

CHAPTER 5: HOW DID CLUSTER CONTEXTUAL FEATURES AND DYNAMICS SHAPE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REFORM?

5.1 Introduction

In answer to the second question posed in this research, this chapter presents the detailed descriptions of each cluster's contextual features and dynamics, and how these features and dynamics shape the implementation of the school management reform. The chapter discusses how the reform goals of promoting democratic participation, collaboration and equitable distribution of resources have been implemented in the three primary school clusters as well as the relationship between the school management reform and teaching.

5.2 How did primary school clusters respond to cluster-based school management?

5.2.1 Makalani cluster

This is a rich urban cluster consisting of eight primary schools with strong leadership, qualified and experienced teachers. Six out of the eight schools are resourced schools and only two are under-resourced. As mentioned previously, this cluster is selected to bring to the study an in-depth understanding of how schools in a rich cluster receive and deliver cluster-based school management reform as well as how the resourced schools support the under-resourced schools as per intentions of the school management reform. The case study was also selected to assess the extent to which cluster-based school management reform implemented within the context of a rich urban cluster relate to improvements in the teaching practices of teachers.

Most of the schools are located in town, except one which is situated outside the town. The school buildings are in good conditions. All schools have high enrollment rates. The cluster centre is built on the premises of the circuit offices and is close to the Teachers'

Resource Centre (TRC). Some of the schools are situated within walking distance of the circuit offices and the TRC. Teachers and learners in the cluster have access to the TRC which has a library; reading room; big photocopier machine; four computers; study room and working rooms for teachers.

Socio-economic and cultural backgrounds

The cluster is located in a small town, which is characterised by outward looking economy. The economic activities in and around this town include bricklaying, carpentry, trading and farming. The town provides the following services: transport, communication and health services. It also has two supermarkets and some general dealers, accommodation and banking facilities. The socio-economic background of teachers and learners in some schools ranges from middle-income groups to very low income groups. Some of the learners in this cluster are from family backgrounds of artisans such as bricklaying, carpentry, electricians, while other learners come from families who farm for a living.

Some of the schools in the cluster are located in the same cultural (ethnic) communities; two schools are located in mixed cultural backgrounds. The majority of teachers and learners in the cluster come from predominantly one language and cultural background. The language, which is dominant in these communities, is Afrikaans. However, some learners come from the following different language backgrounds: *Otjiherero*, Oshiwambo and Khoekhoegowab. Afrikaans is the medium of instruction in the lower primary phase in all except one school.

Teaching and learning environments

School and classroom conditions

As indicated earlier, six of the eight schools are resourced schools. The resourced schools are quite big primary schools, but the school which is headed by the cluster-centre principal is bigger and better-resourced than the other resourced schools. The physical conditions of the classrooms at the resourced schools are good and neat. There is a library at each of the resourced schools. Classrooms are big, with enough space to store teaching materials and learners can move about easily. The class size ranges from 30 to 35 learners. There are enough cupboards for keeping teaching materials. Classrooms are full of teaching materials such as posters, books, puppet containers and flashcards. Each learner has a workbook for reading and mathematics exercises. There are enough textbooks for learners.

The physical conditions of some classrooms at the two under-resourced schools are good, but need renovations. There are no libraries at the under-resourced schools. The classrooms are small with limited space to store teaching materials and for learners to move. The class size ranges from 38 to 40 learners. Classrooms are decorated with teaching materials, but there are few cupboards for keeping teaching materials. Each learner has a workbook for reading and mathematics exercises. There are some collections of teaching materials, but fewer than at the resourced schools. The textbooks are not enough for all learners. Most of the schools and classroom conditions in this cluster indicate that they are conducive to teaching and learning. The class size is reasonable.

Organisational and implementation arrangements

Inspectors of education are the main facilitators for the implementation of the school management reform at the cluster level. Circuit inspectors being at the middle management level, immediately in charge of clusters are expected to play an important role in supporting the implementation of cluster-based school management reform. Circuit inspectors are supposed to manage cluster centres in collaboration with cluster centre principals and cluster management committees. The circuit management committee is the management structure, consisting of circuit inspector and cluster-centre principals, which is responsible for supervising and monitoring cluster activities at the circuit office level.

However, in this cluster the circuit management committee had not been established. Makalani cluster represents a less supportive context for the implementation of the school management reform. The inspector of the circuit in which Makalani cluster located, took an 'ease off' approach in the way in which he facilitated the implementation process (Miles and Huberman, 1994). He knew what was expected of him, but he did not do much to facilitate the implementation of the cluster system:

'I was supposed to head the circuit management committee; work together with the cluster-centre principal..... for example to identify training needs in the cluster; involve in the establishment of the subject groups, because of my workload, I couldn't do that....the system is not really effectively as it is supposed to be' (Inspector of education).

The inspector ignored his responsibility as a facilitator for the implementation of the school management reform in his circuit. He perceived the reform as interfering with his other roles and responsibilities as a circuit inspector.

The circuit inspector has a reserved attitude towards the school management reform. He indicated that there was no need for cluster-based school management reform if schools have strong leadership and qualified and experienced teachers. He argues that in the rural

areas and where schools are isolated and far from the circuit offices, cluster centres 'are distributing and collecting points'. He also argues that in towns, especially in a situation where all the schools in the cluster have good facilities and are well managed, the need for the cluster system is minimal: *'schools call the circuit office directly if they experience a problem, they can easily pick up and collect things from the circuit office.'*

The inspector argues that cluster-based school management reform becomes insignificant if schools are already self-sufficient and have easy and direct access to resources. He therefore further argues that there was no need for cluster-based school management reform to be introduced in Makalani cluster: *'the schools have strong leadership, and are more or less on par, the clustering may not work properly; schools can come to the circuit if they need information or need to submit something to the circuit office'*.

The inspector does not believe in delegating his responsibilities to cluster-centre principals, because he still believes that he has the responsibility to supervise and support schools.

The inspector influenced the way the schools implemented the school management reform. At the cluster level, the cluster management committee is the management structure which is responsible for managing, supervising and monitoring the cluster activities. The cluster management committee consists of cluster-centre principal, satellite school principals and head teachers as co-opted members. However, in this cluster the management structure was established informally. The school principals resisted the appointment of a cluster centre and cluster-centre principal: *'it was not easy to appoint a cluster centre and cluster-centre principal for the schools in this town because the leadership and school resources are more or less on par'* (Inspector of education).

