

Education decentralisation and school clustering in Namibia: the politics of implementation

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ABSTRACT

In 2000 the Namibian Government introduced decentralisation reforms in education in the form of school clustering. This article analyses the role of local politics in the implementation process. The key role players are education inspectors, school principals and teachers. We found that these stakeholders have influenced the reform's limited outcomes by contesting and supporting it, by engaging in contested and consensual political relationships with one another, and through competition over resources. This is a qualitative, comparative study of three school clusters situated in two districts (also called circuits). The empirical material was collected in the education districts which have implemented the reforms for the longest periods. The clusters we researched are diverse in terms of geographical location, the resources at their disposal, and the communities their schools serve.

Keywords: Namibia, education decentralisation, local politics

INTRODUCTION

In this article we seek to understand the role of local politics in determining the implementation and practice of educational change. The definition of what constitutes politics is one that emerged from analyses of the empirical material we

collected. It concerns the contested and, to some degree, consensual relations of power among the key role players, and their competition and struggles over resources. The main interest groups are district education inspectors, principals and teachers. Parents and the communities surrounding the schools have to date had little impact on state education policy. As Naidoo (2004, p. 225) writes in regard to governmental perceptions of educational change in South Africa:

There is an assumption that 'declared policies' will be translated into practice in an unproblematic smooth process if there are strong controls to ensure that the bureaucracy faithfully executes directives from the top. But, policy ideas are received and interpreted differently within different political architectures, infrastructures, and ideologies. The policies are reworked, tinkered with, and nuanced through complex processes of influence, dissemination and re-creation in contexts of practice.

Background to the Namibian Reforms

Apartheid education governance, introduced by South Africa after it had been granted a mandate by the United Nations to govern Namibia at the end of World War II, had the following, well-known features: racial and ethnic segregation and inequality, undemocratic participation by interest groups and school communities, little bureaucratic accountability and transparency, top-down policy implementation, power centralised with certain decentralising features, to ensure white hegemony (Cohen, 1994; Weber, 2002).

Namibia gained political independence from South Africa in 1990. The new government dismantled the apartheid system. A National Ministry of Education was established, divided into decentralised regional offices, circuits and, in 2000, a system of school clusters. Groups of between 5 and 7 schools, in close geographic proximity, were formed into clusters. The clusters were de-concentrated agents of the regional directorates and the national head office or Ministry of Education.

A leading school was selected to act as a cluster centre, based on the fact that it commanded more resources, was close to the surrounding, satellite schools, and had a principal who was willing and able to drive the implementation of the reform. Authority for managing school supervision and in-service training was granted to school clusters. The policy goals were to improve school management and teaching and learning, further equity goals through sharing resources between rich and poor school communities, promote democracy by providing structures for stakeholder participation, and provide support to teachers. It was also hoped that there would be greater communication and collaboration between government district structures, which, additionally, could better support principals and schools, as well as among schools and teachers (Dittmar, Mendelson & Ward, 2002).

Circuit, cluster, and cluster-based subject committees were formed. A circuit committee is comprised of the circuit's cluster school inspector and cluster-centre principals. A cluster committee is comprised of the cluster-centre principal, the school principals from each satellite school, and co-opted members such as teachers and school board members. A cluster-centre principal is allocated to each school cluster. The main tasks of the cluster-centre principal are to co-ordinate the activities of the cluster and to manage and supervise the cluster in accordance with the national decentralisation policy goals. He or she chairs the cluster management committee. Similarly, the circuit inspector acts as the leader of the circuit management committee and is responsible for supervising the activities of the cluster-centre principals (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002).

