

## **CHAPTER 9: SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **9.1 Introduction**

Decentralisation reforms have been implemented in countries around the world on the assumption that decentralisation would improve the quality of education. Since the implementation of decentralisation reforms in the 1980s, its effects on the quality of education have not invariably been positive. As mentioned previously, this study is in part a response to ongoing debates in the literature, about the effectiveness of decentralisation reforms in improving the quality of education. This chapter synthesises the main findings and the conclusions drawn from the survey and case study research on how the primary school clusters implemented cluster-based school management reform and the extent to which the reform relates to improving teaching in Namibia. In addition, the chapter discusses the contributions of the present study to the ongoing debates about the effectiveness of decentralisation reforms in improving teaching, the limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research, and ways to improve the implementation of decentralisation reform such as school clustering in a developing context.

### **9.2 Main findings and conclusions of the study**

The study commenced by investigating the implementation of cluster-based school management reform through the perceptions of the range of stakeholders and the extent to which the reform improves the quality of teaching practices in classrooms. This section discusses the main findings and the conclusions drawn from this study in relation to the existing knowledge base on the implementation of school clustering in a developing context and on the relationship between school clustering and improving teaching.

### **9.2.1 The actual practices in schools contradict school principals and teachers' perceptions on the influence of the reform on school practices.**

While the school principals and teachers reported that the reform promoted stakeholder collaboration and cooperation, teacher involvement in decision making, democratic practices and sharing of resources, the implementation culture and practices that prevail in the clusters contradict the school principals and teachers' perceptions of the influence of the reform on school practices.

An in-depth study of the three primary school clusters revealed that inspectors, school principals and teachers ignored democratic practices or continued operating as they used to prior to the introduction of the reform. One inspector rejected the view of delegating administrative tasks to clusters, while the other inspector employed bureaucratic control in supervising the work delegated to cluster level. Cluster-centre principals organised cluster activities without involving the satellite school principals and teachers in their clusters. School managers did not involve teachers in the planning of cluster-based subject meetings, but instructed to attend meetings.

While school principals and teachers reported that school managers and teachers were empowered to implement the reform, school principals and teachers expected initiatives and directives on how to facilitate the implementation process to come from the top and decision-making was perceived to emanate from the top and to filter down.

Observation data from the three case studies revealed that the reform did not promote collaboration and co-operation among schools and teachers. Teachers in the rich and semi-urban clusters could not work in a collaborative manner. They were individualistically-oriented and not particularly concerned about their colleagues in the clusters. Localised teacher support structures introduced by the reform to improve teachers' teaching

practices, appeared to be unstructured, un-focused and lacked clarity, guidelines and resources to support teachers improving their teaching. Satellite school principals felt disempowered and resisted the management styles of cluster-centre principals. School principals were accustomed to individualism and independence in the organisation and management of their schools and resisted interference with their authority to run their schools on a daily basis. Resourced schools were reluctant to share resources with under-resourced schools, felt self-sufficient and continued to protect their resources. Schools have been accustomed to work in isolation and to be competitive and individualistic. They have had trouble to give up their ethos of competitiveness and individualism in order to accommodate the values of collaboration and cooperation.

This study shows the strength of the use of mixed methods in evaluation studies. It demonstrates that mixed method approach design can yield richer, valid and reliable findings than evaluation study based on either the qualitative or quantitative method alone. It is evident from this study that survey research provided generalisable information on the school principals and teachers' perceptions and opinions of the reform, while qualitative methods provided deeper understanding of implementation issues and processes of the reform which could not be captured through the survey research.

### **9.2.2 Resource scarcity and reluctance to share resources impede the implementation of cluster-based school management reform**

Although the data from the survey research revealed that schools shared resources, conclusions drawn from the three case studies were that schools did not have sufficient resources and that they have been reluctant to share resources. Resourced schools in both rich and urban clusters did not embrace the implementation of cluster-based school management reform. As mentioned previously, the resourced schools viewed the school

management reform as a potential threat to their resources, and therefore were not prepared to share resources with the under-resourced schools. The goal of resource sharing and the assumption that it promotes equitable distribution of resources has not been realised.

The under-resourced schools embraced the school management reform; because they assumed the reform would improve the standards of their schools by having access to more resources. However, the data from the case study research revealed that the reform did not provide schools with sufficient resources. Schools, especially in the rural cluster, continue to struggle with limited resources.

Schools competed over limited resources and therefore were unable to share resources in order to improve the teaching practices of teachers as per the intentions of cluster-based school management reform. The cluster-centre principals and cluster subject facilitators could not visit satellite schools to support teachers at the classroom level due to limited resources. Teachers, especially in rural schools could not attend cluster subject meetings regularly for lack of adequate resources. Cluster-based school management reform did not provide the means to help teachers in rural schools to gain access to resources, nor provide alternative means to alleviate teacher isolation in these rural schools. It is unrealistic to implement a reform which requires additional resources in schools in communities with little or no resources. The reform goals of resource sharing, improving school supervision and teaching through (localised) cluster supervision and support could not be achieved because of resource scarcity and fear of losing resources.