School principals were not prepared to give up their authority and to be under the authority of another principal. In order to deal with this challenge cluster rotational leadership was introduced and the cluster centre was built on the premises of the circuit office and not on the premises of a school.

The cluster lacks a definite structure, the cluster management committee meets when needs arise:

... 'we act on ad hoc basis....there is no plan of action or year plan. There is a management committee....but we work informal...when there is something that needs to be discussed, me and the other cluster-centre principal and the secretary meets, plan and set up an agenda and other principals just attend the meeting' (current cluster-centre principal).

The cluster-centre principal still believes in hierarchical bureaucratic approaches to management as opposed to participatory approaches. The satellite school principals are not involved in the planning of cluster meetings.

In this cluster teachers are also not involved in the activities of the cluster and therefore do not have enough information on how cluster-based school management reform works: *'the CCP and my principal do not manage the cluster together... I know there is a cluster management committee.... but I don't have any idea what they discuss in meetings'* (a teacher from one of the resourced schools).

The other structure that is supposed to coordinate activities at the cluster level is the cluster-based subject groups. In this cluster, although the cluster-based subject groups are established, this structure also lacks proper operational strategy and therefore is not also working well:

....cluster groups are established... but don't operate effectively and regularly '

'Cluster meetings should take place more regularly and subject facilitators must be knowledgeable to help us learn more...we need to understand how we can implement the new syllabus in our classrooms' (a teacher from one of the under-resourced school).

The reason why cluster-based subject groups do not have clear operational strategies can be explained by the fact that the cluster does not have proper management structure in place, because both the inspector and the cluster-centre principal lack commitment to the school management reform. Lack of clear operational strategies can also be explained by the fact that the school principals and teachers view the school management reform as not having a significant role in their practices. The schools in this cluster feel self-sufficient and therefore do not see the purpose of cluster-based school management reform.

It is evident that the school management reform was not implemented successfully in this cluster. The inspector did not facilitate the implementation of the reform because he did not see the need for the school clustering system due to the fact that the schools in the cluster have resources, strong leadership and have easy access to other resources. His attitude towards the school management reform has influenced the way in which the schools have responded to the reform. As indicated above, the schools resisted the appointment of the cluster-centre principal, because the school principals did not want to accept the authority of the other principal. The cluster established informal management structures and the cluster-based subject groups lack operational strategy.

Institutional commitment

This sub-section discusses the commitment of the cluster to implement the school management reform. As already indicated, the structure for implementing the school reform was established informally and there was little commitment on the part of the managers responsible for implementing the reform. Commitment to education

decentralisation initiatives is identified as one of the conditions for successful implementation of decentralisation reforms in developing countries (Pellini, 2005).

As shown in the previous sub-section, the circuit inspector and the schools showed little or no commitment towards the school management reform. One needs to understand whether lack of commitment to the reform has resulted from lack of understanding of the reform or whether the cluster has decided to ignore the reform because the circuit inspector and schools have perceived that the management reform as a threat to their autonomy.

Both the cluster-centre principal and satellite school principals in this cluster pointed out that (since the inception of the cluster-based school management reform) the roles and responsibilities of the cluster-centre principal and satellite school principals were not clearly defined: *‘we need to be clear about what we should do, what are roles and responsibilities in the cluster; the roles and responsibilities of the CCP’* (a satellite school principal).

The cluster-centre principal indicated that he did not understand what was expected from him as a person who was expected to manage the cluster in a collaborative manner. In his own words, he indicated that there was a need for the training of both cluster-centre principal and satellite school principals in order to understand the expectations of the management reform:

....‘there is need for proper training on roles and responsibilities of satellite principals and cluster-centre principals in the cluster system and how the cluster is really supposed to work, I don’t think I have the authority to identify and deal with problems of other schools’ (cluster-centre principal).

It is clear from the words of the cluster-centre principal that he did not understand the school management reform as well as the level of authority he was supposed to have over other schools since his status as a cluster-centre principal was not clearly defined. Understanding of the school management reform is essential to the implementation of the reform. One of the satellite school principals expressed this sentiment clearly:

...the former cluster-centre principal seemed to have some clarity on how to manage the cluster; the cluster activities were planned and well organised, each school principal was given responsibilities in the cluster, we got guidelines from him, he explained to us what each one of us was supposed to do; but this stopped....the current one does not really have clarity on how to manage the cluster; there is no planning, we just attend to issues' (one of the satellite school principals).

The words of satellite school principals confirms that without deep understanding of the change, the key implementers are likely not to have commitment to implement it successfully.

One could argue that school principals may lose commitment to implement change, because the school management reform was implemented with little consistent support. The school principals clearly pointed out that cluster-centre principals were expected to implement the reform without support:

'The authority acknowledges that we are not up-to-date with the cluster system; we just operate on our own way' (cluster centre principal).

'I was not formally trained as cluster-centre principal; I was led by my own experiences' (former cluster-centre principal).

'Cluster-centre principals are appointed, but were not provided any support; they are just left on their own' (one of the satellite school principals).

Clearly, the school management reform was introduced with little or no support provided to the key implementers. School principals could not be expected to undertake new

challenges and practices if their capacity and commitment was never developed and therefore the school principals might choose to ignore the implementation of the reform.

Though the school principals in this cluster feel adequate, it becomes evident that they, like other principals in the other two clusters, do have a clear understanding of how cluster-based school management reform is supposed to work.

Institutional responses to school management reform

Transfer of power and authority to cluster level

The inspector in this cluster believes that he has the full authority to manage schools; school principals have to report directly to him and cannot delegate the responsibilities of his office to the cluster centre principal:

'I feel that I have to do what I am supposed to do..... I cannot delegate my tasks and responsibilities to the cluster centre principal.... and I don't feel comfortable for a cluster centre principal to act on my behalf....she or he has to be at his school' (Inspector of education).

