

CHAPTER 1

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Decentralization as a phenomenon has been an attractive theme in educational reforms across the globe. The birth of a new South Africa in 1994 necessitated various reforms in education, and like in many other countries, decentralization was imperative in order to address, among other issues, the undemocratic governance practices and inequalities of the former apartheid educational system. Cummings and McGinn (1997:393) argue that “decentralization carries connotations of participation, emancipation, empowerment, autonomy, and other concepts that condemn dictatorship by a central authority. The concept of decentralization is, however, confusing. Like any other policy with good intentions, decentralization may both solve old problems and create new ones.”

Lim and Fritzen (2006:1) contend that “decentralization as an approach to development occupies an important conceptual position within the development debate. Yet the assessment of decentralization, in a significant share of the academic and practitioner literature, has shifted from marked optimism to one of caution, even pessimism.” The proponents of decentralization usually argue that decentralization has the potential of improving quality, increasing innovations, increasing effectiveness and efficiency, redistributing political power, and solving the problems of financing education. However this concept is more dynamic than it appears to be on the surface.

1.2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to investigate the establishment of districts and circuits as nodes of service delivery in the Mpumalanga Education Department and the rationale for the later abolition of these structures and their integration into new structures, namely regions. Section 6(a) of the Mpumalanga School Education Act, 1995 states that the Member of the Executive Council (MEC) may divide the area of the province into Educational Districts and each district into Educational Circuits, for the purpose of the administration of matters under the province's ambit, but it is silent about the power and authority of these structures. This study interrogates the legal and policy frameworks that informed the formation of districts and circuits as well as the subsequent shift from districts to regions. The role of districts and circuits is examined in order to gain an understanding of how they operated and why the districts were discontinued and reorganized into regions. The rationale for the organization of education governance structures and administration in Mpumalanga is analyzed in order to determine how it was implemented and which models informed the organization of the various administrative structures (DoE, 1995c).

This study examines (a) what prompted the provincial Education Department in Mpumalanga to initially establish districts; (b) how districts fared in terms of carrying out their mandate, especially in terms of service delivery to circuits and schools; and (c) what led to their discontinuation and the establishment of three new regional offices. Samoff's

(1990) typologies of decentralization are used as a lens to determine what kind of decentralization Mpumalanga opted for, whether it is ‘administrative decentralization’, ‘political decentralization’ or what is commonly known as ‘cooperative governance’ as defined by the RSA Constitution (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1993). The study demonstrates the existence of cooperative governance among the three spheres of governance, namely national; provincial and local. For example, provinces have jurisdiction over everything related to education, except for higher education. The lack of clear powers contributed to the failure of districts and circuits to provide coordination, professional support, and resources that were expected from them.

The study analyzed the core functions and the underlying rationale behind the shift from districts to regions through addressing the following questions:

1. Which decentralization model(s) informed the formation of districts and circuits in Mpumalanga Education Department?
2. What circumstances led to the dismantling of districts and their amalgamation into regions?
3. What has been the effect of this shift on service delivery in circuits and schools? (Did it lead to an improvement or decline in service delivery, education governance in the province, efficiency and effectiveness?)

This study argues that the shift from districts to regions in Mpumalanga is the result of inadequacies in the district structure, which caused it to fail. These inadequacies filtered down to the performance of roles and responsibilities which led to the demise of districts

and their amalgamation into regions, which were given more powers and resources in order to fulfill their mandate.

1.3. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Mpumalanga Province is situated in the north eastern part of South Africa, on the border with Mozambique and Swaziland. The 1993 Constitution (RSA, 1993) brought about the creation of the Mpumalanga Province, which is a consolidation of various territories established during the era of apartheid. It comprises portions of the former Bophuthatswana, Lebowa, and Transvaal province, as well as the entire former homelands of KaNgwane and KwaNdebele. The population of the province is about 3.1 million and the languages most spoken are SiSwati, Zulu, Ndebele, Afrikaans, English, Sepedi, Setswana and siTsonga (DoE, 1995a)

According to Census 2001 figures, about 40.4 % of the province's population live in urban areas, while 59.6 % live in rural areas. The education system inherited from the previous government comprised nine separately administered departments. These included the former racially based tri-cameral Houses of Assembly, Delegates and Representatives, KaNgwane, parts of Bophuthatswana and KwaNdebele homelands, and two provincial administrations of the Department of Education and Training (DoE, 1995a).

The crisis, which for many years engulfed the education system throughout South Africa,

was also prevalent in Mpumalanga or the Eastern Transvaal, as it was formerly known. Systematic racial discrimination had led to gross inequalities in the institutions administered by the former ethnically based departments. The process of restructuring was complex because of the history of systematic isolation arising from apartheid policies of racial segregation. Each of the former departments had their own staff, legislation, regulations, procedures, governance structures, curriculum and organizational culture. It was a priority to establish a new administration with new personnel to promote the dissolution of racial inequalities and divisions. It was decided that the structuring of the new non-racial department of education and the appointment of personnel would follow a process of consultation (DoE, 1995a).

In 1995 the Mpumalanga Provincial Education Department divided the province into 10 administrative districts (DoE, 1995a), although the initial proposal had been to establish 12 such districts. Each district was further divided into circuits. These structures were at the centre of service delivery in education. Each circuit administered and coordinated about 30 schools and/or 15000 pupils within a geographic area. The demarcation of these new circuits had the effect of re-grouping schools on a non-racial basis. The overall objective of this decentralization was to achieve effective coordination, bring education governance closer to the people, and realize the prompt delivery of service and the sharing of resources. In terms of section 126 of the Constitution of 1993, provinces have power over education, with the exception of that offered at Universities of technology and universities. This provision established three spheres of governance, namely national, provincial and local (RSA, 1993).

However, in 2001 the provincial structures in Mpumalanga were reorganized. Districts were scrapped and amalgamated into three regional offices which serve delivery points, namely: Ehlanzeni, Gert Sibande, and Enkangala, with the head office in Nelspruit. This again resulted in a five tier structure. With the abolition of districts, circuits became the second tier of service delivery with the first level being made up of schools.

The change from the old apartheid regime to the new dispensation after the 1994 elections necessitated the emergence of a new education bureaucracy. Fleisch (2002) argues that this process went through three distinct phases. The first phase (January 1994-April 1994) had its origin in the work of a small group of political activists who were responsible for preparing the African National Congress (ANC) to take control of the education system after the elections. The second phase (May 1994-April 1995) commenced immediately after the election when a quasi-official, interim structure, the Strategic Management Team (SMT), which was also known as the semi-official advisory group, was put in place. The final phase (May 1995) in the formation of the new organization commenced with the appointment of a new group of permanent senior bureaucrats, officially referred to as the Broad Management Team (BMT). The formal structure of leadership evolved over time; that is, from a non-hierarchical network of political activists into a formal bureaucratic structure of senior managers. Key aspects of the activist knowledge and practices endured in the new context (Fleisch, 2002).

The SMT, (although it was a national structure some provinces had a replicate)

established dynamic new practices that were carried over to the new organization. In the first year of governing, a unique team approach to management evolved: proto-district structures were tested; the formal organizational structure of the new department was sanctioned; patterns of incorporation of the apartheid departments were negotiated; experiments with new forms of state power were undertaken; and habits of crisis management were built up. This ‘interregnum’ (the time between one rule and the next) was a period in which the new Minister of Education had formal authority, but no real power over the old bureaucracies and their budgets (Fleisch, 2002:22).

The SMT’s proposal was for strong district offices; districts were to be non-racial; and geographic areas were to be sufficiently small to be served efficiently by local offices that could be intimately acquainted with schools. The districts were to be not only an administrative convenience, but the basis for the new governance approach (Fleisch, 2002:28). According to the Mpumalanga Strategic Plan document, the core functions of districts were intended to be administration of personnel, finance, and logistics; secondly operations, especially local policy development, circuit management, identification of needs and research; and thirdly professional support including, among other things, the provision of content and methodological support of different learning areas, in-service training (INSET) policies, and the management of teacher centers (DoE, 1999:8).

1.4. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

This study is vital because it contributes to the existing literature on the role and

organization of district and regional structures in education provision. This study seeks to understand how districts or regions relate to the provincial and national level. It also seeks to understand how they exercise their authority downwards to circuits and schools.

Sayed and Jansen (2001:226) argue

“that South Africa has an additional level of management, namely the National Department of Education. In Australia education is a state responsibility. In each state, the central office is responsible for policy, guidelines and frameworks. Regions, districts and schools are responsible for the design and management of implementation. Unlike Australia, the national level results in additional complexities and variations between provinces.”

The study will be useful in uncovering facts about why the Mpumalanga province initially chose a flatter structure of districts in order to fill the gap between circuits and the provincial office immediately after the 1994 democratic dispensation. The study also probes the rationale for subsequently phasing out districts and resorting to regions such as Ehlanzeni, the selected case study. A number of studies have been conducted about districts and other places in Gauteng (Fleisch, 2002). Another study by Sebidi (2008) focused on the shift from districts to regions in Mpumalanga, using Nkangala region as a case study. This study uses Ehlanzeni region as a case study and will therefore make a contribution to the literature on this subject.

1.5. ARGUMENT

This study argues that the shift from districts to regions in Mpumalanga is the result of inadequacies in the district structure which caused it to fail. These inadequacies filtered down to the performance of roles and responsibilities which led to the demise of districts

and their amalgamation into regions, which were given more powers and resources in order to fulfill their mandate.

1.6. THESIS OVERVIEW

An outline of the whole thesis is shown underneath commencing from chapter one up to the last chapter. This part gives the reader a glimpse of what the thesis entails.

CHAPTER 1

This chapter introduces and outlines the purpose of the study, the background and context of the establishment of the Mpumalanga Province, the rationale of the study, and lastly provides an overview of this thesis.

CHAPTER 2

This chapter argues that decentralization and centralization are waves that follow one another. Both concepts are imperative in order to achieve an efficient and effective education provision. Karlsen (1999:2) argues that “there is tension between decentralization efforts and the need for central control. He views decentralization as a way to manage conflict and to provide what is known as ‘compensatory legitimization’.”

This chapter provides a basis for investigating the shift from districts to regions, in order to understand whether it was an attempt to strengthen the central function, or to ease the

tension between districts and provincial education offices. The decentralization efforts in South African educational governance are discussed. Lastly the theoretical framework is drawn from the literature, to be used as the lens through which decentralization is viewed.

CHAPTER 3

This chapter argues that the interpretative framework, or qualitative research methodology, is the most appropriate approach for this study, in order to understand the meaning people assign to the world and their experiences therein. The focus is on the research design, including the research approach, research methodology, and data collection methods. The chapter reports how documents were analyzed and what findings emerged. The personal journal, validation strategy, limitations of the study and lastly ethical considerations are also presented.

CHAPTER 4

This chapter argues that the establishment of districts was an attempt to bring government closer to the people with the intention of enhancing service delivery.

It focuses on research question number one that seeks to discover which decentralization model(s) informed the formation of districts and circuits in the Mpumalanga Education Department.

The following topics are at the centre of the discussion: policy background and legislative framework for education restructuring, the establishment of districts and circuits in Mpumalanga, operations of districts and circuits, the relationship between districts and

circuits, lastly the powers and responsibilities.

CHAPTER 5

This chapter argues that districts had a serious shortage of resources and that impacted negatively on their performance. This situation led to a number of challenges and their failure to deliver services to circuits and schools as expected.

The discussion includes lack of resources, policy implementation, lack of support to schools and reasons that led to the demise of districts.

CHAPTER 6

This chapter will argue that regions were created to be afforded more powers, the provision of sufficient resources, personnel and financial control to be able to provide service delivery to schools. This chapter addresses the second research question.

The discussion focuses on background and context, education governance restructuring across the globe, the process leading to the establishment of regions, how the region operates, the relationship between region and circuits, powers and responsibilities, lastly service delivery under the region.

CHAPTER 7

This chapter will contend that the shift from districts to regions has had a positive effect

on service delivery to schools in Ehlanzeni Region as a case study and around the Mpumalanga province in general. This chapter seeks to answer research question number three.

Among other things, the following issues are discussed: resource provision; curriculum support; specialization; in-service training and teacher development; communication; efficiency and effectiveness of regions; the effect of the shift on service delivery in schools and circuits; and lastly the challenges faced by regions.

CHAPTER 8

This chapter will provide a summary of key issues raised throughout the study, the findings including the challenges that are faced by regions as well as recommendations. It will also address the question of the national district development unit, educational structures boundaries, the future of districts and regions in South Africa and lastly the implication of the study on decentralization literature and future research.



CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The review of literature provides the state of knowledge pertaining to educational districts and regions in various international and national contexts. This review centres on literature in the field of education decentralization because districts and regions are intermediaries of provincial departments of education in South Africa.

2.2. INTERNATIONAL TRENDS IN DECENTRALIZATION

Leung (2004) argues that educational decentralization seems to have emerged as a global trend in recent decades. According to Lim and Fritzen (2006) it occupies an important conceptual position in the policy discourse and it is being considered or attempted in a diversity of developing and transitional countries by solvent and insolvent regimes; by democracies (both mature and emergent) and autocracies; by regimes making the transition to democracy, and by others seeking to avoid that transition; by regimes with various colonial inheritances and those with none. It is being attempted where civil society is strong, and where it is weak. It appeals to people of the left, the centre and the right, and to groups that disagree with each other on a number of other issues. The proponents of decentralization usually argue that it has the potential of improving quality, increasing effectiveness and efficiency, redistributing political power, and solving the problem of financing education (Leung, 2004).

There is no consensus as to what *decentralization* really means. A number of authors define it in different ways; a few of these definitions are interrogated here. Rondinelli, McCullough and Johnson (1989, p.59) define decentralization from an administrative perspective as:

“ the transfer of responsibility for planning, management, and the raising and allocation of resources from the central government and its agencies to field agencies, subordinate units or levels of government, semi-autonomous public authorities or corporations, area wide, regional or functional authorities, or non-governmental private or voluntary organizations.”

Slater (1989) views decentralization as the creation of relatively autonomous agencies and enterprises that can render specific duties with greater flexibility and speed than the traditional central office. Mangelsdorf (1988) defines decentralization in a linear context by viewing it as the transfer of authority to plan, make decisions and manage public functions from a higher level of government to any organization or agency at a lower level. Samoff (1990) argues that the concept of decentralization has attracted a great deal of contestations. Although many scholars talk about decentralization, they are not all referring to the same thing. He points out that it is imperative to consider the historical background, political ideology, and contemporary educational problems of a country in order to understand a particular conceptualization of decentralization.

Lauglo (1995) refers to decentralization as a means to disperse objects away from a central point. This term refers not only to that process but also to the condition of objects being located remote from the center. Reddy and Sabelo (1997) concur with Lauglo's (1995) definition of decentralization as the dispersion of something from the center, but they confine it to two forms, namely *deconcentration* and *devolution*. Reddy and Sabelo (1997) define *deconcentration* as the delegation of decision making authority to dependent field units (administrative or bureaucratic decentralization). These authors view *devolution* as the cession of power to make decisions to represented authorities, or to more or less autonomous public or voluntary enterprises.

Litvack, Ahmad and Bird (1998:14) define "decentralization as the assignment of fiscal, political and administrative responsibilities to lower levels of government. It occurs

worldwide for different reasons, at different paces, and through different means. It takes many forms and has several dimensions”. Mardones (2007) writes that administrative or functional decentralization refers to the transfer of public agencies’ management, programmes, projects, or entire policy areas to sub-national governments. Samoff (1990) provides another dimension of viewing decentralization by suggesting a distinction between *administrative decentralization* and *political decentralization*. He argues that the language of administrative decentralization is service delivery, efficiency, and behavioural incentives and rewards. Political decentralization, on the other hand, involves effective participation, empowerment and collective action.

This study investigates how the arguments alluded to above, have influenced decentralization measures in South Africa. The relationship between *administrative decentralization* and *political decentralization* is also investigated. Samoff’s (1990) argument is useful for this study because it sheds light on whether, in the South African context, decentralization was prompted by administrative and management requirements, or whether districts and regions were established to enhance participation and empowerment. His decentralization typologies provide a frame of reference for this study in pursuing the origin and role of districts and regions in South African education governance (Samoff, 1990).

Samoff (1990:524) further clarifies his position by stating

“that decentralization has to do with power relations: the debate centers around the balance of power between the centralized authority and the local initiatives. Not questioning who rules, or who benefits, is surely as political as posing such questions, and it perpetuates the presumption

that decentralization necessarily empowers disadvantaged groups. On the other hand, posing these questions requires us to recognize that decentralization may or may not empower, and that administrative decentralization can be not only centralizing, but also depoliticizing.”

Sayed (2002) conceptualizes decentralization as a process affecting change in four domains namely, global, national, local and institutional. In the global context it refers to a dispersion of certain actions and activities by nations. An example of this could be the implementation of agreements by international organizations. It is often argued that the world has become a global village; hence whatever is happening elsewhere may be imported and adapted to any country if it is deemed to be a solution to that country’s challenges. Secondly, the national domain refers to what transpires within a country’s context, for example, South Africa is unitary state with three distinct spheres (national, provincial and local) having clearly defined powers. The third domain refers to decentralization from the national government to provinces, regions and to lower levels such as districts. Lastly, the institutional domain refers to decentralization at school level. The decentralization experienced in Ehlanzeni occurred and affected change in the third domain according to the above argument.

2.3. FORMS OF DECENTRALIZATION

According to Rondinelli et al. (1989:72), “there are five major organizational forms of decentralization, namely: *privatization, deregulation, devolution, delegation, and deconcentration.*” These authors state that *privatization* and *deregulation* represent

organizational forms of decentralization that permit governments to divest themselves of responsibilities for functions, either by transferring them to voluntary organizations, or allowing them to be performed by private businesses.

Devolution implies a shift of responsibilities from the central to local government, and requires that local government should be granted autonomy and independence and be clearly viewed as a separate level over which central authorities have minimal or no control (Rondinelli et al., 1989:74). *Delegation*, according to Rondinelli et al. (1989), is a transfer of authority from the central government to either lower levels of government and/or agencies, but which can be withdrawn at a later stage. Litvack (1998) contends that deconcentration does not involve any transfer of authority to lower levels of government; instead it involves the dispersion of responsibilities for certain services from the center to branch offices. *Deconcentration* as a form of decentralization is a vital aspect of this study because it provides a standpoint for understanding how districts and regions in South Africa relate to their provincial head office in terms of the various organizational forms of decentralization

Lauglo (1995:58) elaborates on the spatial nature of decentralization as “*geographical decentralization* of the state autonomy, by transferring more authority to local officials to take initiatives, to budget, and to recruit and deploy staff.” Lim and Fritzen (2006:2) classify decentralization into four categories, namely: “*administrative, fiscal, political* and *market* decentralization.” *Administrative decentralization* refers to the transfer of policy making, planning and management responsibilities from central to lower levels.

This category includes *deconcentration* and *delegation*. *Deconcentration* is a simple geographical dispersion of branches from central government, but no real authority is transferred to lower levels. *Delegation* refers to the transfer of certain functions to lower levels that remain accountable to the central level. *Fiscal decentralization* refers broadly to efforts to change the distribution and sources of resources available to local governments. It may include transfer between levels of government, authorization of local borrowing, cost recovery, and changes to revenue sources available to local government through taxes, user fees and contributions (Lim & Fritzen, 2006).

Lim and Fritzen (2006) view *political decentralization* as the devolution of power to democratically elected local governments or, in a much weaker form, the attempt to make local government more accountable to communities through the establishment of oversight boards, or the introduction of new forms of citizen participation in development projects and policy making. Finally, their concept of *market decentralization* involves attempts to transfer substantive control over resource allocation to non-state actors; privatization is the obvious example in this category.

Decentralization can have either a territorial or a functional basis. It can be *territorial* with the aim of bringing authority geographically closer to both frontline bureaucrats and the public they service, or *functional* in the sense of transferring authority to specialized agencies. Lim and Fritzen (2006:3) further contend that the aims associated with different types of decentralization include ‘economic’ interests in efficiency, classic ‘leftist’ concerns with participation and democracy, or ‘rightist’ interests in reducing state

intervention in the economy.

The same authors (Lim & Fritzen, 2006) provide another lens for viewing decentralization in South Africa whether it is classified as administrative, fiscal, political or market decentralization, the other lens is Samoff's (1990) decentralization typologies. Parker and Kirsten (1995) distinguish between three forms of decentralization namely *political*, *fiscal* and *institutional* decentralization. He concurs with Lim and Fritzen (2006) that *political decentralization* is primarily concerned with increasing public participation through citizens' involvement in public institutions. He defines *fiscal decentralization* as fiscal resources that are given to the decentralized institutions to fund rural public goods and services. This form of decentralization includes locally generated resources, transfers from higher levels and resources acquired through loans. According to Parker (1995), *institutional* decentralization refers to well-developed political, moral and legal institutions which possess identities that have been encouraged through political competition and participation of political parties and civil society.

Cohen and Peterson (1995) also contend that decentralization may be categorized into four types namely: *political*, *market*, *spatial* and *administrative* decentralization. *Administrative decentralization* is further divided into three categories namely *deconcentration*, *devolution* and *delegation*. They argue that there are two types of frameworks, namely *administrative design* and *type-function* frameworks. These frameworks are important in assisting governments and aid agencies in transitional and developing countries to design and implement decentralization strategies and reforms.

The *administrative design* framework as categorized by Cohen and Peterson (1995) aims at assisting decision makers and aid agency professionals to strengthen local-level governance, increase transparency and accountability, and improve government's performance. This approach attempts to break the monopoly of central control and introduce innovative ways to allow the local level to produce and deliver public goods and services (Cohen & Peterson, 1995). These authors promote the *type-function* framework (types and forms of decentralization) because it distinguishes between various forms, types and categories of decentralization as indicated above. This framework is based firstly on the emerging trend of finding ways to reinvent the public sector. Secondly, principles are drawn from the theoretical literature on organizations, public choices, and public finance. Thirdly, this framework promotes economic growth, addresses financial incapacity of the state, reduces the spatial concentration of development, and promotes bureaucratic reform.

Since both studies by Samoff (1990), and Lim and Fritzen (2006), present typologies of decentralization, it is helpful to compare their approaches. Unlike Lim and Fritzen (2006), who classify decentralization into four categories, Samoff (1990) classifies it into two categories, namely: *administrative* decentralization and *political* decentralization. Lim and Fritzen (2006) view administrative decentralization as the transfer of policy making, planning and management responsibility from central to lower levels, while Samoff (1990) argues that it is one of service delivery, efficiency, and behavioural incentives and rewards. He further argues that political decentralization refers to effective

participation, empowerment and collective action. Samoff (1990) mentions only the transfer of decision making authority to previously under-represented or marginal groups when he refers to political decentralization, while Lim and Fritzen (2006) state that there is devolution of power to democratically elected local structures.

Lauglo (1995:9) contends that three main values are often invoked in rationales for decentralization, namely: a politically legitimate dispersal of authority, the quality of services rendered, and the efficient use of resources. The forms of decentralization may differ, depending on the values they are primarily concerned with, although primacy in terms of one value tends to include some regard for the other values as well. Nickson (2001) views decentralization as a process that leads to improved productive and allocative efficiency, as well as greater effectiveness and equity.

Bjork (2006) argues that decentralization in Pakistan, for example, was implemented to improve service delivery, devolve power, decentralize administrative authority, and focus on the deconcentration and distribution of resources to district level.

Andrews and De Vries (2007:429) contend that decentralization improves democratic governance by facilitating citizen participation. Furthermore, decentralization permits more efficient delivery of services. Gedikli (2009) argues that participatory planning involves all public and private parties, as well as civic organizations, and other stakeholders who come together to express their views on the problems and potentials of their locality in order to reach consensus. Mintrom (2008) argues that the creation of local level opportunities for participation in decision making is viewed as important in

allowing people to develop their capabilities as democratic citizens. Andrews and De Vries (2007:428) argue that there are many reasons for decentralization, but the primary justification is that a decentralized environment offers optimal conditions for citizen participation.

Samoff (1990) contends that decentralization proposes a distinction between administrative decentralization which is one of service delivery, efficiency, and behavioural incentives and rewards while political decentralization is one of participation, empowerment and collective action. UNESCO (2001) argues that the impetus to decentralize has often been political or financial, yet the supporters of decentralization say it can address problems confronting education systems, especially those related to performance and accountability.

According to Leung (2004), decentralization is a trend in many countries, but such measures are triggered by very different motives and take different forms. Mongolia, China, Cyprus, United States and Great Britain are good examples of such motives and forms. In the South African context, the decentralization debate in the literature has paid little attention to the purpose and rationale for the establishment of districts and regions. While South African literature offers the educational rationale for the importance of districts and regions such as systematic reform, little has been investigated about the implications of such imperatives with respect to the effectiveness of districts and regions in supporting schools and how they relate to schools in terms of quality education.

According to the White Paper on Education and Training (RSA, 1995b:47), the aim of the provision in section 126 of the 1993 Constitution (RSA, 1993) was to empower provincial governments with executive responsibility for education within their jurisdiction (other than universities and universities of technology), subject to the national government's responsibility of protecting essential national interests. According to the Presidential Review Commission (DoE, 2005) the move towards greater decentralization was employed in order to bring government closer to the people. However, the Commission felt that in the rush to devolve powers, insufficient attention was given to the capacity of the provinces to assume these powers.

De Clercq (2001) argues that the status at that time of districts and regional offices in some provinces disclosed the following factors which hindered their effective functioning: severe staff shortages with sufficient competencies; the absence of clear and appropriate delegation from provincial head offices to the regions and districts; limited capacity in terms of skills and knowledge; and the absence of an effective model on which to base the district or region interface with schools. The literature demonstrates that districts and regions face major structural, organizational and resource challenges that are unlikely to be resolved easily.

However there is little analysis about why these challenges persist in the system.

Coombe and Godden (1996:40) contend that:

“it is probably over-ambitious to attempt universalistic justification across time and place, about how late political motives drive decentralization policies because the motive force of political expediency and typical policies' motives will vary greatly among countries depending on local

circumstances. It has to do with motives and considerations of the participants that influenced decision-making.”

The argument put forth by Coombe and Godden (1996) is important to this study because it assists in examining whether such political, administrative, ideological, financial and pedagogical motives played a role in the formation of districts and regions in South Africa. This study is also conscious of the fact that motives vary from country to country depending on local circumstances.

Governance according to Wehmeier, McIntosh, Turnbull and Ashby (2005) refers to the activity of governing a country or controlling a company or an organization; it also refers to the way in which a country is governed, or a company or institution is controlled. To govern therefore means to legally control a country or its people and be responsible for making laws, as well as providing services. Governance in the context of this study will therefore refer to the formulation of laws, managing and regulating of the education system through democratic principles. The ANC (1995) contends that a unitary education system and democratic system of governance that facilitate the participation of stakeholders have been consistent demands of the democratic movement. According to the DoE (1995b) the constitution made provision for governance of educational institutions with regard to the rights, powers, and functions of governing bodies or similar structures of the department.

Wehmeier, McIntosh, Turnbull and Ashby (2005) defined power as the ability to control people or things. It is the ability to get things done by others. It also refers to political

control a country or an area. It means to control and influence other people and their actions. Authority on the other hand refers to the right to command; right to give orders. It refers to power that is given to someone to exercise. Authority is a legitimate form of power based on an official position. It is the power to enforce law and take command, and to expect obedience from those without authority. Sehoole (2005:99) argues that “Weber believed that authority in the new organizational was rational because leaders recognized and obeyed for subscribing to values of reason, logic and efficiency.” Power can exist without authority, for example an armed robber has power but no authority. Authority can exist without power, for example a teacher has authority over his pupils but no real power. In the context of this study power will refer to the control and influence that any structure or person may have in terms of the law. Authority will therefore refer to delegated or legitimate form of power acquired by virtue of a particular position.

2.4. DECENTRALIZATION AND RE-CENTRALIZATION

This section analyses trends in various countries in order to investigate different rationales for decentralization and re-centralization. These issues inform and direct my study. In Norway the decentralization movement for education commenced in the 1960s and became very strong in the late 1970s. It continued during the 1980s and 1990s, but the arguments and the nature of the decentralization movement itself changed over time. The Curriculum Guidelines of 1987 (Karlsen, 1999) reflected the local needs and conditions in Norway at the time, but even though the bottom-up strategy is still the accepted rhetoric, there was a shift in the 1990s towards a more traditional top-down

government strategy. The New Curriculum Guidelines of 1997 are mainly the result of a central initiative to bring back the top-down strategy. During the 1970s and 1980s there was a move towards a less standardized and more locally oriented curriculum to include local knowledge and local culture. However, the New Curriculum of 1997 changed this endeavour by focusing on a National Standardized Curriculum and stressing more academic and skills-oriented education. The above-mentioned case is an example of a reaction to decentralization, something which is referred to as *re-centralization* (Karlsen, 1999:4).

Karlsen (1999:2) argues that there is tension between decentralization efforts and the need for central control. He views decentralization as an important way to manage conflict and to provide what is called compensatory 'legitimization'. That is, the modern state has to compensate for the erosion of legitimacy and decentralization rhetoric is a way to enhance its legitimacy and thereby maintain power. Weiler (1990) concurs that there is tension between decentralization efforts and the need for the state to assert and reassert control. In some instances, as pointed out by Kohl (2003), decentralization has also been manipulated politically to reinforce the power of the central government.

In British Columbia, Canada according to Karlsen (1999) a new funding system was centrally imposed through the School Amendment Act of 1990. This Act instituted a lump sum funding system with more local freedom. This example illustrates contrasting initiating dynamics, where reform through decentralization was initiated from the top. However, decentralization reforms can be perceived as being precisely the opposite of

what they claim, and in reality they can be a strategy for strengthening central power. The decentralization of power to local bodies includes making them responsible for implementing central goals. The British Columbia case presents decentralization dynamic in which initiating is a central task, but implementing and accountability are local duties. Another feature of this case is the decentralization of content and power to set curricula at local level, which legitimizes standardization and central control.

Karlsen's (1999) tension argument is vital for this particular study as it investigates decentralization and centralization moves in South Africa, with special reference to the Mpumalanga Education Department, which has experienced both processes. In investigating these processes, it is important to find out whether such moves were a result of tension between decentralization efforts and the need for control. The tension, argument is vital for study as it investigates what informed the abolition of districts and their amalgamation into regions.

Decentralization and centralization forces may occur at the same time as contradictory phenomena. This is what Karlsen (1999) refers to as decentralization-centralism or *re-centralization*. Khamsi and Stolpe (2004:2) argue that "many comparative researchers have highlighted the international pressure for governments to decentralize the education sector." It is not surprising that several comparative researchers have critically commented on this global trend. They raise serious concerns regarding the transferability of decentralization policies and experience from one cultural context to another. Mangelsdorf (1988) contends that the interest on the part of developing countries may be

spontaneous, but sometimes changes in local governments are the result of national and international politics and events, rather than local initiatives.

Khamsi and Stolpe (2004) state that a lot of speculation has revolved around whether a decentralized education system such as that in the United States of America, can achieve the required level of coherence to implement changes demanded by current reforms.

