging learning. Teacher dominated teaching limits learners in the development of conceptual understanding, critical thinking and analytical skills.

In classrooms when teacher dominated teaching is practiced most of the time, teaching is based on the following two traditional methods: un-interactive whole class teaching, and question and answer methods. The lesson described below represents chalk and talk teaching. The teacher is 46 years old. She has 17 years of teaching experiences and obtained a Lower Primary Teacher Certificate. She has been teaching Lower Primary for 17 years. The teacher is teaching in an under-resourced school in the Hendrich cluster. The teacher claimed that she did not receive support during the implementation of cluster-based school management reform and her teaching practice did not improve as a result of cluster-based school management reform. The literacy lesson below was presented to a Grade 1 class:

*June 02 Observation (12h30 to 13h15): General Overview:*

The classroom is small with limited space for teaching and keeping learning materials. The classroom has 38 learners. It is decorated with posters and pictures of animals. Other materials on the wall include: letters of alphabet and flash cards on days of the weeks and months of the year. There are two cupboards with teaching materials. There is a limited collection of teaching materials. The medium of instruction is English, but learners come from different language backgrounds: Otjherero, Afrikaans, Oshiwambo and Khoekhoegowab. Learners sit permanently in groups and desks are arranged closely to one another. There are enough learner workbooks.

The teacher put a poster on the chalkboard. She asked learners to sound words as a whole group. She struggled to pronounce some words. Some learners were sounding words without looking at the chalkboard; some were busy playing with bottle tops in an ice-cream container. The teacher stood at the chalkboard most of the time. She continued putting posters with new words on the chalkboard without checking whether all learners could read, before she proceeded with new words. She continued asking learners to read words on the poster as a whole group. Some learners continued playing with friends. She only told one learner to concentrate. She went back to her seat for a while and then asked learners to identify words from the poster and paste them on the one side of the chalkboard as she was saying them. Most of learners struggled to read the words. The pattern of pasting words on the poster continued for a long time until the lesson was completed. The bell rang and the period ended.

The following is the evaluation of the lesson as per observation criteria:

*June 02 Observation (12h30 to 13h15): Specific Evaluation*

1. The teacher stood most of the time at the chalkboard. The interaction between the teacher and learners in this lesson was poor.
2. Some learners responded to the teacher's instructions by reading words from the chalkboard, while others said words without looking at the chalkboard.
3. The teacher only used whole class teaching, which was not interactive and limited to allowing learners to practice reading individually.
4. Little was done to assist learners to make connections between what they already know and new material.
5. In this lesson, there was no evidence of engaging learners in higher order thinking skills.
6. The teacher used posters to enhance learning; however these were not used effectively because the teacher spent most of the time standing at the chalkboard and asked learners to read words as a whole group.

7. In this lesson there was no evidence of the use of teaching strategies and materials to support learners see the relationship between different learning areas
8. The teacher did not adapt instruction to the variations in learners' abilities, because she used whole class teaching method most of the time.

In this lesson the teacher did not meet the criteria for effective teaching. The teacher-learner interaction was poor, and the teacher could not keep learners on task. Some learners were sounding words without looking at the chalkboard, while other learners were playing with friends. The teacher was limited in assessing or learning active participation of all learners. Consequently, she could not monitor learning effectively, because she could not react effectively to learners' responses to the lesson. The teacher did not use a variety of teaching strategies; she focused more on whole class teaching which was not interactive. The teacher requested learners to sound words repeatedly, without assessing whether they were learning. The teacher used only posters as indicated in the evaluation; these were not used effectively to enhance learning. The use of a variety of teaching strategies is associated with good teaching practices (Campbell et al., 2004; Kyriacou, 1986). Learners were given little time to practice reading individually. The teacher concentrated on teaching the whole class and provided little individual assistance. Monitoring of learning and support to individual learners is associated with good teaching practices (Anderson, 1991). The teacher was not able to assist learners make connection between what they already know and new material as well as to see the relationship between different learning areas. The lesson described above was of poor quality and therefore the teacher did not teach effectively.