As stated, the clusters are de-concentrated agents of the regional directorates and the national head office of the Ministry of Education. They are tasked with implementing the goals of decentralisation and with carrying out the administrative functions which are centralised hierarchically at regional and national levels. These units were not recognised in law until recently. There is thus no real local autonomy

and independence and no process of influencing policy from the bottom up. In this respect there are interesting similarities with the apartheid system. The National Ministry of Education controls curriculum development, finance, resource allocation, policy, procurement, pre-service teacher training, examinations and quality assurance, while the regional offices are responsible for personnel, instruction, evaluation and teacher recruitment. School clusters are responsible for managing resources, school supervision, promoting democratic participation and collaboration, and building school management and leadership capacity. It is also intended that teachers share innovative ideas about curriculum and pedagogy, solve problems, and develop collegial networks and teaching and learning materials through the formation of inter-school, teacher subject forums that meet regularly. (Dittmar et al., 2002; Pomuti, 2009).

Research design and data collection

The management of the Ministry of Education in Namibia is decentralised into 13 education regions. There are 47 districts and 280 clusters, each region consists of about 5 to 11 districts and there are 5 to 10 clusters per district. Out of 13 regions, 5 regions have implemented cluster-based school management reform for the longest period. These were the regions we studied. In these 5 regions, there are 14 districts and 64 clusters.

A questionnaire-based survey obtained basic data about the schools and the implementation of the reforms. The analysis of this data together with discussions with regional and district officials underscored 3 criteria which appeared to have been important in understanding the reform context: geographic location, the socioeconomic conditions of the surrounding communities, and the role of leadership, that is, strong or weak management and commitment in driving change. On the basis these criteria 3 school clusters with varying characteristics were selected for more in depth study. Makalani cluster has the most resourced schools,

is situated in an urban area and is led by leaders who are enthusiastic about the reforms. Hendrich cluster has one well-resourced school, is located in a semi-urban area, with a strong leader who was also assigned, according to education officials in Hendrich cluster, with assisting the under-resourced schools and weaker leaders in the cluster. Otjimue cluster has many under-resourced schools and is situated in an impoverished community in a remote rural area.

Of the 8 schools in Makalani cluster, 4 schools (2 resourced schools and 2 under-resourced schools) were selected at random; of the 5 schools in Hendrich cluster, 3 schools were selected (the well-resourced school and 2 under-resourced schools) at random, and of the 5 schools in Otjimue cluster, 3 schools were selected at random. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principals of all 10 selected schools, with 2 inspectors of education, 1 for Makalani cluster and the other who supervised both Hendrich and Makalani clusters, as well as with 18 teachers with the longest teaching experience in primary schools, 10 in Makalani cluster; 4 in Hendrich cluster and 4 in Otjimue cluster.

The main data collection methods used for this article were observations of cluster meetings and face-to-face and telephonic interviews. These were complimented by classroom observations, focus group discussions, and analyses of relevant policy documents, including minutes of cluster and subject group meetings and manuals used in the training of cluster principals. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and coded. The codes were grouped and patterns and themes developed.

Cluster subject meetings were repeatedly observed examining the use of resources, the topics discussed, and what teachers said about their work in the context of the government's governance reforms. These meetings lasted about 3 hours. Detailed notes were written after the meetings and during visits to schools. As stated, face-to face interviews were conducted with 18 teachers in 10 schools.

The selection of teachers was done purposefully, based on a questionnaire which they had completed, their willingness to participate, and their experience. Formal, semi-structured as well as informal interviews were conducted focusing on their understandings and views about the reforms, its positive and problematic features, the value of cluster meetings, and issues that emerged during the discussions. The interviews lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. Face-to-face interviews were also conducted with 10 principals. The discussions centred around their views on the reforms and its implementation at schools. Because of practical circumstances, telephonic interviews were conducted with both the circuit inspectors who were responsible for the 3 school clusters. Similar questions were asked as was the case with the principals, but the focus was directed at their experiences and perceptions as officials in the education department.