In this cluster, the inspector perceived that the reform interfered with his roles and responsibilities as a circuit inspector. He perceived the school management reform as a threat to his power and authority over schools. From the inspector's point of view, the cluster-centre principal does not have a different status from other school principals. According to the inspector, the cluster-centre principal's primary responsibility is to manage his school like other school principals.

The transfer of authority and power to cluster level received resistance from school principals. The school principals resisted the appointment of a cluster-centre principal and were not prepared to give up their authority and to be under the authority of another principal: *'school principals were reluctant to accept the authority of another*

principal....there was strong competition among the schools in the cluster and the schools did not cooperate effectively' (circuit inspector).

The school principals in this cluster also responded in the same way as the circuit inspector. They resisted the appointment of the cluster-centre principal because they perceived the school management reform as a threat to their identities as school principals as well as disturbing their institutional organisational culture.

Resource sharing

The school management reform advocates that resourced and under-resourced schools should share resources; in this way, resources are better utilised. The resourced schools perceived the reform as a threat to their resources. They felt self-sufficient and were concerned about extra burden that would be placed on the resources of their schools. The under-resourced schools were positive about the school clustering system and regarded the system as a means for upgrading the standards of their schools.

The resourced schools came up with strategies to protect their resources. The schools avoided being involved in the administrative tasks of cluster activities. The Teachers' Resource Centre was made responsible for running the administrative duties of the cluster activities such as copying and distribution of the minutes of cluster meetings, and coordination of cluster meetings for various cluster-based subject groups.

There is no collaboration among school principals. Schools operate by themselves, they feel self-sufficient, and there is no need to get support from other schools. The schools used to compete with each other and therefore find it difficult to cooperate. The following

extract from the transcripts of the interviews with the circuit inspector, describe the relationship among the schools in the cluster:

...the system in this cluster is not working properly. I don't know..... attitudes may be?....there is a strong competition between schools...the schools find it difficult to cooperate...you know.. .all most of all schools in this town are on par in terms of strong leadership and resources' (Inspector of education).

The teachers from the resourced schools do not value the idea of sharing information at cluster-based subject group meetings, because they argue that schools have different circumstances. The teachers feel adequate, because they have experiences and skills in lower primary phase: *'schools have different conditions, different textbooks and different teaching materials... we are force to go to meetings.....we are forced to communicate... we have experience and skills to teach lower primary' (a teacher from one of the resourced schools).*

Like in the case of school principals in the resourced schools, the culture of mutual support and collegiality was little or absent in teachers in the resourced schools. The teachers from resourced schools were reluctant to share ideas and resources with other teachers because they felt that they were self-sufficient. Teachers from under-resourced schools perceived the reform as a means to learn from teachers in the resourced schools, but lost confidence in the school management reform because no improvement was done at the schools: *'it doesn't help to go to meetings if classroom conditions stay the same, you go to a meeting ...you discuss good ideas..... but when you come back to your classrooms...you have different situations' (a teacher from an under-resourced school).*

One can argue that although under-resourced schools embraced the reform, the fact that the reform did not provide additional resources to their schools, they lost confidence in the reform.

Case study conclusions

The response of this cluster to the implementation of cluster-based school management reform has not been positive. The cluster resisted the implementation of the school management reform because it was perceived as a threat to its existing tradition and culture in schools. The circuit inspector resisted the school management reform because he perceived it as a threat to his power and authority over schools. The school principals also resisted the school management reform because they perceived the reform a threat to their power over their schools. The resource schools did not accept the reform because they perceived it as a threat to their resources. The resourced schools felt self-sufficient and resisted working together with under-resourced schools. The schools in this cluster are competitive and lack a spirit of collaboration and cooperation.

Makalani cluster as a rich urban cluster, with strong leadership, qualified and experienced teachers find it difficult to work within the framework of collaboration and mutual support. This case study demonstrates clearly that competitiveness and individualism are incongruent with the theory of cluster-based school management reform and therefore hamper the spirit of mutual support and cooperation. The case study also demonstrates that although the majority of the schools in this cluster have resources, strong leadership, qualified and experienced teachers, and under-resourced schools could not get support from the resourced schools, because resourced schools do not value mutual support and collegiality. Chapter 6 elaborates more on how the ideologies of competitiveness and individualism impede the implementation of cluster-based school management reform.

The school principals lacked understanding of their roles and responsibilities in the school management reform as well as commitment to the change. It is evident from this case

study that this cluster feels self-sufficient and regards cluster-based school management reform as being insignificant to their context.

It is clear from this case study that there is sufficient evidence to draw conclusions that the school management reform has not been successfully implemented in this cluster. It is also clear that there is not sufficient evidence to draw conclusions that the school management reform relates to teaching, because: (1) schools in this cluster have contested authority, power and resources and there was no attempt to come up with strategies to improve the teaching practices of teachers; (2) teacher support structures such as cluster-based subject groups lack operational strategies to improve the teaching practices of the teachers; and (3) no additional resources were provided to under-resourced schools to improve the teaching practices of teachers.

5.2.2 Hendrich Cluster

This is a poor urban cluster consisting of five primary schools. The cluster has only one school, which is resourced with strong leadership, qualified and experienced teachers, while other schools do not have strong leadership, some teachers are qualified and experienced, while others are less qualified, but have ten or more years of teaching experience. The cluster centre is the school which has better facilities and resources than other primary schools. The school buildings of the cluster centre are in better conditions in relation to school buildings of the under-resourced schools. The cluster-centre principal is appointed on a permanent basis. As mentioned previously, this cluster was selected to bring to the study an in-depth understanding of how schools in a cluster with only one resourced school, receive and deliver cluster-based school management reform. The cluster was also selected to assess the extent to which cluster-based school management reform implemented in this context relate to improvements in the teaching practices of teachers.

The cluster centre is situated in a close proximity to the Education Centre, which houses the Teachers' Resource Centre, the Circuit Inspector's office and Community Library. Teachers and learners in the cluster have access to the community library, which has children books, few copies of school textbooks and reading books. The TRC is recently built and has a computer lab, which is heavily used by the TRC staff. The under-resourced schools are located in the township separated from the resourced school by a river and railway. The teachers and learners in the under-resourced schools have to travel about 7km to access resources at the community library and the cluster centre.