One pattern observed when teachers use whole class teaching is that teachers ask learners to say words after her/him as a group and this is repeated many times in lessons. It was also observed that when teachers use whole class teaching, they were limited in using a variety of teaching strategies. Whole class teaching and limited teacher learner

interactions were common practices in most of the classrooms visited. Most teachers were limited to shallow questioning techniques and only a few teachers used different levels of questioning. In most cases learners responded as a whole group and teachers requested them to repeat the answer more than once. Teachers were unable to guide learners to realise the correctness or inadequacy of their answers. This kind of teaching is limiting learning for understanding, as well as impeding learners in making connections between what they already know and new material.

Inappropriate whole class teaching was not only observed in under-resourced schools, but also in resourced schools. It was also used in the classrooms of those teachers who claimed to have received professional support through cluster-based school management reform as well as those who claimed that their teaching practices have been improved as a result of the implementation of cluster-based school management reform.

Only *seven* teachers out of the eighteen teachers observed, taught lessons which showed evidence of promoting active participation of learners in lessons, keeping learners on task, using a variety of teaching strategies, seeking active participation of learners in learning, using of varied questioning techniques, and using teaching materials and resources to enhance learning. *Four* of the seven teachers were teaching in Makalani cluster (*three* lessons were observed at the resourced schools and *one* was observed at one of the under-resourced schools); while *two* teachers were teaching in Hendrich cluster (*one* lesson was observed at the resourced school and the other *one* lesson was observed at one of the under-resourced schools) and *one* teacher was teaching in Otjimue cluster.

One example of the lessons referred to above, was the Mathematics lesson observed in Makalani cluster. In a Mathematics lesson, on the topic measurement, the teacher put the

weight scale in front of the class to enable each learner weigh up his/her weight on the scale. The teacher explained the functions of the scale and facilitated the lesson in a manner in which learners could relate what they were learning to their own experiences. The teacher used varied questioning techniques, engaged learners in variety of learning activities, sought active participation of the learners in learning, supported learners to connect new ideas to their prior knowledge and experience, provided feedback and kept learners on task. It is evident from the classroom observations that teachers who are well qualified taught better than those who are less qualified.

It became clear from the classroom observations that teachers were not skilled in assisting learners learn unconnected facts or challenging learners to think critically or analytically, monitor learning, develop understanding of concepts, respond to learners' incorrect, partially correct or poor answers or use a mixture of higher and lower order questions. It was also observed that teachers were limited in adapting instructions to different learning needs of learners; assisting learners to make connections between what they already know and new material, and assisting learners to make connections between different learning areas.

It was also noted that only these same *seven* of the eighteen teachers, taught lessons which showed evidence of a teacher trying to assist learners who had trouble in learning and engaging learners in higher order thinking respectively. Teachers who are well qualified and experienced presented all seven lessons. *Four* of the seven teachers were teaching at resourced schools, while *three* of them were teaching at the under-resourced schools. *One* of the three teachers was teaching at a school in the rural cluster. *Four* of the seven teachers indicated in the interviews that they have been attending workshops for lower primary education reforms and have contributed on the development of lower

primary education syllabuses and teachers' guides significantly. The teachers who conducted these lessons indicated that they did not receive any support from the school management reform and that their teaching practices were not changed as a result of cluster-based school management reform.

It was also observed that only *six* lessons showed evidence of teachers trying to assist learners make connections between different learning areas. *Four* of the six teachers were teaching at resourced schools, while *two* of them were teaching at the under-resourced schools. The six teachers are also well qualified. These teachers claimed that cluster-based school management reform did not change their teaching practices.

### **8.3 Excessive use of group work**

Teachers were limited in the amount of cooperative learning situations they created. Group work became a popular teaching method in the Namibian classrooms because it is associated with the theory of learner-centred teaching which the Ministry of Education advocates. Teachers take it for granted that in each lesson, learners should be involved in group work. However, teachers do not have sufficient skills to organise learning in order to promote cooperative learning, nor do they understand that group work does not necessarily mean cooperative learning.