Scholars studying educational change in other countries argue that in some contexts, clearly defined hierarchies and more centralized structures may be more effective in bringing about successful reform (Khamsi & Stolpe, 2004). According to Lauglo (1995), bureaucratic centralism is prevalent in many developing countries. The legacy of colonial rule reflects the need to control and develop in order to meet the needs of colonial rule itself, and then there is also the need for nation building initiatives associated with independence. Lauglo's study realized that central planning which is practiced by most developing countries is an example of bureaucratic centralism. Lauglo (1995) further argues that bureaucratic centralism is a pattern which emerges when local and regional governments are weak, especially after independence. Mangelsdorf (1988) argues that the degree of decentralization which accompanied decolonization elsewhere in the world is determined by the degree of centralization or decentralization established by the former regime

In Mongolia according to Khamsi and Stolpe (2004:2) for example, the withdrawal of "internationalist assistance from fraternal socialist countries led to a major economic crisis that forced the Mongolian government to seek funding from the international

community composed of free market economies. This reorientation had an impact on their educational policies, which have been borrowed for in 1992.” It is argued by Khamsi and Stolpe (2004) that British and American experts have always favoured the introduction of a decentralized system of educational administration, whereas Soviet and German Democratic Republic experts usually recommended a centralized approach to the countries that they have advised.

The decentralization of governance and finance has been used as a panacea to combat what went wrong during the socialist era: the lack of quality, efficiency and cost effectiveness, and the dependence on external subsidies for funding the costly education sector. What began in 1993 as a presentation of possible solutions by the Mongolian government was used merely as a strategy to appease international donors and was later prescribed as a condition for international loans and grants. The argument about Mongolia prompts this study to be aware of hidden motives – it is essential to investigate whether or not South Africa, like Mongolia, used decentralization measures for the purpose of securing international loans and grants. According to Khamsi and Stolpe (2004) some developing countries such as Mongolia opt for certain programmes pertaining to educational reforms simply in order to appease donor countries.

No real decentralization occurred in Mongolia, irrespective of international pressure that was exerted, because no devolution of decision-making authority from central to provincial, district or institution really occurred. In 2002 the Parliament of Mongolia introduced a new educational law that was known as the re-centralization law. This law

introduced re-centralization measures by abolishing school boards that had decision-making powers (including hiring and firing of principals), and replacing them with school councils with purely administrative functions. As a result, district governors and provincial governors, who are state and party representatives, were put back in charge of regulating school matters (Khamsi & Stolpe, 2004:8).

Several issues are evident from the above account. Firstly the Mongolian Government lacked the political will to implement the decentralization of education and finance portfolios. Secondly, there was a hidden agenda in their educational decentralization policies which were utilized as bait to secure international grants and loans. These policies remained on paper only and were never implemented. Thirdly, the stakeholders in education were not involved in educational reforms. Public and political support is crucial for changing the legal foundation of education administration.

The fourth issue that emerges from the case of Mongolia is that capacity building is critical for the success of decentralization policies in order to equip officials with the necessary skills pertaining to their new roles and responsibilities. Fifthly, the historical background and context of a country must be taken into account to ensure the success of decentralization. The reluctance of the Mongolian Government to decentralize governance and finance was based on their conception of democratic centralism, a core principle of socialist governance. This approach is based on the Marxist- Leninist ideology that the state as a representative of the proletariat (working class), needs to enforce democratic centralism, which first ensures that all groups participate in

governance (democracy), and then carries out the decisions effectively and efficiently (centralism) (Khamisi & Stolpe, 2004:16). To summarize, decentralization should not be touted with a hidden agenda. Furthermore, elements crucial to its effectiveness include the political will of the bureaucrats, the involvement of stakeholders, capacity building for officials on the ground, and consideration of the historical and political context of a country.

Generally speaking, education systems in the East, where the collective takes precedence over the individual, have traditionally taken a centralized approach. Central governments develop, design and execute policies and standards for school finance, curricula, text books, assessment and teacher preparation. But as the East Asian countries become more and more complex, their governments are finding that a centralized approach fails to meet the needs of the increasingly diverse population. The advance of communication technology and the condensation of the global village have provided decision makers with a repertoire of ideas which they can refer to in solving these emerging problems. Educational decentralization is one such idea (Leung 2004:2). It is clear that various ideological approaches, as explained above, have an influence on choosing either centralization or decentralization. These approaches form another dimension in viewing decentralization in South Africa, namely whether or not it had something to do with the argument of the collective versus the individual.

In China, a 1985 government document declared that the power for the administration of elementary education belonged to the local authorities. Due to financial constraints, the

Chinese government relaxed their monopoly on running schools and from 1994 allowed non-state sectors to do so, hence the emergence of Minban schools (administered by the people) and Guoyou schools (owned by the state but run by private enterprises). One cannot decentralize the operation of schools without a certain amount of decentralization of the curriculum; hence, another area of decentralization in China is that of the curriculum and textbooks. Prior to 1986, the whole country used a uniform set of textbooks published by the Peoples Education Press, written according to the standardized curriculum for all. This changed in 1986 with the introduction of different groups of educators and publishers, which were commissioned to publish different textbooks to cater for the various needs of students from different parts of the country. The curriculum however remained uniform, and so a handful of provinces were selected as pilot areas for the development of their own curricula and syllabi, e.g. Shanghai Province. This case shows that China chose to decentralize due to financial constraints. It is essential to find out whether South Africa's impetus to decentralize was borne out of a single factor or a combination of factors, including financial constraints.

It is important to note that among these moves towards decentralization, there were at times moves in the opposite direction. For example, a Shanghai Municipal Commission of Education was formed in 1995 according to Leung (2004) to take charge of all aspects of education in Shanghai. The Municipal Commission is directly under the National Ministry of Education and the Municipal Government, and all educational matters, which were formerly under the control of other departments of the Municipal Government, were transferred to the Commission. This can be interpreted as a reaction to decentralization,

which is referred to as *re-centralization* (Leung, 2004:4). The argument put forth in the case of Shanghai is that re-centralization was an attempt to balance the loss of control from the center to the periphery. This is another vital issue for this study which investigates the move from districts to regions – to understand whether re-centralization was introduced as an attempt to balance the loss of control, or due to financial constraints, or curriculum standardization, as in the case of Mongolia.

The impetus for decentralization in China was the need to share the country's financing of education and not the devolution of authority to lower levels of the hierarchy. In Hong Kong, decentralization refers mainly to the transfer of authority and decision making from the government to schools. Hong Kong's education system has been a mixture of centralization and decentralization. It is centralized in terms of the curriculum and the examination structure, but decentralized in terms of operation of schools, because most schools are run by religious or other non-governmental organizations known as School Sponsoring Bodies (SSBs). In October 1997 however, there have been major changes in the operation of schools and School Based Management (SBM) is now the norm. This move is perceived as a way of regaining control from the School Sponsoring Bodies and is an example of re-centralization (Leung, 2004). The arguments put forth above, in the cases of Shanghai and Hong Kong, are vital for my study; they shed light on a number of issues that led to decentralization, as well as motives for re-centralization.

In Cyprus, according to Panayides (2003:5), educational decentralization is limited to minor matters such as infrastructure of school buildings, determining the educational

districts for each school, and providing the furniture and fittings required for schools to function. The responsibility for providing these services has been transferred to the School Boards who are practically the owners of the schools. A school board is established in each municipality to take care of schools under its jurisdiction. In rural areas there are school boards responsible for schools under their area.

It is difficult to implement educational decentralization in Cyprus because the country is too small. It is an island, with an area of only 5,910 sq.km and a population of 700 000 residents. This case shows that the size of a country is also important for decentralization to succeed, as well as dictating the form it should take; for example the demarcation of districts in a small province in South Africa, like Gauteng Province, may not be comparable with Mpumalanga's larger geographical area. This dimension is vital for my study because it reveals another factor which plays a role in decentralization decisions.

Gershberg and Jacobs (1998:5) contend that

“the transfer of authority to lower levels is seen as an instrument for improving service provision, by making the people who supply the service more directly accountable for their performance. However, by disaggregating the different aspects of accountability, in many respects the expected improvement requires both greater autonomies for the local service provider, and also strengthened performance of some central function.”

They refer to this strengthening of central functions as *re-centralization*. They argue further that many social reforms aim to give the sub-units greater discretion over how to use their budget; however a strong central commitment to mobilize financing and help distribute information about local performance is likely to significantly enhance the extent and sustainability of local service improvement. The same authors (Gershberg &

Jacobs, 1998:6) state that there are many arguments in favour of decentralization; “however when examined in more detail, it becomes apparent that achieving greater efficiency and equity often requires both decentralization and a strengthening of central functions, or re-centralization.”

It has already been stated by Gershberg and Jacobs (1998) above that capacity building is critical for sub-units to execute their duties and responsibilities effectively; however if the local level administrative capacity is weak, then the central government must either take steps to improve it, or continue to use its expertise to provide services directly. They argue that national governments have the greatest capacity for inter-regional distributive policies, re-allocating resources from wealthier jurisdictions to poorer ones. In addition, national governments may be less vulnerable to be captured by local elites and interest groups.

The proponents of re-centralization further argue that many important taxes, such as consumption and income taxes, can be handled more efficiently and equitably by the national government. Sub-national governments can run up deficits that in extreme cases can threaten macro stability. National governments must account for externalities, spillovers, or economies of scale associated with equity or redistribution concerns.

Gershberg and Jacobs (1998:8) argue that “in practice, the reform environment contains constantly evolving elements of decentralization and re-centralization.” Karlsen (1999:5) argues that “the model of decentralization and centralization as waves following and replacing one another is far from reality. The cases referred to from Norway and British

Colombia indicate that the process usually goes in two directions at the same time”.

In the United States and Great Britain lessons are emerging from the pattern of educational reform of these two most decentralized educational systems. These two countries according to McGinn and Cummings (1997) are undergoing simultaneous thrusts towards further decentralization at the micro level, and centralization at the macro level. On the one hand, they increased the local management of schools, partly as a response to the choice movement, which in itself is a product of the larger role being given to market forces in the public sector. At the micro level, however, there is tremendous concern on both sides of the ocean for national standards assessment and implementing greater national control over the quality of educational provision.

“The differentiation in standards of educational provision in the United States and in Great Britain is great, largely due to the decentralized system of educational finance, but also in the latter case, the great diversity of school types, which rely on public as well as private finance” (Cummings & McGinn, 1997:194). These cases attest to the fact that centralization and decentralization are forces that follow one another, and decentralization alone is not a panacea for all education problems. For this study it is vital to determine whether the reorganization of districts into regions in Mpumalanga can be understood in the light of the differentiation in standards argument experienced by countries such as Britain and the United States of America.

The above review of the literature has uncovered the following facts about the concepts

of decentralization and re-centralization. These facts are critical for my study because they provide a lens for viewing decentralization from a broad perspective.

- Decentralization moves are sometimes adopted due to financial constraints, or to resolve financing problems, e.g. China, Mongolia, and Hong Kong.
- Regaining central control, or re-centralization, sometimes becomes necessary e.g. Norway, Mongolia, China.
- Curriculum standardization or control over the quality and provision of education is another driving factor, e.g. Great Britain and the USA.
- The size of a country may be crucial for determining decentralization policies, e.g. in Cyprus it was difficult to implement decentralization due to its small size.
- Capacity building of the new responsible officials is crucial for the success of decentralization efforts.
- Greater efficiency and equity is often achieved through both decentralization and centralization – some authors refer to this phenomenon as waves following one another.
- Decentralization moves always start from the top – local bodies usually implement the central goals or strengthen the central function.
- Most developing countries decentralize education due to international pressure, e.g. Mongolia.
- A country's particular context, historical background, and contemporary problems have an impact on the success of decentralization.
- For decentralization to succeed there should be political will.
- Decentralization is sometimes used as a hidden agenda for other imperatives.

- Involvement of all stakeholders is critical for the success of decentralization.
- Proponents of decentralization attribute improved service delivery to this approach.
- Sub-national governments can run up deficits that can threaten macro stability.

Therefore, national governments must account for externalities, spillovers or economies of scales associated with equity or redistribution concerns.

2.5. CHALLENGES OF DECENTRALIZATION

USAID (2005) argues that the following issues usually pose challenges for decentralization efforts. Firstly, the design as specified in legislation and decrees may create uncertainty as to which level of governance or which decision maker is responsible for what. Secondly, the capacities of school boards to govern schools, or school directors to manage schools, or teachers and others who work collectively to reform the school, are often weak and need development. It is therefore not surprising that Ghana, for example, resorted to posting highly qualified personnel to local levels in order to address this concern. Thirdly, system support to the newly decentralized authorities may not exist. Sub-national governments, school boards, and parents may have very little information about the school's academic and financial performance relative to other jurisdictions or schools. Finally, decentralization is often not accompanied by increased discretionary funding required for schools to exercise their new responsibility for self-improvement (USAID, 2005).

The challenges raised above are vital to consider in this study on decentralization,

because they highlight certain factors which may or may not have contributed to the reorganization of educational structures in Mpumalanga. To summarize, these challenges include the design of the structure, capacity of the local officials, support from higher authorities, and the capacity required to exercise new responsibilities.

2.6. DECENTRALIZATION EFFORTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

According to the Policy Framework for Education and Training (ANC, 1995), the national education and training system was supposed to have four levels of governance, namely: national, provincial, local, and institutional. The policy framework argued that the responsibility for providing education would be shared between central government and the provinces in order to ensure that policy formulation and the provision of education is fair, efficient and directed towards the promotion of human development in all its aspects. However, at that stage, the powers and roles of local governance and management structures in relation to districts were still to be clarified through further consultation. This fact is relevant to my study in order to shed light on the role which districts were supposed to play.

Karlsson, Pampallis and Sithole (1996) argue that in spite of what is stated in schedule 6 and Section 126 of the 1993 Interim Constitution (RSA, 1993) in terms of national and provincial legislative competencies, the centralization/decentralization debate remains a contentious issue. Any weakness in the system, be it at central, provincial, regional/district/circuit and school levels, is likely to have a bearing on the whole system.

This means that a call for either decentralization or centralization creates an unnecessary dichotomy, as if there were some ‘Chinese wall’ between them. There is no global trend towards decentralization or centralization alone in education systems, which usually display features of both decentralization and centralization simultaneously. This argument is vital in order to understand the balance between decentralization and centralization forces.

According to Malherbe (2005:1):

“the ANC firmly believed that political power should be centralized as far as possible in order for the government to be able to act quickly and decisively and to prevent the entrenchment of previous or the possibility of delaying tactics by those still clinging to the apartheid ideology.”

It should be stated however that this initial opinion was compromised during the negotiations prior to the new dispensation (ANC, 1995). The process of clarifying the role and powers of districts did not occur as indicated by the establishment of the District Development Project (DDP) in 1998, whose mandate was to address this issue. In 1998/9, the DDP received a lump sum of R100m to showcase what post-apartheid education management should be like, with special focus on communication, accountability, and command, from the level of schools through various actors at district and regional levels, all the way up to the provinces.

Chisholm, Motala and Vally (2003) argue that there is a need to develop capacity at district level in order to enhance productivity and performance. Policy Reserve Fund (PRF) grants were awarded on condition that districts improve their planning, service

delivery, school support performance and accountability. Even though there was no clear policy on districts, the Department of Education was serious about developing the capacity of districts, as demonstrated by the availability of the lump sum from the PRF earmarked for district development (Chisholm et al., 2003: 678). This PRF initiative is important for this study, especially to assess how districts performed after being given such an amount to develop capacity, and whether or not they fulfilled their mandate to improve schools. If they did not achieve these goals, what were the hindrances?

The decentralized system of South African education governance devolves powers and responsibilities to provinces and schools. Provinces delegated some of their authority to districts for the purpose of managerial efficiency, accountability, and educational effectiveness. Prior to the new dispensation, district administrative units or post offices passed down regional or provincial mandates to schools, rather than providing professional support. The personnel of the 'apartheid district' were accountable not to the district or area manager, but to the regional/provincial offices. Currently districts are supposed to play a policy implementation role, supporting instructional improvement and creating sites of learning (Chisholm et al., 2003). It is vital for this study to determine what role districts were supposed to play in school improvement.

Chisholm, Motala and Vally (2003) contend that functions were devolved from the national department without the necessary transfer of funds. Provinces experienced problems in prioritizing their budgets to accommodate the additional functions. All provincial education departments inherited divergent systems, procedures and practices.

They faced great challenges in trying to establish a common acceptable administrative system. In June 1998/9 the National Conference on District Development was held in Mpumalanga to review and debate what was needed to enhance district capacity and how to make districts more effective in their professional school support and service delivery. This conference resolved that each province should hold a District Development Conference with a view to improving district delivery to schools. The nine provincial district conferences were held between June 1999 and January 2000, at which the following problems were identified:

- Misalignment of government structures;
- Districts' limited decision-making powers;
- Lack of a legal framework and sufficient delegated authority to support schools' work;
- Shortage of human, financial and material resources;
- Lack of head office support in driving implementation reforms;
- Lack of policy realism and continuity;
- Lack of coordination of directives to districts.

A key observation of stakeholders was that district officials related to them and used bureaucratic procedures, which were similar to those of the former apartheid era. They argued that they experienced similar administrative inefficiencies, bureaucratic delays, and lack of appropriate support. District officials such as deputy education specialists and subject advisers were not always professionally supportive or informed about policy

implementation and school support work. It was alleged that they tended to pass down head office directives, rather than working professionally with schools to motivate educators and negotiate ways of adapting reforms to the schools' context.

It is imperative for this study to determine how districts and regions survived in spite of the problems raised above, and to investigate which developments took place in response to the problems listed above. It is evident that the devolution of functions without the necessary transfer of funds and lack of support created challenges for districts. The challenges mentioned above are relevant for my study, in terms of investigating whether they might have contributed to the decision of Mpumalanga to resort to a regional structure (Chisholm et al., 2003).

The conferences revealed that there were deeper structural and politically sensitive reasons for the poor performance of districts; therefore there was a need to rethink the locus of governance power and the way each level exercised its power. Secondly, there was a need to create an interdependent governance system that would lead to an improvement in teaching and learning. Lastly, it was imperative to improve policy implementation, school support, and service delivery in order to improve teaching and learning.

The Gauteng Department of Education reorganized its system in 1998 according to Fleisch (2002) due to internal and external pressures. The external pressures stemmed from the state budget squeeze and the national government's commitment to promote

cost efficiency and accountability. Other pressures came from civil society wanting a more responsive bureaucracy to provide better quality support and service delivery. The internal pressures included, among other things, focusing solely on taking over old, fragmented state structures, and lessening the power of the old bureaucrats through cultural and structural changes. Organizational structures were put in place without the formulation of long-term departmental strategies and priorities. These circumstances are important for my study because they shed light on some of the pressures which were faced by provincial departments of education in South Africa and the rationale for restructuring such systems.

De Clercq (2002:86) argues that “the relationship between the South African provincial governments and districts is that of administrative delegation.” She goes on to remind us that decentralization and centralization are social constructs whose meaning and impact depend on their context, the forces behind them and their relationship, as well as implementation strategies. According to De Clercq (2002), the main struggle was to transform the racist, undemocratic and inefficient apartheid state systems. The populist demands were for democratization of the state, greater participation of civil society in decision making, and for an interventionist, accountable state, committed to democracy and equity.

Divergent views were articulated by international groups. The white opposition wanted to limit the power in the hands of the state and pressed for a more lenient, less regulatory, cost efficient state with devolved powers to provinces and local institutions. It has already

been stated that there was a shift in the view held by the ANC prior to 1994. The ANC's demands were for both some decentralization and centralization to pursue the objectives of democracy and equity. During the negotiation process (CODESA), a compromise was reached in terms of a three-tier system. De Clercq (2001:44) claims that provincial implementers faced serious challenges. "There were complex educational reforms to implement, a fragile government system, a lack of financial resources, and a lack of human resources and capacity, all of which constrained effective policy implementation, equality, service delivery and school improvement. All these perspectives provide a lens for understanding decentralization measures in South Africa."

Jansen and Taylor (2003:8) contend that "there is consensus among policy analysts that there has been a widely observed policy–practice gap in South Africa's education system since 1995." They claim that abundant evidence is available to support this argument. However they concede that the reasons for this underperformance of education policy are widely contested. The dominant view holds that the policy gap should be attributed to the weak capacity within the new state, the lack of material resources for learning, the restricting role of the national examination, the weak academic and professional knowledge base of practicing educators, and the underdeveloped infrastructure for modern schooling, especially in rural areas. The question of a policy gap is important to this study which investigates the problems which hindered the effective performance of districts.

A contrasting but minority view cites the politics of transition, or what Hans Weiler

quoted by Jansen and Taylor (2003:9) calls the “political costs of reforms”, that is, the conscious decision to retard progress on radical reforms, given the political resistance and contestations that are associated with reforms. Irrespective of numerous challenges confronting the South African education system, Jansen and Taylor (2003:9) cite the following as achievements of the new dispensation:

- The creation of a single national education system out of 19 racially, ethnically and regionally divided education systems, and the reorganization into nine provincial departments.
- The creation of non-discriminatory school environments into which access is gained on the basis of criteria other than race or religion, even though there are still isolated incidents of racial confrontations at a few institutions such as (according to Jansen and Taylor, 2003:9) Vryburg, Bryanston, Potgietersrus and Ruyterwacht.
- The generation of a formidable architecture of policies and laws to govern education.
- The small but important increase in end of school or matriculation pass rates, especially from 1999 onwards.
- The delivery of certain basic services has clearly improved and remains at high levels. One of the closely monitored areas is the delivery of learner support materials.
- The creation of new institutional typologies is one of the most recent achievements. This includes the creation of 50 Further Education and Training (FETs) out of 150, the incorporation of colleges of education into universities, and the merging of technikons or universities of technologies and universities into various combinations, even though these mergers were sometimes contested through both politics and the courts.

- Finally South Africa has been able to achieve among the highest enrollment rates in African education. More than 12 million learners attend school, with gross enrollments rates averaging 100 percent for primary schooling, and 70 percent for secondary schools. The participation rate of girls is recorded as one of the highest in Africa.

The arguments put forward by the authors above highlight issues which are all relevant to this study. These issues include the development of districts, structural and political reasons for districts' poor performance, the devolution of functions without the transfer of funds, the balance between decentralization and centralization, the policy gap, decentralization perspectives, and the four levels government which were initially proposed by the ANC, as well as the achievements of decentralization. In the South African context, very little research has been undertaken about the way in which decentralization actually manifests itself at the district and regional level of the education system. This study contributes towards an understanding of decentralization in the South African context in relation to the arguments put forth above, pertaining to the way forward for districts after the provincial conferences.

The comparison of international and local literature on decentralization revealed similarities in countries such as China, Cyprus and Mongolia. These countries are categorized as developing countries just like South Africa. Therefore the challenges they experienced would be normally be similar. For example in Mongolia there was no political will to decentralize education. International pressure play a role in that country's

decentralization and no real decentralization took place; it was only done to appease international donors. In China decentralization was seen as a way of resolving the financing of education. Decentralization was opted as a way of improving service delivery. The international literature has also shown that when national interests are high on the agenda it is unlikely for devolution of power to occur. Decentralization in South was not without challenges of lack capacity, size of the districts, international pressure, the need to improve service delivery, financial challenges and the national interests. Unlike Mongolia political will was prevailing and decentralization efforts were not meant to appease donors. Lastly, the historical, political context of a country and contemporary challenges are determining factors.

2.7. ORGANIZATIONAL SUBDIVISIONS

The establishment of organizational subdivisions is a matter of operational choice for provincial departments of education; this is in line with the Public Service Act (RSA, 1994) chapter 2-section 3(b). The White Paper on Education and Training (RSA, 1995) chapter 9 section 28, states that the organizational structures of education will be totally revised and that “at every level beyond the school, whether circuits, districts or areas, new structures will be needed, including new head offices (DoE, 1995:51)

Smit and Cronje (1997) define the systems approach to management as viewing an organization as a group of interrelated parts with a single purpose. The action of one part influences the other parts and managers therefore cannot deal separately with individual

parts. Managers should view an organization as a whole and anticipate the effect of their decisions on the other parts of the organization. From a systems point of view, it is imperative for management to maintain a balance between various parts of an organization and its environment.

Smit and Cronje (1997) argue that the systems approach was developed in the 1950s by Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1901-1971), who was a biologist. He noted certain characteristics common to all sciences, namely, the study of a whole or an organism; the tendency of a system to strive for a steady state of equilibrium; and lastly that an organism is affected by and affects its environment and can thus be seen as an open system. The systems argument provides a framework for viewing districts and regions as parts of the whole education system (Smit & Cronje, 1997:48). According to the National Education Policy Framework (NEPI, 1992), the systems approach views the role of governance as being accountable, equitable, and efficient control in terms of the generation, distribution and utilization of resources, which includes physical, human and financial resources.

2.8. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws on Samoff's (1990) typologies of decentralization in order to conceptualize districts and regions with a view to exploring whether they were established as a result of *administrative decentralization* or *political decentralization*, whether there is a single dominant model that characterizes districts and regions, or

whether there is a combination of both types of decentralization. Lastly this study also explores whether districts and regions can be conceptualized outside the two models proposed by Samoff (1990).

They refer to this strengthening of central functions as *re-centralization*. Karlsen (1999:2) argues that “there is a tension between decentralization efforts and the need for central control.” He views decentralization as a way to manage conflict and to give what is known as compensatory legitimization. This argument is providing a basis for looking at the shift from districts to regions whether it was done with an attempt to strengthen the central function or to ease the tension between districts and the provincial Education offices. De Clercq (2002:86) argues that “the relationship between the South African provincial government and districts is that of administrative delegation.” Lim and Fritzen (2006) argue that decentralization has the potential of improving quality, increasing innovations, increasing effectiveness and efficiency, redistributing political power and solving the problem of financing education.

The arguments put forth in this chapter by various authors are critical for this study which investigates how the shifts in structures impacted on service delivery. The type of relationship that exists between the provincial education offices and the sub-units is important for this study as it attempts to conceptualize the performance of districts and regions in the South African context. It is clear that sometimes decentralization initiatives are aimed at enhancing efficiency, rather than merely devolving power and authority to lower levels of the hierarchy. Sometimes educational decentralization is politically

triggered, as it was in the case of Taiwan in 1987. For this reason, and in order to benefit from experiences elsewhere, one needs to understand reform measures in terms of the contemporary problems, political, and cultural contexts in which they take place (Leung, 2004). According to Common (1998), it is not possible for all countries to adopt global standards for public management. Furthermore there is a danger that pressures for globalization may produce unintended consequences if applied uniformly across diverse political or administrative cultures.

In conclusion, international literature on decentralization and centralization provides a lens for viewing the decentralization and re-centralization moves that are occurring in South Africa, a country that is in transition. It has already been stated that decentralization and centralization are waves that follow one another. Authors such as Gershberg and Jacobs (1998) argue that both concepts are imperative in order to realize efficient and effective educational provision. It is also evident that the historical, contemporary educational problems and the cultural context of a country need to be taken into account when decentralization measures are implemented.

Leung (2004) argues that for westerners, ideological ideals such as democracy are pursued for their own sake, but for East Asians, they are perceived as a means to serve the purpose of efficiency rather than an end in themselves. So the notion of decentralization is considered as something with intrinsic value, but it is utilized in various East Asian countries as a means of achieving their own agendas. It is also evident that re-centralization, or the strengthening of the central powers as other scholars call it, is common practice in many countries of the world, to mention just a few: Norway,

Canada, China, the United States of America and Great Britain.

This literature review has provided a background as to what drivers prompt countries to decentralize education. UNESCO (2001) argues that political and administrative reasons prompt decentralization. The national Department of Education in South Africa argues that the move towards decentralization was employed in order to bring government closer to the people (DoE, 2001). Countries in the East and West view the process of decentralization and centralization differently, based on their own ideologies. What is prevalent from the above discussion is that decentralization is adopted by many countries for administrative, political, ideological and financial reasons. It is also clear that structures such as districts and regions play a significant role in decentralization, but it should be mentioned that the terminology differs from country to country. For example, in Britain local bodies are known as Local Education Authority (LEAs) and in China self-governing schools are called Minban and Guoyou schools. Lastly, decentralization is not a panacea to all educational problems.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The focus of this chapter is on the research design utilized in this study. Mouton (2004) defines the research design as a blueprint or a plan that outlines how the research will be conducted. It entails the research approach, research methodology, data collection methods, and data analysis. It explains how documents were collected and analyzed and what findings emerged. My personal journal, the validation strategy, limitations of the study and lastly the ethical considerations are also part of this chapter.

3.2. RESEARCH APPROACH

The epistemological position which I deemed fit for my study is the interpretative research paradigm. This approach argues that individuals interacting with their social worlds construct their own reality. The interpretative framework views human activity and institutions such as schools, as 'social constructs'. Knowledge is constructed not only by observable phenomena, but also by descriptions of people's intentions, beliefs, values and reasons, meaning making and self understanding (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit 2004:20).

According to Wellman, Kruger and Mitchell (2007), qualitative research aims at establishing the socially constructed nature of reality, to emphasize the relationship

between the researcher and the object of the study, as well as to stress the value-laden nature of the inquiry. Hence, interpretative research is interested in understanding the meaning people have assigned to the world and their experiences in the world. The basic assumption of the interpretivist is that most of our knowledge is acquired through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, documents and other artifacts. McMillan and Schumacher (2001:395) argue that the researcher interprets phenomena according to the meanings people assign to them; this includes individual and social actions, beliefs, thoughts, as well as perceptions.

The interpretative approach allowed the study to interpret events in the Ehlanzeni region in Mpumalanga according to the meanings assigned to them, including the social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions of everyone involved. All the processes which took place during the era of districts and circuits, as well as during the restructuring into regions, were conceptualized through socially constructed reality.

3.3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research project is a case study of the education districts and regions that fall under the Mpumalanga Department of Education in South Africa. The specific case is the Ehlanzeni Regional Office of the Department of Education, which comprises 422 public and independent schools, 15 circuits, and 9 232 educators. Qualitative research methodology was used for data gathering and analysis by utilizing the following research strategies: literature review, interviews, case studies, and primary and secondary data

relating to the establishment of districts and circuits.

The qualitative research approach was utilized for this study because the goal was to investigate the rationale behind shifts made in the governance and administrative approaches in Mpumalanga provincial education departments, which could best be understood by using the qualitative approach. The research questions posed in this study were explored through a single, qualitative study that illuminated how the provincial department of education had understood the roles and responsibilities of districts and regions in terms of service delivery.

According to Borg and Gall (1989:402), a case study involves an investigator who makes a detailed examination of a single subject or group or phenomenon. Most case studies are based on the premise that a case can be located that is typical of other cases, that is, a case is viewed as an example of a class of events or a group of individuals. This case study provides an understanding of districts in Mpumalanga and the rationale behind the shift to regions and the different roles that regions were supposed to play. The case study approach was chosen because it provides a detailed examination of a subject or phenomenon which may be typical of other cases. It was also used to identify common and uncommon features in education governance structures such as districts and regions in South Africa.

McMillan and Schumacher (2001:193) argue that it is hazardous to draw any general conclusions from a single case study. However this problem can be greatly reduced by

investigating multiple case studies involving several replications of the single case study. This means that a study can only be generalized to another setting which is similar to the one used in the experiment; however different variables may limit this. Cohen and Manion (1995:447) contend that the researcher may generalize, but it is much more likely that any generalization will be done by interested individuals or practitioners who are in a similar situation to the one investigated by the researcher. It is the practitioner, rather than the researcher, who judges the applicability of the researcher's findings and conclusions to other settings.

I utilized a purposeful sampling strategy to identify the province and region for the case study. McMillan and Schumacher (2001:401) contend "that purposeful sampling is chosen to increase the utility of information obtained from small samples. It requires that information be obtained about variations among sub-units before the sample is chosen. The researcher then searches for information-rich key informants, groups, places, or events to study." In other words, the participants are chosen because they are likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomena the researcher is investigating. Most of the respondents were part of the district and are now part of the region, which made them knowledgeable and therefore relevant to this study. They provided me with reliable knowledge which I was able to confirm as I interviewed others throughout my study.