From the observation of under-resourced schools, the teaching conditions seem to be additional barriers for successful implementation of school management reform. Only

resourced schools have libraries. Most classrooms are physically poor. Some classrooms do not have enough chairs for learners, or some chairs are broken. Most of the lower primary classes are overcrowded; there are insufficient teaching and learning materials such as workbooks for learners, textbooks, crayons and pencils. In some classes visited, not all learners were able to do exercises and finish on time, having to wait for others to finish because they were sharing crayons and pencils. Teachers also could not provide much individual attention because classes were over-crowded and teaching time was limited.

### **9.2.3 Potential threat to the authority of school inspectors and school principals leads to poor implementation of cluster-based school management reform**

Sharing and collaboration are some of the underpinning principles of cluster-based school management reform. Successful implementation of cluster-based school management reform requires schools to work in a shared and collaborative manner. The data from the case study revealed that there has been little shared and collaborative leadership in the clusters. The circuit inspectors were unable to facilitate the implementation of the school management reform using skills and approaches in line with the tenets of the school management reform. The inspector for Makalani cluster resisted the school management reform because he perceived it as a potential threat to his authority over schools. The inspector for Hendrich and Otjimue clusters supervises cluster activities through centralised and authoritarian approaches. The school principals in both rich and poor urban clusters resisted the school management reform because they perceived it as a potential threat to authority over their own schools, while the cluster-centre principals manage the cluster activities through bureaucratic styles of management.

Although the data from the survey research reveal positive outcomes of the implementation of the reform, the data from the case study research show that the reform goals of resource sharing, collaboration and democratic participation have not been implemented successfully because of fear of losing authority and power. Schools continue to work in isolation and there is little consistent support from the regional offices to support the key implementers to make a shift from their existing culture to a culture that fits decentralisation reforms.

#### **9.2.4 Incongruence between democratic ideology and the colonial ideologies impedes the implementation of cluster-based school management reform**

Successful implementation of cluster-based school management reform requires institutions and key implementers to make a shift from past ideologies to the ideologies advocated by decentralisation reforms. The ideologies that the street-level bureaucrats inherited from the colonial system remain unchanged and schools continue operating within those ideological frameworks.

Table 19 below shows the incongruence between the characteristics of past ideologies and the tenets of cluster-based school management reform:

<b>Characteristics of past ideologies</b>	<b>Tenets of cluster-based school management reform</b>
Respect and blind submission to authority	Freedom of thought and action
Bureaucratic control and rigid hierarchical governance	Shared, participatory and collaborative leadership
Initiatives and policy directives come only from top	Collective problem solving and shared decision-making, bottom-up initiatives
Competitiveness and individualism	Collectiveness and collaboration

*Table 19: The characteristics of past ideologies versus the tenets of cluster-based school management reform*

The key role players were unable to make a shift from ideologies that existed prior to the introduction of cluster-based school management reform to the democratic ideology, which promotes shared, participatory and collaborative leadership and management. The key role players either ignored the democratic ideology and continued operating as they used to, or implemented cluster-based school management reform through authoritarian and bureaucratic approaches.

As shown in table 19 and chapter 6, the characteristics of the ideologies that existed prior to the introduction of cluster-based school management reform are quite contrary to the tenets of cluster-based school management reform. For example, the authoritarian ideology emphasises respect and blind submission to authority, while cluster-based school management reform advocates freedom of thought and action. It is clear that the authoritarian ideology is opposite to a democratic ideology. Bureaucratic ideology is also not congruent with the tenets of cluster-based school management reform because the bureaucratic ideology advocates that schools should be governed by a set of rules and procedures, while cluster-based school management reform promotes shared and collaborative leadership. Under bureaucratic control, an official should be provided with instructions and directives from the top, while cluster-based school management reform advocates bottom-up initiatives, collective problem-solving and shared decision-making. Schools are accustomed to values of competitiveness and individualism, while cluster-based school management reform promotes values of collectiveness.

The inspectors, as officials responsible for facilitating the implementation of cluster-based school management reform, could not promote stakeholders' participation in decision-making processes. The inspector responsible for Hendrich and Otjimue clusters imposed change upon schools and expected schools to implement the change through blind

submission to authority, while the Makalani inspector rejected the delegation of authority and responsibilities to cluster-centre principals, because he interpreted that delegation of authority and responsibilities would undermine his authority as a circuit inspector.

Because of bureaucratic control, school principals and teachers lack initiatives to implement the school management reform without directives and guidelines from the regional authorities. In other words, although the school management reform advocates bottom-up initiatives, bureaucracy and its unchangeable procedures stifle initiatives in schools.