The lesson described below represents excessive use of group work. The teacher is 42 years old. She has 10 years of teaching experiences and obtained a Lower Primary Teacher Certificate. She has been teaching Lower Primary for 8 years. She was teaching in an under-resourced school in the rural cluster (Otjimue cluster). The teacher claimed that she did not receive support during the implementation of cluster-based school management reform and that cluster-based school management reform did not improve



her teaching practice. The Environmental Studies lesson below was presented to a Grade 4 class:

*May 31 Observations (9h20 to 10h00): General Overview:* The classroom is small with limited teaching space. It is decorated with posters of letters of the alphabet, and months of the year. There is also children's work on the classroom wall. The medium of instruction is English. The learners come from predominantly one language background which is Otjherero. There are 25 learners in the classroom. There are no cupboards, except two shelves with a few outdated textbooks. There are subject corners for each of the subjects, with few teaching materials. Learners are sharing textbooks and there are not enough learner workbooks. Learners do not sit in groups permanently.

In introducing the lesson, the teacher asked learners to mention natural resources and then told learners to take textbooks and read the text about water as a natural resource. One learner was given a chance to read the passage. There was no discussion about the passage. The teacher picked up a poster with pictures and asked the learners to identify pictures that described the use of water. She took pieces of paper with incomplete sentences and gave them to the learners to complete. Only a few learners were able to complete the exercise. She then divided learners into groups to do an exercise which required learners to draw and write about the use of natural resources. For a long time most learners sat quietly in the groups and later began to draw pictures individually. The teacher walked around to check how the learners were drawing. It seemed that the teacher did not realize that learners were working individually. The majority of learners did not have pencils and erasers and therefore used pens to draw, when they made mistakes they stopped drawing and began to talk with the friends. The teacher did not pay attention to them and continued walking around the groups. She then asked learners to report as a group. Though she mentioned a specific group name, learners reported back as individuals. The teacher did not extend on what learners reported. The bell rang and the period ended.

*May 31 Observation (9h20 to 10h00): Specific Evaluation*

1. The teacher stood most of the time at the chalkboard. The interaction between the teacher and learners in this lesson was poor.
2. Only a few learners could read the passage and completed the exercise. It was evident that most of the learners could not read.
3. The teacher used whole class teaching and question and answer methods, but these were not used effectively, because the teacher was not skilled in questioning techniques and explaining concepts. Though the teacher tried to use group work as

a teaching method, she did not have a clear understanding of the method and how it can be used to enhance cooperative learning.

4. Little was done to assist learners to make connections between what they already know and new material.
5. In this lesson, there was no evidence of engaging learners in higher order thinking.
6. The only materials that the teacher used to support learning were the posters and textbooks. However, these were not used effectively to develop learners' understanding of concepts.
7. In this lesson, there was no evidence of the use of teaching strategies and materials to support learners see the relationship between learning areas.
8. Little was done to adapt instruction to the variations in learners' abilities; the teacher only assisted some learners, others were still struggling with the drawing.

As in the Literacy lesson, the teacher who taught the Environmental Studies lesson did not meet the criteria for effective teaching. This is a typical example of most of the lessons observed in the three primary school clusters. The teacher-learner interaction was poor, and the teacher could not keep learners on task. The main aim of the lesson was unclear and the teacher lacked clarity and skills on how to engage learners in cooperative learning activities. The following teaching qualities associated with good teaching practices were absent from the lesson: use of mixed of higher and lower order questions, monitoring of leaning and support to learners while engaging in learning activities, appropriate use of group work, involvement of learners in a variety of learning activities, developing understanding of the subject matter and promotion of co-operative learning.

It was evident from the way in which the teacher presented the lesson that she lacked an understanding of how to use group work as a teaching method. The teacher asked learners to engage in a group activity, but she did not plan a cooperative learning activity. She did not realise that it is ineffective to use group work method in a situation where learning requires an individual effort. She used whole group/individual teaching even if

they were ineffective. The lesson was not interesting and the majority of learners showed little interest in the activities. It was also evident that the teacher was not able to assist learners make connections between what they already know and new material as well as assisting them to see the relationship between different learning areas. As indicated in the evaluation of the lesson, the teacher did not assist learners to develop higher order thinking skills, since her teaching was very much superficial. It was evident that the teacher did not teach for understanding and her subject matter knowledge as well as pedagogical content knowledge is limited. It is also evident from the teaching methodologies of this teacher that her teaching skills are limited. The lesson described above was of poor quality and therefore the teacher did not teach effectively.

It was observed that in many classrooms observed, learners sit in permanent groups, while in some classrooms learners have to be divided in groups in every lesson. This could be attributed to the fact that teachers lack an understanding that one of the key principles underlying group work is cooperative learning. Therefore, in most of the classrooms observed, teachers divided learners in groups, but learners worked individually.