The choice of the Ehlanzeni region was guided by the following selection criteria:

- The willingness of officials to participate;
- Ease of access to the region in terms of its geographic location, that had

minimal financial and time implications;

- Further information was available from former Mpumalanga government officials who were part of the debates which preceded the formation of districts and regions.

3.4. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The data collection methods used for this study were face to face, in-depth, unstructured interviews with former and present government officials of the Mpumalanga Department of Education, as well as anyone who had participated in the negotiations process or task teams prior to the formation of districts and regions. Individual interviews were preferred for this study in order to understand the participants' conceptualization of districts and regions, including the roles which districts and regions were supposed to play.

Interviews, documents analysis and the literature review were used to collect data.

According to Denscombe (2004), interviews have an advantage of providing in-depth and detailed data, the researcher acquires valuable insight, informants have an opportunity to expand their opinion and they are encouraged to identify what they regard as crucial factors.

The interviews were conducted with the following key officials of the Department of Education in Mpumalanga who were part of the formation of districts as well as their

restructuring:

- The Chief Education Specialist in the region responsible for circuit coordination;
- The Chief Education Specialist in the region responsible for General, and Further Education and Training;
- The Deputy Chief Education Specialist responsible for the Intermediate and Senior phase;
- The Former Chief Education Specialist and Acting Regional Director of the new and fourth region in Mpumalanga;
- The Provincial Director responsible for Strategic Planning and Project Coordination;
- The Provincial Director responsible for Human Resource Management;
- The Provincial Director responsible for Resource Planning;
- The Chief Education Specialist responsible for Quality Management and Support in the province;
- The Chief Director of the Mpumalanga Department of Education;
- The former Member of the Executive Council (MEC) of Education in Mpumalanga during the period 1999 till 2004;
- The current Member of the Executive Council (MEC) of Education in Mpumalanga from 2004 to date;
- The former member of the Lowveld District and the Escarpment from 1995 till 2000 and Chairperson of the Representative Council;
- Three Circuit Managers from the Malelane Sub-region;
- Ten principals and educators from the former 'Model C' schools and disadvantaged schools in the region, who were employed before and during the former districts, in

order to gather their views on the reasons for the shift from districts to regions and the impact on service delivery.

The focus of these interviews was to gain an insight into how the participants conceptualize the establishment of districts and circuits, as well as their views on the formation of the current regions. The questions used in the interviews were informed by data that emerged from the literature review and document analysis.

The literature review, according to Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2007), helps to identify inconsistencies or gaps in the body of knowledge that may justify a research study. It helps in identifying where the proposed research fits in. Any study should relate to the existing body of knowledge and achieve its own importance by contributing to the field. It may even persuade other researchers to pursue further research on the particular topic. The literature review provided this study with important facts and background information about decentralization and re-centralization efforts across the globe. It identified weaknesses and problems in previous studies enabled this study to consolidate various typologies and opinions. It offered the researcher ideas as to how to approach this study. Findings and conclusions of past studies were related to this study. Lastly, the process of going through the literature inspired me to pursue this study and contribute my findings to the field.

3.5. DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Primary (government sources and official documents) and secondary sources (unofficial reports and publications) were analyzed, such as Mpumalanga Department of Education reports, policy texts, the Department's organogram, reports and policy documents related to districts and regions, and departmental newsletters. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act No. 200 of 1993 (RSA, 1993), the Mpumalanga School Education Act No.8 of 1995 (RSA, 1995), the White Paper on Reconstruction and Development Notice no. 1954 of 1994 (RSA, 1994), and many other relevant documents were analyzed in an attempt to add any information that was found to be relevant to my study. Mouton (2004) argues that documentary sources are compared with data already gathered, and then added as new information to the present study where they can be of use.

3.5.1. EXAMINATION OF PRIMARY SOURCES

The analysis of the primary sources exposed that districts and circuits were merely administrative units with no powers, policy framework or resources. The DoE (1997b) report showed that there was an urgent need to address the dilemmas of decentralization in the Mpumalanga Education Department. This report referred to the lack of powers and 'brain drain' from the district offices due to the secondment of officials to head office, thus leaving the districts without capacity. This situation created conflict between district managers and the head office. It was necessary to finalize the organogram, which had been changed several times and was not based on organizational needs and strategic priorities.

There was a need to address the bureaucratic structures which were not cost effective.

The Mpumalanga Education Department had three sub-offices, ten district offices, fifty-eight circuit offices, four Middelburg offices (Oaks, Galleries, Magistrates, and Finance), with finance further divided between Middelburg and Nelspruit offices. The then Head of Department had an office in each of the two towns. Another feature of the structure was the uneven distribution of resources. The department was overstaffed and over-resourced in several areas of the bureaucracy, while understaffed and under-resourced in several other areas. (DoE, 1997b)

The document analysis revealed the following additional challenges. High monthly rental fees were being paid for renting the many offices. The department lacked a rational, long-term staff deployment and employment policy for key professional, administrative and management positions. The communication system across the different levels of the education bureaucracy was dysfunctional. This manifested itself in breakdowns in communication, such as long delays in response to correspondence, no acknowledgement of correspondence received, frequent non-response to correspondence, inaccessibility of departmental offices by means of a telephone, and lack of telephone and facsimile services in some rural schools. The department had poorly defined roles and responsibilities for personnel in key positions throughout the system of administration. (DoE, 1997b)

The lack of support to schools was evident, with no help forthcoming, even after having reported problems, as explained above. There was no strategic planning; hence responses

were primarily to districts, circuits and schools in crisis situations. There was no synchronicity between national, provincial and district level policies, plans and programmes. The department lacked coordination across the different directorates and sub-directorates which resulted in duplication of effort, confusion and wastage, particularly at the point of service delivery. There was a serious lack of collaborative policy planning. The directors had no direct access to the Head of Department, and there was a lack of performance indicators and adequate infrastructure. (DoE, 1997b)

3.5.2. EXAMINATION OF SECONDARY SOURCES

Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005) argue that secondary sources include comments, explanations, books, journals. Publications such as books and journals are aimed at a wider audience and are easier to locate than primary sources. According to Mouton (2001) secondary sources refers to written sources (including the internet) which discuss, comment, debate and interpret primary sources of information. These include books, articles, chapter or internet article that a researcher consults to get an opinion about the topic that is investigated. Lastly, the examination of the secondary sources indicated that the restructuring or shift from districts to regions was implemented in order to address the challenges pertaining to the lack of power, resources and the financial muscle. The aim was to maximize responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency in terms of service delivery by the Mpumalanga Department of Education.

3.6. PERSONAL JOURNAL

A personal journal was utilized as a tool to encourage reflection in my study. My experiences, reflections and thoughts about districts and regions were recorded in the journal. This helped me to improve the questions which I posed in the search of information. All the responses which I received when interviewing participants were recorded in this journal, and they were then integrated with the tape transcripts to refine participants' responses to the research questions. Some participants even gave me the names of other respondents which were also recorded in the journal for further interviews.

3.7. DATA ANALYSIS

As a qualitative case study, three key steps were followed in data analysis, namely, the development of thematic constructs, the indexing of thematic data, and piecing together the whole picture. Qualitative data analysis is primarily an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns or relations among categories. Most categories and patterns emerge from the data, rather than being imposed on the data prior to data collection (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001)

In this study the first stage in analyzing the data was to construct categories, themes and concepts which emerged from the different information sources, namely the interviews and the document analysis. This included pre-coded categories and prior issues derived from the theoretical framework, and codes that emerged from the interviews. The second

stage of data analysis was indexing the interview transcripts in accordance with an explanatory text-based directory of index headings, in order to determine the reasons for the abolition of districts. Finally the perceptions, accounts and experiences of all the participants or interviewees were compared and contrasted.

Wilkinson (2003:78) contends “that data comes in many shapes and forms. The role of analysis is to bring data together in a meaningful way and enable us to make sense of it. Before analyzing data it must be coded in some way.” This study brought together data from the interviews and documents and analyzed it in order to extract meaning from it. Silverman (2004:58) argues “that qualitative field research should pay careful attention to the collection and analysis of documentary realities. Such enquiry is not confined to the inspection of documents themselves. It must incorporate a clear understanding of how documents are produced, circulated, read, stored and used for a wide range of purposes.” It should also be stated that documents embody individual actions, interactions and encounters which need to be interpreted.

Documents are social artifacts in that they are produced, shared and used in socially organized ways. They are not, however, transparent representations of organizational routines, decision-making processes and professional diagnoses. In the light of this argument put forth by Silverman (2004), this study analyzed data between documents and interviews with the intention of finding similarities between what documents presented and what interviews presented, so that the picture could emerge. Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004:127) contend “that qualitative data analysis takes place continuously

throughout the data collection process. The researcher constantly reflects on impressions, relationships, and connections while collecting data. The search for similarities, differences, categories, themes, concepts, and ideas forms part of the continuous process.” This study analyzed data continuously in order to determine relationships and connections as well as the impressions that were reflected between documents and the various interviews that were conducted.

Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2007) argue that theme identification is the most fundamental task in qualitative research. They describe ‘themes’ as umbrella constructs identified by the researcher before, during, and after data collection. Themes can also be identified by reviewing field notes. These authors categorize the following techniques for identifying themes, each of which is discussed further below: word analysis (word repetitions, key words in context, and indigenous terms), reading of larger units (for example comparing and contrasting material and searching for missing information), international analysis of linguistic features (metaphors, transitions and connectors), the physical manipulation of texts (unmarked texts, pawing, as well as cut and sort procedures), and lastly secondary data analysis.

- Counting words and repetitions – this method counts key words in the field notes that may occur more frequently than others.
- Indigenous categories and key words in context – this method entails identifying the indigenous characteristics of the language of a group of people.
- Comparison and contrast – this method is used in focus groups and entails comparing

answers given by members of a group within the focus group. The researcher compares sections of text and tries to identify the reason why chunks of texts differ from each other.

- Searching for missing information – this is done with the aim of identifying information which the respondent might have withheld deliberately. Much can be learnt from the text by what is not mentioned, and silence is often an indication of important information that the respondent does not want to disclose.
- Metaphors and analogies – respondents often use metaphors and analogies in interviews to express their thoughts, behaviour, and experiences in a poetic form. This should not be interpreted literally, but an explanation should be sought from the respondents.
- Transition and connectors – linguists who worked with recorded texts in Native American languages noticed the recurrence of elements like ‘now’, ‘then’, ‘now then’, and ‘now again’. These elements are indications of thematical changes and are called ‘transitions’. Connectors refer to words that connect different sentences in a usual way, such as ‘because’, ‘since’, and ‘as a result’. Researchers should look out for both transitions and connectors to identify the logical development of the course of the interview.
- Unmarked texts – new themes can be identified by examining texts in the field notes that have not been associated with a theme previously. Usually the text needs to be read a few times in order to identify these themes.
- Pawing, cutting and sorting – although pawing is not a scientific method, it is valuable. The researcher uses an ocular scan method to read through the text in order

to familiarize him or herself with it. The researcher then simultaneously marks different aspects by using different coloured pencils to underline key phrases. Cutting and sorting involve identifying the most important remarks in the texts first. Each text is then cut out and pasted onto an index card. The researcher writes the name of the respondent on the back of the card. Then all index cards are sorted into different piles of similar quotes. Each pile is named afterwards, according to the theme it represents.

- Secondary data analysis – the researcher consults other reports or information on the same topic that is being analyzed. The field notes are questioned and reviewed on the basis of any new information found.

3.8. TRUSTWORTHINESS

Denscombe (2004:275) argues that” there are many ways of checking the validity of the findings.”

- Triangulation – multiple sources of data (e.g. Regional Director, Chief Education Specialists who work at the region), and multiple methods (document analysis and interviews) were used to search for convergent categories of data.
- Member checks – the data (which were tape recorded and transcribed) were taken back to the interviewees so that they could confirm the accuracy of the information. In addition, participants were asked to comment on the categories developed for the analysis of data and the final narrative.
- Thick description – this case study tried to provide a comprehensive and vivid description of the district and regional settings, details of the participants’ opinions

about the emergence of districts and regions, as well as an outline of the role which these structures were expected to play.

3.9. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is not free from limitations, as with any research study of this nature. The following limitations emerged during the course of my study.

Being a qualitative case study of a particular region, “the findings cannot be generalized’ to all regions and districts in South Africa; it is up to practitioners to do so if they deem the findings and conclusions relevant to their situations, as argued by Cohen and Manion (1995:447). According to Bryman (2004:275), “it is difficult to generalize the findings of qualitative research, because it entails the intensive study of a small group of individuals sharing certain characteristics, as opposed to quantitative research which usually deals with large samples. Qualitative research findings tend to be oriented to the contextual uniqueness and significance of the social world being studied. However, a thick description provides others with a ‘database’ for making judgments about the possible transferability of findings to another milieu. “

Punch (2005:255) argues “that qualitative research should satisfy the following questions in order for the findings to be transferable.” First, is the sampling theoretically large enough to encourage transfer of findings to other situations? Second, is the context thickly described, so that the reader can judge transferability of findings to another situation? Third, on the level of abstraction of the concepts in the data analysis: are they at a sufficient level of abstraction to permit their application to another setting?’ In the light of this argument, this study can be considered to be transferable if it satisfies these

criteria.

My presence as a researcher at the regional offices might have influenced regional officials' behaviour and interaction with one another, thus negatively affecting the objectivity of the data. This is what McMillan and Schumacher (2001:193) refer to as the 'Hawthorne effect'. However this effect was reduced by making use of triangulation. I double checked the information that I got through posing the same questions even though in a different phrasing, to other informants in order to verify the information at my disposal.

3.10. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I established an informal protocol that was negotiated with the region and the provincial offices before the commencement of the study, based on the ethics statement of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria.

3.11. CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED DURING THE STUDY

This study was not without challenges, as is the case with any research project. Being the only candidate for this level from my area, I had to motivate myself to succeed because I had no peers in the area with whom to share my experience. The first year was spent attending contact sessions at the university, which laid the foundation for approaching my study. The second year saw me working on my research proposal and defending it

successfully towards the end of that year. That was an achievement for me, considering the fact that some of my fellow candidates were still attempting to find a focus for their studies. The third, and part of the fourth year were spent conducting the field work and writing the research report. I faced some challenges in terms of focusing on my study, due to the nature of my work, which gave me little time to dedicate to this study. This had a detrimental effect on my progress, which caused me to miss my target for finishing the thesis. As a result I had to extend my registration to the fifth year in order to complete the study.

The major challenge I faced in conducting my field work, was the tight schedule of my interviewees especially senior officials, which made it difficult for me to stick to my plan. I had to adjust it now and then to suit their availability. This required a great deal of perseverance on my part, especially pertaining to the senior officials of the Department of Education. I did not experience problems in contacting educators, principals and circuit managers to be interviewed.

Another challenge was in acquiring the primary documentary sources from the department, such as reports, policies, minutes or any documentation relating to districts. When I enquired about these documents at head office, most of the officials denied any knowledge of where these were kept since the head office relocated from Middleburg to Nelspruit. I was, however, able to secure a few documents, such as the Report on the Assessment of the 2001 Mpumalanga Grade 12 Results, the Consultancy on the Assessment and Enhancement of Head Office and Districts Management, Newsletters,

the 1998 Mpumalanga Senior Certificate Irregularity Report, the Districts and Regions Organogram, and other unpublished documents.

All interviews were recorded on tape and as notes in my journal. In one case I interviewed someone, thinking that the interview was being recorded, only to discover later that the tape recorder was not switched on. At least I managed to write something based on the interview notes, which helped a lot. I made a point that after each and every interview I wrote all the responses of the interviewees and reconciled this with the tape transcript in the evenings while the information was still fresh in my mind that helped me to make sense of what the interviewees meant. This incident did not retard my progress because only one interview was affected and I still had my back up in terms of the notes I was writing during all interviews.

3.12. MENTORING PROGRAMME

I have already referred to the contact sessions which were very helpful to me. I also benefited a great deal through my dedicated and caring mentor who, irrespective of his pressured schedule, made a point of assisting me to realize my goal. I am very grateful for such a fruitful and healthy relationship between me and my mentor. To mention just a few, my mentor used the following strategies to support me, all of which were really helpful: encouraging extensive reading on anything related to my topic, obtaining assistance from his colleagues with regard to their opinion on how best to approach this study; feedback on any progress which I made on the subject; regular meetings which

dealt with challenges and solutions, as well as targets.

3.13. LESSON LEARNED AND HOW IT AFFECTED ME

When I embarked on this study I had little knowledge about the process of decentralization as it unfolded in Mpumalanga and in the country at large. The study gave me the opportunity of comprehending the processes that transpired immediately after the 1994 first democratic elections, which was guided by national priorities. I discovered that between 1994 and 1997 the government priorities were first to dismantle apartheid structures and create a unified education system; second to resolve the question of financing education on an equitable basis; and third to lay the policy framework. Districts were therefore established in order to meet these objectives.

At first, I could not understand what caused districts not to perform according to the expectations of schools and circuits. I had no understanding about the rationale for the establishment of districts, except for the utterances of politicians that they were bringing government closer to the people. The reorganization process has since come and gone; people heard that districts were to be phased out and reorganized into regions but the real reasons were not well articulated. This study exposed the rationale for this reorganization. Just one of the reasons was that it was done in order to align educational structures with municipal boundaries.

I learned that governments around the world always strive to improve service delivery

and therefore their structures are not static, but subjected to a lot of review in pursuit of this goal. Decentralization is adopted by many countries, yet the motives for such actions differ from country to country. Decentralization can only be understood within a country's historical, geographical, social, economical and cultural context.

Lastly, I learned that governments are always strategic and pursue their own objectives. They usually believe in exercising control, or are sometimes reluctant to redistribute power; therefore a balance between centralization and decentralization is often opted.

CHAPTER 4

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF DISTRICTS AND CIRCUITS IN MPUMALANGA (1994-2002)

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter argues that the establishment of districts was an attempt to bring government closer to the people with the intent of enhancing service delivery.

It focuses on research question number one that seeks to discover which decentralization model(s) informed the formation of districts and circuits in the Mpumalanga Department of Education. Among other things discussed are what prompted the establishment of districts and circuits, and the process that led to their formation. It has already been mentioned that decentralization occupies an important position as an approach to development around the globe, as argued by Lim and Fritzen (2006). The concept of decentralization is, however, confusing. Like any other policy with good intentions, decentralization may both solve old problems and create new ones.

The review of the literature demonstrated what prompts countries to decentralize education. Countries in the East and West view the process of decentralization and centralization differently, based on their ideologies. UNESCO (2001) contends that political and administrative reasons prompt decentralization. Leung (2004) argues that China decentralized education in order to solve financial problems. Kohl (2003:153) argues that “decentralization is viewed as a process that transfers a range of responsibilities from national to local governments.” His argument is based on the

assumption that decentralized governments are not only more efficient and less corrupt, but also can promote economic development and democracy better than centralized ones. Mardones (2007) concurs that decentralization promises a variety of benefits such as public service efficiency, effectiveness and democratic accountability; however it has also generated concerns with regard to macroeconomic stability, local government capabilities, local corruption, and citizen participation. The DoE (1995a:15) argues that “in Mpumalanga the move towards decentralization was employed in order to achieve coordination, bring government closer to the people, realize prompt service delivery and the sharing of resources.”

Parker and Kirsten (1995) argue that decentralization is associated with the devolution of powers and responsibilities from central government to lower level political entities. However, the motivation and aims of central government in devolving power may vary widely. The same report further contends that it is therefore imperative to first understand the intent of central government. In turn, this intent is conditioned by the historical, economic, social and political antecedents of a particular country.

This chapter therefore investigates the intent of the Mpumalanga provincial government in establishing districts and circuits in the education sector.

4.2. BACKGROUND OF POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR EDUCATION RESTRUCTURING IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

The birth of the new South Africa triggered a lot of change and resulting restructuring

processes. Fleisch (2002:27) argues that “the agreement on the Interim Constitution paved the way for a number of processes to unfold.” In January 1994 an informal national group was convened to strategize the legal authority of the organizational structures. This group was known as the Strategic Management Team (SMT). Immediately after the 1994 democratic elections, a new national government and nine provincial governments were formed, but this was just the start of more governance changes to come.

According to the DoE (2001b), the Ministry of Education was confronted with three inter-related tasks during the period 1994-1997, namely: the dismantling of apartheid structures and creating a unified education system; creating a more equitable system of financing education in a context of huge demands on limited resources; and thirdly creating a policy framework to give concrete expression to the values that underpinned the post-apartheid state. In keeping with the national agenda of the country, the Mpumalanga province also had to dismantle apartheid structures and create a unified education system. This process was conducted within the province’s historical and geographical context, and is substantiated by what this study discovered as the rationale for establishing districts and circuits. As mentioned above, the SMT at provincial level, considered and advised on ways of forming structures such as circuits, districts and head offices.

This study found that the provinces had a clear mandate from the national ministry with regard to the process which they were to follow during the transformation process, as clearly promulgated by the department’s intention pertaining to the formation of a non-

racial education system. These sentiments were echoed by the then interim head of the Malelane District (Shube, 1995), when he addressed school principals on 25 April 1995 about the task he was assigned to play in the formation of the district. He explained that he was nominated by the MEC with clear instructions to lay down the foundation for a district. He mentioned that the plan was to establish twelve districts with four to six circuits each. However two districts never materialized and only ten were established. Amongst this official's tasks were identifying district offices, receiving district personnel, monitoring the restoration of the culture of teaching and learning, as well as the maintenance of the general welfare of the new district. He pointed out that these processes had to be carried out according to principles of transparency, inclusivity and fair representation. The District Management Team (DMT) was established, comprising the inspectorate and support services in the district, but other stakeholders were still to be taken on board. Three officials were seconded to assist in establishing the nucleus of the administration section for the district. The district had three sections, namely: finance, logistics and personnel, and provided services to 179 schools, 120 781 learners and 2 700 educators.

According to the African National Congress (1995), the former system of governance and its fundamental illegitimacy had been the chief target of political contestation at every level through the years of resistance to apartheid education. A unitary education system and democratic system of governance to facilitate the participation of all legitimate interest groups were consistent demands of the democratic movement. De Clercq (2002) argues that powerful international groups and the white opposition wanted a more lenient,

less regulatory and cost efficient state with powers devolved to provinces and local institutions, and with policies which could attract foreign investment. She further argues that prior to 1994, the ANC was in favour of centralized powers over educational finances, personnel, provisioning, policy and policy implementation in order to transform the previously discriminatory and fragmented system. However during the negotiations, the ANC position shifted to deal more pragmatically with the complex challenges of promoting equity, redress, cost efficiency and global competitiveness. Aware of the failure of other states in developing an effective, democratic, centralized production and distribution system, the ANC agreed to the compromise of a three-tiered system enshrined in the 1993 Constitution which divided the educational powers, responsibilities and finances between the national, provincial and local levels.

Common (1998) argues that since the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) have an interest in ensuring best practices, it is more likely that managerial techniques are imposed on countries. He further argues that these organizations have political agendas which cannot be ignored, and they are at the center of a continual conflict over control and direction of policy. This opinion substantiates De Clercq's (2002) argument above concerning the deliberations during the negotiations for a new dispensation in South Africa.

Kallaway, Kruss, Donn and Fataar (1998) argue that the balance of power of the negotiated settlement dictated the terms of the constitutional provision for education. While policy debates between the proponents of the National Education Policy

Investigation (NEPI) and the Education Renewal Strategy (ERS) prior to 1994 centered on the desirability of centralization or decentralization of educational governance, the new Constitution dictated the devolution of power to a large degree from the center to the nine provinces. These writers further explain that the national ministry of education is responsible for education at universities and university of technologies, and for establishing a national policy framework of norms and standards for education in general. The provinces have the power to legislate on all aspects of basic schooling and education, subject to the national policy framework.

De Clercq (2002) argues that the post-apartheid state reflected the outcome of powerful political, social and institutional struggles and conflicts. According to her, the main struggle was to transform the racist, undemocratic and inefficient apartheid state systems. The populist demands were for the democratization of state power and greater participation of civil society in decision making. In terms of section 126 of the RSA Constitution of 1993 (RSA, 1993), national and provincial governments share concurrent powers in framing educational laws and systems. Schedule 6 of the same Constitution grants provinces powers over education at all levels, other than that offered at universities of technologies and universities. This provision establishes three spheres of governance, namely national, provincial and local. De Clercq (2001) contends that the national level is responsible for developing policy frameworks, norms and standards across the system, and has monitoring and quality assurance powers over policy implementation and the quality of education. The provincial level also has policy making powers, as long as it does not contravene the national legal framework but assists in fulfilling its main

responsibility of policy implementation and service delivery.

Section 6 (a) of the Mpumalanga Schools Education Act, 1995 (DoE, 1995c) states that the Member of the Executive Council (MEC) may divide the area of the province into educational districts and each district into educational circuits, for the purpose of the administration of matters under the province's ambit, but it is silent about the power and authority of these structures. De Clercq (2001) reports that the provincial head office delegated some administrative authority to the sub-units called districts (or regions), for them to administer and manage policy implementation and professional support to local institutions. Head office remains responsible for the coordination of policy implementation, allocation of posts, school personnel and finances, management support to districts (or regions) and provisioning to schools.

Mardones (2007) argues that if national interests prevailed during the first round of negotiations, then administrative decentralization would occur first, followed by other forms of decentralization later. Motala and Pampallis (2001) argue that the dominant international discourse on state theory revolves around 'hallowing' or 'rolling back' of the state. The implementation of the ideas embodied in this discourse has led to the downsizing of the welfare system in North America and Europe. Such debates have pushed for downsizing the post-apartheid state and a change in the way it delivers services and responds to its citizens. They further contend that clearly the post-apartheid state had to find new ways of breaking from the previous regime's racist and authoritarian practices. Yet, in the context of post-apartheid transformation and the

imperative to deliver services to promote equity, the state needs to remain the driving force in the national restructuring process. Such restructuring demands large scale coordination, resources and vision. Scarce resources and fiscal austerity have in many cases been the reason for lack of service delivery in education and other spheres of social policy.

Mangelsdorf (1988) contends that in the case of Ecuador, decentralization was carried out with the intention of strengthening democracy and providing the institutional framework for the implementation of a new set of social programmes designed to eliminate the extreme socio-economic inequalities which prevailed in that country. Decentralization was therefore viewed as an alternative to the centralized administrative model.

This section has presented the background that led to cooperative governance between national and provincial governments in South Africa. What is evident here is the centralization of policy development and the decentralization of delivery. This concurrent sharing of power between the national, provincial and local levels is a feature of cooperative governance. The DoE Review (2001b: 9) describes cooperative governance as a South African phenomenon arising from our unique political settlement which was translated into the Constitution. One of the main concerns was the provinces' constrained ability to apply national norms based on principles of equity and redress because of organizational, financial and service delivery limitations.

De Clercq (2001) argues that the cooperative model of governance was introduced to develop a more responsive public sector which could, beyond loyal policy implementation, balance more equally the relationship between managers, workers, governors and civil society stakeholders. Fleisch (2002) contends that this governance model won some legitimacy from civil society as the new leadership struggled to capture state power and master the bureaucratic system, culture and processes. Such a decentralized approach has been used by social democratic states, with a previously strong civil society, to recapture public authority from the technocratic and economic power elites. De Clercq (2001) argues that in South Africa, the senior leadership in government, which came from organized civil society, chose a model of cooperative governance that had the legitimizing strengths mentioned by Fleisch (2002), but also had weaknesses as it constrained the state in developing its capacity to lead and govern.

De Clercq (2001) reports that the Ministry of Education developed a new legislative framework, to promote its transformation agenda of greater access; equity; redress; quality and democracy for all. These imperatives caused the National Department of Education (DoE, 2001b) to use their controlling powers to ensure that implementation systems and mechanisms were in place to enable provincial departments to implement loyally their policy and service delivery tasks. Provinces, on the other hand, used their powers to establish districts and circuits as their administrative arms. The cooperative governance approach relies on a Traditional or Weberian administration model (De Clercq, 2002) with stringent controls to ensure that different bureaucratic levels execute their duties as expected. This approach argues that discrepancy develops between

policy and practice, not because of policy shortcomings, but as a result of the lack of adequate bureaucratic resources, capacity or implementation controls. The result was that the national Department of Education retained many aspects of this rational, bureaucratic model of administration.

Decentralization in South Africa should also be understood within the framework of what is happening globally in terms of education. Common (1998) contends that globalization means that the exercise of political authority and bureaucratic power is no longer confined to the boundaries of nation states. He further differentiates between the concept of New Public Management (NPM) as policy convergence or as policy transfer. Policy convergence may occur between nations with political elites of similar convictions, while policy transfer refers to poorer states that may accept new policies more readily than expected, given their level of socio-economic development.

4.3. ESTABLISHMENT OF DISTRICTS AND CIRCUITS IN THE MPUMALANGA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

A working committee that was known as the Strategic Management Team (SMT) at provincial level was appointed by the first MEC of Education in Mpumalanga, to determine how to establish the new education structures in keeping with the vision of the newly established government. After much deliberation and consultation, the SMT formulated a proposal for a head office, and ten district offices serving circuits and schools. The staff complement at head office was formed by means of seconding officials

from the former apartheid education departments.

Fleisch (2002) reports that the SMT had to assist the Member of the Executive Council in the formation of the new Mpumalanga Department of Education, which involved according to (DoE, 2001b) integrating formerly divided bureaucracies, and transferring institutions, staff, offices, records, assets and more than ten million learners and teachers into a new system, without a breakdown in service delivery. It should be further emphasized that this had to be done across diverse racial and economic conditions and large geographical areas, within a short space of time (Sukati (b) and Masango, personal interviews, 2007). The (b) or (a) alphabet behind any respondent differentiates between two interviewees with identical surnames.

Participants in this study (Masango, Mashego, Sukati (b), and Mahlalela, (personal interviews, 2007) gave three reasons for the establishment of districts and circuits after South Africa's first democratic elections. Firstly, the whole process was necessitated by the change from the apartheid era to a new democratic dispensation or what may be called the change of political focus. Secondly, this change of political leadership created a need to integrate all former apartheid education departments to form a non-racial Department of Education in Mpumalanga. There were formerly nine departments which were separately administered, namely: the tri-cameral Houses of Assembly, Delegates and Representatives, KaNgwane, parts of Bophuthatswana, and KwaNdebele homelands, as well as two provincial administrations of the former Department of Education and Training (DoE, 1995a).

Thirdly, the aim according to (DoE, 1995b) was to bring government closer to the people in line with government policy through government structures at schools. Mahlalela (personal interview, 2007) reported that: “The main purpose was to bring government closer to the people”. Andrews and De Vries (2007) argue in their discussion of decentralization and participation, that the goal is to cure the ailments of representative democracy by bringing decision-making processes closer to the citizens. The proponents of decentralization believe that such a move reveals preferences for the public good, thus serving as a tool to promote efficiency.

Mokoena (b), Khoza (b) and Mahlalela (personal interviews, 2007) reported that the demarcation of districts and circuits was influenced by the weight or the number of schools, the number of learners, distance and geographical location. For example, the Hazyview district had large circuits with up to 18 000 learners per circuit, the Sabie district had circuits with up to 5 000 learners per circuit, and the Lydenburg district had fewer learners per circuit. Political factors also played a role in decision making.