Socio-economic and cultural backgrounds

The cluster is located in a small town characterised by inward looking economy. Teachers and learners come from socio-economic backgrounds ranging from middle income to very low/no income groups. The economy depends on small-scale tourism and has very limited trading shops to cater for surrounding commercial farms. The town provides the following services: transport, communication and health services. It also has one supermarket and some general dealers, accommodation and banking facilities.

Schools are located in different cultural (ethnic) backgrounds, with one or two dominant languages. Teachers and learners in the cluster come from different language backgrounds, which include Otjiherero; Oshiwambo; Khoekhoegowab; German and Afrikaans. English is the medium of instruction as from Grade 1.

Teaching and learning environments

The physical conditions of some classrooms at the under-resourced schools are good, but need some renovations. All schools in the cluster have high enrollment rates. One of the

under-resourced schools has double shifts. The class size ranges from 38 to 42 learners. There are no libraries at the under-resourced schools. Classrooms are decorated with pictures and there are cupboards for keeping teaching materials. Each learner has a workbook for reading and mathematics exercises.

The resourced school which is the cluster centre is a big primary school. The physical conditions of the classrooms at the resourced school are good and neat. There is a library and a conference room. The school also has two photocopier machines. Classrooms are big, with enough space for learners to move. The class size ranges from 30 to 35 learners. The classrooms are decorated with posters and pictures. There are cupboards for keeping teaching materials. Classrooms are full of teaching materials such as posters, books, puppet containers and materials from the surrounding environment.

Organisational and implementation arrangements

Hendrich cluster represents a supportive context for implementing the school management reform. The inspector is a strong advocate of cluster-based school management reform and embraced the delegation of authority to clusters. Unlike Makalani cluster, there is a circuit management committee under the leadership of the circuit inspector in this cluster, which is responsible for providing guidance to cluster-centre principals regarding the management of clusters. The inspector is excited about the reform and her level of commitment is remarkable. She was instrumental in the implementation of the school management reform and being a strong advocate of the school management reform influenced the way schools received the school management reform.

In this cluster the cluster management committee that is supposed to be responsible for managing, supervising and monitoring the cluster activities is established. The cluster

management committee consists of school principals, heads of departments and subject convenors from different schools under the leadership of cluster-centre principal. Parents are not members of the management committee. In this cluster, the cluster management committee meets twice a term under the leadership of the cluster-centre principal. The committee meets always after the meetings of subject groups in order to get feedback from cluster-subject meetings. Unlike Makalani cluster, this cluster has a year program for cluster activities. All cluster activities including cluster management committee meetings are scheduled in the cluster year program. The year program shows that all the major administrative activities, which take place in various schools, are coordinated by the cluster-centre principal and not by the cluster management committee.

Like in the case of Makalani cluster, various cluster-based subject groups for primary and lower primary phases were set up to develop common schemes of work; set question papers and enable teachers to come together and share ideas and problems. The cluster-based subject committees meet twice a term under the leadership of the subject convenors. Subject group meetings are held before the cluster management committee meetings. All the cluster subject committee meetings are scheduled in the cluster year program. Unlike the case of Makalani cluster, the cluster-based subject groups seem to operate well.

Institutional commitment

As indicated earlier, the Hendrich inspector was instrumental in the implementation of cluster-based school management reform. Unlike the inspector of Makalani cluster, she has a high level of commitment towards the school management reform. However, the inspector lacks the managerial skills and expertise required to facilitate the implementation of the reform within the framework of shared and collaborative leadership.

Unlike in Makalani cluster, it seemed that Hendrich cluster made an attempt to prepare the school principals for their roles and responsibilities to implement the school management reform:

'We conducted induction workshops for cluster-centre principals in which we explained the roles and responsibilities of the cluster-centre principals; we also explained to them that they have power over school principals in their clusters...they can assign tasks to satellite principals and can be acting circuit inspectors... we also visited other regions, like the region which implemented the cluster system for the first time' (inspector of education).

Cluster-centre principals were given authority and power to manage clusters; therefore they were given the authority and power to delegate tasks to satellite school principals.

The views of the school principals regarding the training offered by the regional office are different from the one of the inspector. From the interviews with the school principals, they indicated that they did not receive sufficient support to enable them to implement the reform. The cluster-centre principal indicated that she received training as a school principal, but insufficient training on how to manage a cluster: *'I received training on stress management; national standards, performance indicators and discipline....but I still don't know whether what I am doing is right'* (cluster-centre principal).

Although the inspector claimed to have inducted the cluster-centre principal, it appeared that the capacity for the cluster-centre principal to undertake new challenges was not fully developed. One teacher interviewed also confirmed lack of capacity building in school principals. She indicated that she doubted whether cluster-centre principal and satellite school principals received training to manage the cluster: *'I don't think they received training; even our own principal does not know how to guide us'* (a teacher from the cluster centre).

Like in the case of Makalani cluster, the understanding to comprehend the reform, and the commitment and capacity of school principals to implement the reform was not fully developed. The inspector being a strong advocate of the reform remains ignorant about the low commitment, limited resources in schools and insufficient capacity of school principals to implement the reform. This finding is consistent with the findings from studies conducted in South Asia that lack of awareness about the lack of support felt by local educators is one of the obstacles to the successful implementation of decentralisation reforms in developing countries (Bjork, 2004).

Institutional responses to school management reform

Transfer of power and authority to cluster level

Unlike the inspector of Makalani cluster, the inspector responsible for this cluster supports the delegation of power and authority to clusters. She does not feel that her authority and power over the schools is threatened. She still believes that she has authority over the school principals. She believes that the school management reform would empower the school principals and lighten her workload: *'through this system we empower our managers.... the system has really made my work much easier, now I only sent six faxes... I only call six schools, instead of calling all the schools in my circuit'*.

The inspector perceived the distribution of authority and power to cluster level as a means to improve the management of satellite schools: *'I provide in-service training during circuit management meeting....I encourage the cluster-centre principal to put points on the agenda for their meeting, which will help other principals to grow.... Some principals do not even know how to deal with disciplinary issues'* (circuit inspector).