When teachers use group work, teaching time is wasted because learners take a lot of time to settle in groups. Teachers do not have effective strategies to divide learners in groups without wasting time. Teachers also had trouble in keeping all learners on task; and were not able to offer explanations or reinforce what learners reported in order to develop understanding of the subject content in learners. It was observed that teachers were not skilled in planning teaching time effectively. In most cases, when learners were engaged in group work, they did not finish the group activity nor did they complete the reporting of their work on time. In addition, teachers do not get enough time to extend the

experiences and knowledge of learners. It was evident in most of the lessons observed that instructional time was not used effectively.

#### **8.4 Limited individual learner instruction**

Teachers were limited in responding to learners with different learning needs. Out of eighteen lessons observed, only *seven* lessons were observed in which teachers tried to respond to learners with different learning needs. Six of the seven teachers were the same teachers as before. *Four* lessons were observed in Makalani cluster, another *three* lessons were observed in Hendrich cluster. In all the seven classrooms, the class size was more than 35 learners.

The lesson described below represents limited individual learner instruction. The teacher is 27 years old. She has 6 years of teaching experiences and obtained a Higher Diploma in Lower Primary Education. She has been teaching Lower Primary for 4 years. She is teaching at the cluster school in the Makalani cluster. The teacher claimed that she did not receive any support during the implementation of cluster-based school management reform and the reform did not improve her teaching practices. The literacy lesson below was presented to a Grade 2 class:

##### *June 6 Observation (08h30 – 09h10): General Overview.*

The classroom is big with enough space for teaching and keeping materials. It is decorated with posters, teaching and learning materials. There were 27 learners in the classroom. The medium of instruction is English. There are cupboards and boxes to keep teaching materials. The class has a collection of a variety of teaching materials such as: posters, books, puppets, containers and realia. The classroom has subject corners and each subject corner has materials related to the subject.

The teacher put a poster on the chalkboard with a reading text. Each learner was given a text to read. The teacher read a text together with learners, but she was reading from the chalkboard and learners were reading from their text, some children were saying words without looking in the texts.

The teacher identified the difficult words from the reading text and explained the meaning of the words to the learners by means of teaching aids. She then asked learners to read the text. Learners were reading the text as a whole group. Only a few learners were reading from the text, but most learners were not paying attention, but the teacher did not encourage those who were not reading the text. She continued asking learners to read the text over and over. Some learners were staring at the text without saying any words, while others who tried to read the text struggled to read some words. The teacher continued asking the learners to read as a whole group. She did not give learners opportunities to read the text individually. She did not bother assisting those who were struggling to read. One group of learners in the corner was playing with their friends and two began to fight, while other learners were saying words without looking at the text. Towards the end of lesson she asked three learners to read the text.

*June 6 Observation (08h30 – 09h10): Specific Evaluation*

1. The teacher stood most of the time at the chalkboard. The interaction between the teacher and learners in this lesson was poor.
2. Only a few learners could read the text. It was evident that most of the learners could not read the text.
3. The only method the teacher used was whole class teaching.
4. Little was done to assist learners to make connections between what they already know and new material.
5. In this lesson, there was no evidence of engaging learners in higher order thinking.
6. Although she gave learners copies of the text, the teacher used only posters to enhance learning; however these were not used effectively because teacher spent most of the time standing at the chalkboard and did not use the posters to meet the learning needs of the individual learners
7. In this lesson, there was no evidence of the use of teaching strategies and materials to support learners see the relationship between learning areas.
8. Very little was done to adapt instruction to the variations in learners' abilities; learners struggled to read the text, but the teacher only assisted three learners who struggled to read.