Mahlalela (personal interview, 2007) argues that historically the legacy of apartheid created a backlog in the provision of resources, such as telephones and fax machines. The level of poverty was high and so in order to minimize the costs of traveling, circuits and districts were to be closer to schools. The demarcation of districts was a political decision and also driven by administrative matters such as the enrolment of learners and geography of the province. A district had to have five circuits in order to be manageable and accessible.

The above decisions were based on the claims of the proponents of decentralization, namely that it will bring equity, efficacy and improved service delivery to formerly disadvantaged groups. Panayides (2003) argues that the success of decentralization efforts also depend on the size of the country. In Cyprus, for example, decentralization was hampered by the small size of the country. Only functions such as maintenance of school buildings and infrastructure were transferred to school boards or local authorities. Hentschke, Nayfack and Wohlstetter (2009:319) argue that “the district size appears to be a factor that influences a superintendent’s role in the improvement process.” Their qualitative work examined small, mid-size and large districts, defining large district as those serving more than 2 500 students. They found that successful superintendent leadership was hands-on and less delegated than what tends to be characteristic of successful leadership in very large urban school districts.

In the light of the above findings, and with the legacy of South Africa’s racially divided society, provincial governments were faced with various challenges. The Mpumalanga province made decentralization decisions based on its topography, and the weight (the number of teachers and learners) and distribution of schools. The DoE (2001b) review, as already mentioned, reports that the education ministry had three inter-related tasks, namely: dismantling apartheid structures and creating a unified education system; creating a more equitable system of financing in the context of scarce resources; and creating a policy framework that reflected the shape of values that underpinned the democratic South Africa. It is obvious that what the provinces did immediately was to

execute the agenda of the national office, since this was fundamental in contributing to the success of anything that was to follow in terms of improving education in South Africa. The literature review shows that Pakistan according to (Bjork, 2006) followed a uniform or standardized structure for decentralization, whereas in South Africa some provinces had both regions and districts as sub-units, while others such as Mpumalanga established districts.

Nickson (2001) argues that decentralization is not always triggered by international pressure; for example Latin America's New Public Management (NPM) approach around 1988 was the region's own initiative. Decentralization was undertaken as a means of democratization and increasing citizen participation, especially of ethnic or disadvantaged minorities. Common (1998) argues that the paradigm shift in public administration away from bureaucracy, which stresses managerial rather than administrative values, is often known as New Public Management (NPM). In South Africa, decentralization as a process achieved through a negotiated settlement, was perceived as a vehicle of transforming society as well as enhancing participation by its citizens.

De Clercq (2002) points out, however, that during the negotiations there were fierce debates with regard to the policy direction the country should follow, so that what we see is the result of contestations. The question of international pressure cannot be ruled out if one considers that the world has become a global village. Best practices in certain countries influence decisions in other countries. The ANC argues that its compromise

from its initial position of favouring a centralized system occurred after realizing the failure of such systems across the globe (ANC, 1995).

Seller (2005) argues that the move towards regional government in Scotland and Wales was to shift authority nearer to the people, with options including the devolution of local education administration from country to district councils. It is evident that in the case of South Africa, decentralization was adopted for the purpose of bringing government closer to the people, while in Scotland it was aimed at shifting authority through devolution. In Mpumalanga decentralization both political and administrative as already mentioned even though, no transfer of authority took place as opposed to the Scotland scenario cited above. It is therefore questionable how districts and circuits were supposed to improve service delivery without decision-making powers. This study demonstrates that districts and circuits were used as vehicles of social integration by bringing the previous racially divided institutions and staff together under one unit. It is therefore not surprising that most of the districts and circuits spent their time resolving racial conflict in schools, as mentioned by Sukati (a) (personal interview, 2007).

South Africa, with its new and young democracy, wanted to improve quality, as argued by proponents of decentralization who claim that it has the potential of improving quality, increasing effectiveness and efficiency, redistributing political power and solving the problems of financing education (Lim & Fritzen, 2006). This claim is, however, contentious because none of the interviewees mentioned anything about the improvement of quality. They indicated only that decentralization was aimed at improving service

delivery. However quality improvement is clearly articulated by Jansen and Taylor (2003) who describe how provinces had to address the goals for educational transformation after the change of government in 1994. The first goal was the pursuit of equity, in order to eliminate disparity between former white and black schools. The second goal was to improve efficiency, because of high levels of wastage expressed in terms of high dropout and repetition rates. Thirdly quality had to be addressed, because of documented poor quality of teaching and learning in schools. Fourthly effectiveness required attention as evidenced by poor responsiveness in educational performance to the high levels of funding received by the education sector. The last goal was the pursuit of democratic governance, because of the legacy of authoritarian practices in education generally, and the concomitant lack of parental participation in school governance. De Clerq (2002) argues that top on the ANC's agenda was efficiency and global competitiveness of the education system.

In Mpumalanga, the aim was to integrate all the racially divided departments in order to establish a unified department, as described by Masango, Sukati (b) and Mashego (personal interviews, 2007). Historically, during the colonial and post-colonial eras, most African countries were highly centralized in governance and practice (Kauzya, 2007). Since the 1990s, the pendulum has swung towards decentralization of powers to lower levels. Many African countries believe that decentralization will enable greater participation of communities in problem analysis, planning, implementation, oversight and sustainability. Mardones (2007) contends that decentralization reforms in Latin America are often attributed to the processes of democracy and consolidation.

Decentralization has been pursued as a result of political crises during periods of democratic transformation. What Kauzya (2007) says about the benefits of decentralization is crucial for this study which investigates the shift from districts to regions. The question of whether the shift benefited local communities, as Kauzya's (2007) argument implies, is addressed later.

This section has demonstrated that the demise of the apartheid regime brought about the need to change education governance structures, systems, procedures, ethos and culture, in order to be in line with the new dispensation. This rationale is prevalent in the arguments put forth by Masango and colleagues (personal interviews, 2007), as well as the Department of Education (DoE, 2001b) publication. These findings clearly demonstrate the change in political leadership created a need to integrate former racially divided departments in order to establish a single non-racial, non-sexist and democratic department governed by the principle of equity, quality, effectiveness and democracy.

It emerged that the criteria for the demarcation of districts and circuits in Mpumalanga were the number of learners and schools, distance, geographical distribution, efficiency, and political factors. Bjork (2006) points out that history, education trends, topography and local culture play an important role in decentralization. This statement is also true of the former apartheid South Africa with its history of oppression and inequality, disparities in the provision of education, topographical factors, and the local culture at that time, all of which played a significant role in decentralization after 1994. For example, the former culture of separate development, or racial division, had to be

reversed in order to build a non-racial society that treats individuals based on the principles of equality, respect and dignity. The top priority on the agenda was the dismantling of apartheid structures and the creation of new ones, as well as improved service delivery. The study confirms what the literature presents about the process leading to the formation of national and provincial governments. The SMT is cited by both the literature and interviewees as having been instrumental in the formation of government structures in Mpumalanga, as it was in terms of the whole country.

This section can therefore conclude that the establishment of districts and circuits in Mpumalanga was prompted by the following reasons: firstly, the need to bring government closer to the people; secondly, it aimed at improving service delivery. Thirdly, it was meant to facilitate the formation of a non-racial education system, and fourthly, it was intended to reduce traveling costs of officials to schools and circuits. Lastly, the formation of these structures was to address administrative matters. When the study, applies Samoff's (1990) typologies, the formation of districts and circuits displays features of both administrative decentralization, through the emphasis on service delivery, and political decentralization, through focusing on community participation, empowerment and collective action.

4.4. OPERATION OF DISTRICTS AND CIRCUITS IN THE MPUMALANGA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Lauglo (1995) confines decentralization it refers to the dispersion of authority away from

national to local bodies within a public, governmental system. Samoff (1990:515) argues that “the use of the concept decentralization has produced a distorted and acrimonious debate that has made effective dialogue on the subject nearly impossible because of the different contexts of countries.” It is imperative to consider the historical background and contemporary educational problems of a country in order to understand the national conceptualization of decentralization. Masango and colleagues (personal interviews, 2007) view districts as an internal administrative arm of the provincial Department of Education. Jansen and Taylor (2003), in debating South Africa’s education reform, limit their argument to three issues, namely curriculum reform, educational finance reform and teacher rationalization, because according to them, these were the first three interventions of the new democratic government.

It is therefore not surprising that the Constitution (RSA, 1993) provides a framework for a unitary system of education managed through cooperative governance between the national ministry and provinces. This arrangement emphasizes a greater degree of coordination and direction, as clearly stated by the Department of Education (DoE, 2001b). The National Education Policy Act of 1996 (RSA, 1996) gives the national ministry powers to determine norms and standards for planning, provision, governance, monitoring and evaluation. The formula for funding is also determined nationally. This policy was clearly intended to address the imbalances which had been created by different funding formulas that were used in the past, which left a legacy of significant inequalities in terms of the curriculum, and distribution of teachers and resources. This is the situation in which districts found themselves, as indicated later in this study.

Sayed (2002) argues that decentralization is a concept that is commonly used yet it “generates more heat than light” (p.38). He further contends that the success and efficacy of decentralization is measured according to different perspectives. This study shows that decentralization in Mpumalanga did not involve any transfer of decision making (Motshana, personal interview, 2007), but that districts and circuits were established as a link between schools and the provincial Department of Education. They were an administrative arm of the department, according to Masango and colleagues (personal interview, 2007) and a link between schools and the department. Districts had to assist schools in interpreting and implementing policies. For example, they encouraged schools to involve various stakeholders in education, such as parents, in shaping the direction of a school. Districts had to provide support to schools and facilitate the delivery of stationery, learner support material and textbooks. They had to resolve racial conflict which was rife during that period, and provide moral support. They were supposed to coordinate all activities by giving the required support to schools and circuits. Khoza (b) (personal interview, 2007) contended that districts had three main functions namely; examinations, professional support and resource planning.

A review of literature as argued by Andrews (2007), Gedikli (2009) and Mintrom (2008) has highlighted that decentralization improved democratic governance through citizen participation, permits more service delivery, develop people’s capabilities. Mahlalela (personal interview, 2007) contended that districts were responsible for ensuring that schools convened Annual General Meetings (AGMs) to prepare for the incoming year,

and report on school activities for the past year. Districts were expected to involve parents in shaping the direction of schools, encourage democratic governance at schools, and promote the participation of the public through structures such as the District Education and Training Council (DETC). This structure had to report on a quarterly basis to the District Management Team (DMT) which coordinated their recommendations and then forwarded them to the provincial structure known as the Mpumalanga Provincial Education and Training Council (MPETC). These governance structures included educational managers and representatives from the unions and the business sector. Cohen and Peterson (1995) argue that decentralization is adopted as a strategy to strengthen governance, increase transparency and accountability, and enhance the effective and efficient production and delivery of public goods and services.

Mahlalela's argument (personal interview, 2007) highlights the fact that decentralization was also employed to encourage community participation through structures such as the District Education and Training Council which involved a variety of stakeholders with an interest in education. This viewpoint is closely related to Samoff's (1990) category of political decentralization. The role and responsibilities of districts could be best explained by Seller's (2005) argument that the authorities were implementing and interpreting national and provincial policies, as well as channeling interaction between these bodies and other agencies. Chinsamy (2003) contends that there was a gap between policy formulation and policy implementation, and hence a vacuum existed in the structures necessary to translate policy into practice.

In terms of the role and function of circuits, Mokoena (b), Shabangu, Ngcane and Bhiya (personal interviews, 2007) were of the opinion that a circuit is responsible for supporting all the schools under its jurisdiction. It is a central education office which is closer to the schools, an extension of head office, and an advisory office between districts and schools. Circuits are strategically placed to assist schools, since they are the closest office which is easily accessible to resolve whatever challenges may be encountered by schools during the execution of their duties. Circuits supervise principals, check basic functionality of schools and coordinate all the activities of schools. The circuit office liaises between schools, districts and provincial Department of Education, up to the national department. Its role is to assist in the implementation of all departmental policies. This structure is most important for the success of all policy implementation, because it is where the ‘real work’ takes place.

This study found that districts and circuits were viewed as field offices that were strategically established to assist the province in delivering educational services to the people, as well as encouraging community participation in education matters through structures such as the District Management Team (DMT), the District Education and Training Council (DETC), and the Mpumalanga Provincial Education and Training Council (MPETC). The above agrees with what the literature review contend decentralization as explained before. Furthermore, decentralization permits more efficient delivery of services. These authors refer to this process as the triple connection “participation-decentralization-efficiency”.

4.5. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DISTRICTS AND CIRCUITS

The relationship between circuits, districts and head office is best explained by what Motshana and Masilela (personal interviews, 2007) said about these structures. They were mere post offices, ‘conveyer belts’, links and an administrative arm of the department. The type of decentralization which best describes this relationship is deconcentration, as defined by Rondinelli, McCullough and Johnson (1989), which relates to the shifting of workload from the central government to field offices or local government. This is based on the thinking that some public goods can only be effectively provided at the field or local level. Mardones (2007) writes that administrative or functional decentralization refers to the transfer of public agencies’ management, programmes, projects, or entire policy areas to sub-national governments. It has already been mentioned that districts had three main sections, namely: finance, logistics and personnel.

Reddy and Sabelo (1997) argue that local government is deliberately created to bring government to people at the grass roots level, as well as to give them a sense of participation in the political process that controls their daily life. They argue further that decentralization motives are based on four assumptions, namely: that local needs vary from one place to another; that locally financed and produced services will be cheaper; that the balance of power between central and local government- stronger regional or local government can control the tendency of national government to become all powerful; and lastly that the coordination of services is rendered more easily at the local level than at the national level. Weiler (1990) argues that nationally and internationally,

decentralization is viewed as a process that brings about participation, equality of opportunity, and reform. Mangelsdorf (1988), Khamsi and Stolpe (2004) cites international pressure, national politics and events rather than local initiatives as sometimes reasons for decentralization.

Ts'oele (2006) contends that decentralization has been a trend in many African countries for at least 20 to 30 years; however motives for implementing decentralization may be economical or political. Economical motives may be aimed at improving services and promoting economic growth, while political motives may legitimize the state after major political changes, such as what happened in South Africa. Rondinelli (1981) provides two arguments that encourage governments in third world countries to decentralize. Firstly, it is believed that decentralization will expedite the pace and spread the benefits of growth, integrate diverse regions in heterogeneous countries, and use scarce resources more efficiently to promote development in poor areas. Secondly it is believed that if the poorest groups are to get larger shares of government services, then decentralization of public service delivery and involvement of beneficiaries in planning and decision making at the local level, is recommended.

The Departmental review document (DoE, 2001b) argues that the systematic transformation in terms of policy was in place, but that the challenges of implementation remained. It further states that attention was to be paid to implementation and delivery. The focus was on the provision of an education that contributed to learners' personal and

social development and the need to strengthen community and civil society participation in schools. According to the NEPI report (1992:41), the educational district was to be established under a negotiated autonomy. Districts were supposed to be given authority and power in order to demonstrate both capacity and willingness to manage local education, and the ability to meet national equity, quality and efficiency targets.

This study therefore found, as argued by some interviewees, that it was not possible to devolve powers and authority to the districts, due to the post level of district heads which was equivalent to that of a chief education specialist. This study found that central planning as practiced by most developing countries is an example of bureaucratic centralism. The literature review has proved that bureaucratic centralism occur in many developing due to the need to build a nation , control central planning to meet the national interest. This situation according to Mangelsdorf (1988), Lauglo (1995), Khamisi and Stolpe (2004) emerges when local regional government are weak especially after independence. This therefore raises a question as to how districts and circuits were supposed to enhance service delivery to schools in the absence of powers and authority, and the existence of bureaucratic delays.

Mokoena (b) and colleagues (personal interview, 2007) argued that districts were meant to support circuits and schools in terms of curriculum development, physical resources, conflict resolution and referral of problems. Padayachee (personal interview, 2007) viewed the role of districts as that of coordination and support, as well as observing the transition to democracy. Rondinelli (1981) argues that regions, provinces or districts

provide a geographical base for the coordination of various projects in developing countries. Mohlala (2007a) argues that districts were established to support schools and provide quality education. Provinces delegated some of their authority to districts for the purpose of managerial efficiency, accountability, and educational effectiveness. Seller (2005:1) argues that where there is a heightened demand for school improvement, schools and district offices often has to seek innovative ways of addressing this reform agenda with fewer financial resources and altered governance structures.

The literature review according to Bjork (2006) shows that decentralization in Pakistan, was implemented to improve service delivery, devolve power, decentralize administrative authority, and focus on the deconcentration and distribution of resources to district level. Mangelsdorf (1988) argues that it is critical to analyze claims made for decentralization once it has been implemented, versus the actual outcomes of the policy. He further contends that decentralization has been linked with benefits such as equity, effectiveness, responsiveness and efficiency. This study found that districts were meant to support schools in terms of curriculum development and physical resources, play a coordination role, manage transition, provide quality education and act as a referral office.

Mangelsdorf (1988) argues that the degree of decentralization which accompanied decolonization elsewhere in the world is determined by the degree of centralization or decentralization established by the former regime. Shepherd (2000) claims that the emphasis on good governance in terms of efficiency concerns, is a narrow premise on which to approach this subject, because there is a far wider range of issues often more

closely related to development objectives than the sometimes narrow efficiency concerns. Good governance may be necessary, but that is not sufficient for poverty reduction. The focus should be broadened to include: public expenditure patterns and revenue growth; local institutional development and rural local government; getting a perspective on inclusiveness and access into sector reform; eliminating corruption; and establishing partnerships with the private sector and NGOs.

Seller (2005:2) contends “that a school district performs administrative functions such as implementing and interpreting national and state policies, as well as channelling interactions between national bodies and other external agencies, with the school.” The views expressed by Mokoena (b) and Khoza (b) (personal interviews, 2007), questioned how circuits were supposed to supervise principals, as well as monitor the basic functionality of schools under circumstances characterised by shortages of personnel, and being overloaded. The question of enhancing service delivery was just something not easy to realise under such conditions.

This study shows that the provincial department was reluctant to devolve substantial powers and authority to the lower level, due to incapacity at the local level. Kohl (2003) argues that administrative decentralization often fails in African countries due to lack of local expertise. It is not surprising that decentralization in the South African context, with special reference to Mpumalanga, faced significant challenges in trying to integrate the formerly segregated education departments and bring services closer to the people. It was unlikely that South Africa, with its legacy of racial division and disparity in terms of

resources, funding norms and different qualities of education systems, could devolve autonomy pertaining to education matters to provinces and local authorities. Instead of power and authority being devolved to districts and circuits, it was in fact, centralized at head office for the sake of monitoring the districts' role in interpreting and implementing policy, and de-racializing and democratizing the education system. This situation should, however, be understood within the three interrelated tasks (DoE, 2001b) of the national department of education immediately after 1994.

Rather than devolving power, finance and resources, the Department of Education (DoE, 2001b) describes the focus as being the provision of education that contributes to learners' personal and social development, the need to strengthen community and civil participation in schools, as well as bringing government closer to the people. This argument is closely associated with Samoff's (1990) typologies of political decentralization and administrative decentralization, which is substantiated by Masango and colleagues (personal interviews, 2007) that the establishment of districts and circuits was purely an administrative issue and nothing more. But it is also evident that decentralization enhanced participation of the community in educational affairs. Stakeholder participation was encouraged in the District Education and Training Council, as well as in the form of parental participation at school level through school governing bodies which were elected through a democratic process representing the aspiration of the parents and the state.

4.6. POWERS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The National Education Act of 1996 (RSA, 1996) gives the Minister of Education powers to determine national norms and standards for education planning, provision, governance, monitoring, and evaluation. Democratic principles must be exercised within the context of overall policy goals. Consequently, provincial powers and those devolved by provinces to regions, districts, and educational institutions must align with the goals of equity, redress, quality and democracy. Circuits were therefore an extension of districts, with no powers at all. They were established only to support schools and implement policies

The principle of cooperative governance used in the wording of the Constitution (RSA, 1993) underpins provisions in education. Within the agreed national framework, provinces are given a significant degree of autonomy in educational provision. This simply means that national and provincial governments may legislate on any issue pertaining to non-tertiary education. The national government may only supersede provincial government where there is conflict and such an issue may be dealt with appropriately only by the national government. This may include issues regarding uniformity, economic unity and equality.

Based on this principle of autonomy, a law was passed early in 1995 known as the Mpumalanga Schools Education Act (RSA, 1995c). This law granted the Member of the Executive Council (MEC) powers to divide the province into districts, circuits, and schools for administrative purposes. Mahlalela (personal interview, 2007) argued that

although the district structure was based on the Mpumalanga Schools Education Act, it had no authority because section 6 (a) of the Act talks only about an educational district, and the Act does not mention anything about the powers of districts.

This study demonstrates that provinces were reluctant to devolve powers to local level for a number of reasons, as Mahlalela (personal interview, 2007) argues in section (5.2.) that discusses lack of power and authority. Masilela and Padayachee (personal interview, 2007) contend that the position of district heads was not high enough to warrant such powers. Another contributing factor to the lack of devolution could have been political pressures – the country was in transition and there was a lot of contestation between political parties during the negotiations, with some in favour of the federal system of governance. What ultimately emerged was a compromise, as highlighted by De Clercq (2002). It is also argued by Weiler (1990) that elites and bureaucratic establishment, in most cases, are reluctant to devolve powers to lower levels if they think that it may not achieve their national agenda.

This further substantiates Coombe and Godden’s opinion (2006) that decentralization motives vary from country to country and should be based on history, educational trends and the local culture (Bjork, 2006). According to Common (1988:441) “there are differences between countries in terms of style, nature, timing and space of reform which are not necessarily correlated with the political colour of government. For instance, he quoted Wright (1994) who sees of the United Kingdom programme as “imposed radicalism” compared with the “evolutionary and internally generated programme of the

Germans” In some instances, as pointed out by Kohl (2003), decentralization has also been manipulated politically to reinforce the power of the central government. Rondinelli (1981) argues that there should be political will to transfer planning, decision making and managerial authority to field agencies and lower levels of administration if decentralization is to succeed. This recommendation prompts the question as to how districts in Mpumalanga were supposed to perform in the absence of adequate authority as a necessary condition for decentralization to be a success.

This study found that the Mpumalanga Schools Education Act of 1995 (RSA, 1995) is silent about the powers of districts. It is therefore not surprising that districts were confronted with a number of challenges as they tried to implement national policies with few resources and decision-making powers, in the context of severe schooling problems on the ground. This state of affairs is confirmed by Chisholm, Motala and Vally (2003) who claim that the relative authority and decision-making powers of national, provincial and district levels are sometimes not clear. It should also be mentioned that the Constitution of South Africa (RSA, 1993) makes provision for the country to be a unitary state with a unitary government consisting of three spheres: national, provincial and local, with significant decentralization of powers and functions, including budgeting. Districts are merely sub-units or intermediaries – they are somewhere in between provinces and the local level.

Davies (1999) argues that in some countries, the local or municipal government has major responsibilities in terms of education provision within the boundaries of the

municipal authority. For example, in the United States of America, the greater part of the responsibility for schools has been bestowed on the local municipality, which may even be within a school district which is smaller than the local authority. In South Africa, however, this is not the case since the local municipality has no direct role in the provision of education within its area.

The literature and interviews have shown that districts in Mpumalanga had no powers – they were mere post offices and responsible only for policy implementation. According to Mahlalela (personal interview, 2007), this was done deliberately – it was a strategic move that powers should be minimal at the district level. The above argument vindicates what Malherbe (2005) who writes about the ANC stance with regard to powers. He argues that the ANC believed that political power should be centralized as far as possible in order for the government to prevent the entrenchment of previous ideologies, or delaying tactics by former bureaucrats who were still clinging to apartheid ideologies.

This chapter commenced with the argument that the establishment of districts was an attempt to bring government closer to the people with the intent of enhancing service delivery. It concludes that services were of course brought closer to the people; however that did not translate into effective service delivery as had been envisaged.



CHAPTER 5

HISTORY OF SERVICE DELIVERY UNDER THE DISTRICTS (1994-2002)

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter argues that districts had a serious shortage of resources and that impacted negatively on their performance. This situation led to a number of challenges and their failure to deliver services to circuits and schools as expected.

The District Development Conference held in June 1999 in Mpumalanga (Chisholm, Motala & Vally, 2003) revealed that there were deeper structural and politically sensitive reasons for the poor performance of districts; therefore there was a need to rethink the locus of power and the way each level exercises its power. Secondly, there was a need to create an interdependent governance system to improve effectiveness and efficiency. Lastly, it was imperative to improve policy implementation, school support and service delivery in order to improve teaching and learning. This situation is confirmed by Chisholm, Motala and Vally (2003) in their discussion of the district conferences, namely that external factors were real impediments to the performance of districts. They further argue that it is not enough to have more powers at any level of governance, without substantial educational restructuring. According to them, the real issue is how an interdependent governance system should satisfactorily resolve the extent of influence that each level of government should exert over various factors in order to improve teaching and learning conditions.

The following section discusses the negative aspects in the history of service delivery.

5.2. LACK OF POWER AND AUTHORITY

In terms of section 126 of the Constitution of 1993 (RSA, 1993), and schedule 4 of the 1996 Constitution (RSA, 1996), provinces have power over education except for university of technologies and universities. This provision established three spheres of

governance, namely national, provincial and local. The responsibilities not only for overall policy, but also for implementation and school support, are spread between the national and provincial governments. This complexity, especially at an early stage of development in the new South Africa, is often a source of confusion and poor coordination. The relative powers of the different tiers are unclear; districts in particular, encountered problems with implementation of policies due to lack of resources and decision-making powers. Section 6(a) of the Mpumalanga School Education Act 1995, (DoE, 1995c) states that the Member of the Executive Council (MEC) may divide the area of the province into educational districts and each district into educational circuits, for the purpose of the administration of matters under the province's ambit, but it is silent about the power and authority of these structures (DoE, 1995c).

Motshana (personal interview, 2007) argued that district managers complained about the lack of power, which created a hostile relationship between head office and districts. The review of literature exposed that district officials used bureaucratic procedures, which were similar to those of the apartheid past. The district officials argued that they experienced similar administrative inefficiencies, bureaucratic delays and lack of appropriate support from higher levels of governance. District officials and subject advisers were not always professionally supportive or informed about their policy implementation duties and school support work. It was alleged that they tended to pass down head office directives, rather than working professionally with schools to motivate educators and negotiate ways of adapting reforms to the school context. This study seeks to determine how districts and regions survived in spite of the problems raised above.

Weiler (1990) argues that authority in education is effectively exercised through the regulation of institutional and individual behaviour, as well as through the allocation of resources. This authority is exercised by the state and its agents. He cites examples of roles and responsibilities rendered by the state as setting standards at different levels for educators and other personnel. These standards may be set in the form of curriculum prescriptions, examination requirements, or certification. Returning to the argument that three interrelated tasks confronted the education ministry, the agenda was set for the whole country concerning what was supposed to be done in relation to education structures.

Mahlalela (personal interview, 2007) argued that it was strategic not to give more powers to the districts. This begs the question: was the withholding of power due to the fact that the province wanted to prescribe what was to be done, or because everything had to be decided by head office; was it a way of exercising authority as argued by Weiler (1990)? Further discussion of the subject shows that in any event, it was not possible to delegate extensive powers and authority to lower levels due to the post level of district heads. The question remains as to what role districts were supposed to play in relation to service delivery and what type of services they were expected to deliver. This study found that the above dilemma about lack of devolution of power is true. For example, when the question of power and authority was posed to the interviewees, all of them reported that the districts and circuits had no powers; they were merely post offices passing everything to the provincial head office. They also mentioned that districts and

circuits were inefficient and lacked the necessary support from higher levels of governance.

Buckland (1995) argues that although the constitution provides for three spheres of governance (national, provincial and local), many departments identified a fourth level or even a fifth level (e.g. regional and district levels), so there is a need to clarify whether such levels have policy discretion or are simply administrative arrangements. If there is policy discretion, then a question about the consultative and accountability mechanism should be posed. Sayed (2002), when referring to decentralization at institutional level, argues that a question should be posed about who benefits and how much power is actually transferred to different levels.

The decentralized system of South African education governance devolves powers and responsibilities to provinces and local level. Provinces delegated some of their authority to districts for the purpose of managerial efficiency, accountability, and educational effectiveness. Districts were supposed to play a policy implementation role, supporting instructional improvement and creating sites of learning (Chisholm, Motala & Vally, 2003). This assertion provides an answer (although not satisfactory) as to the role and type of services districts were supposed to deliver; namely they were to implement policy and support schools. However, the question remains about how they were supposed to support schools without the necessary resources.

Karlsson, Pampallis and Sithole (1996) argue that in spite of what is stated in schedule 6

and section 126 of the Interim Constitution in terms of national and provincial legislative competencies, the centralization/decentralization debate will remain a contentious issue. Any weakness in the system be it at national, provincial, regional/district/circuit or school level, is likely to have a bearing on the whole system. This argument holds true because although districts were intended to bring governance closer to the people, their weakness in terms of lack of power and authority, as well as inadequate resources, compromised the very objective they were meant to address. This situation illustrates that any weaknesses can undermine an entire system of governance.

This study has revealed that the responsibility of providing education is shared between central government and the provinces in ensuring that policy formulation and the provision of education is fair, efficient and directed towards the promotion of human development in all its aspects. However, the powers and roles of local governance and management structures in relation to districts still had to be clarified through further consultation. This point is relevant to my study in order to shed light on the role which districts were supposed to play. This question has now been answered by stating that they were to implement policy and support schools, according to the Department of Education. Another question emerged, concerning the power and role of local governance and management structures in relation to districts. Why did South African governance structures not devolve the necessary power and authority to local government and management structures? Was it a question of capacity, resources (financial or human), or something else?

This study found that it was not possible to delegate enough power to the districts. Masilela and Padayachee (personal interviews, 2007) argued that the delegation of power to the districts was a challenge because these structures were headed by a chief education specialist, at a low level of management. They explained further that districts had very little power and authority, for example, they could appoint educators; otherwise they merely passed everything to head office. Reddy and Sabelo (1997) contend that any decentralization will only be successful if it is accompanied by far reaching administrative reforms with effectively redistributed power. Based on this contention, it would seem that when districts were established, the idea of devolving power to them was not on the agenda; had it enjoyed sufficient prominence, then from the start district managers who were equivalent to education specialists (Masilela and Padayachee, personal interviews, 2007) would not have been appointed.

This study demonstrates that decentralization in Mpumalanga, and in the country at large, was not without challenges and hindrances. These challenges were later vindicated by the ‘Resolution of Districts’ conferences that were held around the country in June 1999 as correctly argued by Chisholm, Motala and Vally (2003).

Mokoena (b) (personal interviews, 2007) reported that circuit managers had little power and authority to decide on the progression and promotion of learners. The closure of schools could not be decided by circuit managers because they had no authority; only head office could approve the closure of a school if there was a need to safeguard learners and teachers. It took a long time before the power to appoint a post level 1 educator was delegated to district heads. District heads had only operational powers, such as approving

an official trip. In fact they had no real power and very few people understood why districts existed.

Weiler (1990) argues that elites and bureaucratic establishments tend to protect their power. They may attempt to enhance it, and they share power reluctantly, especially with people they view as not sharing their beliefs, or in whom they lack confidence. Mahlalela (personal interview, 2007) argued that when districts were established in 1995, powers were centralized; the head office was staffed with “old and new blood” (employees from the former apartheid departments and the new employees). It was a strategic move to keep powers at district level to a minimum. During that period they did not have sufficient support staff. Districts had to implement decisions of head office; districts could only make recommendations and head office had the final authority. This report concurs with Schoole’s (2005:98) statement with regard to the centralization of power. He argues that “there was contestation over power and who was in control, as the former bureaucrats held on to power while the new order struggled to seize it.” This was as a result of the ‘sunset clause’ which guaranteed jobs for all civil servants for the first five years of the new dispensation.