Like in the case of Makalani, the transfer of power and authority to cluster level also received resistance from school principals. The satellite school principals in this cluster also resisted the authority of cluster-centre principals, because they perceived the reform as a threat to their power and authority over own schools:

'We are not really involved in the management of the cluster; the CCP is the only one who coordinates the cluster activities'; we do not want the CCP to manage the cluster alone' (satellite school principal).

'We want each and every principal to be allocated specific tasks and responsibilities, we have to be part of the management of the cluster, we feel we are left out and only one person manages the cluster activities' (satellite school principal).

Though the satellite schools in this cluster are regarded as schools with weak leadership, the satellite school principals have responded in the same manner as satellite school principals in Makalani cluster. In other words, the satellite school principals in two clusters resisted the school management reform, because they perceive it as a threat to their authority and power over their schools.

As indicated in the previous sub-section, the induction workshop for school principals only explained the roles and responsibilities of the cluster-centre principals and did not explain to the satellite school principals what their roles and responsibilities would be in the implementation of cluster-based school management reform. Lack of clarity about the roles and responsibilities of satellite school principals causes confusion of what is expected from the satellite school principals. Ambiguity in the roles and responsibilities of satellite school principals has also created tensions among the school principals, because they felt excluded from the management of the cluster activities. Ambiguity in the roles and responsibilities has also defeated the goal of the school management reform. Instead of cooperating with the cluster-centre principal, the satellite school principals chose not to do

much regarding the cluster activities, because they perceived the reform to be a threat to their power and authority as school principals.

Resource sharing

Like in the case of Makalani cluster, the principal of the resourced school perceived the reform as a threat to the resources of her school and was concerned about extra burden that was placed on the resources of her school:

'Two schools in this cluster don't have fax machines; any information coming to the cluster centre needs a phone call to the other schools; this is very time consuming; other cluster schools sometimes make use of the photocopier at the cluster centre because their machines were out of order'.⁸

In order to protect the resources of her school, a cluster fund was established 'so that the burden won't be on the school fund of one school only'⁹. The school principal of the resourced school responded to the implementation of cluster-based school management reform in the same manner as the school principals of the resourced schools in Makalani cluster. This explains clearly that the resourced schools responded negatively to the implementation of the school management reform, because they perceive the reform as a threat to their resources. It also explains why the culture of cooperation and mutual support is poor or absent in schools.

Like in the case of Makalani cluster, the teachers from the resourced school felt adequate and expressed that they were the only ones who provided support to the others and they did not receive anything back: *'We don't benefit from the system.....we are the only one giving our little resources that we have'*.

⁸ Cluster annual report, 2004

⁹ Cluster annual report, 2004

The teachers from the resourced school perceived the reform as an exploitation of their resources and wasting of their time because they are not benefiting from the interaction with other teachers. From the interviews with the teachers from the resourced school, they indicated that they did not see the need for schools to share ideas if schools operated at different standards:

'We do not have confidence in the school clustering system.....we receive little from other teachers and schools are not at the same level..... some schools do not make use of the exam papers drawn up at the cluster level; they say these are too difficult to their learners' (a teacher from the resourced school).

The teachers from the resourced school also felt that teachers from satellite schools were not interested in their help and were not cooperative:

....as a cluster centre, we find that teachers from other schools, who really need help, are not interested....sometimes it is so tiresome to try to drag them along to the expense of your school..... some teachers within the cluster make use of all information they can get, but the rest just carry on as before (a teacher from the resourced school).

Teachers from the resourced school felt adequate and were not prepared to continue working together with teachers from under-resourced schools. They felt that their resources would be overstretched and no commitment was shown from the teachers in under-resourced schools that they were making use of ideas they got from them to improve their teaching skills: *'some teachers do not implement the good advice from others that they get... I am not referring here to the teachers of my schools...but to others in different schools from our cluster'* (a teacher from the resourced school).

Although teachers in the resourced schools showed their willingness to support teachers in the under-resourced schools, teachers in the resourced school in this cluster responded to the implementation of cluster-based school management reform in the same manner as teachers in the resourced schools in Makalani cluster. As mentioned previously, teachers

in the resourced schools felt self-sufficient and therefore did not value the contributions from the teachers in the satellite schools.

Teachers from under-resourced schools felt that they were not asked to contribute to the planning and preparations of cluster-based subject meetings: *'most of the time teachers are not asked to contribute on what will be discussed during the cluster meetings'* (a teacher from under-resourced school)

'We don't do a lot during the cluster meetings... sometimes there is no program, you just sit there and nothing is going on' (a teacher from under-resourced school).

Teachers argue that the cluster meetings lack proper structure and clarity and therefore meetings do not progress. While teachers from the resourced school argue that teachers from the satellite schools are not interested in the help provided them, though they (teachers from the satellite schools) are the ones who are in need of support, teachers from the under-resourced argue that cluster-based subject meetings lack clarity and therefore has little or no significant value to their work.

Like the teachers in the resourced school, teachers from the under-resourced schools were not keen to continue attending cluster-based subject group meetings. They argue that the meetings: lack structures and clear guidelines on how to conduct cluster-based subject group meetings; lack clarity on what support cluster-centre principals should provide to teachers; and lack strategies on how to facilitate subject meetings to be more meaningful to teachers and contribute to teacher learning. The teachers also felt that they did not learn much from the cluster-based subject group meetings. In sum, teachers from both resourced school and under-resourced schools are reluctant to continue with cluster-based subject group meetings because they feel that meetings are not productive and waste of time.

The data from the two case studies reveal that though the capacity of schools in terms of resources and leadership is different, the schools in the two clusters responded to the implementation of the school management reform in more or less the same manner. The two case studies demonstrate that the culture of mutual support and cooperation is little or absent in the schools. It can be concluded that schools have not yet upheld the values advocated by the school management reform. One may argue that teamwork or resource sharing is a complex exercise and that schools hold different values and beliefs about shared visions and collaboration.