While the school management reform advocates shared decision-making, collective problem solving and collaborative management, there has been little or no teamwork or team-planning going on in clusters. The inspectors have been managing the schools without consultations of school principals and the cluster-centre principals have been managing the cluster activities without involving the satellite school principals and teachers in their clusters.

Though the school management reform advocates schools to be viewed as collective entities rather than individual institutions, schools were not be able to make that shift. Schools continue to operate individually and compete with each other. An example of this is that the resourced schools felt adequate and were not prepared to share resources with under-resourced schools.

One can conclude that 'a previously existing culture of cooperation and /or mutual support' is one of the conditions for successful implementation of decentralisation reforms in developing countries (Pellini, 2005). It is clear from the three case studies that an existing

culture of cooperation and mutual support was absent; instead there were strong beliefs of individualism, competitiveness and the influence of the apartheid ideologies.

As shown in table 19 above, the doctrines of the authoritarian and bureaucratic control, competitiveness and individualism are contrary to the tenets of the school management reform. Therefore, these ideologies are barriers to successful implementation of cluster-based school management reform. It is clear that the central authorities have not made significant efforts to build the capacities of the key implementers to make a shift from the past ideologies, to the ideology which fits decentralisation reforms. The key implementers were clouded with the past ideologies and were unable to make a shift in order to implement the school management reform as intended. One can conclude that the strong beliefs and values in authoritarian, bureaucratic and individualistic ideologies (which are contrary to the philosophy of collaborative leadership and management) impede the implementation of the school management reform in the three primary school clusters.

#### **9.2.5 Teacher-support strategies introduced by cluster-based school management reform have little or no significant influence on the teaching practices of teachers**

As mentioned previously, advocates of cluster-based school management reform identify the cluster management committee, cluster-based subject grouping and cluster subject facilitators as teacher support strategies to improve the quality of teaching in schools.

Drawing on the findings from the three case studies there is little or no link between teacher-support strategies introduced by cluster-based school management reform and improvement in the quality of the teaching skills of teachers in the three primary school clusters. The evidence from the three case studies indicated that the functions of the cluster management committee remained unknown to most of teachers. The cluster management committee meetings focused on administrative issues rather than teacher

professional development activities. There is no evidence of teachers being supported through cluster-management committees. Teachers reported that they had been supported by their own principals, except in the poor urban cluster (Hendrich cluster), where the cluster-centre principal supported the teachers in the satellite schools with little involvement of satellite school principals. Schools in clusters rarely worked as a team to improve the teaching practices of teachers, except in the poor urban cluster, where the cluster-centre principal tried to motivate satellite school principals to support teachers in their schools. However, the satellite school principals interpreted the intervention as interfering with their school affairs.

Teachers also perceived little or no support from cluster-based subject group meetings. The limitations of cluster-based subject group meetings are identified as follows:

First, cluster-based subject meetings lack structure and a clear focus on how to support teachers, improve their teaching practices. There were no professional development activities (conducted in a systematic manner) during cluster-based subject meetings. Discussions and sharing of information took place in a haphazard way. It is not clear whether cluster-based subject meetings focused on teacher professional development issues or administrative issues. There were no planning and preparations done for cluster-based subject meetings except a list of agenda items.

Second, lack of sufficient pedagogical knowledge limited teacher learning. Though teachers raised their needs for professional development during cluster-based subject meetings, they were provided with little support from colleagues because teachers lack sufficient pedagogical knowledge, and subject advisors generally do not attend cluster-based subject meetings.

Third, discussions and sharing of ideas are limited ways to improve teaching practices of teachers. Although discussions during cluster-based subject meetings related to teaching practices of teachers, discussions and sharing of ideas without demonstration of good teaching practices and concrete lesson plans make it difficult to relate those discussions and sharing of ideas to their teaching practices.

Fourth, though teachers may share good practices during cluster-based subject meetings, schools and classroom conditions remain different. Teachers maintain that it does not help them to discuss good practices or ideas on how to improve teaching if classroom conditions are different or nothing is done to improve classroom conditions in under-resourced schools.

Fifth, teachers have been reluctant to work in a collaborative learning environment. Teachers are used to working in isolation. Cluster-based subject meetings require teachers to uphold values of teamwork, mutual support, respect and understanding. During cluster-based subject meetings observed for this research, it was evident that there was limited mutual support and teamwork.

Sixth, cluster-based subject meetings require additional resources to be available in schools. As mentioned previously, cluster-based subject meetings, especially in the rural cluster were not held regularly because of transport problems and long distances.

Finally, cluster-based subject meetings are perceived as routine activities. Teachers have been attending subject meetings because they felt obliged to do so. Teachers are not motivated to attend the meetings because they do not see the benefits of cluster-based

subject meetings. None of the teachers interviewed could mention one aspect of her teaching practices that improved as a result of attending cluster-based subject meetings.