Slater (1989) argues that there is a strong tendency to avoid devolving administrative power to the regional and local levels. This may be due, among other factors, to the presence of, anti-democratic social segments in the regions, and the scarcity of trained personnel. Geographical size can be used as a pretext for belittling any serious discussion on the need to reduce centralized power in a unitary state. Following the argument of

Mahlalela (personal interview, 2007) that limiting the power of districts was strategic, he cited the shortage of human resources and the duty of implementing head office's decision as the rationale behind the lack of powers at this level. Mahlalela's argument (personal interview, 2007) concurs with Slater (1989) in terms of the avoidance of devolving powers to lower levels in the presence of anti-democratic social segments and the shortage of trained staff. Based on the evidence from the interviews, and the arguments of Slater (1989) and Weiler (1990), this section can conclude that the failure of decentralization was due to the non-devolution of power and authority to lower levels.

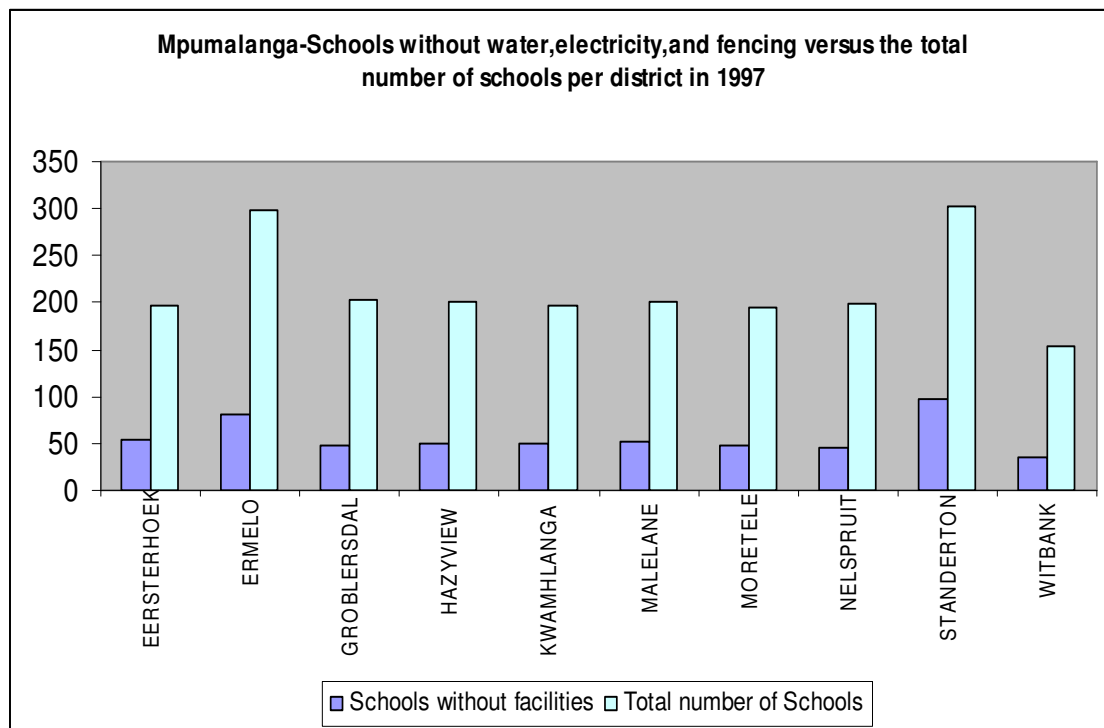
5.3. LACK OF RESOURCES

5.3.1. PHYSICAL RESOURCES

Districts failed to deliver as expected, partly due to the lack of physical resources. Zulu, Khoza (a) and Mnisi (personal interviews, 2007) reported that districts were selective in terms of the resources that they supplied to schools; for example furniture, chalk, registers, text books and stationery were provided. However, the delivery of furniture was very slow. They also explained that no capital projects were initiated, for example, no classrooms or new structures were built because the provincial department was still trying to balance the resources.

Sambo (personal interview, 2007) claimed that the provision of physical resources was insufficient. Old structures were left redundant, for example, schools with hostels which no longer had a need for hostel facilities. On the other hand, schools such as Lowveld

High School in Nelspruit still have hostels. The reason is because most of the African elites send their children to town schools where they reside during the school season. Themba (personal interview, 2007) claimed that districts did not do much in terms of physical infrastructure; for example fencing of schools was done, but renovation was slow. For example, her school applied in 1994 for renovation of the school buildings but nothing happened until around 1996. In some schools, running water, electricity, and fencing were not available (Themba and colleagues, personal interviews, 2007), and there were no fax machines or duplicating machines.



Source: Mpumalanga Education Department, Statistics 1997

FIGURE 1: SCHOOLS WITHOUT FACILITIES

Figure 1 confirms what the interviews found about the state of resources in the province

during the district era. In the Malelane district, for example, about 50 schools out of 200 schools were without facilities such as water, electricity and fencing. In the Nelspruit district about 46 out of 198 schools were without facilities, while in the Hazyview district about 48 schools out of 201 were without facilities. These figures confirm what the respondents argued about the shortage of resources.

Shabangu (personal interview, 2007) reported that districts did not last long – only 6 years from 1995 until 2001, when they were dissolved. He argues that districts performed well within their limit. This success is attributed to the delivery of stationery and policy implementation. In terms of infrastructure, there were no buildings for the new circuits such as Lubombo, Nkomazi East, and Khulangwane, since the focus was on building schools. The districts had very few subject advisers since subject advisers reported to head office and only later moved to districts. Shabangu (personal interview, 2007) contended that few schools had resources such as computers and laboratory materials – only selected schools received computers. Principals had to raise funds to supplement resources.

According to Khoza (personal interview, 2007), from 1994 onwards there was minimal support in the supply of physical resources. Districts continued with the old structures, for example the shift from the offices of the former KaNgwane to the rented offices, which negatively affected service delivery. The new incumbents wanted to claim their own power. The 2004 notice on e-education (DoE, 2004) revealed that the growth rate of schools in Mpumalanga that had computers between 2000 and 2002 averaged 59% and

was higher among secondary schools than primary schools. In 2002, only 22.9% of schools in Mpumalanga had computers for administrative purposes, with 12.4% of schools utilizing computers for teaching and learning.

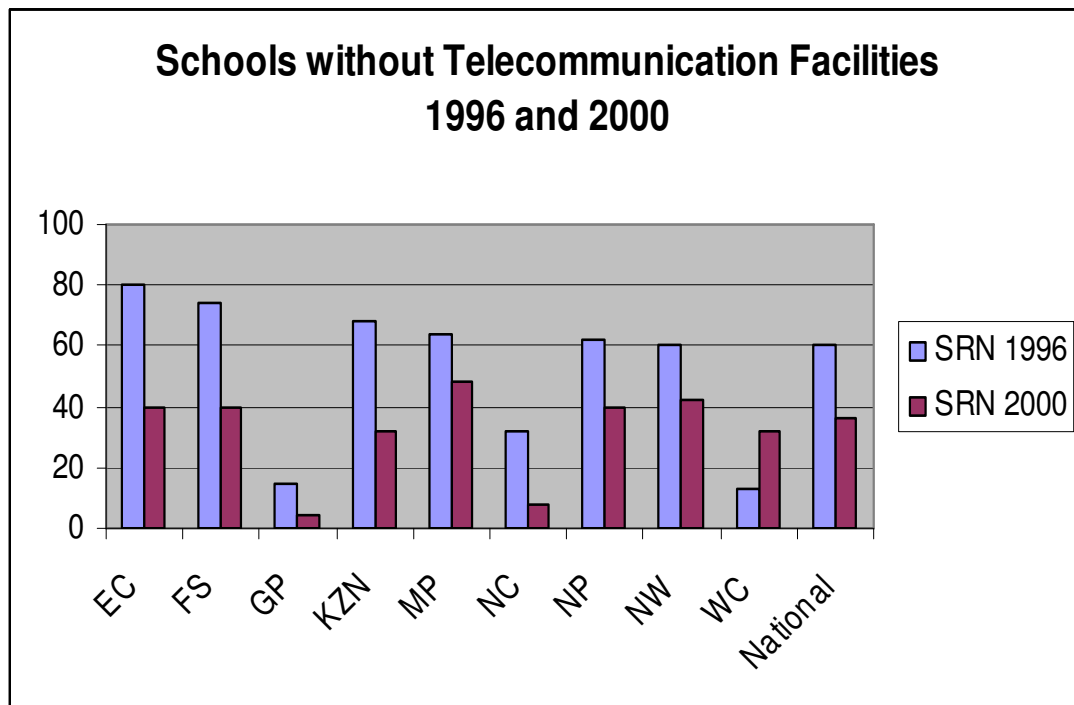
TABLE 1: SCHOOLS WITH COMPUTERS, BY PROVINCE IN 2002

Provinces	Schools with computers	Schools with computers for teaching and learning
Eastern Cape	8.8 %	4.5%
Free State	25.6%	12.6%
Gauteng	88.5%	45.4%
KwaZulu-Natal	16.6%	10.4%
Mpumalanga	22.9%	12.4%
Northern Cape	76.3%	43.3%
Limpopo	13.3%	4.9%
North West	30.5%	22.9%
Western Cape	82.4%	56.8%
National	39.2%	26.5%

Table 1 depicts the number of schools with computers and those without computers for teaching and learning during the year 2002. It indicates that there was at that time, a dire shortage of computing facilities, as confirmed by Khoza (a) (personal interview, 2007), who argued that districts provided little in terms of resources. This study found that districts did not provide resources as expected; most of the interviewees contended that they received absolutely nothing. Parker and Kirsten (1995:1) contend that: “there is

a growing realization that many types of institutions can actively participate in decentralization efforts and delivering of services.”

USAID (2005) argues that at times, decentralization is not accompanied by an increase in funding required by schools to exercise their new responsibilities. Jansen and Taylor (2003) compared 1996 and 2000 in terms of schools without certain resources. They found that the percentage of schools without telephones decreased from 59 percent in 1996 to 36.4 percent in 2000. The percentage of schools without running water decreased from 34 percent to 27 percent; the percentage of schools without access to proper toilet facilities declined from 55 percent in 1996 to 16 percent in 2000; access to electricity improved from 40 percent to 54,9 percent, and the number of schools with computers increased from 2,2 to 6,6 percent. Figure 2 shows the decline in the percentage of schools without telecommunication facilities from 1996 to 2000.



Source: Department of Education (2001)

FIGURE 2: SCHOOLS WITHOUT TELECOMMUNICATIONS FACILITIES

The School Register of Needs (SRN) 1996 represents schools without telecommunication facilities in 1996, while SRN 2000 represents schools without telecommunication facilities in the year 2000. Bearing in mind that districts existed from around 1995 up to 2000, it is obvious that they operated under a dire shortage of many resources and it was not possible to satisfy the needs of all schools. However, they tried their best within the limited resources at their disposal, as depicted by the decline of schools without telecommunications between 1996 and 2000 shown in the figure above.

It is clear that communication was a real problem, as indicated by the interviewees.

About 62 % of schools had no facilities in Mpumalanga province during the year 1996. In the year 2000 the percentage dropped to 45 % of schools without facilities. From 1996 up to 2000 there is a reduction of about 17 %. Marchiori and De Lourdes Oliviera (2009:672) report that “Brazilian social scientists are adopting an approach that enables communication to be at the centre of an organization. This is in contrast to the functionalist perspective that emphasizes coordination of activities and improving the quality of written and oral messages. Brazilian scholars believe that the new direction in communication increases accountability and interaction among diverse stakeholders, which in turn enhances an organization’s sustainability process.”

This study found that districts were confronted with limited physical resources and there is no evidence to suggest that other role players were assisting, as argued by Parker and

Kirsten (1995). Districts were selective in their provision of physical resources; for example they supplied furniture according to some respondents, although it was inadequate; they also supplied chalk, registers, text books and stationery. No classrooms or new structures were built during the district era, and renovation of buildings was not rendered. Some schools had no support staff, duplicating machines, telephones or fax machines, nor electricity. Similar constraints were cited by Boshoff (personal interview, 2007), in that when former white schools opened admission to all racial groups, their enrolment soared yet they did not receive any additional classrooms. Old structures were left redundant, for example unused hostels and former government structures.

Districts performed within their limits, only because they operated for a short period (1995-2001). According to Shabangu (personal interview, 2007) the hiring of offices cost the provincial department a lot of money. Some circuits had no infrastructure and still have no infrastructure such as offices, for example Lubombo, Nkomazi East and Khulangwane circuits. The Lubombo circuit is attached to a primary school, Nkomazi East is attached to an education development centre, and Khulangwane is housed at a tribal structure. A lot of time was spent on the restructuring process or resolving conflicts. General service delivery in terms of physical resources was not good.

5.3.2. HUMAN RESOURCES

It has already been mentioned that human resources were a challenge in the operation of districts. Sambo (personal interview, 2007) contended that there were few curriculum implementers, workshops were very scarce, and schools had no support staff. Schools

were forced to perform, but teacher development was lacking. He further argued that the closure of teacher colleges was another error, which led to a shortage of siSwati, Maths and Science educators as well as general educators in Mpumalanga. This is something that should be addressed as a matter of urgency. Teacher colleges were closed because it was thought that there was an over supply of educators. The DoE (1999) argued that Colleges of Education were to be absorbed by Higher Education institution and they were to be reduced to at least one or two College of Education in the whole province. Furthermore, educators produced by the colleges were lacking in terms of content knowledge, especially in the secondary schools.

In terms of human resources and administrative support, Pillay (personal interview, 2007) argued that Indian schools were better off, since they came from the former House of Delegates; his school had (and still has) three administrative clerks and five general workers. Sambo (personal interview, 2007) reported that minimal resources were supplied; there were no support staff, administrative clerks, and general workers. The principal had to do everything. Primary schools were even worse off, because they had no administrative clerks, especially the formerly disadvantaged schools. Bhiya (personal interview, 2007) stated that administrative clerks and general workers were provided; his circuit had two general workers and two administrative clerks. In general, schools were equipped with about 40 % of their human needs according to Bhiya (personal interview, 2007) in terms of administrative clerks and support staff.

This study shows that little support was provided to struggling schools. Boshoff (personal interview, 2007) contended that as a former white school, they were lucky to have one administrative clerk and two general workers who were paid by the state and the SGB hired two more general workers. Very few workshops were organized by the districts; the only workshops were for school principals, and none were meant for deputy principals or School Management Teams (SMTs).

Bjork (2006) argues that even though Pakistan implemented decentralization on a large scale, with a design based on five fundamentals, namely: devolution of power, decentralization of administrative authority, decentralization of management functions, and distribution of resources, it was not without challenges. For example, the lack of skilled personnel and lack of will to relinquish power by the bureaucrats stalled decentralization measures. Parker and Kirsten (1995:5) argue that “decentralization efforts need a skilful central government to include the right combination of political, fiscal and institutional elements to ensure success”

This section has shown that schools from the former Tri-cameral Houses were better off during the district era, in terms of resources whether human, physical or financial resources. For example, they had adequate administrative clerks, support staff, deputy principals, education specialists, and educators. The situation changed gradually as their enrolment soared, due to admission being opened to all races. Another interesting feature is that they did not receive a lot of attention from the districts in terms of professional support, since they were performing well.

In the light of the arguments of Bjork (2006), and Parker and Kirsten (1995) about conditions required for decentralization initiatives to succeed, it is clear that Mpumalanga (and South Africa as a country) should have done more than they did at the time, in terms of the implementation of decentralization. Decentralization requires the right combination of political, fiscal, and institutional elements to ensure success. Furthermore, the government should have devolved power and authority, as well as resources, to districts and circuits to enable them to perform as expected.

5.3.3. FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Padayachee (personal interview, 2007) claimed that budgetary problems made it difficult to provide the required resources; for example, in 1999 and 2000, personnel costs consumed 99 % and 85 % respectively of the Mpumalanga Education Department's total budget. Shepherd (2000) argues that urban local government is sometimes a base from which improvements can be developed; rural local government is frequently not well structured and often bankrupt, unless there has been a central policy of decentralization. According to Masilela and colleagues (personal interview, 2007), districts had no budgetary control, due to the fact that they did not have authority to take major decisions. The Provincial Review Report (DoE, 2004) states that functions were devolved from the national department without the necessary transfer of funds. All provincial education departments inherited divergent systems, procedures and practices. They faced great challenges in trying to establish a commonly acceptable administrative system.

The argument by DoE (2004) sheds light on what Padayachee (personal interview, 2007) claimed about the provincial budget, namely that it was not enough, considering the high personnel expenditure in 1999 and 2000. It is therefore clear that districts were operating under financial constraints, although they were confronted with a number of demands from schools and circuits. The expectation to deliver services was a matter of urgency for the community after the first democratic elections. It is obvious from this study that the decentralization road was not an easy one.

Nickson (2001) argues that it is evident from recent studies that more education decentralization would not only raise economic growth rates, but also reduce the extremely high level of income inequality. He further argues that closing the education gap in Latin America was not simply a question of increasing public spending, but also allocating those resources in a more efficient and equitable manner. The South African situation was similar: there was a need to reduce inequality as well as distributing resources in an equitable manner. Even today, that challenge remains. According to the SA Yearbook (Burger & Tibane, 2007), South Africa has one of the highest rates of government spending in education in the world; in 2007/08 for example it allocated R105, 5 billion to education. This depicts the commitment that government has about improving the lives of its citizen through investing in education.

This study demonstrates that the lack of budgetary autonomy for districts created a serious challenge in the execution of their duties. They had money in theory, but the final decision rested with head office which was in control of finances. Even if districts

requested something to be purchased for them, they had to wait for approval (or otherwise) of their request by someone who was not in touch with the real situation, which contributed towards the dismal performance of districts. Parker and Kirsten (1995) argue that lack of adequate funding for lower level institutions is the single most important factor that undermines many decentralization attempts. As shown by this study, districts operated in a difficult economic situation, as well as suffering the effects of the transitional period, all of which constrained their performance.

Parker and Kirsten (1995) argue that districts could not deliver; hence decentralization did not bear the expected fruits. The interviews revealed that districts registered many complaints, including the lack of financial resources, which meant that they could not support schools effectively.

5.3.4. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Districts were supposed to assist schools in policy interpretation and implementation. Mokoena (a) (personal interview, 2007) pointed out that districts existed during the transitional period when the country was engaged in restructuring and policy formulation; therefore schools grappled with the misinterpretation of policies and not following the right procedures, due to the extent of the changes. Most policies and Acts were formulated during the district era, for example the National Education Policy Act (1996), the South African Schools Act (1996), and the Employment of Educators Act (1998), to mention just a few. The Department of Education (DoE, 2001b) confirms the above

argument that most of the time was spent on creating a sound legislative framework for educational transformation.

One may ask the question as to whether districts performed this task successfully in the light of the problems cited above. Padayachee (personal interview, 2007) argued that the geographical proximity of districts to circuits in itself created a conflict between these structures, especially because the districts could not provide the support that was expected. According to the line functions of the department, circuits reported to the districts, and districts reported to head office; therefore schools had to wait a long time before receiving services. So Padayachee's claim (personal interview, 2007) about the emergence of conflict was due to the fact that districts were almost a duplication of circuits. The role of districts was clearly stated by Mahlalela (personal interview, 2007) who pointed out they were responsible for ensuring that schools convened Annual General Meetings (AGMs) to prepare for the incoming year, and report on school activities for the past year. Districts were expected to involve parents in shaping the direction of the school, encourage democratic governance at schools, and promote the participation of the public through structures such as the District Education and Training Council (DETC). This structure had to report on a quarterly basis to the District Management Team (DMT) which coordinated their recommendations and then forwarded them to the provincial structure known as Mpumalanga Provincial Education and Training Council (MPETC). These governance structures included managers, and representatives from the unions and the business sector. Another view was given by Khoza (b) (personal interview, 2007), who argued that districts had three main functions,

namely examinations, professional support and resource planning. They did not fare well in offering these services, since circuits were struggling to deliver and districts could not provide the necessary support.

Buckland (1995) argues that the role of districts in governance was limited by their lack of policy discretion. This study found that districts did not perform to the expected level in terms of policy, although they did their best to assist schools. Most of the capacity building initiatives focused on developing school managers in order to be able to promote change. Districts succeeded in ensuring that all learners are admitted by schools of their choice, irrespective of colour or creed. It is not surprising that districts spent most of their time resolving conflict; as a result of their tireless efforts we can now boldly say that South African schools represent the demographics of our country.

The actions of districts contributed to nation building which should be viewed as an ongoing process. So far the country appears to be on the right track, regardless of sporadic racial incidents at certain institutions of higher learning. De Clercq (2002) argues that the ministry of education developed a legislative framework to promote its agenda for change which was designed to achieve greater access, equity, redress, equality and democracy for all. The challenges left the DoE with no option but to use its controlling policy powers to ensure implementation systems and mechanisms were in place and to make sure that provincial departments implemented their policy and service delivery mandates. Hence some aspects of the traditional Weberian administration model are prevalent in the approach of the DoE.

5.3.5. LACK OF SUPPORT TO SCHOOLS

Support to schools during the district era was insufficient, as reported by Zulu and colleagues (personal interviews, 2007). They explained further that people were confused due to the restructuring process. For example, it took a long time for subject advisers to be appointed; subject advisers, like most employees, were not sure whether they would be absorbed into the new structures or not. In most cases, they continued working from their offices rather than going out to schools where their expertise was required. It was difficult for curriculum implementers to support schools efficiently because they were struggling to master the new curriculum. They had received inappropriate training which had a negative effect on their performance. The situation was further exacerbated by lack of transport for the curriculum implementers.

Fleisch (2006) argues that international trends in terms of school improvement emphasize bottom up strategies such as the learning organization, whole school development, school based reform, site based management, decentralization, community and parent participation. The lack of support from the district, due to the shortage of human resources at that level, was an impediment to school development, hence the complaints from the interviewees. Magagula, (personal interview, 2007) claimed that subject advisers were not helpful because they lacked specialization in particular learning areas, due to the fact that most of them were former educators who were not trained in mentoring other educators. She also mentioned that the system was changing from an

educator centred approach to a learner centred one, and that in itself was a challenge.

Ngcane (personal interview, 2007) argued that

“Slight support was received. Subject advisers did not cope with the workload and many were frustrated and left the system due to a number of challenges including lack of coordination, staffing and transport.”

The above argument concurs with that of most interviewees about the problems that were encountered by districts. De Clercq (2002) argues that the new education bureaucrats performed poorly in policy implementation due to lack of departmental capacity and resources, which limited national, provincial, district and school performance. These challenges rendered districts ineffective in terms of service delivery. Bhiya (personal interview, 2007) argued that the change from inspectorship to managers was not fully welcomed, and the SGBs lacked direction because although they were in place, they operated as the old committees had done. The districts were not operating according to the strategic plans.

Districts officials conducted some workshops on the formulation of the vision and mission, but that also posed a challenge. Mkhathswa (a) (personal interview, 2007) contended that districts introduced subject advisers, or what is currently termed ‘curriculum implementers’, but the lack of resources and lack of budget control at the district level posed challenges; as already mentioned everything was controlled by head office. This meant that principals facilitated everything; the only thing that increased during the district era was paper work. Themba (personal interview, 2007) claimed that there were few curriculum implementers and they were not based at the district; they

reported instead to the head office in Middleburg. Buckland (1995) contends that the pace of change was frustrating to the majority who expected swift changes.

Khoza (a) (personal interview, 2007) contended that schools received little support. They had to work on their own in terms of what was best for their learners. The authority of principals was challenged by district officials who emphasized the need for them to change. Curriculum was more union driven than administratively driven. This meant that educators focused more on issues related to their working conditions, rather than on the curriculum itself. Very little teacher development took place for some years. During the former Kangwane administration, if a teacher continued with further studies, they were funded by the department. If they successfully completed five or more courses, they received compensation. This practice stopped after the inception of districts.

Workshops were organized, but officials lacked expertise and the so-called subject advisers (currently called curriculum implementers) were not enough in number for all the subjects. Educators did not benefit from workshops that were offered. During 1994 there were inspectors who knew their work, but they were denied access to schools by the highly unionized educators who saw them as part of the old system. De Clercq (2001) contends that many Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) districts had no existing staff with sufficient competencies or the capacity to benefit from any capacity building initiatives. The situation in Mpumalanga was not any different from that in Gauteng.

Pillay (personal interview, 2007) argued that the facilitation of learning programmes and timing of workshops were not good. For example, four day workshops were not enough to understand the new curriculum. Learning programmes were not well conducted.

Moonsumy (personal interview, 2007) argued that districts provided support in terms of resources, but this was not enough; for example his school struggled for three years with the appointment of a clerk. He believes that you need to have a certain amount of knowledge in order to generate certain skills, because slow learners need to be guided step-by-step on how to do a complicated task.

Seller (1995) argues that schools may be innovative; however they need the support of the district to establish conditions for sustainability and continuous improvement.

Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith (1988) cite the lack of capacity at the local level in Haiti as a factor which contributed towards the failure of reform initiatives. Buckland (1995) contends that most expertise left the system when people were given the option of early retirement. Although this process was well intended, it caused a brain drain of expertise.

This study found the following with regard to support given by districts to schools: Most respondents received little or no support from districts. It took a long time for subject advisers or curriculum implementers to be appointed. The curriculum implementers' inadequate knowledge of the new curriculum posed a challenge in the presentation of workshops to educators. Curriculum implementers complained about the lack of transport at the district office as an impediment to their visits to schools. Curriculum implementers were overloaded because not all subjects were covered by this support role. The district

lacked strategic planning. They only conducted workshops in assisting schools in understanding the formulation of vision and mission statements. It took a long time for the district to deliver textbooks. At the beginning of district stage, most workshops were meant for principals, but the focus later included educators. The buzz words during those days were ‘transformation’ and ‘change’. There was ‘bad blood’ between the old guard and the new incumbents, and the situation was not conducive to achieving national goals.

This study found that even if districts and circuits have been portrayed as having failed in a number of areas, there are certain aspects that are worth mentioning where they have some credit or positive effects. The first issue relates to their success in capacitating school managers in terms of school leadership and management. Secondly, the delivery of stationery was completed before the commencement of the school year according to the interviewees. Thirdly, districts were accessible due to their proximity to schools, even though they could not provide all solutions to meet the needs of schools. Fourthly, the integration of racially divided institutions into democratic, non-racial ones was achieved. Fifthly, they were able to encourage community or citizen participation.

Even though it was argued by most interviewees that districts failed to perform effectively, there are some positive attributes which should be mentioned about these structures. Shabangu (personal interview, 2007) mentioned that there were a lot of programmes in which the district was doing well in capacitating educators. For example, the team called the ‘butterflies’ or ‘teacher trainers’ organized a number of workshops to capacitate educators under the supervision of someone from the district. Zulu (personal

interview, 2007) reported that a departmental auditor conducted workshops for administration clerks and principals during the district era, which was a good thing. Shabangu (personal interview, 2007) pointed out that a district award function was introduced to encourage schools to perform. Districts also initiated fundraising by encouraging the business sector and other stakeholders to take part in educational activities, especially in the former Malelane district.

Districts were able to resolve a lot of racial conflicts during their period of existence. They introduced Japanese micro kits to alleviate the shortage of science laboratories, which assisted educators in conducting science experiments. Most of the interviewees also agreed that the districts succeeded in the provision of registers, chalk and stationery. Lastly, the districts performed well in the integration and formation of a single non-racial department of education in Mpumalanga.

5.3.6. WHY DISTRICTS WERE ABOLISHED

Gershberg and Jacobs (1998:8) argue that “in practice, the reform environment contains constantly evolving elements of decentralization and re-centralization.” This study found that the shift from district to regions was aimed at reducing administration or bureaucracy, cutting expenditure, improving efficiency, being able to afford more personnel, granting more powers to the regions, consolidating expertise, and increasing efficiency. The aim was to improve the level of management and strengthen it, reconfigure government structures, align education structures with municipal boundaries,

improve communication and financial management, and streamline the organization at large. The abolition of districts was employed as a solution to a general outcry about their overall performance in Mpumalanga.

This study shows that districts were not effective due to a lack of power and authority, resources (physical, financial and human), capacity, and coordination. They were located closer to schools; however that did not translate into improved service delivery as envisaged, due to the challenges they encountered having no decision-making power. Karlsen (1999) and Weiler (1990) argue that there is tension between decentralization efforts and the need for central control. This study found that districts complained about the lack of power and authority at the district level, and that in itself created a hostile relationship between head office and the districts. This claim is substantiated by the (DoE, 2001a) which argues that the process of restructuring was aimed at maximizing responsiveness of the department and enhancing effectiveness and service delivery. The (DoE, 1997b) report claims that it had become imperative to reduce the number of districts in order for them to be effective.

5.4. CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided a background about what prompts countries to decentralize educational systems. UNESCO (2001) contends that political and administrative reasons prompt decentralization. Leung (2004) argues that China decentralized education in order to solve financial problems. The DoE (2005) argues that the move towards

decentralization in South Africa was employed in order to bring government closer to the people. Seller (1993) argues that the move towards regional government in Scotland and Wales was to shift authority nearer to the people, with options including the devolution of local education administration from country to district council.

The DoE (2001) argues that there was a need to strengthen community and civil society participation in schooling issues. Countries in the East and West view the process of decentralization and centralization differently, based on their ideologies.

Seller (2005:2) contends that “a school district performs administrative functions such as implementation and interpretation of national and state policies, as well as channeling interactions between these bodies and other external agencies and the school.” Weiler (1990) argues that nationally and internationally decentralization is viewed as a process that brings about participation, equality of opportunity, and reform.

What is prevalent from the above discussion is that decentralization is adopted by many countries for administrative, political, ideological and financial reasons. Common (1998) argues that states at the same level of development face similar problems, for which there are a number of feasible solutions. Similar reform programmes then begin to appear across a range of political and administrative settings. It is also clear that structures such as districts and circuits have a significant role to play in decentralization, but it should be mentioned that the terminology and the rationale differ from country to country.

For example, in Britain districts are known as Local Education Authority (LEAs) and in

China the various types of structures are called Minban and Guoyou. It should be stressed that decentralization is not a panacea to all educational problems. According to the Presidential Review Commission (DoE, 2005) the Commission felt that in the rush to devolve powers, insufficient attention was given to the capacity of the provinces to assume these powers. Rondinelli (1981) argues that regions, provinces or districts provide a geographical base for the coordination of various projects in developing countries.

Divergent views were articulated by international groups and the white opposition in South Africa, who wanted to limit the power in the hands of the state and pressed for a more lenient, less regulatory, cost efficient state with devolved powers to provinces and local institutions. It has already been stated that there was a shift in the view held by the ANC prior to 1994. The ANC's demands were both for some decentralization and centralization, in order to pursue the objectives of democracy and equity.

During the negotiation process, the Convention of a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) reached a compromise for a three tier system. Narsee (2006:214) views districts as having a "deconcentrated organizational status;" they only promote the aspirations of state authority by facilitating the dispersion responsibilities for certain services from the provincial office to circuits and in turn to schools. According to De Clercq (2002), the main struggle was to transform the racist, undemocratic and inefficient apartheid state. The populist demands were for democratization of the state, greater participation of civil society in decision making, and for an interventionist, accountable state committed to

democracy and equity.