Case study conclusions

Drawing on the data about the contextual features and dynamics of this cluster, one can conclude that the school management reform was not successfully implemented in this cluster: (1) though the inspector for this cluster was a strong advocate of the school management reform, she was ignorant of how the reform was received and delivered by schools, she lacks skills and expertise required to facilitate shared and collaborative school management reform and therefore did not provide enough support to schools; (2) the resourced school felt self-sufficient and resisted working together with the under-resourced schools, because they perceived the reform as a threat to their resources; (3) the cluster-centre principal did not have confidence in the managerial skills of the satellite school principals and therefore managed the cluster by herself with little involvement of the satellite school principals; (4) the satellite school principals resisted being under the authority of the cluster-centre principal because of they perceived the reform as a threat to their power and authority over their schools; (5) the resourced school felt exploited because it felt that the under-resourced schools relied too much on their resources; (6) the satellite school principals provided little support to the cluster-centre principal because

they felt that their contributions to the management of the cluster were not valued; (7) the teachers from the resourced school resisted sharing ideas and knowledge with teachers from under-resourced schools because they felt that teachers from the under-resourced schools were poor and their schools were below their standards; and (8) even though cluster-based subject groups were established, they lack structures and operational strategies and therefore were unproductive.

The data from this case study reveals that there is sufficient evidence to draw conclusions that the school management reform was not successfully implemented in this cluster (see the conclusions above). The data also reveals that there is not sufficient evidence to draw conclusions that the school management reform relates to teaching, because: (1) the resourced school was reluctant to share resources with the under-resourced schools; (2) the teachers from the resourced school were reluctant to share knowledge, ideas and resources with teachers from the under-resourced schools; (3) though the cluster established structures to support teachers, these structures were not working effectively to support teachers improve their teaching practices; and (4) no additional facilities and resources were provided to under-resourced schools and cluster-based subject group meetings lack guidelines on how to support teachers improve their teaching practices.

5.2.3 Otjimue cluster

Otjimue is a rural cluster, consisting of five primary schools. The cluster centre is one of the primary schools, which is bigger than the four other schools in the cluster. All schools in this cluster are under-resourced. As mentioned previously, the cluster was selected to bring to the study an in-depth understanding of how schools in a rural school, located in remote, isolated and impoverished communities respond to the implementation of cluster-based school management reform. The cluster was also selected to assess the extent to

which cluster-based school management reform implemented in this context relate to the improvements of the teaching practices of teachers.

The cluster centre building was erected at the school premises. The cluster centre has 12 computers, a photocopier, stationeries and cleaning materials. The cluster centre has also a small library. The cluster-centre principal is the principal from the cluster centre and is appointed on a permanent basis. The cluster-centre principal and the satellite school principals are qualified and have more than six years of school management experiences. The qualifications of teachers in the cluster range from Grade 12 plus two years of tertiary education to grade 12 plus three years of tertiary education. The teaching experience of the teachers ranges from six years to more than 20 years of teaching experiences. Teachers and learners in the cluster come from predominantly one language background. Otjiherero is the medium of instruction in the lower primary phase and English is taught as a subject.

Socio-economic and cultural backgrounds

The cluster is located in a remote area, with isolated communities, which depend largely on subsistence farming. The area does not have the following services: transport, communications (except one telephone booth) and banking services. There are no accommodation facilities, hospital, bookshops, Teachers' Resource Centre or community library. There are small shops with limited groceries. Schools are located in isolated and impoverished communities. The schools have feeding programs for learners from needy communities.

Teaching and learning environments

All five schools are under-resourced schools, with low enrolment rate and isolated. The primary school, which is the cluster centre, is bigger than the satellite schools. The class size ranges from 25 to 30 learners. However, the class size at the upper primary phase is smaller than the class size at the lower primary level. The physical conditions of some of the classrooms are in satisfactory conditions while some are in poor conditions. The classrooms are small with limited space for learners to move. There are few cupboards for keeping teaching materials. Learners share textbooks. Satellite schools do not have enough classrooms and because of low enrolment rate grades are combined in one classroom. In other words, there are schools with only two classrooms, one for grades 1 and 2 and another one for grades 3 and 4. The schools do not have offices and staff rooms. Some classrooms have a few cupboards for keeping teaching materials and some classrooms do not have any cupboards. Learners share textbooks. Some schools do not have school fences, electricity and sanitation facilities. The following section discusses cluster contextual dynamics and how these shape the implementation of cluster-based school management reform in Otjimue cluster.

Organisational and implementation arrangements

Otjimue cluster is located in the same circuit as Hendrich cluster. It also represents a supportive context for the implementing the school management reform, because the inspector is a strong advocate of cluster-based school management reform and the schools have embraced the school management reform.

As in the case of Hendrich cluster, the inspector was instrumental in the implementation of the school management reform and being a strong advocate of the school management reform influenced the way schools received the school management reform.

She facilitated the establishment of necessary structures for implementing the school management reform. The cluster management committee was established, consisting of school principals, heads of departments and subject convenors from different schools. Parents are not members of the management committee. Initially, the cluster management committee in this cluster was supposed to meet once a term under the leadership of the cluster-centre principal, but due to transport and communication problems meetings could not be held regularly. The cluster has an action plan. The action plan indicates the schedules for various cluster committee meetings. Unlike the year program of Hendrich cluster, the action plan for this cluster does not include the administrative activities taking place in various schools in the cluster. The minutes of the cluster management meetings indicate that cluster management meetings have focused more on administrative issues and organisation of social events in the cluster, and have been focused less on classroom practice related issues.

As in the case of Hendrich cluster, various subject groups for primary and lower primary phases were set up to develop common schemes of work; set question papers and enable teachers to come together and share ideas and problems. Initially, the cluster-subject committees were supposed to meet once per term under the leadership of the subject convenors, but due to transport and communication problems, meetings could not be held regularly.

Although schools in this cluster have embraced the school clustering system, they became frustrated, because cluster meetings could not be held regularly due to transport and communication problems. Therefore, the schools lost confidence in cluster-based school management reform as a means to upgrade the standards of their schools.

Institutional commitment

As indicated earlier, the inspector for both Hendrich and Otjimue clusters claimed that the regional office conducted induction workshops for both cluster-centre principals and satellite school principals. However, the cluster centre principal interviewed, indicated that she did not receive training from the regional office: *'I never received any training; we just meet in cluster meetings and discuss things. We invited the circuit inspector to come.... but she never comes to our meetings'* (cluster-centre principal).