Based on the limitations discussed above, it is evident that cluster-based subject meetings are limited in the extent to which they can improve the quality of the teaching practices of teachers. The cluster-based subject meetings in urban clusters were cancelled because of lack of interest in teachers to attend, while cluster-based subject meetings in the rural cluster were cancelled repeatedly due to transport problems and long distances.

It is also evident from the three case studies that teachers were not supported at the classroom level, because of limited personnel who were assigned to provide support to teachers at classroom level. Cluster subject facilitators are full-time teachers; one for Otjimue cluster is a principal who also has her own teaching load. Because of their teaching responsibilities, cluster subject facilitators do not have time to support all the teachers in their clusters. Besides their teaching load and limited time, cluster subject facilitators do not have transport or transport allowance to enable them to visit teachers in various primary schools in their clusters.

It can be concluded that teacher-support through cluster subject facilitators, like the cluster management committee and cluster-based subject meetings are limited improving the teaching practices of teachers.

Only teachers from the poor urban cluster pointed out that the cluster-centre principal visited them in their classrooms. None of the teachers interviewed, reported that cluster subject facilitators visited them in their classrooms.

It is safe to conclude that having sufficient personnel in schools is one of the conditions for successful implementation of decentralisation reform in developing countries (Pellini, 2005). It is evident from the three case studies that overwhelming multiple demands on schools and teachers are impeding factors for successful implementation of decentralisation reforms in developing countries (Naidoo, 2005).

It can be concluded from this study that there is insufficient evidence that teacher-support strategies introduced by cluster-based management reform have a considerable effect on the quality of the teaching practices of teachers in the three primary school clusters.

**9.2.6 There is no evidence from the three case studies that the teaching methods of teachers who have received support through cluster-based school management reform are significantly different from those who have not**

Drawing on the data from the three case studies, only *seven* out of eighteen teachers observed had effective teaching skills. These teachers reported that they did not receive any support during the implementation of cluster-based school management reform and their teaching practices did not improve because of the implementation of cluster-based school management reform. The majority of teachers did not meet the criteria for effective teaching. Some reported that they received support during the implementation of cluster-based school management reform, while others claimed that they did not receive support during the implementation of cluster-based school management reform. In the same category, some teachers also reported that their teaching practices improved because of cluster-based school management reform, while others reported that their teaching practices did not improve.

Drawing on the four lessons described in chapter 8, of which two were presented by teachers who claimed that they received any support, and another two presented by teachers who claimed that they did not receive support, none of the four met the criteria for

effective teaching. Their teaching methodologies focused more on whole class teaching and question and answer methods; only one used teaching strategies, materials and resources effectively. The other *three* teachers could not promote active participation of learners in lessons; keep learners on task; or use a variety of teaching strategies, teaching materials and resources to enhance learning. *All four* teachers were not skilled or were limited in their ability to adapt instructions to the learning needs of different learners; involve learners in challenging activities which require them to think critically or analytically; assist learners to make connections between what they already know and new material; and assist learners to see the relationship between different learning areas.

It can be concluded that there is no evidence from this study that the teaching methodologies of teachers who claimed they have received support during the implementation of cluster-based school management were significantly different from those who claimed they have not received the support.

#### **9.2.7 There is no sufficient evidence from this study that cluster-based school management reform relates to improving teaching**

The data from this study revealed that schools were not provided with enough resources during the implementation of cluster-based school management reform to improve the teaching practices of teachers. Schools have been competed for limited resources and therefore they did not share resources to support teachers to improve their teaching practices. Teachers in the rural cluster still have difficulties accessing resources and therefore the situation in rural and isolated schools remains unchanged.

Drawing on the findings from the three case studies, little support was provided to circuit inspectors and school principals to enable them to transform schools from the culture of competitiveness and individualism, to that of collectiveness in order to promote the culture

of collegiality among teachers, or to support those who have insufficient pedagogical knowledge and skills.

The findings from the three case studies also indicate that cluster-based school management reform did not build the capacity and skills of teachers to engage in collaborative learning to support those who have insufficient pedagogical skills. It seems the reform did not yet break the teacher culture of isolation. From the cluster-based subject meetings it seems that teachers were either limited in sharing ideas with another freely or have not yet developed skills to reflect on their teaching practices. Reflecting critically on one's teaching practices is a skill that requires time and confidence to develop.

It is evident from the survey and case studies research that the teacher support strategies introduced by cluster-based school management reform were limited in the extent to which they improved teaching practices. Teachers in the three primary school clusters have little information on how a cluster-management committee relates to their work.

Cluster-subject group meetings lack structure and clarity on how to support teachers to improve their teaching practices. Besides its vague focus, cluster subject meetings are limited to discussions and sharing of ideas, which do not guarantee improvement in teaching practices. Cluster-subject group meetings also lack staff with sufficient pedagogical knowledge to guide teachers in their discussions. It is evident from the three case studies that in order for teachers to attend cluster-subject group meetings regularly, it requires additional time and resources are required. It is also evident from the survey and case studies research that there is insufficient evidence that cluster-subject group meetings have significant effects on the quality of teaching practices of the teachers.