This chapter concludes by arguing that the rationale for the establishment of districts and circuits after 1994 was based on the following: Firstly, districts and circuits were formed as a way of consolidating the various former departments which were previously divided on racial grounds. There was therefore a need to integrate these entire departments in order to form one department guided by the democratic principles as enshrined in the Freedom charter and the 1993 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1993), namely non-racial, non-sexism, equity, redress, justice and democracy.

Secondly, districts were established as an administrative arm of the provincial department as argued by Masango (personal interview, 2007), to take care of schools. This was substantiated by Motshana (personal interview, 2007) who argued that they were established as a link between the department and schools. Thirdly, another idea that prevails is that districts were established based on the principle of bringing government closer to the people with the aim of expediting service delivery to schools.

This chapter found that decentralization was prompted by political change which occurred across the country and necessitated the realignment of governance structures to embrace democratic principles and practices. Masilela, Masango, Padayachee, and Sukati (b) (personal interviews, 2007) all agreed that there was a need to integrate the former segregated departments into one single, non-racial and democratic department. Mahlalela (personal interview, 2007) argued that decentralization was adopted in order to bring

services closer to schools in line with the government's principle of bringing government closer to the people. It was believed that such an action would improve service delivery. This is the background on the formation of educational districts and circuits in the Mpumalanga province.

This study also found that decentralization is not always triggered by international pressure as argued by Nickson (2001) in the case of Latin America, where it was their own initiative. The NEPI report (1992:41) argues that "the education district was to be established under a negotiated autonomy. Districts were supposed to be given authority and power in order to demonstrate both capacity and willingness to manage local education and the ability to meet national equity, quality and efficiency targets."

Rondinelli et al. (1989) claims that decentralization relates to the shifting of workload from the central government to field offices or local government; this is based on the thinking that some public goods can only be provided effectively at the field or local level. This chapter found that districts were viewed as field offices that were strategically established to assist the province in delivering services to the people. Districts encouraged community participation in education matters through structures such as the District Management Team (DMT), the District Education and Training Council (DETC), and the Mpumalanga Provincial Education and Training Council (MPETC).

The establishment of districts should be understood within the DoE's (2001) three inter-related tasks during the period 1994-1997, namely dismantling apartheid structures and

creating a unified education system; creating a more equitable system of financing education in the context of huge demands on limited resources; and lastly creating a policy framework. The Weberian administration model influenced the formation of districts and circuits by the Mpumalanga Education Department. Finally, the establishment of districts and circuits displays features of Samoff's (1990) administrative decentralization and political decentralization typologies.

This chapter began with an argument that districts had a serious shortage of resources and that impacted negatively on their performance. This situation led to a number of challenges and their failure to deliver services to circuits and schools as expected. It concludes that districts struggled a lot to provide adequate services to circuits and schools however they were constrained by the dearth of power, finance and resources.

CHAPTER 6

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF REGIONS (1998-2002)

6.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter argues that regions were created for the following reasons: a political decision, to be afforded more powers, to acquire sufficient resources, personnel and financial control; and to be able to improve service delivery to schools.

Rondinelli et al. (1989) contend that decentralization is the transfer of planning, decision making, or administrative authority from the center to the local level. In the light of this argument, this chapter argues that districts could not execute their duties to the satisfaction of their clientele, due to the lack of power and authority, finance and resources. The situation they found themselves in created many challenges, as discussed below.

6.2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Samoff (1990:521) argues that “there is no absolute value in either centralized authority or local autonomy. Both approaches are vital and more or less imperative at different times, and should be able to coexist.” The first seven themes that emerge as the rationale for the restructuring into regions are the reduction of administrative burdens and the improvement of efficiency, as argued by Motshana, Shabangu, Mnisi and colleagues

(personal interviews, 2007). Each of these themes is discussed below.

In terms of increasing efficiency districts were viewed as merely a duplication of circuits, in that they provided nothing more than what circuits provided. In the opinion of Bhiya (personal interview, 2007), reasons for the shift included the reduction of bureaucratic processes, so as to speed up service delivery and increase effectiveness. Mnisi (personal interview, 2007) viewed the shift from districts to regions as a way of reducing personnel, rather than addressing the needs of schools and making service delivery more effective and efficient. Shepherd (2000) argues that Civil Service Reform (CSR) is a major approach to reducing the size of government departments and increasing government's efficiency. He further contends that a study in Uganda found positive results in increasing the salaries at the top end, rather than at the middle or bottom end.

The second reason for restructuring into regions was the granting of more power and authority. Masilela, Padayachee and Mbatsane (personal interview, 2007) argued that the shift was carried out in order to afford more powers and resources, because it was impossible to grant more powers to a district. It should be mentioned that the position of a district head was equivalent to that of a chief education specialist. Padayachee (personal interview, 2007) put it well by arguing that there was a need to improve the level of management and this was not possible given the constraints previously discussed. Interviewees further argued that the lack of powers caused districts to be ineffective. Having more powers meant being able to appoint more personnel to manage and administer the new structures. This opinion is asserted by Chinsamy (2003) who argues

that almost all provinces restructured their education departments to create relatively autonomous structures that would have more authority to decide on a number of issues. The South African government believed that this move would enable them to provide better service and support to schools.

The third rationale is political decision making that set things in motion, as argued by Masango and Mabuza (personal interviews, 2007). These interviewees gave the background for this decision by arguing that, first of all, the terms ‘district’ and ‘region’ were used interchangeably by the African National Congress (ANC). They further stated that the idea to abolish districts and establish regions emerged at the 1997 ANC Conference in Mafeking. The conference resolved that governance structures were to be reconfigured to correspond with municipal boundaries. Masango (personal interview, 2007) further cited an example that during the unbanning of the ANC in 1990, it had 14 administrative regions but these were reduced to 9 regions, which ultimately formed the nine provincial governments after 1994 as we know them today. It was felt that the country was over bureaucratized. The above discussion suggests that it is not surprising that some provinces use ‘regions’ instead of ‘districts’, or both, as long as they are aligned with municipal boundaries.

The reconfiguration of government structures was an imperative in the opinion of Khoza (b) (personal interview, 2007), who contended that the locality, number of circuits, and alignment with municipal boundaries, were reasons for the restructuring. In some provinces a region is different from a district; it is also interesting to note that the national

department is attempting to establish a norm as to how many schools should constitute a district and how many layers the system should have. In Mpumalanga: Ehlanzeni, Gertsibande and Nkangala regions were established and not six, as recommended by the management study (DoE, 1997b). The fourth region, Bushbuckridge, was integrated into Mpumalanga in 2007 (DoE, 2007a). Regions are demarcated in line with municipal boundaries in order for regions to have more decision-making powers. For example, Bushbuckridge is only one municipality, while the Ehlanzeni region comprises three municipalities, namely: Nkomazi, Mbombela and Umnjindi municipalities. These three municipalities form the Ehlanzeni District municipality. Watervalboven previously fell under Nelspruit district but now it falls under the Nkangala municipality and hence the Nkangala region. Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith (1988) contend that at some point in their modernization, most nations have sought to initiate or review administrative reforms as a response to socio-political situations. Mangelsdorf (1988) argues that it is important to start small, planning for the long term, training local participants, planning for donor involvement and gradually phasing out external support.

The fourth reason for the shift was the consolidation of resources in order to gain and consolidate expertise that was unevenly scattered throughout the districts (Masango and Padayachee, personal interviews, 2007). For example, Gertsibande formerly had a shortage of curriculum implementers, but that challenge was resolved through the amalgamation of districts into a region. Padayachee (personal interview, 2007) argued that the shift to regions was done in order to consolidate expertise, afford regions more powers, increase efficiency and improve the level of management. Nickson (2001) views

centralized decision making as a stumbling block to economic growth and efficient service delivery. According to him, a far more pertinent question is whether the state (for example, in Latin America) has the capacity to perform the new regulatory and enabling roles that it is now obliged to render under the New Public Management (NPM) reforms.

The fifth reason was the need to enhance the level of management as argued by Padayachee and Mbatsane (personal interviews, 2007). District managers were the equivalent of a chief education specialist. It was therefore impossible to devolve more powers to the district structure due to inadequate levels of management. Mahlalela (personal interview, 2007) reported that it was felt that powers could not be granted to a number of people, referring to the ten former district heads. It was therefore imperative to restructure and establish new structures with the necessary powers, resources and personnel.

The sixth reason reported by the interviewees was cutting expenditure, as argued by Ngcane, Masuku and Khoza (a) (personal interviews, 2007). It was necessary to streamline administration as a way of reducing government expenditure. The lack of infrastructure during the district era meant that government had to rent buildings to use as offices and this proved to be too costly. These interviewees argued that the move minimized costs in terms of renting buildings. It was also envisaged that the restructuring would enhance school support, since cutting expenditure would allow resources to be channeled elsewhere and further improve service delivery.

The last reason for the restructuring was the pursuit of effectiveness as argued by Swanepoel (personal interview, 2007), namely that it was done to make the management of education more effective in terms of communication, financial management and organization. Shabangu (personal interview, 2007) indicated that the Mpumalanga Provincial Government formulated an action plan in order to make the management of the province more effective. Most components which are present now were not available at the district level. One of the reasons that districts were not effective was that everything had to be finalized at head office. Shepherd (2000) argues that traditional support to local government has centered on top-down strengthening of capacity to deliver services and to manage effectively. This includes strong elements of participatory planning and management, which allows participation by different social groups. These interventions take time and require a strong relationship between human resource development, planning and finance. Even where financial commitment is there, local government usually operates best on a partnership basis with the private sector, civil society and NGOs.

The Ehlanzeni region is composed of three former districts, namely Nelspruit, Hazyview and Malelane. The region had better powers when it was established than the former districts. District heads were at the level of chief education specialists (CESs) and could not take required decisions; regions have more human resources, more delegated powers, as well as more accountability. Mpumalanga Education Department is now dealing with planning conferences for FET schools, underperforming schools, and monitoring of curriculum implementation. Each component has a strategic plan, rather than only one for

the province, as in the past. The restructuring exercise had to adapt head office policies to the needs of the province. Motala and Pampallis (2001) contend that state structures do not only represent the external demands of the state's citizens, business, labour, and organization of civil society, but also the internal claims of the bureaucrats and politicians working in institutions and tiers of the state.

6.3. EDUCATION GOVERNANCE RESTRUCTURING ACROSS THE GLOBE

This study demonstrates that what happened in Mpumalanga was also the case in a number of other countries, eight of which are discussed in this section. Firstly in Bolivia, under the 'Ley de Participacion Popular (LPP)' according to Nickson (2001:6), an education reform law was passed, which at the same time strengthened relations between schools and local government. The boundaries of educational district offices were redrawn to correspond with municipal boundaries. The absence of any strategic vision of educational reform from the center caused the Bolivian Educational decentralization initiative to fail. The educational board, "Directorios Locales de Educacion" (Nickson, 2001:6) was abolished and replaced by a municipal-wide educational board known as the 'Juntas Distrial (JD)', with members drawn exclusively from civil society.

Secondly, Henley and Young (2008) cite an interesting scenario in one of the provinces in Canada. They report that over the two last decades there has been a great deal of

amalgamation as well as centralization of control of public education, through curriculum frameworks and province-wide student assessment. Most provinces have recentralized authority of important governance issues such as collective bargaining and educational funding. These functions were taken away from schools boards and assigned to the provincial government. For example, in one province, namely Manitoba in 1993, the Progressive Conservative Provincial government was supposed to review school board boundaries based on a commission's recommendations for amalgamation. However the party chose not to act upon the commission's recommendations. In 2001 the New National Democratic Party government reduced the number of school boards in the province from 54 to 37. The study discovered that the shift in terms of size, structure and function of school boards was a response to changing economic, social and political developments in Canada.

Thirdly, Cummings and McGinn (1997) point out that in the United States and Great Britain, lessons are emerging from the pattern of educational reform of these two most decentralized educational systems. These two countries are undergoing simultaneous thrusts towards further decentralization at micro level, and centralization at the macro level.

The fourth example is Hong Kong's education system which has been a mixture of centralization and decentralization (Leung, 2004). It is centralized in terms of the curriculum and the examination structure, but decentralized in terms of operation of schools, because most schools are run by religious and other non-governmental

organizations, known as School Sponsoring Bodies (SSBs). Recently, however, there have been major changes in the operation of schools and the School Based Management (SBM) team, under the label of recentralization, is now in control. This move is perceived as a way of regaining control from the School Sponsoring Bodies, or what is termed re-centralization.

The fifth example is the education system in Norway. According to Karlsen (1999), the New Curriculum Guidelines of 1997 are mainly the result of a central initiative to re-establish a top-down strategy. During the 1970s and 1980s there was a move towards a less standardized and more locally-oriented curriculum to include local knowledge and local culture. However, the New Curriculum of 1997 changed this endeavour by focusing on a National Standardized Curriculum and stressing a more academic and skills-oriented education.

The sixth example is that of the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Education, which was formed in 1995 to take charge of all aspects of Education in Shanghai. The Municipal Commission falls directly under the National Ministry of Education and the Municipal Government, and all educational matters, which were formerly under the control of other departments of the Municipal Government, were transferred to the Commission. The seventh example is that of Mongolia. In 2002 the Parliament of Mongolia introduced a new educational law that was known as the re-centralization law. This Law introduced re-centralization measures by abolishing school boards that had decision-making powers (e.g. including hiring and firing of principals) and replacing them with school councils

with purely administrative functions (Karlsen, 1999).

The eighth and last example is what Cucchiara (2003) reports about Philadelphia's school reform efforts. The state proposed a takeover of the School District office in 2001 to be replaced with 'partnership schools', a collaborative arrangement between a local community organization and Edison Schools or Private schools. However the partnership model did not gain legitimacy and was challenged by politicians, columnists, educators and many other Philadelphians, and as a result it was abandoned. Instead the District was strengthened through the appointment of a Chief Executive Officer, which was a move towards recentralization. The Chief Executive Officer's agenda was to create a more efficient, streamlined administration, to make wise financial decisions, and to bring financial stability to troubled schools. Furthermore, he had to improve teaching and learning through a standardized curriculum, train educators in instructional models, and provide additional instruction for students who were lagging behind academically.

The whole process in Philadelphia was a response to bureaucratic mismanagement and inefficiency of the school district which had been plagued by budget shortfalls and poor student performance. As a remedy to that challenge, the mayor and the governor negotiated a friendly takeover of the district in 2002. The plan included the abolition of School Boards and the establishment of the School Reform Commission.

De Clercq (2001) contends that the restructuring in the GDE was necessitated by the lack of sufficient strategies on how to govern effectively, how to use policy powers to mediate

policy overload, and how to provide school support programmes. This created tensions between head office, districts and schools. Many districts managers complained that they had limited powers.

The examples cited above provide the basis for the abolition of districts and their amalgamation into regions in Mpumalanga, a scenario which also happened elsewhere in South Africa. Educational structures such as regions were aligned with municipal boundaries. For example, the Ehlanzeni district municipality shares the same boundaries with the Ehlanzeni educational region.

The study found that the review of literature provided a basis for the shift from districts to regions in Mpumalanga. For example, Mangelsdorf (1988) argues that it is important to start small, plan for long term, train the local participants, and then gradually phase out external support. Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith (1988) contend that the review of an administration is sometimes employed as a response to socio-political situations. Shepherd (2000) argues that the reduction of the size of an administration increases a government's efficiency.

The findings of the interviews demonstrate that in the case of Mpumalanga, administration was reduced to improve efficiency, according to Motshana and Sukati (a) (personal interviews, 2007). Padayachee (personal interview, 2007) argued that the shift to regions was done to consolidate expertise, afford regions more powers, increase efficiency and improve the level of management. The conclusion is that the shift from

districts to regions was employed in order to streamline administration, afford the regions more powers, and improve efficiency in terms of responding to public needs.

6.4. THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING REGIONS

The study found that the process of forming regions commenced around 1998 and sufficient consultation was done as substantiated by Motshana (personal interview, 2007) who reported that the idea of regions was initiated in 1998 and continued until 2001. All relevant stakeholders were consulted and as usual people had mixed feelings or opinions about the move; some were happy while others expressed unease due to envisaged job changes. Masango and Motshana (personal interviews, 2007) stated that some people had problems with the idea and other people appreciated that the government was pulling resources together. Circuit offices in particular were excited about the whole idea. The interviewees also reported that in addition to consultation, the department commissioned a study on the effectiveness of districts; this study recommended the form, shape, and content of regions. Mashego (personal interview, 2007) was of the opinion that, like any change, the shift from districts to regions was not well accepted by everybody; however communities were mobilized politically pertaining to the new move.

The regions began to function as fully fledged entities in 2002. Padayachee (personal interview, 2007) remarked that all stakeholders were consulted, but change usually brings anxiety. He further explained that the organization dimension protocol was followed – a team comprising all stakeholders was formed, including teachers and union

representatives, to define boundaries and implement the findings of the departmental study that substantiated the need for structural change.

This study found that the (DoE, 1997b) report on Mpumalanga Department of Education and District Management released its findings and recommendations on 30 November 1997. The synthesis of the findings from the interviews about the process leading to the birth of regions, and the recommendations of the (DoE, 1997b) report, informed the discussions about the formation of regions which commenced in 1998 and lasted until 2001.

6.5. HOW REGIONS OPERATE

Regions have more powers as opposed to their predecessors (districts) which were nothing more than mere ‘conveyer belts’. Regional directors have procurement powers up to R100 000, and can appoint applicants from post level one up to the level of chief education specialist. Some powers to make appointments at post level one and as substitute educators have been delegated to circuit managers. Regions and circuits have their own budgets which have been drawn up through a process of consultation and may be utilized according to discretion, unlike in the past. Not all powers have been devolved to regions, for example the power and authority to approve tenders for renovations is still centralized.

The support to circuits and schools has improved. Challenges still exist in terms of appointing more curriculum implementers, although positive signs are evident. The amounts budgeted on paper, which are intended to cover day-to-day maintenance, are now deposited into schools’ accounts. It should be stated, however that this grant is not enough, especially for schools which are part of the no-fee school system. Another challenge in terms of finances is that budgeted amounts are deposited very late, around May or June each year, instead of in January when the school year begins. Baker and Elmer (2009) argue that any school finance reform should be grounded on empirical research in both education policy and school finance for it to yield positive results.” This argument is based on the two ‘off-the-shelf’ school finance reforms that gained, and then waned, in popularity after several years in the United States of America.

Regions introduced school clusters and prioritizing of projects. Curriculum implementers are now categorized according to educational phases – foundation, intermediate, senior, general and further education and training. There is significant improvement if grade 12 results are used as a yardstick, as shown by Figure 3 in the next chapter. The development of educators and their mastery of the curriculum are still challenges, although there are strides in the right direction. Some of the challenges are lack of resources, inadequate training of educators and the promotion criteria of the new curriculum. The region still has under-qualified educators who are assisted financially to upgrade their qualifications. Regions have sufficient manpower as well as divisions that specialize in specific responsibilities. During the course of this study a process was underway to further divide them into subdivisions.

Communication between circuits and regions has improved through the provision of telephones, fax machines, and internet facilities. However there is still a challenge in terms of the timing between the receipt of circulars by schools and the submission date for important reports or documents. For example grade 12 Examination entry forms are usually received at an eleventh hour and this creates a lot of challenges in the examination section. In most case circulars are received a day before the submission date which is frustrating for schools, and this has become the order of the day.

Some of the remarkable improvements that have contributed to the success of the regions include: the provision of computers and software to assist with school administration,

more support staff, the appointment of deputy principals and education specialists, the widening of interaction with other principals in the region, and the payment of government grants to schools. There is still a backlog in terms of resources, learner support materials, libraries, computer laboratories, and the number of classrooms. Underperforming schools are mentored and encouraged to improve their performance. The Ehlanzeni region has shown a remarkable improvement from 2001 to 2008, as depicted by the table 2 and figure 4 in the next page. Grade 12 performance has shown an improvement of about 22, 4 % from 2001 up to 2007 and slight drop in 2008

TABLE 2: REGIONAL PASS RATES IN PERCENTAGES: 2001 TO 2008

YEAR	EHLANZENI	NKANGALA	GERT SIBANDE	BUSHBUCKRIDGE
2001	46	45	54	-
2002	55	43	62	-
2003	59	55	63	64.1
2004	61	60	66	63.5
2005	58.1	55.5	59.9	56.6
2006	66.2	63.9	64.9	47.4
2007	68.4	62.3	63	49.5
2008	58.6	59.6	57.5	30.1

It has already been mentioned in the previous section 7.2. on the background and context that Buchbuckridge region was integrated into Mpumalanga in 2007. Therefore the

records appearing on the table under its column from 2002 up to 2006 represent its performance while it was under Limpopo province. The blank spaces in 2001 and 2002 are mission records which the research could not get due to the reason explained above.

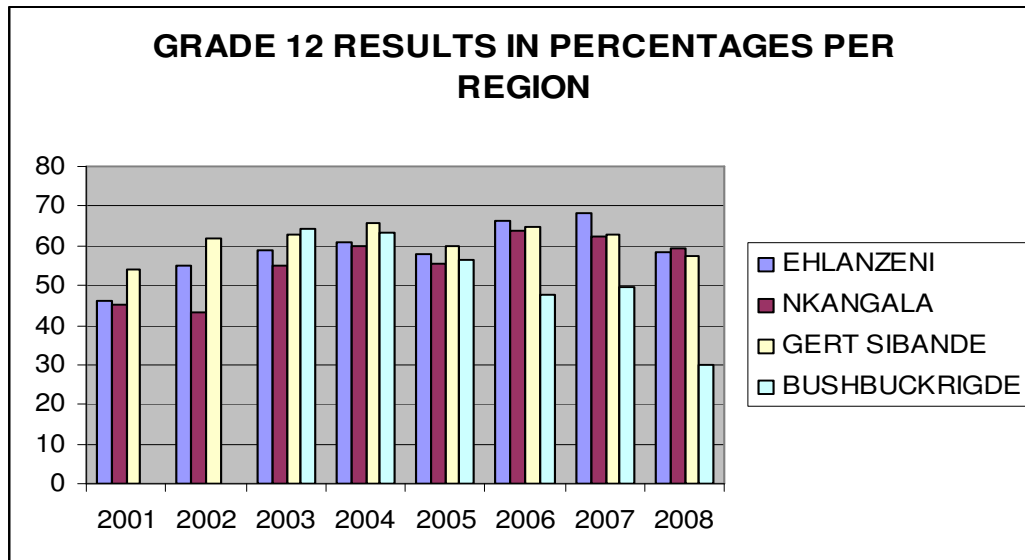


FIGURE 3: GRADE 12 RESULTS IN PERCENTAGES (2001-2008) MPUMALANGA PROVINCE

This study found that more powers were about to be devolved to regions in addition to what they had at the time that the study was conducted. Furthermore, senior posts were going to be elevated to the level of chief director instead of regional director, with two deputy directors.

6.6. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CIRCUITS AND REGIONS

Bhiya (personal interview, 2007) stated that in terms of staffing matters, it is now quick to employ a post level one educator because this power has been delegated to circuits. Promotions are still controlled by the region, but if the required documentation is correct,

approval can be obtained within one day. Districts did not previously follow the correct tender procedure but the regions are doing so. These opinions were substantiated by Mkhathswa (a) (personal interview, 2007) who argued that regions have better powers, the appointment of principals is quick, and post level one appointments, such as substitute educators, have been delegated to circuit managers.

There is an improvement in service delivery in terms of human resource management, physical resources, learners' furniture, and delivery of stationery is excellent. The process for the payment of salaries is also excellent. Regional directors can now make appointments from post level one to five, although post level one appointments have been delegated to circuit managers. Circuit managers can now charge all employees under their authority and fire any that may be guilty of misdemeanors by following the necessary procedures. The region can now procure and pay for services out of their own budget which they control. They only refer issues that are above their mandate to head office.

This study found that circuits have a vital role to play. Shabangu (personal interview, 2007) contended that a circuit is a 'one stop point' between schools and the region. Schools can be assisted at a point closer to them, for example, when they conduct promotional post interviews; they have a resource person who is close-by to assist when they encounter challenges such as writing minutes. Circuits assist schools with administration, for example the summary of leave applications. If there are challenges in

schools, the circuit is close by to assist immediately. The circuit, as part of the decentralized structure, is the advisory and support office between schools and the region.

6.7. POWERS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF REGIONS

Kauzya (2007) argues that political decentralization, or devolution, refers to the transfer of power pertaining to the selection of political leadership and representatives from central governments. It is also defined as the transfer of power and authority to make socio-political and economic decisions from the central government to local governments and communities. A distinction is made between political decentralization first, with regard to the choice of leadership through elections. Second, it would include putting in place structural arrangements and practices that would enhance and facilitate local governments and communities to exercise not only their voting powers in the choice of leaders but also influence the making, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of decisions. Political decentralization according to her should not be limited to these two frameworks. The power and authority to make decisions should not be limited to elected leaders or representatives; full decision-making powers should be devolved from central government to local government, authorities and communities.

Devolution in South Africa should be viewed as a way of rebuilding local communities and environments by promoting local government as a basis for a democratic, integrated,

prosperous, and truly non-racial society. Lauglo (1995) argues that among the rationales for redistributing authority may be the magnitude of the educational enterprise, the heterogeneity of the clientele for education, problems of communication, or the financial burden on the central government.

The regional office structure (DoE, 2007b) mentions that the functions of regions are to:

- Coordinate, implement, maintain and evaluate policy, programmes and systems
- Manage and render corporate services for the region
- Coordinate effective management of systems
- Manage and render communication services
- Manage transformation programmes and processes
- Oversee performance and achievement in the region
- Actively engage in policy development
- Facilitate the development of self-managing schools
- Coordinate and monitor the allocation and utilization of resources
- Handle all communication and publications
- Respond to any complaints or enquiries from the office of the MEC, Head of Department and Branch Managers.

This study found that according to the (DoE,1997b:16) report, regions were formed to reallocate full authority to include functions as the hiring and firing of teacher;

procurement of services and goods and other important functions which could effectively serve day-to-day management and professional needs of school in their areas. Motshana (personal interview, 2007) argues that regions are showing a great improvement in service delivery and school performance in general also measured in terms of grade 12 results.

Lauglo (1995) argues that the idea of decentralizing structures of government is based on a theory that decentralization may yield significant efficiency in the management of education. Mokoena(a) (personal interview, 2007) argued that one of the advantages of the restructuring process is that principals have benefited from exposure to a larger area, and networking with colleagues. This progress is due to the fact that the demarcation of regions is larger compared to that of districts; this enables principals to be exposed to a larger area, which in itself is a positive outcome. Schools in turn have benefited from consolidated expertise, the provision of computers for administrative purposes, and electrification.

Masango (personal interview, 2007) concurred that the establishment of regions has been successful. In the beginning three regions were established, but now there is a fourth one due to the incorporation of Bushbuckridge into Mpumalanga. Not all powers have been devolved to regions, for example the power to approve tenders for renovations, even if a school has been severely hit by storms. Ehlanzeni region is now following correct tender procedures. Themba (personal interview, 2007) listed the following issues which depict significant improvements: regions have introduced a number of divisions, circuits and schools are benefiting, more powers have been devolved to regions, circuit managers

have been given some powers such as hiring post level one employees, disciplinary powers have been delegated to principals, and more support staff have been appointed.

6.8. SERVICE DELIVERY UNDER REGIONS

According to Sayed (2002:36), “for those approaching decentralization from a public administration perspective, its success will be measured by the extent to which the provision of educational services and goods is more efficient as a consequence of the delegation and deconcentration of educational authority. For those approaching it from a political perspective, the success of decentralization is measured by the extent to which political involvement and participation is enhanced, depending on the extent to which the state redistributes authority and power. A pedagogy perspective would seek to locate the advocacy of the policy in relation to improvements in teaching and learning; in other words the extent to which teaching and learning are enhanced. From the economic perspective, decentralization should generate resources and result in an improvement of their allocation.”

Samoff (1990:519) states that development consultants use administrative measures to determine the efficacy of particular decentralization efforts. “Successful programmes are those that reduce delays, improve service delivery, and enhance cost recovery.” Based on Sayed’s (2002) arguments the success of decentralization in Mpumalanga could be best understood from the public administration and political perspective’s point of view. This success can also be measured by what Samoff (1990) argues above.

According to De Clercq (2002), decentralization is advocated by many countries for the purpose of internal managerial and financial efficiency. She further contends that these managerial and financial benefits sometime fail to materialize due to the local level’s lack of capacity, resources and systems for managing these functions. The study has already

alluded to the devolution of financial control to Ehlanzeni region, such a move is making it easier for the region to provide effective management and administration which translate into a general improvement in service delivery. Masilela and Motshana (personal interviews, 2007) contended that Mpumalanga was previously around 50 % but now it has moved to 60 % in terms of grade 12 results; In 2006 grade 12 results Mpumalanga obtained position 7 nationally (DoE, 2007b). This improvement is attributed to the increased power given to the regions.

The *ayihlome ifunde* campaign (a team focusing on underperforming school) played a significant role in improving performance by visiting and encouraging schools. Curriculum implementers are expected to produce year plans depicting their activities. *Izindaba* or *Imbizos* (*Education Summits*) contributed by making the educating enterprise everybody's business. The Ehlanzeni region now has adequate numbers of curriculum implementers and has achieved great improvement on a number of issues, according to Masango and Motshana (personal interviews, 2007). It has a number of divisions and sub-divisions, namely: professional services, corporate services, circuit coordination, communication, and transformation, which are further sub-divided into smaller sections. This structure has improved school performance because the region is fully staffed and has its own budget. According to Shabangu (personal interview, 2007), the region organizes various workshops to develop the skills of school managers, school governing bodies and educators. The region has provided vans to all circuits as a form of transport between circuits and itself, which further improves communication between these structures.

The financial management of schools has improved due to the workshops which administrative personnel have attended. As a result, schools are able to submit their audited financial statements on time, at the end of the financial year. Ngcane (personal interview, 2007) mentioned that the timing of workshops for educators has been improved – instead of occurring in the mornings and interrupting contact time, they are now held in the afternoons to ensure that teaching time is not compromised. Furthermore, school governing bodies are trained in their role as governors, which equip them with the necessary skills to govern.

The region introduced the idea of clustering schools together, whereby educators are able to assist one another. The clusters meet on a regular basis to share ideas and find solutions collaboratively. They also set common examination papers, which are written by all schools in the jurisdiction of a cluster. Underperforming schools are supported through mentoring programmes to enable them to perform, and this exercise has borne fruit. The management teams in schools have been encouraged to be accountable to their constituencies. The region also promotes region-government relations; as a result politicians now participate fully in educational issues especially during school reopening times, or by adopting particular schools. Padayachee (personal interview, 2007) claimed that there is more support, curriculum supervision, and teacher development because of the establishment of regions.

The region is doing its best to engage other stakeholders including partners such as

business and civil society. Heller (2009) argues that South Africa, like India, has a high degree of consolidated representative democracy, yet it has experienced challenges in terms of effective citizenship. In the name of efficiency and more rapid development, the scope and quality of participatory processes created under the Reconstruction and Development Process have been reduced. Mintrom (2008) contends that the effectiveness of individuals tends to decline as an organization grows larger. This in turn leads to weaker incentives to participate. This assertion poses a question as to how regions are handling participation. According to the Department of Education (DoE, 2007a) the holding of Education summits since 2004 with various stakeholders and having Niyabonwa Indaba (Mentoring Summit) for underperforming schools, where Principals share views and best practices with Principals and SGBs of best performing schools which commenced in 2006. The above are attributes to the region's success.