As in the Literacy and Environmental Studies lessons, the teacher who taught the Literacy lesson to a grade 2 class did not teach effectively. The teacher-learner interaction was poor, and the teacher could not keep learners on task. It was evident from the way in which the teacher presented the lesson that she lacked skills on how to teach reading

effectively. The teacher was not able to use a variety of teaching strategies and resources to enhance learning. The following teaching qualities associated with good teaching practices were absent from the lesson: promoting active participation of learners in learning, adapting instructions to the variations in learner ability, monitoring of learners' progress and support to learners while engaging in individual work. The lesson was boring and learners showed little interest in the activity. The teacher ignored the needs of individual learners and therefore did not adapt instructions to learners who had trouble in reading the text. She did not assess learners' progress in learning in order to identify those who experienced learning difficulties. Although, she might have realised that some learners were experiencing difficulties, she seemed not to have skills to help them. The class size was reasonable; therefore, the teacher should have noticed those who experienced reading difficulties. It was observed that the teacher lacked competencies in teaching reading; therefore she might not have skills of how to assess reading difficulties as well as limited skills to carry out remedial teaching. The lesson described above was of poor quality and therefore the teacher did not teach effectively.

Teaching reading is a big challenge in many of the primary classrooms in Namibia. Teachers lack skills in how to teach learners to read effectively. The World Bank study points out that many teachers in Namibia have limited skills in teaching reading: *'teachers have a limited repertoire of reading instruction methods; they cannot help learners monitor their reading comprehension; they have little facility to diagnose student reading and writing difficulties and limited skills to constitute appropriate remedial action'* (Marope, 2005: 29).

In another reading lesson, presented to grade four learners, it was a shocking to find out that learners in grade four could not read even simple words in English. It was observed

that those learners who experienced difficulties in reading where either requested to remain standing for the rest of the period or ignored totally. It was clear from the lesson observations that the teachers lacked knowledge and skills on how to assist learners who experienced difficulties in reading.

### **8.5 Limited mastery of the language of instruction**

Teachers, especially those who are teaching in schools which have chosen English as a medium of instruction from lower grades (grades 1 to 4) , struggled to teach in the English medium of instruction, because of their own limited level of English language proficiency as well as the very low level of English proficiency of learners. In schools, which chose English as a medium of instruction from lower grades, none of the learners and teachers was English native speakers, learners have come from different language backgrounds, and also none of the teachers were trained to teach in the English medium of instruction. Teachers struggled to explain concepts clearly in English.

In the following observation, the teacher is 52 years old. She has 27 years of teaching experiences and obtained a Lower Primary Teacher Certificate. She has been teaching Lower Primary for 27 years. She is teaching in an under-resourced school in the Hendrich cluster. The teacher claimed that she did not receive support during the implementation of cluster-based school management reform and cluster-based school management reform did not improve her teaching practices. The Mathematics lesson below was presented to a Grade 1 class:

*May 30 Observations (13h30 to 14h10: General Overview.* The school has double shifts. It is a grade 1 class. There were 39 learners in the classroom. The medium of instruction is English, but learners come from different language backgrounds: Otjiherero, Oshiwambo and Khoekhoegowab. The learners sit permanently in groups and the desks are arranged closely to one another. Each learner has an ice-cream container (with her/his name on) in which s/he keeps bottle tops. The classroom is colourful, decorated with pictures. There are pictures of wild animals, domestic

animals and pictures of different colours. Other teaching materials on the wall include: letters of the alphabet, flash cards on days of the week, flash cards on pictures and the names of those pictures, example pictures of telephone, TV, radio, computer and newspapers. There are three cupboards for teaching materials: counters, boxes of counters and boxes for workbooks.

The teacher told the learners that they would be learning how to count from one to ten. She told them to take bottle tops from the ice-cream containers and put the bottle tops on the desks. First, she told them to put five on one side and then another five on the other side. The teacher struggled to give or offer explanations in English and therefore most of the time the teacher gave instructions or explanations in three languages: English, Otjiherero and Khoekhoegowab and most of the time learners responded in their mother tongue and occasionally in English. Sometimes the teacher asked learners to count individually or in a choir. The teacher walked around the groups, assisting learners counting by showing them how to count using their own bottle tops and giving explanations in African languages and occasionally in English. Some learners sat quietly with bottle tops on the desks, and were not counting at all. The teacher tried to encourage a few of them to count using their bottle tops, but there were still learners who did not show interest at all. She also tried to stop two learners who were not interested in their work.

After finishing teaching learners to count from one to ten using bottle tops, she picked up a picture of a car and asked learners to identify the number of wheels on the car. When asking questions or offering explanations, the teacher switched from English to an African language or from English to Afrikaans. She also picked up a picture of a ship and asked learners whether it (the ship) had wheels and then asked them why there were no wheels on the ship. After she was satisfied with the answers from learners, she distributed exercise books. She asked learners to write numbers from one to ten. The bell rang and the period ended.