Teachers received little or no support at classroom level during the implementation of cluster-based school management reform. From the survey research, only 38% of the lower primary teachers indicated that they received support during the implementation of cluster-based school management reform and none of the teachers interviewed reported that they received support at classroom level.

The evidence from this study demonstrates a number of missing links between cluster-based school management reform and improving teaching:

First, the roles and responsibilities of school principals on how to support teachers improve teaching were not defined; however, it is not yet clear from the literature whether the leadership and management skills (such as delegation skills, collaborative decision-making and problem-solving skills advocated by cluster-based school management reform) directly relate to teaching. In addition to the management and leadership skills, the reform lacks clarity on how teacher involvement could be utilised to improve teaching in schools.

Second, cluster-based school management reform lacks clarity and guidelines on how to support teachers in improving their teaching practices.

Third, cluster-based school management lacks sufficient resources to support and monitor teaching at the classroom level.

Fourth, cluster-based school management reform lacks clarity and guidelines on how schools and teachers can work in a collaborative manner to improve the quality of teaching in schools.

Fifth, cluster-based school management reform fails to develop management and leadership skills (in school principals) which relate to improving teaching.

Sixth, cluster-based school management reform does not result in schools' adoption of a culture and ideologies that improve (transform) teaching in schools.

Seventh, cluster-based school management reform changes structures of managing schools, but does not provide clarity and guidelines on how these structures could support teaching in schools.

Eighth, cluster-based school management reform introduces teacher support strategies to improve teaching, but these strategies also lack clarity, guidelines and resources to support and monitor teaching at classroom level.

Finally, the evidence from the three case studies shows that the teaching methodologies of teachers in the three primary school clusters lack the competencies and skills associated with effective teaching. The findings from the three primary school clusters indicate that the teaching methodologies of teachers in these school clusters are characterised by chalk-talk teaching, limited elicitation techniques, limited skills to institute remedial actions and language limitations. Although the changes in teachers' teaching practices were not assessed systematically, one can make inferences from the ineffective teacher-support strategies introduced by cluster-based school management reform and the actual teaching methodologies of teachers, that cluster-based school management reform has had little or no influence on the teaching practices of teachers in the three primary school clusters.

### **9.3 Contributions of the present study**

This study contributes to the international scholarship on the relationship between decentralisation and teaching by providing insight into the content and organisation of cluster-based teacher professional development and its effects on teacher learning in a developing context. This study attempts to contribute to the existing knowledge base on the implementation of decentralisation reforms by providing an understanding that successful implementation of decentralisation reforms requires fundamental changes in the ideologies which existed prior to the introduction of these reforms, and neglecting to anticipate resistance due to a shift in an ideology affects the implementation negatively.

#### **9.3.1 Contributions on the existing knowledge base on the implementation decentralisation reforms in a developing context**

The literature on decentralisation has focused on factors affecting the implementation of decentralisation reforms, but has neglected to examine the influence of an ideology on the implementation of decentralisation reforms. This study established that ideologies existing prior to the introduction of cluster-based school management reform were sources of resistance to its implementation. It is argued that although the designers of reform initiative might have been aware of the existence of these ideologies, it seems that the designers have not anticipated that these ideologies could be sources of resistance. School practices had been largely influenced by past ideologies which are contrary to democratic ideology, a belief system which underpins cluster-based school management reform.

Bureaucratic, authoritarian and managerial ideologies had been entrenched in the Namibian society and became a blueprint for social order. While schools were used to a social order informed by bureaucratic, authoritarian and managerial ideologies, the reform introduced a different ideology, one that challenges the past ideologies. The study

established that implementing a 'new' social order that challenges existing social order is problematic. Some key implementers ignored the reform, while others implemented the reform using bureaucratic and authoritarian approaches. The implementation culture and practices that prevail in the clusters resonate more with past practices than with the formal decentralisation aims of extending participatory democracy in education to the grassroots.

This study concludes that old mindsets have not changed substantively; with the results that implementation of democratic ideology has been constrained at the local level. While democratic ideology aims to promote local participation in decision-making and empowerment, faith in the virtues of line-management facilitates the creation of dependency in decision-making. Institutions were unable to make a shift in their traditions, norms and values that carried them through for many years without consistent support. If consistent support is not provided to institutions, they continue to function according to the 'well-established' traditions and norms, and ignore the norms and values advocated by decentralisation reforms.

A lesson learnt from this study is that implementing a new initiative whose ideology challenges the existing ideologies may encounter resistance if the designers of the reform do not anticipate the possible resistance and include mechanisms to overcome such resistance and to monitor the implementation process. Another lesson learnt from this study is that introducing reforms in schools by simply grafting new ideologies onto the existing one may not bring desirable changes in school practices.