Shabangu (personal interview, 2007) argued that schools have enough personnel such as deputy principals, education specialists, administrative clerks, and general workers. Regions have provided schools with computers and software for administration, which has further improved the management of schools in the region. The above discussion vindicates the establishment of regions as a step in the right direction. In other words, much improvement is evident as a result of the establishment of regions. This improvement is evident in terms of the Ehlanzeni region's results, which depict an improvement in grade 12 performance from 2001 to 2008, with a slight decline in 2005.

6.9. CONCLUSION

The chapter concludes that the regions were created as an alternative to districts in order to be granted more powers, sufficient resources, and financial stability. This change in the structural and organizational design enabled regions to improve service delivery to schools. This study found that some of the improvements that came about due to the establishment of regions include the hiring of sufficient personnel for circuits and schools, increased public participation, more opportunities for teacher development, the introduction of school clusters, improved communication networks, better resourcing of institutions, the provision of circuit vans, the appointment of support staff, and increased autonomy of schools.

CHAPTER 7

THE EFFECT OF THE SHIFT FROM DISTRICTS TO REGIONS ON SERVICE DELIVERY TO SCHOOLS (2002-2009)

7.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter contends that the shift from districts to regions has had a positive effect on service delivery to schools in the Ehlanzeni Region as a case study, and around the Mpumalanga province in general. The Mpumalanga Department of Education (MDE), stated in its publication (DoE, 2001a) that the organizational restructuring was aimed at addressing the new challenges. It further stated that the move was aimed at maximizing responsiveness, efficiency and effectiveness in terms of quality service delivery. In the light of this statement, it is imperative to pose the question as to whether or not this has actually transpired. It is now eight years later and this study investigated where the province is in terms of its vision of maximizing efficiency and effective service delivery.

The discussion of the reasons for the shift from districts to regions revealed that it was adopted for the purposes of reducing administration or bureaucracy, cutting expenditure, increasing efficiency, affording more personnel, granting more powers to the region, and consolidating expertise. The aim was also to improve the level of management or strengthen management, reconfigure government structures, align education structures with municipal boundaries, and improve communication, financial management, and the operation of the organization at large (Masango and colleagues, personal interviews, 2007).

Karlsen (1999) argues and Weiler (1990) concurs that there is often tension between decentralization efforts and the need for the state to assert and reassert control. This argument is vital for this study which investigates decentralization and centralization moves in South Africa, with special reference to the Mpumalanga Department of Education, since it exhibits features of both decentralization and recentralization. It is important for this study to find out what has been the effect of this shift on service delivery in circuits and schools? (Did it lead to an improvement or decline in service delivery, education governance in the province, efficiency and effectiveness?)

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This chapter highlights challenges that were faced by districts and interrogates whether there is any improvement in service delivery due to the shift to regions, or if there has been a decline in service delivery, efficiency and effectiveness of education governance in the province.

7.2. POLICY FRAMEWORK

Oluwa (2001) argues that even though there are new orientations in decentralization policies in some countries in Africa, there are issues which remain a concern. Firstly, few countries have been able to allow competition among political parties and democratic decentralization at the same time. Many countries are practising decentralization within the context of a one party state. Secondly, uneven and unequal development of infrastructural and institutional capacities between regions and communities has caused decentralization efforts to be different or asymmetrical across regions. Thirdly,

decentralization policies tend to emphasize vertical transfer of authority and resources from central to local government at a time when central governments are experiencing resource shortages.

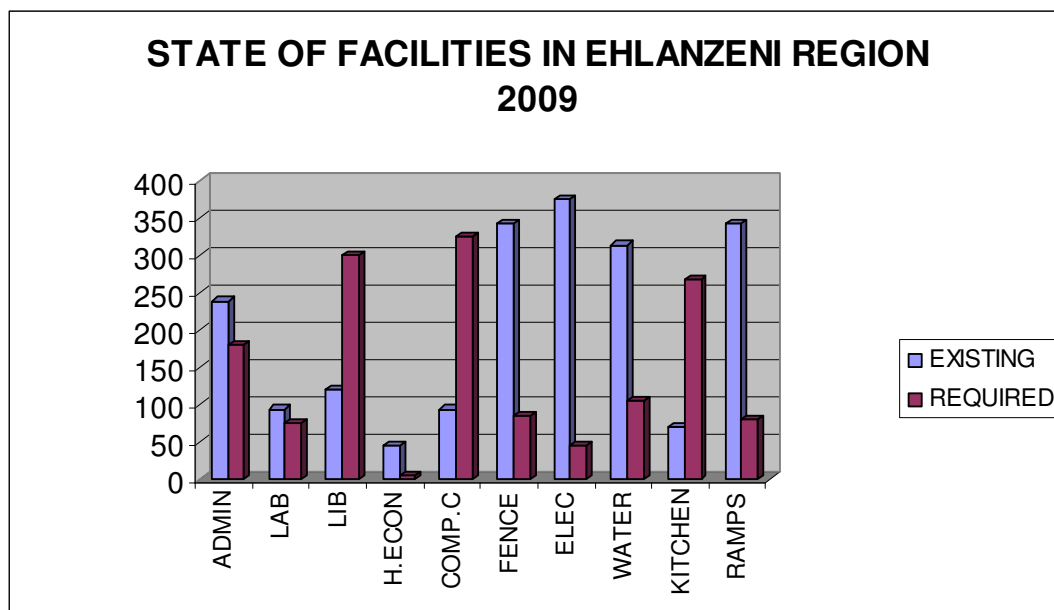
A fourth area of concern is the need to strengthen accountability mechanisms including additional participatory forums such as recall, referendum, a local ombudsman, service delivery surveys and participatory budgeting as being practised in some Latin American and Southern African cities. According to the (DoE, 2001b), and Burger and Tibane (2007), South Africa has a legislative policy framework for educational transformation. Districts or regions are not catered for, except by the Mpumalanga Education Schools Act of 1995 (DoE, 1995c) and the RSA Constitution (RSA,1996) .The former mentions that districts are within the jurisdiction of the MEC if he deems it fit to divide the province into districts for administrative purposes. There is no mention of a region in this Act; therefore this study is questioning the legal framework of regions as well as which structures they accountable are to, and how policies can be made in the absence of a clear policy framework.

This study found that Oluwa's (2001) issues of concern with regard to decentralization among African countries is also true for South Africa, especially the point about uneven and unequal development of infrastructural and institutional capacities between regions and communities which causes decentralization efforts to be different or asymmetrical. The uneven distribution of resources among the former model C and disadvantaged schools created a challenge for decentralization efforts, which is discussed in detail in the

following subsections. Andrews and De Vries (2007) concur with the above argument and contend that designing decentralization policy is difficult in any country, especially in developing countries because institutions, information, and capacity are all very weak.

7.3. RESOURCE PROVISION

Andrews and De Vries (2007:433) argue that “decentralization is not a panacea and unless some demanding requirements are met, performance gains will not materialize.” They further contend that decentralization is bound to fail if sub-national governments do not enjoy political and financial autonomy. This study found that unlike districts, regions do have adequate physical resources such as classrooms, offices, water, electricity, fencing, computers and telecommunication networks. All schools have computers and software for administrative purposes. The region is using government structures rather than renting offices as was the case during the district era.

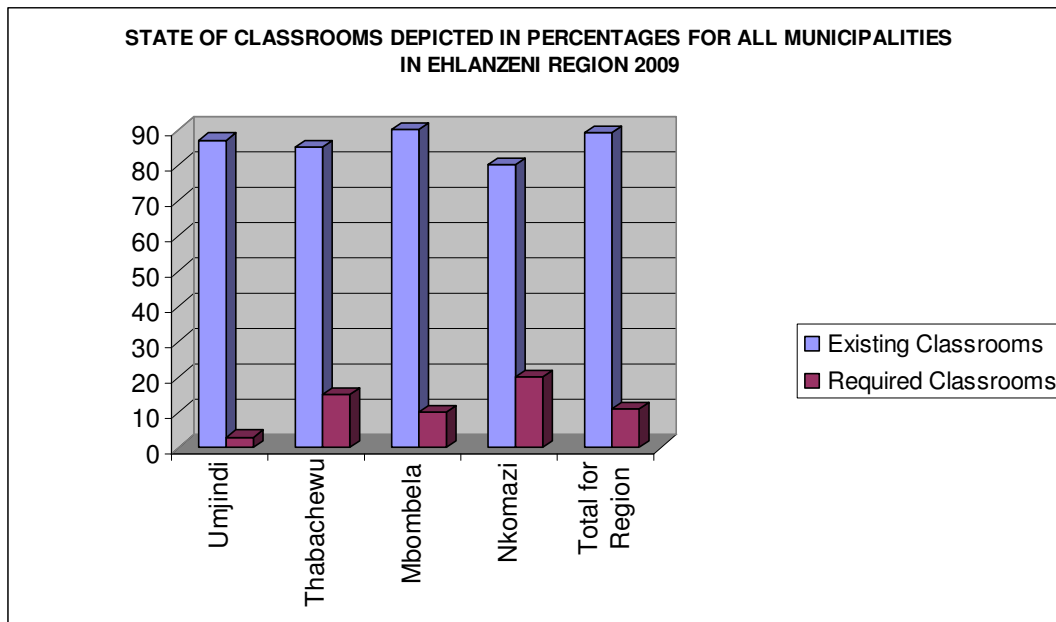


Source: Resource Planning, Ehlanzeni Region 2009.

FIGURE 4: STATE OF FACILITIES IN EHLANZENI REGION.

The above figure illustrates existing and required facilities at schools in Ehlanzeni region with regard to physical facilities such as administration blocks (ADMIN. 239 existing & 180 required), laboratories (LAB. 93 existing & 74 required), libraries (LIB. 119 existing & 300 required), home economic centres (H.ECON.), computer centres (COPM. C. 93 existing & 326 required), fence, electricity (ELEC.), water, kitchen, ramps and rails.

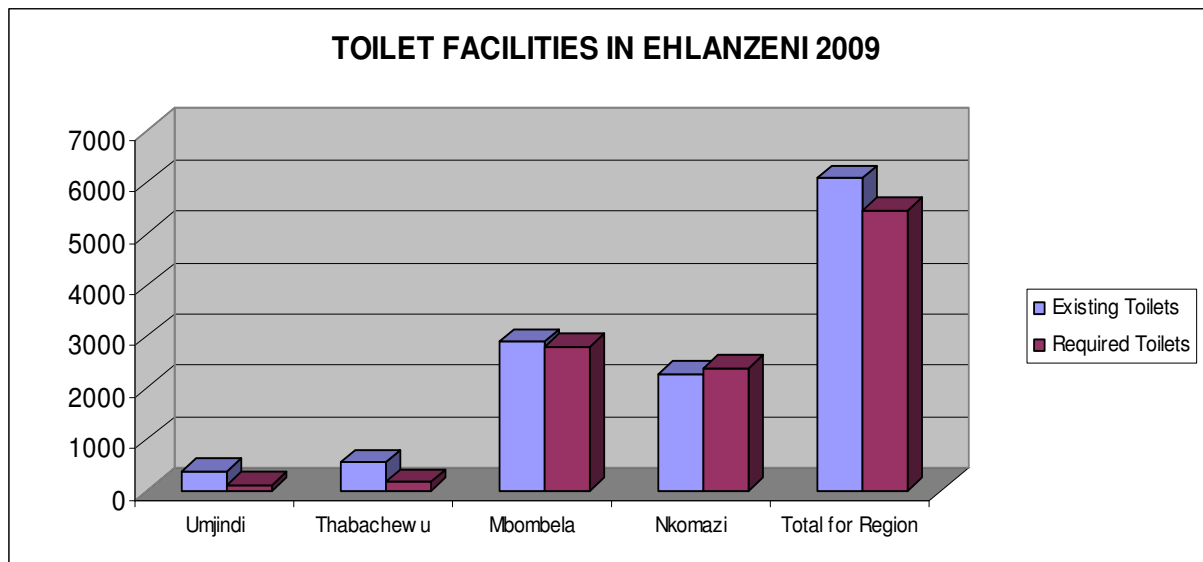
Even though there are still challenges in facilities such as libraries, computer centres and kitchens especially for schools with nutrition scheme, some improvements are seen in the provision of facilities such as fence 344 versus 85, electricity 375 versus 44, water 314 versus 105, ramps and rails 314 versus 79.



Source: Resource Planning, Ehlanzeni Region 2009

FIGURE 5: STATE OF CLASSROOMS IN EHLANZENI REGION.

The above figure depicts the required classrooms in percentages. It is evident from the diagram that there improvement in the provision of such because the need is less than 20 percent all municipalities. With Umjindi only requiring 3 %, Thabachewu 15 %, Mbombela 10 %, Nkomazi 20 % and the overall requirement for the region being 11 %.



Source: Resource Planning, Ehlanzeni Region 2009

FIGURE 6: TOILETS FACILITIES IN EHLANZENI.

The above figure also shows a slight improvement in the provision of toilets facilities in municipalities such as Umjindi (369 existing versus 106), Thabachewu (550 versus 174) and Mbombela (2290 versus 2797). The region however still confronts challenges with regard to the situation in the Nkomazi municipality (2260 versus 5456). The overall situation in the region is 6069 versus 5456. According to Bhiya (personal interview, 2007), circuit offices have vans which they use for transport between the region and head

office. The staffing needs of the region have been met, as opposed to the case of its predecessors, the districts. Schools and circuits have support staff (administrative clerks and general workers), all schools which qualify in terms of the post structure have deputy principals and adequate education specialists, as well as educators. The teacher pupil ratio has been improved to 1:35 for secondary schools and 1:40 for primary schools. The region has adequate curriculum implementers who provide professional support to schools. Their expertise has improved as compared with the district era. Lastly, the region has financial control which enhances its performance even more, because it is able to procure whatever it requires rather than following the slow bureaucratic route as was done by the districts. The budgeted amounts are deposited to schools, thus enabling them to access the necessary money and render services quickly. Slater (1989) argues that decentralizing both spending and revenue authority can improve the allocation of resources by linking the costs and benefits of public service more closely. Carrion-i-Silvestre, Espasa and Mora (2008) contend that there was significant economic growth in Spain at the regional level when the highest decentralization of power and fiscal control was effected.

The above findings indicate that the decentralization of spending on regions is bearing fruit. The interviews conducted for this study demonstrate that there are improvements in the provision of resources to the regions, as compared to the district era. This study found that the decentralization of financial management to the regions has brought about an improvement in the provision of physical and human resources to schools, as well as enhancing the support that can be offered to schools from structures such as regions.

These findings substantiate what Slater (1989) and Carrion-i- Silvestre et al. (2008) contend about the benefits of decentralizing finance and authority. Bhaktawar and Burger (2009) argue that the National Education Infrastructure Management System (NEIMS) which is an update on the school register of needs, shows an improvement in the provision of facilities. This report indicated that 74 % of schools were in a good or excellent condition.

7.4. CURRICULUM SUPPORT

Previous chapters have indicated that districts and circuits were struggling in terms of providing support to schools, but the findings show a subsequent improvement through the regional structure. Magagula and Zulu (personal interview, 2007) argued that the number of curriculum implementers has improved and it is now easier to access them; educators can contact them directly to get any required information, unlike relying on principals as in the past. Zulu (personal interview, 2007) argued that the separation or division of duties according to phases is also remarkable. For example, there are curriculum implementers for foundation, intermediate, senior and further education and training phases. This has improved the kind of support which these officials are providing to schools. The region has adequate curriculum implementers who are accessible; they are subject specialists, unlike being responsible for a number of subjects as was the case in the past. Their expertise has improved due to specialization and workshops which are meant to equip them adequately. They have transport which allows them to access the schools easily. Furthermore, they liaise with cluster leaders who are elected based on

their performance, to supervise and assist educators in their cluster.

Padayachee (personal interview, 2007) claimed that regions are playing their role; as a result there is more training and support, coordination, curriculum supervision and teacher development. Gershberg and Jacobs (1998) argue that the transfer of authority to lower levels should be viewed as an instrument for improving service provision, by making the people who supply the service more directly accountable for their performance. This study found that the advent of regions, with special reference to the Ehlanzeni region, has resulted in the provision of professional curriculum support. The region has enough curriculum implementers who are suitably skilled, accessible and helpful to schools. This has enhanced the provision of curriculum support in general and is contributing positively towards the performance of the region.

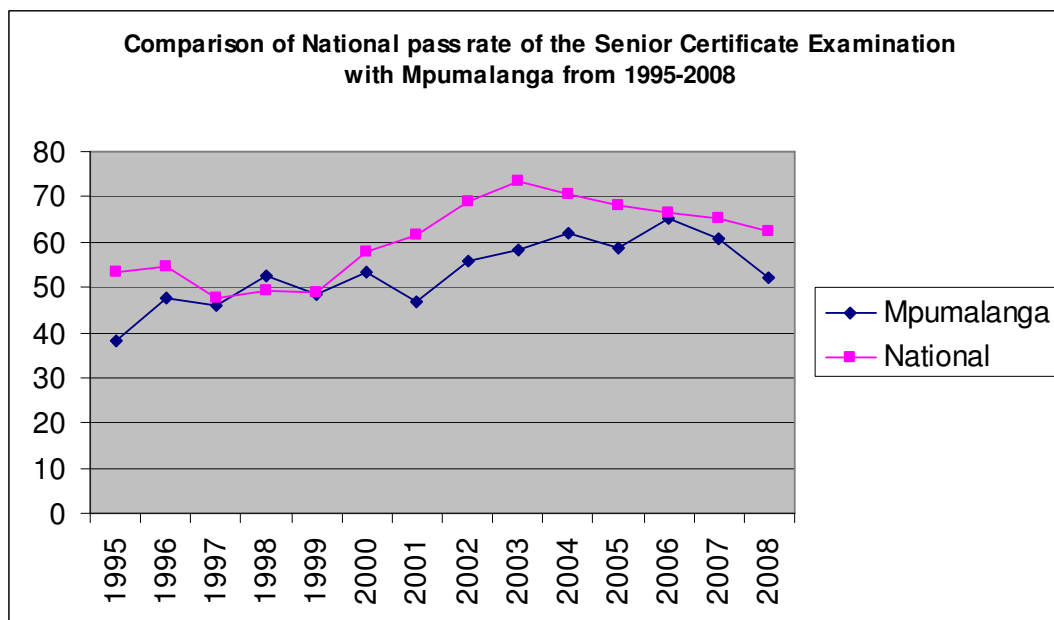


FIGURE 7: COMPARISON OF NATIONAL PERFORMANCE WITH MPUMALANGA PROVINCE

Figure 7 depicts that Mpumalanga has been performing below the national average from 1995 till 2008, with the exception of 1998. This performance is not far from what has been shown by districts in the Ehlanzeni region. The graph shows that after 1995, performance reached its lowest point in 2001 at 46.9 % and improved since then up to 2004 at 61.8 %, with a slight decline in 2005 at 58.6 %. Then there was a decline from 2006 up to 2008. The increase in Mpumalanga's performance from 2001 onwards may be attributed to the introduction of regions in 2001, according to the findings of this study. According to the DoE (2005a; 2005b), from 1995 the national pass rate decreased by 6.0% to sink to its lowest point in 1997 (47.7%). It remained almost the same from 1997 to 1999 (48.9%), and then increased by 24.4% to its highest point in 2003 (73.3%). From 2003 up to 2008 there was a decline in performance.

Themba (personal interview, 2007) argued that the consolidation of expertise at the region in terms of curriculum implementers is a positive sign. The standard or quality of education has improved, the region has been given procurement powers to order textbooks and it has a warehouse. The delivery of textbooks is quick, most schools are better resourced, and workshops on a number of aspects are organized to support schools. Shabangu (personal interview, 2007) argued that although the standard has improved, the quality of learners that are produced from grades 08 and 09 is under threat in terms of content, because educators are grappling with the new curriculum. The paradigm shift from teacher centeredness to learner centeredness has exacerbated the challenges faced by educators.

Kanjeo (2006) states that the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) established the National Education Quality Initiative to support government and other key stakeholders in education, because they believe that providing quality education for all is a crucial step towards improving people's socio-economic conditions.

He reports that two advisory bodies or committees, one national and one international, will be established to add value to the initiative of improving quality in education. The focus will be on improving reading and writing in schools, developing indicators for local role players to monitor education quality, and lastly evaluating the impact of free education on quality. Steyn (2000:47) argues "that quality and equality are not separate entities but sides of the same coin;" however South Africa seems to have emphasized one over the other. "Although there may seem to be a tension between quality and equality, school education should strive to meet both these goals. Quality education should bring about positive changes, outcomes that fit in with the goals valued by those participating in the educational process."

Boshoff (personal interview, 2007) claimed that the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) is helping, although it is seen as a 1 % Salary increment and not as a development tool by educators. Skills development is also a programme with good intentions. According to Viljoen and Pillay (personal interview, 2007), standards dropped and quality decreased in the past ten years, although these are now improving. They further argued that although pupils are passing, it does not mean they have all the required skills.

According to Wa Kivili and Diko (2008) there is generally a problem in the primary section as substantiated by the International study on literacy and numeracy (Chuenyane, 2008) that was conducted in 2005, to assess learners in grade 03, which revealed that learners cannot read or write and have difficulties in arithmetic. If pupils cannot read, they cannot comprehend and therefore cannot understand.

Returning to the quality – equality debate, Sayed (2002) contends that decentralization should be understood from its proponents' perspective, be it administrative, political, pedagogic, and economic. What is important however is in spite of whatever perspective the process of decentralization should not be seen as an end in itself but should ideally promote the quality of learning.

Following Sayed's (2002) argument, decentralization is a futile exercise if it does not add value to the quality of learning. This study found that most of the interviewees concurred with Steyn (2000) pertaining to his argument on South Africa's negligence in terms of quality versus equality, even though these are sides of the same coin. What is, however, interesting is that the focus has now shifted to the provision of quality education as argued by Kanjee (2006), Thwala (2007), Mohlala (2007), and Viljoen (personal interview, 2007).

7.5. SPECIALIZATION

On the question of specialization, Ngcane (personal interview, 2007) argued that since

regions now have enough human resources, there are categories or subdivisions, such as Circuit Coordination, General Education and Training (GET), Skills Development, Finances, and Human Resource Development, which did not exist in the past. Under-qualified educators are now assisted financially by the department to further their studies, and the labour section is able to focus on labour-related issues. All in all decentralization to the regions has resulted in a much better demarcation of work than during the districts era when most services were centralized at head office. Slater (1989) views decentralization as the creation of relatively autonomous agencies and enterprises that can render specific duties with greater flexibility and speed than the traditional central office.

This study found, as argued by Ngcane (personal interview, 2007) and Slater (1989), that the delegation of powers and finances to the region has created leverage in the provision of resources to schools and has further boosted performance. The establishment of a number of sub divisions has enhanced the performance of the region. Responses to requests from schools are now faster.

7.6. IN-SERVICE TRAINING AND TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

It was alluded to above that under-qualified educators are now assisted financially by the department to further their studies (Ngcane, personal interview, 2007) – an innovation that was introduced by the regions. The establishment of the skills development and human resources development sections is contributing significantly towards human

resources development. Furthermore, the introduction of the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) is also playing a significant role in teacher development.

Mokoena (personal interview, 2007) argued that principals now get more exposure to a larger area, are able to network with colleagues, and as a result, schools have benefited from the consolidated expertise. This study found that schools have been grouped into clusters with every learning area or subject having a cluster of educators who meet on a monthly basis to share ideas related to the subject matter. They work in collaboration with one another, including teaching the same activities and setting common question papers. Clusters have proved to be a success especially because they encourage sharing of ideas and expertise. This exercise also contributes towards teacher development, in addition to the workshops that are organized by curriculum implementers. The idea of clusters is practised in all the regions of Mpumalanga.

Rondinelli et al. (1989) argue that for decentralization to succeed there should be capacity at the local level to finance and manage service provision. Nickson (2001) argues that it is one thing to decentralize or devolve powers to the lower level, but then another challenge emerges, namely the capacity to perform the new regulatory and enabling roles which have been bestowed upon a particular level. The region, according to the interviewees, is engaged in in-service programmes as well as upgrading programmes for unqualified or under-qualified educators. Curriculum implementers have organized educators into clusters which is enhancing the capacity of educators to become effective in terms of their teaching practice.

7.7. COMMUNICATION

The communication infrastructure has improved in terms of the use of the internet and fax machines at the circuit level (Bhiya and Ooswesthuizen, personal interviews, 2007).

Most schools now have telecommunication facilities, unlike in the past. Circuits now have a means of transport to travel to schools and the regional office, which enables the region to speed up services between these structures.

Lauglo (1995) claims that problems with communication may be one of the rationales for decentralization. Machiori and De Lourdes Oliveira (2009) argue that communication increases organizational accountability and interaction among diverse stakeholders; hence it enhances the sustainability of an organization's processes.

In the case of this study, the views expressed by circuit managers are in contrast to what school managers say with regard to communication. According to the circuit managers there is an improvement in communication, while school managers argue that this is not the case. This study found that there is a general concern among school managers for improvement in communication especially when it comes to correspondence from the region to schools; usually schools are given short notice instead of enough time to work on whatever activity is supposed to be done and submitted, for example receiving a circular today and being expected to submit something the next day. A few schools still face challenges in terms of telecommunications and the internet.

This section may therefore conclude that communication has generally improved, although there is room for further refinement in terms of the timing of correspondence from the region to schools.

7.8. EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF REGIONS

Parker and Kirsten (1995) contend that the success of any decentralization effort should be measured by its effectiveness (minimum standard of service delivery in a cost effective way), responsiveness to the demands of its clients (the local communities), sustainability as indicated by political stability, fiscal adequacy and institutional flexibility. That argument causes this study to pose the question as to whether regions are meeting the minimum standards of service delivery and cost effectiveness. The second measure relates to their responsiveness to the demands of their clients, namely schools. Thirdly, can regions be sustained – do they have enough financial strength to render their activities, and lastly is there sufficient institutional flexibility on their part? The findings that address these questions are discussed in detail below.

The previous sections have shown that regions have a higher level of management expertise, more powers, adequate human and physical resources, financial control, viable support systems, operational divisions and sub-divisions. Firstly, the region is now headed by a regional director who has been granted more powers equivalent to his level of management. For example, the regional director has power to hire and fire employees ranging from post level one up to five. Some of these powers have been delegated to

circuit managers, such as the appointment of post level one educators. According to Mashego (personal interview, 2007), regional directors can approve the procurement of services or goods up to R100 000, 00 (one hundred thousand rand). The region is now planning strategically instead of planning only for the short term.

Secondly, the region has enough personnel at the region, in circuits and at schools. Schools and circuits have adequate support staff that has been appointed to reinforce service delivery. Deputy Principals and education specialists have been appointed to enhance management at the school level. Masuku (personal interview, 2007) claimed that the creation of promotional posts such as deputy principal, and education specialist for different learning areas are evidence of improvements. It should be remembered that during the district era there was an outcry about principals who were overloaded, so the appointment of deputy principals and education specialists has surely relieved some of the pressure on principals.

Thirdly, the region has adequate physical resources. Mnisi and Shabangu (personal interviews, 2007) confirmed the provision of computers and software to schools for administration purposes. The delivery of stationery and other learner support material has improved. Each and every settlement has a primary and secondary school, according to Mnisi (personal interview, 2007). Nevertheless, there are still some challenges in terms of providing well equipped laboratories, media centers, and computer centers (Swanepeel, van der Merwe and colleagues, personal interviews, 2007).

Fourthly, the region has financial control over its budget. Circuits and schools also have their own budgets which are based on their needs. The region has procurement powers which make the purchase of goods swift as long as it has been approved. Fifthly, the region has a viable support system with fully equipped personnel to assist circuits and schools. Lastly, the region has introduced new divisions such as human resource development, skills development, wellness section, and labour section, all of which are further enhancing service delivery to schools.

The MDE (DoE, 1997b) report argues that the need to restructure educational governance structures in Mpumalanga was aimed at making them more responsive to the needs of the public. This study found that Mnisi and colleagues (personal interviews, 2007) do agree that there has been an improvement in service delivery brought about by the regions. This section therefore confirms that the measurement elements of Parker and Kirsten's (1995) argument with regard the success of any decentralization effort have been met in the case of Mpumalanga.

This study concurs with researchers such as Rondinelli (1981), that the lack of financial resources, physical infrastructure, transport and communication are real hindrances to decentralization. This assertion was also made by Swanepoel, Wandrag, Harvey, Oosthuizen and colleagues (personal interviews, 2007) in connection with things that the region should improve. These issues include further decentralization of curriculum implementers to be stationed at the circuits; enabling some curriculum implementers and educators to master the new curriculum; and the provision of media centers, laboratories

and computer centers. The delivery of furniture should be expedited and lastly, the distribution of circulars at the eleventh hour should be avoided.

Masango, Padayachee and colleagues (personal interviews, 2007) argued that from the government's perspective the idea of regions has been successful. Presently there are three regions with a fourth one recently established. The regions have enhanced service delivery in the province; curriculum implementers were few across the districts now they are adequate and concentrated at the regions. According to Oluwa (2001), two crucial issues should be considered for decentralization to succeed. Firstly, democratic decentralization should be viewed as a process not as an event. Secondly, African states need to move beyond withholding institutional resources from non-government organizations such as religious groups and community-based organizations which could play a critical role in enhancing decentralization efforts.

This section therefore concludes that for decentralization to succeed it is imperative to devolve power and authority to the lower levels. This devolution should be preceded by capacity building of the incumbents. Financial control should be decentralized as well in order to promote efficacy, by enabling officials at the local level to improve physical infrastructure, transport and communication which may otherwise be obstacles to decentralization. This section concurs with Parker and Kirsten's (1995) argument with regard to measuring the success of any decentralization effort. The regions in Mpumalanga are effective and responsive to the needs of schools, irrespective of the fact that there are still some areas of concern.

7.8.1. EFFECT OF THE SHIFT ON SERVICE DELIVERY IN SCHOOLS AND CIRCUITS

This study found that there has been an effect on service delivery as a result of the shift from districts to regions. Mokoena (b), (personal interviews, 2007) argued that the positive effects are evident. For example, within a week schools can get results after an interview for a job vacancy, the region has a budget as does each division, which means they are able to procure their own requirements. New initiatives are currently underway which will further improve the situation at the region by providing more staffing, delegation of duties, and improved accountability procedures. Decisions are now taken locally at a component level, for example the intermediate and senior phase previously fell under one unit with 60 officials. According to the new regional structure this unit will become two units or components, each with 30 officials. This is a move towards specialization, which in the past applied to grade 12 only; now all phases will benefit from specialization.

During the time of their establishment, regions were not well equipped. Khoza (b) and Mahlalela (personal interviews, 2007) stated that powers were delegated at a later time; now a departmental manual is available as a guiding document. Circuits have their own budgets unlike in the past. Some powers have been delegated to circuit as already mentioned previously. Parker and Kirsten (1995:7) argue that “there remains a serious gap in our understanding of the various dimensions of decentralization. The degree and different types of patterns of decentralization have not yet been described and

measured in a consistent way across countries over time, so that at best only an anecdotal characteristic of decentralization of rural development and rural service delivery programme can be made. Without which no judgement can be made whether greater decentralization in some form is associated with greater success in rural development and rural service delivery or whether it results in better targeting the poor and reduced poverty levels.”