Education decentralisation

Walberg, Paik, Komukai, & Freeman (2000) analysed twenty-two definitions of decentralisation from scholarly papers and organisations, from the late 1960s to the late 1990s. There have been noticeable shifts in the meanings of and motives for decentralisation (Dyer & Rose, 2005). The literature draws attention to (a) the shifting power and authority from central, national government to local levels and (b) what functions are redistributed and/or retained by whom. Often there is a partial transfer of power in respect of designated tasks and duties. Sometimes the appearance of devolution is deceptive because real control remains at the centre (McGinn & Welsh, 1999; Naidoo, 2005). In specifying which functions are distributed where, Zajda (2004) emphasises the importance of the distribution of resources, such as finance and human resources, and in regard to education, decisions about curricula. In a recent publication Robinson (2015: 469) uses ethnographic data of “people working in an Australian state education administration during an organisational restructure”. She seeks “to contribute to the literature on the neo-liberalism of education by adding the perspective of the

bureaucrats charged with managing educational reforms”. The government-led strategies that are used, she argues, are about attempts to “recentralise” control at the expense of local autonomy. Her work highlights the tension between decentralisation and centralisation which has been an important theme in the literature on decentralisation. Similarly, De Boer (2012) has discussed developments in to the United States, a country that historically has had one of the most striking decentralised education systems in the world. De Boer speaks about struggles of power between national and local officials that result from the centre seeking to micro-manage and dictate to street-bureaucrats what they should do and how. In sum, these are pre-eminently political issues about the exercise and contest of power.

The broad definition of decentralisation used by McGinn and Welsh (1999) is useful in understanding developments in Namibia: they describe it simply as the transfer of authority and decision-making powers from the central government to provincial, districts, municipalities and schools.

The literature identifies 4 different types and degrees of decentralisation: de-concentration, delegation, devolution and privatisation. De-concentration, a weak form of decentralisation, involves the transfer of administrative authority to lower levels of government without granting them ultimate decision-making powers. Usually the lower levels, such as district education offices and schools, are given greater workloads while decisive powers are retained by the centre. This is the type of education decentralisation implemented by the Namibian Government through a system of school clustering. Similar to de-concentration in rationale and form is the system of delegation. Administrative responsibility for specific functions is delegated to local government structures which have a measure of autonomy. Central authorities are still accountable for the decentralised functions that are transferred, but the centre retains the right to withdraw them if and when it wishes.

Under devolution the centre transfers full decision-making and administrative power to lower levels of government. Local autonomy and independence is formalised. Under privatisation, the state transfers responsibility for designated functions to the private sector in order, it is usually argued, to increase competitiveness and effectiveness in service delivery (Rondenelli & Cheema, 1983; Bray, 1987; Lauglo, 1995; Abu-Duhou, 1999; Bray & Mukundan, 2004). The main arguments used in favour of decentralisation are that it will improve the quality of education, including teaching and learning, result in the effective and efficient use of resources, enhance teacher effectiveness, school management, and school development, and make schools serve local societies better (Ainley & Mckenzie, 2000; Björk, 2004; Walberg *et al.* (2000); Zajda, 2004). The problems and challenges associated with decentralisation have also been discussed in the literature. Dyer and Rose (2005), for example, have stated that in order for decentralisation to work capacity has to be strengthened and developed throughout the education system. Local units have to carry out the reforms and the centre has to support them in this process. Capacity building is required to accomplish the new policy goals set at the top and the lower levels. Govinda (1997:281) writes that greater community participation and delegation does not “automatically” result in stakeholder support at local level, questioning the assumption that decentralisation enhances representivity in decision-making. Communities are not necessarily homogenous and may offer resistance, based on local politics (Essuman & Akyeampong, 2011). According to Schiefelbein (2004) decentralisation has focussed on changing education governance structures, not improving the quality of teaching and learning. And writing about Sub-Saharan Africa, Naidoo (2005:255) states that, “there is little reason to believe that changes in education management alone will improve teaching practice and student learning”.

Recent writing has stressed the argument that decentralisation is characterised by neo-liberal ideas of managerialism, accountability and privatisation. Soudien and Sayed (2005) contend that as a consequence of decentralisation inequalities and inequities can deepen, especially in cases where they have existed before. Decentralisation is consistent with neo-liberal doctrines that advocate the privatisation and marketisation of education and a smaller, non-interventionist state that withdraws from its social responsibilities. (See also Geo-Jaja, 2004; Davies and Bansel 2007; Blum, and Ullman 2012). Making schools “serve local needs” can easily translate into schools serving local markets and the interests of business and industry.