### **9.3.2 Contributions on the existing knowledge base as regards to the link between decentralisation reforms and improving teaching**

Advocates of school clustering claim that supervision at cluster level allows for close-to-school support, because supervisors at cluster level may have a better understanding of issues faced by cluster teachers and cluster heads (De Grauwe and Carron, 1997; Dittmar et al., 2002). Cluster-based subject groups are assumed to foster a culture of sharing, openness and mutual support; provide a framework for in-service training and a point of contact for advisory teaching services (Dittmar et al., 2002). It is also assumed that cluster meetings enable teachers to share ideas and solve problems and therefore such meetings act as a form of in-service training for teachers (Bray, 1987; MacNeil, 2004).

The evidence from this study showed that unstructured and un-focused cluster-based subject group meetings did not support teachers in learning new forms of pedagogy. Structures established to affect changes in teaching should have a focus. Because cluster-subject group meetings lack clarity and a clear focus and guidelines on how to support teachers, the cluster-subject group meetings were limited to sharing ideas, information and problems. Sharing of information and ideas without demonstrations of good teaching practices does not guarantee learning of new teaching skills. In order for cluster-based subject group meetings to be regarded as opportunities for teacher professional development in a developing context, they should be well structured and the resources (material, finance and human) for these structures should be provided.

The literature on school clustering and school-based management emphasises the creation of 'professional learning community' for teachers which provides opportunity to engage in professional dialogue and collaborative problem solving in issues related to teaching and learning (USAID, 2004; Dittmar et al., 2002). This study established that

there has been little collaboration among teachers as well as a lack of initiative from teachers to improve their teaching. Teachers from resourced schools maintained that the reform did not have any benefits for them. They argued that the reform had not promoted collaboration and co-operation among teachers. They preferred to remain self-sufficient in terms of resources and to work on their own. Teachers from under-resourced schools criticised the reform because it did not provide clear guidelines on how to support teachers learning from one another.

In this context, for example, where schools do not have sufficient resources and competent teachers, a professional learning community must have a clear focus on how to support teachers to improve their teaching practices. It is evident from the three case studies that creating a professional learning community per se, without competent teacher educators who can facilitate teacher learning, would not have much influence on the quality of teaching in schools. Teachers should be able to access teaching materials that are not available in their schools at cluster centres. Teachers should also be able to access professional support that they cannot obtain in their schools. It is clear from the three case studies that teachers have not been interested in attending cluster-based subject meetings, because they do not see the value of cluster meetings, to their classroom practice.

While a review of studies on school clustering found teacher groups to be ineffective because they were irrelevant to teachers' immediate needs (Giordano, 2008), this study found that the ineffectiveness of teacher groups lies in the fact that they are unstructured and un-focused and that they lack clarity, guidelines and resources to support teachers improving their teaching.

Advocates of cluster-based school management assume that school management and teaching improve through shared and collaborative leadership and management, equitable distribution of resources, and by creating collaborative learning opportunities for teachers (Giordano, 2008; Ditmar et al., 2002). This study argues that it is not yet clear whether the participatory and collaborative styles of leadership and management directly relate to teaching. This study also argues that in order to claim that a link exists between school clustering and improving teaching, there should be research evidence that shows how leadership and management skills advocated by cluster-based school management relate to improving teaching.

The evidence from the three case studies showed that cluster-based school management reform was not able to create a learning culture in schools. As mentioned previously, cluster-based school management reform fails to transform school tradition and culture into a school culture and tradition geared towards improving teaching in schools. Schools competed over resources. School principals were not able to work in a collaborative manner. Teachers lack skills to work in a collaborative learning environment, because they are used to working in isolation. Though this study did not assess the reflective skills of teachers it could be inferred from the observations during the cluster-based subject meetings that teachers had difficulties in reflecting on their teaching practices.

The evidence from this study also showed that teachers lack values that relate to team work, mutual support, respect and understanding. It is not yet clear from the literature how best school clustering can create a collaborative learning culture in schools, especially in the context of schools which have competitive and individualistic backgrounds. It is also not yet clear the extent that the collaborative learning culture influences the quality of teaching in schools. The evidence from the survey research revealed that both school

principals and teachers rated the collaboration among teachers as high, but rated the influence of the reform on improvement of teaching as very low.