Although the inspector claimed that the roles and responsibilities of school principals were explained during the induction workshops, the cluster-centre principal interviewed, said that she was still not sure how the cluster system could work: *'I am not really sure how the cluster system supposed to work....I was asked to evaluate how the cluster performs, but I did not know really whether what I did was correct'* (cluster-centre principal).

Like in the case of Hendrich cluster both cluster-centre principal and satellite school principals in this cluster lack clarity on how the school management reform is supposed to work:

'We are not really working well as we were supposed to do..... we don't have guidelines on how to manage the cluster as a team, but we try to talk about this in our meetings how we can improve this' (satellite school principal).

Like in the case of Hendrich cluster, the commitment and capacity of school principals in this cluster to implement the reform was not developed and the regional office did not provide regular and consistent support. The inspector being a strong advocate of the reform remains ignorant about the low commitment, lack of resources in schools and insufficient capacity of school principals to implement the reform.

Unlike Makalani and Hendrich clusters, Otjimume cluster does not only lack the capacity to implement the reform in terms of knowledge, skills and experience of school principals, it also experiences capacity problem in terms of resources and financial means. The cluster encountered financial constraints. It struggled to cope with extra costs for maintenance of photocopier and fax machines. The inspector acknowledged that this cluster experienced financial constraints and indicated that the regional office provided financial support:

... 'the region has allocated a budget for the cluster activities..... schools must communicate their needs....the cluster was encouraged to make fundraising and encourage parents to contribute in kind... I think if you are a cluster-centre principal you should be visionary and have initiatives' (circuit inspector).

According to the cluster-centre principal the cluster tried to make fundraising, but the cluster continue experiencing limited financial contributions to cluster fund, because the schools are too small and most of the learners in the schools are from low income family backgrounds: *'the raising of funds is difficult. We are trying hard.... But there is no money; the schools are too small and most of the learners are from low income family backgrounds'* (cluster-centre principal).

It is unrealistic to expect poor communities to raise funds to support the cluster activities. Even though the communities are encouraged to make in-kind contribution, there is no market in the area where the schools could sell whatever the communities have contributed.

Another resource constraint that this cluster is experiencing is transport. Schools are isolated and there are long distances between schools and the cluster centre. The schools do not have official transport to attend cluster meetings:

... 'the schools are isolated, you want to know how other schools are doing, and that is why clustering system is a good thing for rural schools...teachers want to go and make use of

the facilities at the cluster and also attend cluster meetings, but where do they go to get transport and time to go thereour cluster centre is still far from some schools' (satellite school principal).

However, the circuit inspector claimed that the regional office also catered for the transport problem: *'the regional office has provided a government vehicle to the cluster centre.. as I said before schools do not communicate their problems... they don't plan in advance...why can't they plan well if they have transport problems?'*

It is clear that the inspector is ignorant about the difficulties schools are experiencing in implementing cluster-based school management reform. It is also clear that the regional office has not yet recognised that cluster-based school management reform put unrealistic demands on the cluster.

Institutional responses to the school management reform

Transfer of power and authority to cluster level

As indicated earlier, the inspector responsible for Hendrich and Makalani clusters supports the delegation of power and authority to clusters. She does not feel that her authority and power over the schools is threatened since she still believes that she has authority over the school principals.

Unlike the school principals of Makalani and Hendrich clusters, the satellite school principals in this cluster did not respond negatively to the transfer of power and authority to the cluster: *'we have good relationship in our cluster.... the only problems that we have is transport... we can't come together regularly because of transport problems' (satellite school principal).*

....'the CCP sometimes give us some ideas when she visited some clusters and advise us on how to improve our schools' (satellite school principal).

The school principals in this cluster are positive about the school management reform and have accepted the collaboration and team work approach, but find it difficult to maintain it because of lack of resources.

The teachers in this cluster are also positive about the clustering system and has regarded the system as a means of upgrading the standards of rural schools: *'the system could help rural schools to perform better because the resources are near...teachers could be encouraged to work together... the rural schools are isolated and far from town where resources can be obtained'* (a teacher from a satellite school).

Although teachers in this cluster are positive and enthusiastic about the school management reform, their interest and enthusiasm about the reform would not last for a long time because of resource constraints. Cluster meetings could not be held regularly and teachers are forced to finance their own transport to go to cluster meetings: *'We spend a lot time trying to get transport to go to cluster meetings..... you loose teaching time.... the time you reach the cluster centre there is no meetingbecause teachers did not turn up'* (a teacher from a satellite school).

Cluster-based school management reform assumes that it would solve the problems of teacher isolation in rural schools. However, it is evident from this case study that the school management reform has created unrealistic demands to rural schools which they struggle to cope with. Cluster-based subject group meetings could not be held regularly due to transport problems and long distances that teachers have to travel. Teachers in the

rural schools are still experience problems accessing resources at the cluster centre. The advocates of cluster-based school management reform ignore the variations in contexts and assume that a single policy fits all contexts.

Case study conclusions

Drawing from the data on the contextual features and dynamics of this cluster, one can conclude that the school management reform was not successfully implemented in this cluster. Though the inspector for this cluster was a strong advocate of the school management reform, she was ignorant of resources and capacity constraints in the cluster and therefore did not provide consistent support to schools. Although schools in this cluster have embraced the school management reform, it has not yet solved the problem of isolation in rural schools. The reform also did not improve the accessibility of rural schools to resources. It provided insufficient resources to rural schools and therefore rural schools continue to operate under extremely difficult conditions.

This case study demonstrates that though the culture of mutual support and cooperation exists in schools, limited resources impede the implementation of cluster-based school management reform. The case study also demonstrates that not only lack of understanding of the reform leads to low commitment to the reform, but limited resources also suppress the interest of schools in the school management reform. School principals and teachers struggled to get transport to access resources at the cluster school as well as to attend cluster meetings. The sustainability of the reform in this cluster is questionable, because schools do not have enough resources and are located in isolated and impoverished communities.

The data from this case study reveal that there is not sufficient evidence to draw conclusions that school management reform relates to teaching, because: (1) the school management reform did not bring additional resources for teachers to improve their teaching practices; and (2) teachers in this cluster still do not have access to resources and support to improve their teaching practices.