Decentralisation is essentially about shifts in the power exercised by different constituencies in education. The Namibian case shows that this is an on-going political process whose outcomes, at least presently, are not predictable. While the government has succeeded in putting the formal decentralised structures into place, this does not mean that the goals and rhetoric associated with the policy have been achieved. We shall argue that the reason for this is the independent political roles played by the implementers on the ground. Our perspective differs somewhat from those that list the factors that facilitate and enable decentralisation and those that critically review the claims made by the proponents of decentralisation, instructive as these studies have been. We are therefore sceptical of a technical approach that de-politicises education policy analysis and education planning by appealing to perceived objective facts. Policy analysis and political analysis should complement and be integrated with one another.

Our study seeks to understand the role of local politics as crucial to the localisation of decentralisation in Namibia. We wish to show how it influences the outcome of government policies on decentralisation. Generally, the literature on decentralisation has neglected the role of local politics, especially in developing

countries. In so far as one can speak of new trends in the literature it is about the relationship between neo-liberalism and education. A notable exception in regard to a research focus on local politics has been the research of Björk and Blase (2009). Their study focuses on the United States, but they make several points that are instructive to reforms in Namibia and probably elsewhere:

... micropolitical processes and structures make up a school and district offices 'political culture' and account for both stability and change ... It is evident that some political forces may work to maintain the status quo, while others serve the interests of change ... In most instances, externally-imposed educational reform initiatives must contend with existing internal political cultures ... (Björk and Blase, 2009: 198).

Local politics

In this section we analyse local politics in regard to the government's policy initiatives on decentralisation, drawing on the empirical data. We show that local politics are constituted by the relationships of power and the different views of school inspectors, principals and teachers on school clustering. These are in turn influenced by the conditions under which as well as the manner in which the reforms have been implemented. Furthermore, politics in the three school clusters highlight the importance of competition over resources as a crucial factor determining the role players' perceptions and actions, and thus the degree of success and failure of the reform (see Björk and Blase (2009) who define local politics similarly).

Power relations: inspectors, principals and teachers

Inspectors of education wield considerable power because of their senior positions in relation to school principals and teachers. The system also confers upon them the authority to act as the most important bureaucrats at local level that are supposed to take charge of and drive the implementation of education decentralisation.

In the Makalani cluster a circuit management committee has not been established and the circuit inspector did little to ensure that one was formed. He stated:

I was supposed to head the circuit management committee; work together with the cluster-centre principal[s] ... for example to identify training needs in the cluster, [become] involve[d] in the establishment of the subject groups, [but] because of my workload, I couldn't do that ... the system is not really [as] effective ... as it is supposed to be.

It was not only a question of him not providing leadership in establishing a management committee but of the reform interfering with his other duties. He said he did not believe it was necessary in the first place, and argued that schools that had good leadership and were well-run with competent and experienced teachers, especially the self-sufficient schools in urban areas, did not need to participate in the cluster programme. "... schools call the circuit office directly if they experience a problem, they can easily pick up and collect things from the circuit office". Schools could deal directly with himself or the circuit office. This he believed indicated that the decentralisation measures were unnecessary; the system of education governance and the status quo were fine as they were prior to the introduction of the changes. He therefore asserted and exercised his authority to supervise the schools in his circuit and did not wish to relinquish his power by sharing or devolving it to others.

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.

The schools in Makalani supported the position of the school inspector and had in effect formed a *de facto* political alliance with him. An *informal* cluster management committee existed, but these schools resisted the appointment of a cluster-centre

principal. In as much as the inspector wished to retain his supervisory responsibilities, the school principals did not want what they perceived to be interference from colleagues in neighbouring schools in how they managed their own schools. In part this threatened their identities as principals, and in part it was due to the fact that these schools saw themselves in competition with one another. They thus agreed to an arrangement whereby the position of cluster-centre principal would be rotated so that no single principal would be made more powerful for too long. A cluster centre was established in the premises of the circuit, not on the grounds of any of the schools as this too might be seen as conferring a certain status, authority, and singling out a particular school. As for the cluster management committee, the current cluster-centre principal in Makalani said:

... we act on [an] *ad hoc* basis ... there is no plan of action or a year plan. This is a management committee ... but we work informal[ly] when there is something that needs to be discussed, me and the other cluster-centre principals and the secretary meet, plan and set up an agenda and other principals just attend ...