Figure 2 below illustrates the disjuncture between cluster-based school management and improved teaching:

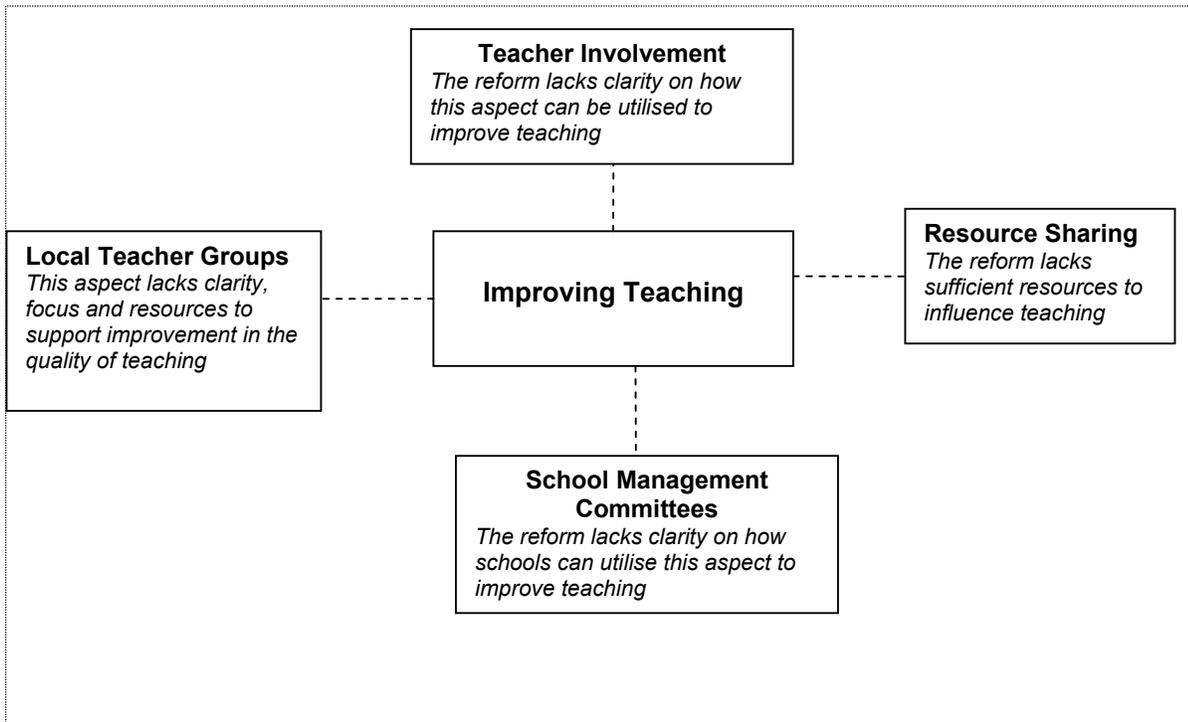


Figure 2: Disjuncture between aspects of cluster-based school management reform and improving teaching

Note: Dashed lines indicate no link between the aspect of cluster-based school management reform and improving teaching.

As described in figure 2 above, there is a disjuncture between aspects of cluster-based school management reform and improving teaching. Local teacher groups (cluster-based subject groups meetings) did not influence the quality of teaching; because they lack clarity, focus and resources to support teachers improve their teaching practices.

With regard to the teacher involvement, the reform lacks clarity on how this dimension can be utilised to improve teaching. Besides the lack of clarity, it is evident from the three case

studies that school principals lack skills on how to involve teachers in decisions that relate to school improvement programs. Teachers were expected to attend cluster-based subject group meetings, but they were not involved in the planning of these meetings. Resource sharing is the other aspect of cluster-based management reform which is assumed to improve the teaching practices of teachers. However, this assumption was proven to be unrealistic because schools were competed over limited resources. The aspect of 'school management committees' also did not influence the quality of teaching in schools. There has been little collaboration among schools. Schools interpreted the school management reform as a potential threat to their power; therefore schools competed for power and authority over their schools. Cluster-centre principals and satellite school principals did not work in a collaborative manner to improve teaching in schools. It could also be argued that schools and teachers may collaborate on number of issues, but collaboration may not guarantee improvement in the quality of teaching. Teachers seemed to be supported more by their own principals than by school management committees.

In summary, this study demonstrates a number of obvious missing links between cluster-based school management and improving teaching, because the reform lacks: (1) clarity, guidelines and resources to support and monitor teaching in schools and at classroom level; (2) clarity on the roles and responsibilities of key implementers in improving teaching; (3) capability to transform school traditions and culture into a culture which transforms teaching in schools; and (4) clarity on how teacher involvement can be utilised to improve teaching in schools.

#### **9.4 Limitations of the present study**

The qualitative data, which has made significant contribution to this study, was collected only from the three case studies. This limits the generalisation of the study findings from few areas of Namibia, considering the country's diversity.

The study focused only in Namibia excluding other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, thus limiting the understanding of the implementation of decentralisation reforms such as school clustering to Namibia.

The study assessed the relationship between cluster-based school management and improving teaching. However, it was limited to capturing sufficient data on the types of managerial and leadership skills which could relate directly to teaching.

Due to time and resource constraints, the study did not capture sufficient data on the effectiveness of cluster-based school management reform in isolated schools with weak school leadership and limited resources.