*May 30 Observation (13h30 to 14h10): Specific Evaluation*

1. Teacher-learner interaction was limited in this lesson as the teacher could not keep all the learners on task.
2. Not all learners were responding to the teacher's instructions, some learners sat quietly at their desks without doing the activity, even though the teacher encouraged them to do so.
3. The teacher used teaching strategies such as providing explanations of how to count as well as showing them how to count by means of bottle tops.
4. The teacher tried to connect the new lesson to what the learners already knew by referring to the previous lessons.



5. There was little evidence in this lesson of the teacher trying to engage learners in higher order thinking skills - except when she asked learners why the ship does not have wheels.
6. The teacher used bottle tops and worksheets in the exercise book to support learning and these were used effectively.
7. There was evidence in the lesson in which the teacher used teaching strategies and materials to support learners see the relationship between learning areas.
8. There was evidence of the teacher trying to assist learners with learning difficulties, though she could not assist all learners who experienced difficulties in counting.

In this lesson the teacher-learner interaction was limited as the teacher tried to keep some learners on task. As indicated in the evaluation of the lesson, there was little evidence of the teacher trying to engage learners in higher order thinking. There was no evidence in the lesson of the teacher using teaching strategies and materials to support learners see the relationship between learning areas. It was evident that the teachers tried to assist learners who experienced difficulties, though she could not assist all learners. Though the teachers have good teaching skills, she could not teach effectively because she was limited by her low level of English proficiency. She could not offer clear explanations or use higher and lower order questions, because of her limited mastery of the language of instruction. It was observed that some learners could not follow the instructions or explanations of the teacher, because she could not speak the mother tongue of some of the learners and the teacher and learners' English language proficiency was very limited.

It was observed that teachers teaching in lower grades were really struggling to teach in English. Teachers tried to teach in the mother tongue of some learners to make them understand, but other learners were left behind. Teachers repeatedly talked about the problems of teaching reading in multilingual classrooms during cluster-based subject meetings as well as their own limited mastery of English as a medium of instruction.

However, no teacher in-service training was conducted during the time of this study to support teachers cope with the challenge of teaching in the English medium of instruction as well as teaching in multilingual classrooms.

Poor mastery of the language of instruction was not only observed in classrooms in urban areas, but also in rural classrooms. In Otjimue cluster, teachers also used code switching, because they were limited in their ability to provide instructions or explained the concepts to learners in English. This was because both teachers and learners have very low levels of English language proficiency. It was also observed that reading either in the mother tongue or in English is a real problem to most of the learners in Otjimue cluster and that teachers lack skills in teaching reading especially in the English medium. In a grade four class, only five learners out of twenty-five learners could read in English, but the level of reading skills was at a grade 3 learner or lower.

It was also observed that teachers in the rural cluster still do not have sufficient access to resources. Teachers used outdated textbooks especially in teaching reading. However, no additional resources were provided to schools during the time of this study to support teachers improve their teaching practices.

## **8.6 Conclusions**

The findings from the three case studies and in particular the classroom observations, indicate that teachers in the three primary school clusters lack skills which require teachers to: engage learners in higher order thinking; assist learner to make connections between what they know and new material; provide clear explanations; use a variety of teaching strategies, use material efficiently, develop learners' understanding of subject content, monitor learners' progress frequently; respond to learners with different learning needs or

assist learners to make connections between different learning areas. Chalk and talk teaching and ineffective use of group work dominate the teaching in many classrooms. These teaching methodologies do not develop understanding of subject content. Chalk and talk teaching and the ineffective use of group work make learners disinterested in lessons and they therefore become demotivated. Uninteresting lessons may lead to disciplinary problems and learning difficulties.