The Hendrich and Otjimue clusters shared the same circuit inspector because they are situated in the same circuit as demarcated by the Ministry of Education. In contrast to Makalani, this inspector was a strong advocate of the reform. She was instrumental in forming the required structures in Hendrich and Otjimue. In Hendrich, for example, a circuit management committee under the leadership of the inspector was established. It guided and had an impact on the activities of the cluster-centre principals. There is also a cluster management committee led by the cluster-centre principal. This committee consists of school principals, heads of departments, and subject convenors. It meets twice during each school term, always after teachers in the cluster have met, so that feedback can be provided by teachers on their subject meetings. At these meetings teachers discuss curricula, develop and plan work, set question papers, and share ideas. They appear to

operate far better in Hendrich and Otjimue, than in the case of the Makalani cluster. The minutes of the Otjimue cluster management committee meetings show that meetings have concentrated more on administrative matters and the organisation of social events than on teaching and learning and classroom practice.

The inspector of Hendrich and Otjimue stated: 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 ...

However, as in Makalani, the Hendrich school principals complained that they did not receive sufficient support from the circuit and regional offices. The cluster-centre principal in Hendrich said, "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". A Hendrich teacher said, "I don't think they [principals] received training; even our own principal does not know how to guide us". The Otjimue cluster-centre principal said, "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". While the inspector is committed to the decentralisation policies and plans, she did not show any awareness of the low commitment and insufficient capacity of school principals to implement the changes.

Whereas in Makalani the inspector was opposed to relinquishing power, the inspector in Hendrich and Otjimue stated her belief in delegating power and thus working towards re-configuring local politics and democratising relations among the different role players. She said, "through this system we empower our managers ... the system has really made my work much easier, now I only send 6 faxes ... I only call 6 schools, instead of calling all the schools in my circuit".

Furthermore, “I encourage the cluster-centre principals to put points on the agenda for their meeting, which will help other principals grow ...” Much of the rhetoric about decentralisation is about “empowering” the lower ranks which several of our respondents said in reality means passing workloads to more junior officials.

The Hendrich satellite principals, like their colleagues in Makalani, opposed the cluster-centre principals:

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.

The cluster-centre principal in Hendrich did not enjoy the support of the satellite principals because she managed the reform by concentrating power in her own hands and failing to win the cooperation of the other principals.

Principals in Makalani and Hendrich saw the reform as undermining and interfering with their authority at the schools they led. In both clusters there was, additionally, confusion about roles and responsibilities of the different bureaucrats and this was often tied to what was perceived to be problematic processes of reform delivery on the part of the regional and national authorities. This generated tensions between the different role players, instead of the greater cooperation as envisaged in the policy goals. Thus, the Makalani cluster-centre principal pointed out that the satellite school principals, including him, did not understand what was expected of them:

... there is need for proper training on roles and responsibilities of satellite principals ... 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.

This principal and some of his colleagues drew attention to the fact that they did not fully understand the reform, particularly their new roles and responsibilities. They furthermore expressed the view that they received little support and were “just left on their own”. Very similar views were expressed by the cluster-centre principal and the satellite principals in Otjimue. The problematic manner in which the decentralisation reforms, particularly at the level of the regional education offices, was implemented goes a long way in explaining the critical responses of key implementers. In this respect the most frequent complaint concerns the absence of on-going support and capacity-building.