In the light of the above argument, this study has demonstrated that in terms of decentralization and the shift to regions, what may be termed ‘recentralization’ has yielded some tangible results in Mpumalanga.

7.9. THE REGIONS’ CHALLENGES

This study has found that regions are encountering their own challenges even if there has been a remarkable improvement in service delivery as argued above; nevertheless there is still room for refinement. Mokoena (b) (personal interview, 2007) argued that some of the challenges include a backlog in Curriculum Implementers appointments, the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) has many more learning areas than in OBE, the capturing of data from the vacancy list is still done at head office and should be transferred to regions. Although fully staffed, some areas are not easily reachable, for example places such as Lydenburg and Mbuzini are too far from the regional office. There is too much dependence on the moderation of Continuous Assessment (CASS). NCS training is another challenge, for example some educators are still struggling with the three levels of planning (lesson programme or face long planning, work schedules and lesson plans). Face long planning refers to a lesson programme planning.

According to Mahlalela (personal interview, 2007), the educational infrastructure was not thoroughly prepared for the movement from ten districts to three regions. Offices are not accessible for the physically challenged population – they have no ramps or lifts, and the situation is the same in all three regions. No renovations have been carried out in the regional offices nor at head office, which adversely affects the morale of the staff. There are no air conditioners, no carpets, no access to internet in some offices, and the theft of government property is rife. Some officials are corrupt, for example, one official was arrested for fraud. As a result of the new structure, the installation of labour saving devices is underway. Every employee of the department should have an office and the infrastructure and office arrangements should be improved.

Parker and Kirsten (1995) argues that decentralization initiatives are not static or rigid – they should be subjected to a continuous process of modification reflecting changes in social, political, and economic conditions. Gedkli (2009:116) contends “that the globalization of socio-economic processes and the localization of efforts for economic growth have led to a search for effective division of responsibilities among central, regional and local governments.” This study demonstrates that shift from districts to regions is something that is a practised in decentralization initiatives as government attempts to improve governance in order to enhance service delivery. Masango (personal interview, 2007) contended that regions are not adequately resourced in terms of cars and other resources. Head office is reluctant to devolve power to the regions. Some restructuring is, however, underway – for example the post of the regional director will

be elevated to that of chief director with two deputy directors. He claimed that resource provision and capacity building in the regions will assist them to plan strategically.

The challenges faced by regions may be summarized as follows. The capturing of data for vacancy lists is still done at head office although capacity is available at the region; this retards the process of recruitment and appointment. Not all schools in the regions are fully reachable due to the vastness of the region's boundaries. Some educators are still struggling with the three levels of planning: lesson programmes or face long planning, work schedules and lesson plans. The salary package of curriculum implementers is not attractive which does not encourage good applicants. Although the region has sufficient staff, there is a challenge in terms of capacity building. It seems as if the infrastructure was not thoroughly prepared for the shift from districts to regions. No renovations have been carried out on offices, which makes working conditions non conducive in terms of productivity. Lack of facilities such as offices, air conditioners and internet access in some offices is a challenge. Theft of government property is also a challenge but labour saving devices for tightening security were being installed at the time of the interviews to alleviate that challenge.

7.10. CONCLUSION

The discussion in this chapter has proved that the shift from districts to regions was not in vain – it has improved a lot of things at the school level. Ten findings are summarized in this concluding section. Some of the findings reflect remarkable improvements as a result

of the establishment of regions, which are evidence of their success; nevertheless some challenges remain.

Firstly, regions have more powers and authority as opposed to their predecessors (districts) who were performing badly. Regional directors have procurement powers up to R100 000, and they can make appointments from post level one up to that of chief education specialist. Some powers to appoint post level one and substitute educators have been delegated to circuit managers. In the case of principals, internal disciplinary measures have been delegated to them.

Secondly, regions and circuits have their own budgets which have been drawn up through a process of consultation and are utilized according to their discretion, unlike in the past. Schools are given a government grant to cover day-to-day maintenance that is deposited to their account, although the amount is not always sufficient. Thirdly, school support has improved and although there are still challenges for the appointment of more curriculum implementers, positive signs are evident.

Fourthly, regions have introduced school clusters and the prioritization of projects. Curriculum implementers are now categorized according to phases – foundation, intermediate, senior, general and further education and training phases. Since the establishment of regions in 2001 there has been significant improvement of grade 12 results as shown by the tables and figures in this chapter. Further development of educators and their mastery of the curriculum are still a challenge, although there are

strides in the right direction.

Fifthly, the question of quality remains a challenge. Some interviewees argued that it is moving towards the right direction, while a few opposed that view. The quest for quality education is exacerbated by the lack of sufficient resources, inadequate training of educators, and the promotion criteria of the new curriculum. The sixth finding is that regions have sufficient human capacity and have begun to specialize in terms of specific responsibilities. They have introduced a number of divisions such as skills development, human resource development, wellness section, labour section, and circuit coordination, systems and planning. At the time of the study a process was underway to further divide them into subdivisions.

The seventh finding is that communication between the circuits and the region has improved through the provision of telephones, fax machines, and internet facilities. However there is still a challenge, as demonstrated by the responses from school managers which differed from the opinion of circuit managers. The eighth factor is improvement at the school level in the form of the provision of computers and software to assist with school administration, support staff, appointment of deputy principals and education specialists, widening of interaction with other principals in the region, and the payment of government grants to schools.

The ninth factor is that underperforming schools are mentored and encouraged to improve their performance. The Ehlanzeni region has shown a remarkable improvement

by 22, 4 % in grade 12 results from 2001 up to 2007. This improvement in the performance of grade 12 learners is attributed to the additional powers granted to the region in terms of financial control and resource provision, as well as the curriculum support that the region provided to circuits and schools. Lastly, the region is capacitating schools in terms of financial management, management and general administration, accountability, and the roles of school governing bodies and representative councils of learners. Even though there are challenges as mentioned, the regions are far more advanced compared to the districts, and surpass districts in terms of the aspects discussed above.

This chapter therefore concludes that significant improvement in service delivery has been brought about by the shift from districts to regions. This process has enhanced education governance, efficiency and effectiveness around the Mpumalanga province in general. About 91 % of the respondents indicated that districts were not effective. They faced a lot of challenges, but the major one was the lack of power and authority which rendered them as mere conveyers of information. Four percent of the respondents argued that districts were effective to a certain extent, if viewed within the context of transformation, while 5 % categorically contended that districts were effective because of their proximity to schools in that they could respond quickly. With regard to regions, the study found that 17, 1 % of respondents viewed regions as ineffective, citing the issues of distance, the size of the region, communication, and capacity as some of the issues hampering their effectiveness. The majority of respondents (82, 9 %) contended that

regions are performing well in a number of respects such as having more power, budget control, sufficient personnel, specialization, and skills development sections.

This chapter has shown that the shift from districts to regions has had a positive effect on service delivery to schools, not only in the Ehlanzeni Region, but in the Mpumalanga province as a whole. The study found that regions are responsive, effective and provide quality service delivery in a number of areas. It should be mentioned however that no single factor can have a bearing on the performance of an organization. So the improvements detected in Ehlanzeni region are as much a consequence of greater personnel efficiency and understanding of their work at all levels as they are a consequence of structural changes.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

8.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a summary of key issues raised throughout the study that is: decentralization trends around the globe, Mpumalanga's history, economic and political situation which prescribe the initial decentralization in the form of districts with special reference to Ehlanzeni region as a case study as well as the circumstances that led to the shift from districts to regions. The effect of the restructuring of education governance structures on circuits and schools. The findings of the study will be outlined including the challenges that are faced by regions. It also addresses the question of the national District Development Unit, boundaries of educational structures, the future of districts and regions in South Africa, and lastly the implications of the study for the decentralization literature and future research.

As previously mentioned, Rondinelli et al. (1989) state that decentralization includes various concepts and its potential success should be thoroughly analyzed in any country before pursuing decentralization policies. Public choice theorists argue that when conditions prevail for free choice, the provision of some public goods is more economically efficient when a large number of local institutions are involved than when only the central government is the provider, but most governments do not pursue decentralization for economic reasons. Hopkin (2009) contends that political parties play

a key role in detecting demands for decentralization and institutional reforms, as a response to either centrifugal pressures, or for other reasons. He further argues that governments may initiate institutional changes in their own image, decentralizing power as a way of resolving internal differences and holding together a heterogeneous electoral population. According to Hopkin (2009:195), “in the United Kingdom, the Labour Party adopted a commitment to devolution as a response to unexpected resurgence of the territorial cleavage, which threatened its electoral strongholds.” Thus in South Africa, with the economy that was growing at a slow pace amidst a number of reform challenges, decentralization was deemed the best way of redressing the imbalances of the past, through drafting the norms and standards for funding at the national level. Decentralization was viewed as a way of encouraging community participation as well as empowering communities at provincial and district levels.

Rondinelli (1981) argues that experience shows that there is a great opportunity for success if institutions provide for community participation, local leadership and decentralization of authority. This argument is based on the notion that if marginalized groups in rural areas are to benefit from government services, a way should be found to decentralize public service delivery and involve the community which it is meant for, in planning and decision making at the local level.

Based on the above arguments for recentralization, it is imperative to examine whether the success alluded to by the proponents has really been achieved through the shift from districts to regions in the Mpumalanga province. This study found enough evidence (as

presented in the previous chapter) to indicate the success of the regions as nodes of service delivery, since the powers that have been delegated to this level enable them to be more effective and efficient than their predecessors (the districts). Regions in Mpumalanga are responsive and effective in service delivery as opposed to the former districts. The communication network has improved due to the introduction of telephones, fax machines, transport and internet at schools as well as the circuit level, in spite of a few remaining challenges as demonstrated by the responses from school managers as opposed to the opinion of circuit managers.

Marchiori and De Lourdes Oliviera (2009) contend that Brazilian social scientists view communication as something that is at the center of the organization. This is based on the belief that communication increases organizational accountability and interactions among diverse stakeholders and thus enhances efficiency. The Ehlanzeni region has a number of divisions and sub-divisions such as skills development, human resource development, wellness section, labour section, circuit coordination, systems and planning. The region has empowered schools in terms of financial management, management and general administration, accountability, and the roles of school governing bodies, and representative councils of learners. Some powers have been delegated to circuit managers and principals. For example, the appointment of post level one employees falls under the jurisdiction of circuit managers and internal disciplinary measures have been delegated to principals.

8.2. DECENTRALIZATION IN PERSPECTIVE

This study shows that decentralization in South Africa has not been without hiccups and hindrances; the districts faced various challenges and constraints including the lack of power and authority, lack of a policy framework, and lack of human, financial and physical resources. Weiler (1990) cites three arguments that are related to decentralization: firstly the *redistribution* argument which has to do with power sharing; secondly, the *efficiency* argument which is geared towards improving the cost-effectiveness of the education system, through more efficient allocation and management of resources; thirdly, the *culture of learning* argument, which emphasizes educational content. This study found that if the efficiency argument is pursued without any real transfer of influence away from the center, it is unlikely that the local level or private sector will provide any additional resources. This argument is based on the notion that the extent to which a wide range of societal organization is involved in education will be equivalent to the contribution they make in terms of resources.

Even though the establishment of districts and circuits was based on good intentions, the road traveled by these structures has been bumpy and hazardous. It is understandable that the road to success is not an easy one; in spite of the tribulations, the National Department of Education still views district offices as key instruments in its pursuit of improved quality of education. Mohlala (2007a) argues that district offices are professional support vehicles primarily established to support schools in providing quality education. But in Mpumalanga districts and circuits did not live up to their expectation as shown by the study.

Bjork (2006) cites that one of the reasons why decentralization was adopted in Pakistan was to improve service delivery. This is also true for South Africa according to what this study has revealed: decentralization was adopted with the aim of bringing services and government closer to the people, so as to improve service delivery. However the results of this study suggest that these aims did not materialize since there were more challenges than envisaged. According to Weiler (1990), understanding the political dynamics of centralization and decentralization in educational policy requires going beyond the kinds of arguments that are typically advanced for advocating greater decentralization.

The first challenge faced by South Africa is that there is no common understanding as to what a district is; Mohlala (2007a) argues that it is imperative to first agree on a common understanding of what a district should be. In some provinces a district is a collection of circuits which provide a range of professional support services to schools. In other provinces these services are housed in districts which are the level closest to schools (thus circumventing the need for circuits). Furthermore, a policy is required to guide the National Department of Education's resource provision to districts. The capacity of districts varies both in quality and quantity due to the effect of the former apartheid funding formula. The new provinces inherited schools from former homelands and as a result the new post apartheid government was faced with immense backlogs. The absence of a policy framework is prevalent in provinces such as Limpopo, Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga and Northern Cape. As a result, 79 districts are affected by lack of policy (Mohlala, 2007). The above mentioned views vindicates what Narsee (2006) argues

about the lack of a uniform meaning of a district, and the lack of national policy on districts or sub structures in South Africa.

Nickson (2001) is of the opinion that the absence of strategic vision of educational reform from the center may lead to the demise of decentralization efforts. This argument is substantiated by Rondinelli (1981) who claims that the success of any decentralization effort depends in the beginning on the strength and competence of the central government to provide support to the lower levels in building administrative capacity. This study has demonstrated that there was no specific direction from the national government in South Africa with regard to sub structures such as districts; hence provincial governments used the power and authority bestowed on them by the Constitution to establish districts or regions, with some provinces having both structures. This created the problem as to the definition of a district, evidenced by the lack of an agreement in terms of its meaning from one province to another.

Lauglo (1995) argues that many developing countries have, after independence, opted for policies for social and economic development which have placed strong emphasis on central planning. This study has shown that educational districts in Mpumalanga did not receive any financial support as opposed to regions, bearing in mind that the country was facing a serious backlog in terms of resources. The funding formula during the apartheid era was based on inequalities and left behind a legacy of disparities. The above argument provides a rationale for centralizing power at the national and provincial levels in a country with a history of inequitable resource provision. There was a need for central

planning at the highest levels with a bit of decentralization to the district office to fulfill the implementation role, as well as to encourage community participation.

According to Padayachee (personal interview, 2007) about 99 % of the education budget in 1999 in Mpumalanga was used for personnel requirements. The lack of sufficient funds at the provincial level was cited as the reason for failing to meet a lot of challenges faced by districts. The DoE (2001b) argues that an equitable share formula was introduced to address the question of inequity but even so, this study found that it was not possible for the districts to provide all the necessities for schools without adequate resources or contributions from other stakeholders.

Parker and Kirsten (1995) argue that the lack of funding for lower level institutions is the single most crucial factor that undermines decentralization efforts. As a result, there is a growing awareness that partnerships with different institutions will enhance decentralization attempts and service delivery. This study found that lack of funding was a challenge for districts and circuits which had no budget under their control. Now the regions have a budget which is drawn up through a process of consultation and is utilized according to their terms unlike during the districts era where everything was centralized at the Mpumalanga Department of Education, districts did not have decision making authority. Even schools now have their own budgets, part of which is deposited to accounts under a school's control. This allocation is based on the national formula for funding which considers the total number of learners per school.

The study confirmed that districts and circuits could not deliver the expected services to schools due to the lack of material and human resources. According to statistics released by Higher Education South Africa (Kgosana, 2008:12), an organization comprising 23 universities across South Africa, schools are not performing according to expectations since they produce learners who cannot cope with university studies. As a result many students drop out and the then chairperson of Higher Education South Africa argued that about 35 % of all first students in South African Universities, mainly African students drop out before June. Kgosana (2008) claims that only one out of three students who register for an undergraduate degree in South Africa complete it within the first four years.

This study views this drop out rate in a serious light as a challenge to the country at large to work tirelessly to reduce such high drop out figures. Potterton (2008:15) argues that “primary school tests, such as the 2006 Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, show that almost 80 % of South African children do not have basic reading skills by the time they reach five, only 2 % measure up to the highest international standards of literacy. A minority of primary school children in mainly privileged schools reach target grade levels, but the vast majority do not achieve basic mastery in reading, writing and mathematics.”

The then minister of Education (Pandor, 2007:12) commented that “teachers are not teaching with implicit objective of grade 12 pupils passing tough papers that will test high level cognitive skills.” South Africa as a country has a dire shortage of skills in the

country, so we cannot afford such a loss of potential skills. This study was investigating the shift from district to regions and how this improved service delivery to circuits and schools. The arguments raised above are of concern as this study investigates how can education governance enhance service delivery to schools. The Regions as education governance structures therefore have a bigger role to play in supporting circuits and schools in whatever way possible to perform so that Kgosana's (2008) and Potterson's (2008) concerns are reversed and eliminated.

Bjork (2006) argues that decentralization is aimed at the devolution of power and authority, the deconcentration of management functions and the distribution of resources to the district level. Such devolution and deconcentration did not occur in the case of districts in the Mpumalanga Department of Education; hence the complaints about lack of power and authority and a dire shortage of resources as substantiated by the interviews as well as the literature.

Lauglo (1990) argues that efficiency is a wider concept because it denotes the quality of the system operation not just the quality of services rendered to those who are reached by these services. He argues that there must be constant and speedy delivery of requests to and from the district office. This argument concurs with what this study discovered through the interviews. This study found that it took a long time for districts to appoint administrative clerks and communication and general performance of districts left a lot to be desired.

Reddy and Sabelo (1997) argue that any decentralization targeting state organs will only be effective if it is accompanied by far reaching administrative reforms which effectively redistribute power. It is therefore not surprising that the question of power and authority of decentralized structures is an issue that should be addressed for decentralization to yield positive results. This study found that even if regions are still in the process of acquiring more powers, they are showing strides in the right direction in terms of improvement of service delivery.

Rondinelli et al. (1989) argue that the success of decentralization depends on political, organizational, behavioural and psychological conditions to support decentralization, as well as sufficient financial and human resources. This study found that districts and circuits did not get the support required from head office, they had insufficient personnel, and were lacking in capacity, all of which contributed towards their failure to deliver services. Sayed (2002) contends that decentralization can be successfully measured by considering the different perspectives associated with it. Countries differ in their rationales for decentralization, some of which include political, pedagogic, economic, and public administration reasons. This study exposed the fact that the establishment of districts and circuits may be viewed as being both *political* in terms of encouraging community participation, and *administrative* in terms of aiming to improve efficiency in service delivery.

Samoff (1990) argues that countries with a colonial background usually pursue a centralized decision-making strategy in order to rationalize the use of scarce resources,

especially skilled personnel. This approach is based on the belief that a decentralized system would encourage racial, ethnic, religious, and regional groups to promote divisive agendas, thus rendering governing difficult. This study found that there was a genuine need to rationalize resources in a country like South Africa, with its background of great disparities. The new national government was reluctant to devolve powers to provinces; hence concurrent governance occurred between central and provincial governments.

Mangelsdorf (1988) argues that the degree of decentralization that is pursued by countries elsewhere in the world is in most cases determined by the degree of centralization or decentralization that prevailed under former colonial governments. This argument applies to this study if one considers that this country had a background of separate development with 19 racially and ethnically divided education systems. This legacy had an effect on the arrangement that was agreed upon after the dawn of democracy in 1994.

Samoff (1990) argues that decentralization initiatives have failed to improve service delivery, although the proponents have not been dissuaded by such failures.

Decentralization efforts have failed even where they were implemented under elaborative supervision and control by the central government. Samoff (1990) cites reasons for failure as the lack of power devolution, and unrealistic goals in expecting too much too soon, issues which are further exacerbated by administrative, operational and resource problems. In this study, the responses from the interviews clearly exposed what is argued above, by highlighting a number of challenges confronting district officials, which created tension between the districts and head office. Shepherd (2002) argues that the

success of decentralization at the local level depends on top-down strengthening of capacity in order to deliver services and to manage effectively. It depends on the participation of various interest groups, and such interventions require strong relationships between human resource development, planning and finance.

Rondinelli (1981) contends that decentralization has not succeeded in many countries due to lack of commitment by national bureaucracies, political motivation for decentralization and its implications in achieving socio-economic growth, or the desire by the center to control fragile and poverty stricken economies. He further argues that decentralization requires preconditions and supporting policies which most governments are not able or willing to provide. It also requires changes in attitudes and behaviour on the part of central government officials, which are sometimes difficult to achieve. Lastly, clear roles for local level administrative units need to be established, as well as decentralization laws.

This study found that districts and circuits in Mpumalanga did not have a legal and policy framework that clearly spelt out their roles. This became a source of contention, as revealed by the interviews. District managers demanded more powers in order to render their duties, and head office was not willing to delegate those powers due to the post levels of the incumbents. The lack of power and authority of district managers caused them to fail in their duties (Samoff, 1990); decentralization initiatives did not succeed due to lack of power devolution, lack of strengthening of capacity at the local level (Shepherd, 2002) and lack of commitment by the national bureaucrats (Rondinelli, 1981).

Slater (1989) views decentralization as a reversion to what was historically a powerful source of development. He argues that many peripheral states existed prior to the centripetal development of certain key functions such as road, rail, post office and communications, energy, some basic services such as iron and steel, a public banking and a variety of public enterprises. The tendency towards concentration created the center and the local and regional levels were weakened during that process.

This study found one of the reasons that were advanced for the lack of power at the district level was its weakness in capacity, as vindicated by the argument above. It can therefore be argued that the concentration of power and all the activities at the center had a negative effect on the local level by eroding any capacity that had existed. In the case of this study, power and authority were centralized at head office due to the lack of suitably qualified incumbents at the local level. It is imperative to pose the question as to whether the ‘sunset clause’ contributed towards this centralization of power at head office.

Schoole (2005) argues that the locus of power was the basis of contestation between the old bureaucrats and the new ones.

This study found that decentralization can only succeed if the government redistributes power, promotes efficiency and enhances the culture of learning, as argued by Weiler (1990). The political dynamics of centralization and decentralization can only be understood by transcending the arguments that are usually declared for pursuing decentralization (Weiler, 1990). Decentralization is sometimes aimed at improving

service delivery as argued by Bjork (2006) in the case of Pakistan. Decentralization initiatives require a strategic vision of educational reform (Nickson, 2001) and what Rondinelli (1981) refers to as the strength as well as competence of central government for it to succeed. Developing countries have a tendency to adopt policies that are inclined to social and economic development, as well as placing strong emphasis on central planning (Lauglo, 1995). Parker and Kirsten (1995) cite lack of funding as the main impediment to the success of decentralization. This study found that districts could not achieve efficacy due to lack of financial resources. It can therefore be said that decentralization can only succeed if financial control is devolved to the local level.

Reddy and Sabelo (1997) argue that the success of decentralization may only be determined if it is accompanied by far reaching administrative reforms. This statement is vindicated by the case of the regions in this study: their success story is based on far reaching reforms which were implemented after the districts' failure to provide resources, coordination and general support. This study demonstrates that decentralization can best be understood according to its implementation rationales. Samoff (1990) mentions political and administrative rationales for decentralization, while Lauglo (1995) refers to a political rationale. The decentralization rationale is linked to the kind of organizational structures involved.

This study found that measuring the success of decentralization is not as simple as it may sound; it should be associated with its proponent's perspective as articulated by Sayed (2002) be it administrative, political, pedagogic or economic. According to Mahlalela

(personal interview, 2007), the establishment of districts was strategic and their main role was to bring government closer to the people.

De Clercq (2002) argues that there was a lot of contestation during the negotiations. The white groups and international bodies propagated the devolution of more powers to provinces, while the ANC was in favour of a centralized system of government. She further argues that the present system is the result of significant compromises on the part of all parties that were involved. The DoE commission (DoE, 2005) felt that there was no need to devolve powers to provinces so quickly, due to their lack of capacity to manage and deliver services. This research therefore concludes that it was unlikely for the national government in South Africa to grant more powers to provinces, given the apartheid background of this country and the post level of district heads as shown by the study.

Slater (1989) argues there is a strong tendency government to avoid devolving administrative power to regional and local levels. This may be due to the presence of among other factors, anti-democratic social segments in the regions, the scarcity of trained personnel, and the geographical size, all of which can be used as a pretext for belittling any serious discussion on the need to reduce centralized power in a unitary state. Weiler (1990) argues that elites and the bureaucratic establishment tend to protect their power and they may attempt to enhance it. They share power reluctantly, especially with people whom they view as not sharing their beliefs or in whom they lack confidence. The above arguments provide the basis for the situation that prevailed in

South Africa in terms of the concurrent sharing of power between the national government and provincial governments, as well as the lack of devolution of powers to the district structure. The new government thought that decentralization would promote undemocratic practices, especially because of the sunset policy which allowed the former bureaucrats to continue working for the new government. This scenario provides the background as to why power and authority were centralized.

There was a need for the national government to pursue the national agenda of transforming the country into a rainbow nation and to achieve national cohesion. According to the Department of Education (DoE, 2001), the first five years of the new era focused on three objectives, all of which have been achieved. The first priority was systematic reform aimed at dismantling apartheid structures and procedures. The second objective was the establishment of one national and nine provincial education departments. The third objective was the creation of a unified system across diverse racial and economic conditions, and large geographical areas, within a short period of time. Slater (1989) views decentralization as a reverse process of what was historically a source of powerful development. This study found that decentralization failed due to the lack of capacity which migrated to the center; hence the strengthening of capacity is imperative (Shepherd, 2002).

8.3. EDUCATION STRUCTURES AND BOUNDARIES

This study demonstrates that decentralization and recentralization should be viewed “like a pendulum or waves following one another” (Khamsi & Stolpe, 2004:8), a view which is supported by other scholars who write about recentralization, such as Karlsen (1999), and Gershberg and Jacobs (1998). Governments often attempt to improve service delivery and in the process some restructuring may be necessary. The political party which is in power pursues its manifesto and implements any policies that it deems fit to improve service delivery, including the demarcation of provinces, regions, districts, and circuits. Education structures are not immune from such changes, as was experienced in South Africa when the new democratic government came into power. It is therefore not surprising that in its endeavours to improve service delivery, the Mpumalanga Department of Education opted for the phasing out of districts, as well as the restructuring of former boundaries to be in line with current political boundaries.

This occurrence is not unique to this country, but also happens elsewhere. For example, Nickson (2001) argues that in Bolivia under the Ley de Participacion Popular (LPP), the boundaries of the district offices were redrawn to correspond with municipal boundaries. In South Africa recently we have seen some cases of re-demarcation which is not necessarily the end of the process; it may happen again in the future as long as it leads to efficacy. The re-demarcation in Mpumalanga led to the amalgamation of districts into three regions including the incorporation of a fourth region namely Bushbuckridge. Recently there has been discussion about further restructuring. Henley and Young (2008) cite an interesting scenario in one of the provinces in Canada, namely Manitoba. They report that over the two last decades there have been many amalgamations, as well as

centralization of control of public education through curriculum frameworks and province-wide student assessment. Most provinces have recentralized authority of important governance issues such as collective bargaining and educational funding.

8.4. THE FUTURE OF DISTRICTS AND REGIONS

The discussion in the previous section indicates that whether one is for it or against it, decentralization appears to be inevitable in any country. It has already been mentioned that decentralization and centralization initiatives are like waves following one another, and there should be a balance between decentralization and the need for control. Sub-structures or intermediaries will remain with us; the only thing that is necessary is for governments to have the political will to drive the process from the center and not to implement decentralization initiatives due to external pressures or for the sake of appearances. As countries move away from centralized forms of governance, governments need to have a strong vision of education reform which not only devolves limited powers and authority to the lower levels, but also considers the questions of capacity, finance, resources as well as sustainability of these structures.

Hentscheke, Nayfack and Wohlstetter (2009) contend in their study of large urban districts, that successful districts focus on aligning the curriculum with state standards, developing school leadership, and improving the district's capacity to respond to students' needs at the local school level. The establishment of units such as the District Development Unit in South Africa is a sign that there is commitment at senior level to

support sub-unit or intermediaries in working effectively and efficiently. This study may therefore conclude that the future of districts and regions in the educational landscape is beginning to look brighter.

8.5. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

This study found that districts and circuits were established in line with the government's principle of taking government to the people; in that they were closer to the people they served. Districts and circuits were field offices that were strategically established to assist the province in delivering services to the people as well as encouraging community participation in education. The study shows however that districts and circuits were not effective due to lack of power and authority, resources (physical, financial and human), capacity, and coordination. They were closer to schools; however that did not translate into improved service delivery as envisaged, due to the challenges that confronted them, which they could not tackle without decision-making power.

This study found that even if districts and circuits have been portrayed as having failed in a number of areas, there are certain aspects that are worth mentioning where some credit is due, or they had positive effects. The first issue relates to their success in capacitating school managers in terms of school leadership and management. Secondly, according to the interviewees, the delivery of stationery was done before the commencement of the school year. Thirdly, districts and circuits were accessible due to their proximity to schools, even though they could not provide solutions to all the needs of the schools.

Fourthly, they successfully integrated the racially divided educational departments into democratic non-racial ones. Fifthly, they encouraged community or citizen participation.

This study found that the devolution of power, as well as the provision of sufficient resources and financial capacity to the regions, enabled these structures to improve in terms of service delivery to schools. To sum up the region has more powers, adequate human resources, physical resources, financial control, a viable support system, and various new divisions that specialize in different activities as discussed in details the previous chapter. This study can therefore conclude that the shift from districts to regions has had a positive effect on service delivery to schools, not only in the Ehlanzeni Region, but also in the Mpumalanga province as a whole. This conclusion is based on the evidence that regions are responsive, effective and provide quality service delivery in a number of areas.

8.6. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DECENTRALIZATION LITERATURE

This study is vital because it contributes to the existing literature on the role and organization of regional and district structures in education provision, as well as education governance structures in general. It provides insight into how districts and regions relate to the provincial office, and how they exercise their authority and power to circuits and schools. Sayed and Jansen (2001:226) argue that South Africa has an additional level of management, namely the National Department of Education, unlike Australia, which results in additional complexities and variations between provinces.

This study is useful because it uncovers facts about why the Mpumalanga province chose a flatter structure of districts initially, in order to fill the gap between circuits and the provincial office immediately after the 1994 democratic dispensation. It also provides the rationale for the phasing out of districts and the establishment of regions such as Ehlanzeni, one of four regions which were established in the province in 2001.

8.7. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that implementing a policy of decentralization is not as simple as it may sound when first considered. It is a process that requires a great deal of thinking, commitment, and energy to succeed. This process is not only complicated, but it is also challenging, requiring adequate political will, planning, finance, resources and capacity. There are many variables such as the country's context, historical background, contemporary problems, political forces, and economic situation that may shape the form, character and outcomes of decentralization initiatives.

This study found the following answers to the three research questions posed. The first answer is that the Weberian administration model influenced the formation of districts and circuits in the Mpumalanga Department of Education. Secondly, decentralization during the districts era in Mpumalanga did not succeed in delivering the desired results because of inadequacies in the district structure which caused it to fail in performing its roles and responsibilities. This led to the demise of districts and restructuring into

regions. The new structures were given more powers, resources, financial control and capacity to fulfill their mandate. Thirdly, the shift from districts to regions led has had positive results on service delivery in schools and circuits. In general, there is improvement in service delivery and education governance. On the question of effectiveness and efficiency, the region is effective, although there are still minor challenges as uncovered by this study.

In conclusion Samoff (1990:522) contends that

“neither centralization nor decentralization in and of itself benefits the disadvantaged. Which is preferable is therefore always a function of what priorities are to be assigned to the different interests involved and the characteristics of the specific situation.”

Decentralization and centralization are processes that swing in either direction, like a pendulum. They are sides of the same coin; only a flip is required to view the other side. Decentralization should be understood from the point of view of a country’s historical, economic and political context, taking into account its contemporary problems and priorities.