It was observed that the English language proficiency of both teachers and learners played an important role. Because of the low level of English proficiency of some teachers, teachers could not explain concepts to learners meaningfully. Marope (2005) concludes that teachers in Namibia lack competencies that are critical to improve student learning:

*'A large base of teachers is reported to have difficulties in interpreting and implementing the curriculum.....Many practicing teachers do not have a sufficient high proficiency in reading skills to enable them to pursue further studies.....Practicing teachers are found to have poor reading skills, grammar skills, elicitation techniques, limited vocabulary, and facility to adequately explain concepts. Teachers' poor English proficiency adversely affects instruction, not only in English as a subject, but in all other subjects that are taught in English, which is a medium of instruction from grade 4 onward' (Marope, 2005: 29).*

It was clear from the classroom observations that teachers lack skills in assessing learning, identifying learning difficulties and constituting remedial actions. These skills are critical in teaching effectively. Teachers also have limited presentation skills. They could not present lessons using a variety of teaching strategies. The teaching methodologies were limited to providing information, with little attempt to teach for understanding.

Teachers were forced to switch from one language to another. Teachers teaching at the lower primary level have difficulties in explaining concepts and giving instructions in English. Teachers talked about the problem of teaching reading in English in cluster-based subject group meetings. However, there has not yet been any evidence of in-service

training courses conducted to address the needs of the teachers during the implementation of cluster-based school management reform.

Only six teachers of the eighteen teachers observed could demonstrate teaching qualities, which are associated with good teaching practices. The majority of teachers observed in the three primary school clusters still use traditional teaching methodologies, which are limited in their capacity to enhance conceptual understanding and the development of critical thinking skills. It seems that teachers who are well qualified and experienced teach better. A mastery of the language of instruction by teachers seems to play an important role in teaching. Teachers have poor mastery of both English and African languages. Most of the African Languages are still developing. The World Bank study argues that *'because of teachers' language limitations, reading lessons tend to be mechanised verbalisation of words, without grasping the meaning or context'* (Marope, 2005: 29).

Drawing on the data from the three case studies, the study concludes that there is no evidence to show that the teaching methodologies of teachers who claimed to have received support from cluster-based school management reform are significantly different from those who claimed that they have not received any support from cluster-based school management reform. From the examples of the four lessons described previously, teachers who claimed to have received support during the implementation of cluster-based school management reform presented two of the lessons, and teachers who claimed that they have not received any support during the implementation of cluster-based school management reform presented the other two lessons. It is clear from the evaluation of the four lessons, that none of the four teachers could teach effectively. The teacher, whose teaching methodologies showed evidence of the teaching qualities associated with good

teaching practices, indicated that she did not receive support during the implementation of cluster-based school management reform.

The evidence from the three case studies shows a missing link between cluster-based school management reform and improving teaching. The teaching methodologies of the teachers (except a few teachers) are still characterised by chalk-talk teaching, a teaching methodology that does not enhance active participation of learners in learning and therefore does not develop understanding of subject matter. The other common teaching methodology, which dominates most of the classrooms, is the use of group work. Teachers do not have an adequate understanding of group work as a teaching methodology, as result group work is used ineffectively or inappropriately. Teachers have limited mastery of the language of instruction as well as limited skills in explaining concepts. It seems that teachers did not learn new teaching skills during cluster-subject group meetings, because cluster-subject group meetings are limited to discussions and sharing of information, with no demonstrations of good teaching practices.

Cluster-based school management reform did not provide sufficient resources in schools. Resources such as textbooks, exercise books, stationeries and supplementary books are not sufficient in schools. Most of the schools in Namibia have shortage of books and instructional materials. It is observed that there is a high student-textbook ratio at both primary and junior secondary levels, ranging from 8 at primary to 13 junior secondary. It is further observed that *'other than a textbook shortage, Namibia schools are characterised by a dearth of other instructional materials such as student workbooks, teaching aids, and enrichment materials'* (Marope, 2005:27).

There is insufficient evidence from the three case studies that cluster-based school management reform improve the quality of the teaching methodologies of teachers in the three primary school clusters. The school management reform did not provide adequate resources and support to improve the quality of teaching in schools. The schools, especially in the rural cluster struggle to access basic resources and the classroom conditions remain unchanged. Teachers argue that teaching would not improve if classroom conditions remain unchanged.

Although the teaching practices of the teachers in the three primary school clusters were not assessed systematically it can be inferred from the data on classroom observations that the teaching methodologies of teachers in the three primary school clusters were not effective. It is safe to conclude that cluster-based school management reform has little influence on the teaching methodologies of teachers in the three primary school teachers.