For their part the teachers in Makalani appeared to be apathetic about the reform because of the absence of activities, poor organisation, and lack of leadership on the part of more senior officials. “I know there is a cluster management committee ... but I don't have any idea what they discuss in meetings”. In regard to the cluster-based subject groups the common view was that they “don't operate effectively and regularly”. Teachers in Hendrich expressed similar sentiments. They also pointed out that they were politically voiceless: “most of the time teachers are not asked to contribute ... [to] what will be discussed during the cluster meetings”. While the teachers at the resourced school in Hendrich stated that the teachers from the poorer schools were not interested in the assistance they offered, the teachers from the under-resourced schools stressed that the meetings lacked structure and purpose and that generally the reforms had been poorly implemented. Teachers in Hendrich, for different reasons, felt that the subject meetings were a waste of time.

The Otjimue cluster was exceptional in that the transfer of powers and the creation of new governance structures and positions did not generate opposition to the reforms as it did in the other two clusters. Unlike the other two clusters, the Otjimue cluster is located in a predominantly homogenous community in terms of its ethnic composition. We did not explore this factor in

any depth. It may have influenced the implementation of the reform in the 3 clusters and might explain the difference in politics between Otjimue on the one hand, and Hendrich and Makalani on the other.

Competition and struggles over resources

Various writers have stated that without adequate resources there is little chance of school clustering succeeding in developing countries (Pellini, 2005; Govinda, 1997; Naidoo, 2005). One of the goals of the Namibian reform is that rich schools share resources with poor schools. In the Makalani cluster the resourced schools were reluctant to share their resources with the poorer schools. They felt that the under-resourced school would place a burden on their resources. This applied to the rich school in Hendrich as well. The principal said:

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.

The resourced schools instituted strategies to protect their resources. Many clusters, including Makalani, had a Teachers' Resource Centre. The Centre was responsible for the administrative duties associated with the cluster. This enabled the rich schools to avoid having to collaborate and to minimise their dealings with the poorer schools. In Hendrich a special cluster fund was established "so that the [financial] burden won't be on the school fund of one school only". The resourced schools had a tradition and culture of competing with one another. According to the Makalani circuit inspector, "School principals were reluctant to accept the authority of another principal ... there is strong competition among the schools in this cluster and the schools did not cooperate effectively".

An additional reason for the cluster-based subject groups not working well was that the teachers of the resourced schools, who felt confident about their own teaching abilities and skills, did not wish to share information and skills about curricula and pedagogy with their colleagues in poorer schools. A Makalani teacher said: "... we are force[d] to go to meetings ... we are forced to communicate ...". Teachers from the rich school in Hendrich expressed similar views. One teacher said, "We don't benefit from the system ... we are the only one giving our little resources that we have". She reported:

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 for their learners.

Some Hendrich teachers expressed open hostility towards the teachers at the under-resourced schools in the cluster:

... 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 at the expense of your school ... some teachers within the cluster make use of all the information they can get, but the rest just carry on as before.

As far as the teachers in the under-resourced schools in Makalani were concerned, the view was expressed that:

... 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.

The under-resourced schools in Makalani, Hendrich and all the schools in Otjimue, welcomed and supported the reform because they saw it as an opportunity to improve the conditions under which they worked as well as improving the

professional development of their teaching staff. One Otjimue teacher said, “We share ideas on how to do things in the classroom ... I know what others are doing, what I should concentrate [on] when I am teaching.”

The under-resourced schools, especially in Otjimue, learned that the reality differed from their expectations. No additional facilities, resources or teacher professional development resulted from the implementation of the reform.

As noted above, Otjimue circuit did not have any resourced schools. Thus political conflict could not be directed at neighbouring schools as is the case with Makalani and Hendrich. As stated, the school communities, school principals and teachers in Otjimue supported the decentralisation initiatives in principle. It could be that they saw it as a way to promote greater equality within the system, although this was not explicitly stated. There were no power struggles, for example, around the prospects of cluster-centre principals usurping the power of the satellite principals. Neither was there any significant competition among the schools. The Otjimue cluster-centre principal explained that over time he had become critical of the changes because they did not have the resources to implement it. The principal said:

To be a cluster-centre principal ... your school has to incur expenses on behalf of other schools, I am now charging other schools for the use of the photocopier ... because I cannot continue using my school resource to support other schools.