From the discussion of the implementation of cluster-based school management reform in the three primary school clusters, it becomes clear that cluster contextual features and dynamics shape the implementation of cluster-based school management reform. The following section highlights the contextual dynamics of each primary cluster. In particular, the section highlights how different role players respond to the implementation of cluster-based school management reform.

5.3 Synthesis of the responses of the three primary school clusters to cluster-based school management reform

This section presents a comparative summary of the responses of the key role players in the implementation of cluster-based school management reform in the three primary school clusters. Table 18 below presents a synthesis of responses of the key role players:

Cluster-based school management implementation and cluster dynamics			
Role players	Makalani cluster	Hendrich cluster	Otjimue cluster
Inspector	The inspector resisted the school management reform and rejected the view of delegating authority to clusters	The inspector was a strong advocate of the school management reform, supported the delegation of authority to clusters, but employed bureaucratic and authoritarian approaches in the way she facilitated the delegation of authority to clusters	The same inspector was responsible for facilitating the implementation of cluster-based school management in Hendrich cluster
Cluster-centre principal	The first cluster-centre principal showed interest in the school management reform and regarded the reform as a tool for improving school administration, while the	The cluster-centre principal (CCP) did not show interest in school management reform and felt obliged to implement the school management reform. Because of the strong influence from the inspector,	The cluster centre principal lacked confidence in her leadership as a cluster-centre principal. Because of the strong influence from the



	second cluster-centre principal did not show interest in the school management reform as well as lacking clarity about his role as a cluster-centre principal	the CCP implemented the school reform through bureaucratic approaches.	inspector, the CCP implemented the school management through bureaucratic approaches.
Satellite school principals	Satellite school principals resisted the school management reform, felt adequate and were reluctant to accept the authority of the cluster-centre principal.	Satellite school principals resisted the school management reform, felt disempowered and were reluctant to accept the authority of the cluster-centre principal.	Satellite school principals embraced the reform, but felt disillusioned as the reform unfolded in schools.
Teachers	Teachers from the resourced schools resisted the school management reform, felt adequate and were reluctant to implement the school management reform. Teachers from under-resourced schools embraced the school management reform, but lost confidence in the reform because of lack of support.	Teachers from the resourced schools did not embrace the reform and felt obliged to implement the school management reform. Teachers from the resourced school also felt adequate and were reluctant to implement the reform. Though some teachers from the under-resourced schools embraced the reform, other teachers lacked confidence in the reform.	Teachers embraced the reform, but lost confidence in the reform, due to its inability to change the lives of teachers in the rural and isolated schools.

Table 18: A summary of responses of the key role players in the implementation of cluster-based school management reforms in the three primary school clusters

Table 18 above shows how clusters were different and similar in the way in which they responded to the implementation of cluster-based school management reform. The cluster-centre principals in all three clusters showed low commitment to the school management reform, except the first cluster-centre principal of Makalani cluster. The satellite school principals in Hendrich and Makalani clusters resisted the reform, except the satellite school principals in Otjimeue cluster. Teachers from resourced schools in Hendrich and Makalani clusters felt adequate and were reluctant to implement the reform, while teachers in Otjimeue clusters embraced the reform, but later lost hope in the reform due to its inability to provide adequate resources in the rural schools. It is clear from table 18, that

the reform encountered strong resistance (due to shifts in power and incongruence between school traditions and the tenets of the school management reform), mainly in the resourced schools and this had negative impact on its implementation. The schools which embraced the school management reform also lost confidence in the reform, which led to its unsuccessful implementation. In other words, some of the main variables that cause the unsuccessful implementation of the school management reform in the three primary school clusters are resistance due to shifts in power and institutional values and traditions, low commitment of key implementers and the inability of the reform to provide adequate resources to schools.

5.4 Overall conclusions

One can conclude that the school management reform was not successfully implemented in the three primary school clusters. It is evident from the data from the three case studies that there are differences and similarities in the ways in which the three clusters responded to the introduction of the school management reform. The rich urban cluster ignored the school management reform because they totally rejected the tenets of the reform, which are contrary to their institutional culture, and character of individualism and competitiveness. Although the poor urban cluster was influenced strongly by the inspector responsible for the cluster to implement the reform, the satellite school principals, and teachers from the resourced school did not embrace the reform. Although the rural cluster was optimistic about the introduction of the school management reform, the schools became disenchanted by the fact that the reform could not solve the problems of the rural schools, but added more difficulties in rural schools.

The resourced schools in both rich and poor urban clusters resisted the school management reform because they perceived it as a threat to their resources. The school

principals in both rich and poor urban clusters resisted the school management reform because they perceived it as threat to their power and authority. There was little commitment from school principals in all three clusters to implement the reform. It is evident from the three case studies that no additional resources were provided to schools.

The regional offices remain ignorant about limited resources in schools and lack of capacities of school principals to implement the school management reform. It is also evident that the support from the regional offices has not been consistent in all three primary school clusters. There is strong evidence from the two urban clusters that schools competed over the limited resources and power. While the schools in the rural cluster seem to embrace the theory of collaboration and cooperation, they question the sustainability of reform due to lack of resources.

The key argument in this chapter is that schools in the three school clusters could not collaborate as per the intentions of cluster-based school management due to the threat of loss of power and resources. Availability of resources is regarded as one of the pre-conditions for successful implementation of school clustering in developing countries (Pellini, 2005; Govinda, 1997; Naidoo, 2005).

Drawing on the data from the three case studies, one could conclude that there is not sufficient evidence to draw conclusions that school management reform relates to improving teaching due to: (1) lack of collaboration among school principals and teachers to implement the reform; (2) lack of clarity of the school management reform on how to improve teaching; and (3) limited resources to improve the teaching practices of teachers.

The literature on school clustering emphasises the importance of resource sharing as a means for improving teaching (Pellini, 2005; Assefa, 2001; Dittmar et al., 2002). The findings from the three case studies show that schools did not share resources, because of the threat of the loss of power and resources. The goals of democratic participation, collaboration and equitable distribution of resources could not be achieved as per the intentions of cluster-based school management. The three case studies demonstrate that changing governance structures does not necessarily lead to equal distribution of power and resources in schools. While this chapter discusses how the three primary school clusters resist the reform due to loss of power and resources, the next chapter focuses on another source of resistance, a shift in ideology.