This study does highlight how school traditional norms and values, and existence of the past ideologies affect the implementation of cluster-based school management reform; however, it did not examine how decentralisation reforms can change highly individualistic and competitive oriented schools to more shared and collaborative schools.

#### **9.5 Recommendations for future research**

Research on the relationship between education decentralisation and education quality has advanced considerably, especially in developed countries. However, the research evidence on the relationship between education decentralisation and improving teaching

has not been conclusive. As mentioned previously, a variety of decentralisation reforms are introduced to improve teaching in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, there is little research conducted on the relationship between education decentralisation and improving teaching in Sub-Saharan Africa. The following are topics for future research on the relationship between education decentralisation reforms and improving teaching.

Studies designed to investigate the leadership and management skills which directly relate to teaching, would be valuable. Studies should assess the extent to which leadership and management skills such as delegation of problem-solving and collaborative decision-making relate to improving teaching. Likewise, studies on the roles and responsibilities of key implementers such as cluster-centre principals, satellite school principals and cluster-subject facilitators in improving teaching would provide valuable data to shed light on the relationship between school clustering and teaching. Since the move towards education decentralisation has become popular in Sub-Saharan African countries, substantial research evidence on how school clustering reforms improve the quality of teaching in African classrooms is valuable.

Another area of research would be studies of local teacher groups and teacher resource centres as localised teacher development strategies. Studies to investigate how these structures facilitate teacher learning would yield useful data on the relationship between decentralisation reforms and improving teaching. In addition, studies that systematically examine the effects of these structures on the quality of teaching in schools would contribute to our understanding of the link between localised teacher development and teaching in developing contexts.

## **9.6 Recommendations for improving implementation of cluster-based school management reform in a developing context**

### *Develop strategies for supporting the implementation of cluster-based school management reform*

This study establishes that cluster-based school management reform has introduced ideological changes which challenge traditional ways of running schools. The democratic ideology challenges bureaucratic styles of control and faith in the virtues of line-management as well as ethos of competitiveness and individualism. This study revealed that inspectors, school principals and teachers ignored democratic practices, or they continued operating as they used to do prior to the introduction of cluster-based school management reform, or they implemented the reform through bureaucratic approaches. Substantial changes from 'past' practices to democratic practices require opportunity to be created for substantial discussion about why such changes are needed and how these changes will benefit schools and teachers.

In addition, consistent support should be provided to school inspectors (district officers), school principals and teachers to enable them to make a shift to an ideology that supports decentralisation reforms.

### *Review teacher- support strategies*

The evidence from this study shows that teacher-support strategies introduced by the cluster-based school management reform are ineffective in improving teaching practices of teachers in Namibia. In order for decentralisation reforms to have effects on teaching

practices of teachers, a review of the current teacher support strategies is needed. The recommendations from this study are as follow:

- (1) Identify teacher support structures and strategies that could support teachers at teacher-resource centre, cluster and classroom level. Combining the effort of supporting teachers at teacher resource centre, cluster and school levels might be the appropriate teacher support strategy for Namibia, since teacher resource centre staff and school managers are full-time officials appointed for teacher support.
- (2) Carry out training needs assessment to determine the competencies and skills that should be developed in teachers to improve their teaching practices.
- (3) Develop a systematic teacher continuous development program geared towards improving teaching.
- (4) Develop incentives for teachers to participate in continuous professional development activities.
- (5) Develop systematic follow-up activities for teachers at classroom level.
- (6) Determine the resources needed to support teachers at classroom level.
- (7) Pilot the program in remote and isolated schools to determine its suitability in difficulty conditions.
- (8) Monitor the implementation of the programs.

*Evaluate the effectiveness and affordability of cluster-based school management reforms in improving teaching in a developing context*

It is evident from this study that successful implementation of cluster-based school management reforms requires a reasonable transportation and communication network, availability of resources and sufficient personnel in schools. It is clear from the study that rural clusters and isolated schools have transport and communication problems. It is expensive for a developing country to have in place a reasonable transportation and

communication network in rural areas. It is also expensive for a developing country to provide sufficient resources and personnel in all schools in a sparsely populated country such as Namibia. The evidence from the rural case study showed that schools had embraced the school management reform, but its implementation was constrained by the fact that schools are isolated and located in impoverished communities.

This study argues that cluster-based school management reform could be an efficient decentralisation reform for distributing administrative responsibilities at local level, but it might not be an appropriate intervention for improving teaching in schools. Therefore this study recommends that since conditions in developing countries are far different from those of developed countries, decentralisation reforms designed for developed countries should be adapted in accordance with the needs of developing countries.

This study therefore recommends a well thought-out cluster-and school-based in-service teacher development strategy which combines in-class support to teachers as a possible intervention for teacher professional development in Namibia. This strategy needs to be tied to a clear focus on improving the teaching competencies of teachers as well as improving the planning and facilitation competencies of officials responsible for teacher professional development at both levels.