Their views also started differing from those of the more senior bureaucrats. According to the Otjimue inspector:

... 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 [a] visionary and have initiative.

According to the cluster-centre principal these suggestions were tried, but failed: “... raising funds is difficult. We are trying hardbut there is no money; the schools are too small and most of the learners are from low income family backgrounds.”

The other defining feature that shaped reform delivery in Otjimue was the isolation and long distances between the schools. Transport and communication were difficulties that have not been overcome. A satellite principal stated:

The schools are isolated, you want to know how other schools are doing, and that is why [the] clustering system is a good thing for rural schools ... teachers want to go and make use of the facilities at the cluster meetings, but where do they go to get transport and time to go there ... our cluster centre is still far from some schools.

The circuit inspector, however, claimed that transport should not be a 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?”

The cluster-based reform promised to break teacher isolation in rural schools. Otjimue teachers said that the subject group meetings could not take place because of transport difficulties and because of the distances they had to travel.

CONCLUSION

We have reviewed the contrasting roles played by the school inspectors of Makalani on the one hand and of Hendrich and Otjimue on the other in implementing the decentralisation changes and establishing the relevant structures. In Makalani and Hendrich there was considerable opposition to the

creation of the new position of cluster-principal. The satellite principals (like the Makalani inspector) did not want to relinquish their authority. They did not want any interference from other principals in the management of their schools. There was also debate about what the reforms were about, and about the new job descriptions. In addition, principals and teachers criticised the manner in which the reforms were delivered and the lack of follow-up support from the higher authorities. The inspectors and regional offices showed little awareness or sensitivity to the problems encountered at the local levels. Instead of creating a culture of collaboration and greater equity, resourced schools and teachers in Makalani and Hendrich continued to compete with one another and jealously guarded their resources which they did not wish to share with under-resourced schools. Unlike Makalani and Hendrich, in Otjimue the reform and the new structures were welcomed in principle. The hope was that schools would receive sorely-needed resources and would improve teachers' professional development and work. Over time frustration resulted when this did not transpire. Distance and transport were key contextual factors resulting in limited implementation of the reform goals in Otjimue. In general, changing governance structures in Namibia has not changed the distribution of power, resources, or teaching and learning in the three clusters in significant ways.

In so far as the literature on decentralisation has paid attention to politics, it has neglected and has not paid sufficient attention to analysing political circumstances at the local level. The Namibian case draws attention to the intersection between (a) the different contextual conditions under which decentralisation is implemented, (b) the political relations among the local actors, and (c) the crucial role played by resources. Together they determine the degree to which policy goals were reached and the degree to which democracy in education governance can be consolidated.

In stressing the importance of politics we are also critiquing the technical traditions in education policy analysis, well-known in International Education and widely used

in developing countries. As Reimers and McGinn (1997:33-34) argue in this regard, Planning is [perceived to be] the derivative of analysis; its function is to identify those policies that will result in the most effective allocation of resources. Planning and policy analysis use technical (i.e. supposedly non-political) analysis and focus on means to achieve ends defined outside the planning process by politicians or policy actors ... Politics is sometimes included as an element in analysis but generally as an exogenous variable, or error term. Policy analysis does not include political analysis.

The policy of education decentralisation in Namibia stresses the discourse of consensus, ignoring the fact that local politics may exist. Indeed, the policy explicitly states that the aim is to build collaboration and co-operation among the different role players and schools. The reality shows that there is more conflict than consensus, although most of it does not occur in the open. A case could be made for the existing governance structures to be changed so that local politics are recognised and accommodated, rather than remain hidden and/or enforced through the exercise of hierarchical, coercive processes. The balance between the centre, the region and the local, and among the different education constituencies, will probably have to be negotiated in whatever system is implemented. However, a serious shortcoming of de-concentrated forms of decentralisation is that while localities are granted structures to articulate voice, that voice is muted because it cannot decisively influence what the centre decrees. School communities that include parents, at the level of the district or circuit, should be provided with forums that can determine and if necessary change what government decides regionally and nationally. The system should work reciprocally, from the bottom up as well as from the top down.

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