CLUSTERING AS MODEL FOR EFFECTIVE MANNAGEMENT OF SCHOOLS IN NAMIBIA

MICHAEL JOSEPH UIRAB
PTC, BA (NAM), B.TECH. (PRETORIA TECH), B.ED. (PU FOR CHE)

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE MAGISTER EDUCATIONIS
IN
EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT
IN THE
FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES
OF THE
NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY (POTCHESTROOM CAMPUS)

SUPERVISOR: PROF M.J. MOSOGE

POTCHEFSTROOM
2006

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- I am profoundly indebted to the **Almighty** for His mercy, wisdom and good health in order to be able to complete this study.

- Furthermore, I wish to register my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, **Prof M.J. Mosoge,** for his invaluable motivation, expert guidance, encouragement and being a source of inspiration. His endless advice, insight and encouragement during times of despair kept me firmly focused until the very end.

- The **staff of the Ferdinand Postma Library** for their outstanding service, friendliness and assistance.

- The **North-West University** for financial support and the Statistical Services for the questionnaire design and the analysis of the research data.

- The **Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture**, especially the **Erongo Education Region** for allowing me to distribute the questionnaires among principals in the Region.

- All the **principals** of the Erongo Education Region for their time and understanding to complete the questionnaires.

- My colleagues, mentors and friends: **Messrs G. Uiseb, S. Gaoseb, H.T. Hoaeb, D. Gurirab and U.P. Xoagub,** and many others whose names could not be mentioned here due to limited space, for their words of encouragement.

- To all my spiritual brothers and sisters of **Circuit Usakos of the Evangelical Lutheran Church** in the Republic of Namibia for their prayers.

May God bless all these people and institutions!

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, my beloved wife **Emelie, children Michel junior and Michille**. Your support, patience and compassion, but above all, your understanding and prayers during my studies away from home are highly appreciated. It is also dedicated to my late daughter **Elmary//Gubasen/Uiras** who could not see the achievement of her father due to her untimely death.

"A mission accomplished is sweet to the soul" (Prov. 13:19a).

ABSTRACT

This research study is based on the cluster system model for effective management of schools in Namibia, with special reference to Erongo Education Region. The cluster system introduces a new perspective on the way the schools are managed. It radically differs from the historically isolated school, employing individualistic approaches and management practices characterised by strong hierarchical structures and top-down decision-making.

The cluster system advocates shared decision-making, teamwork, collaboration, integration and networking. In other words clustering provides a superb climate for teachers, principals, parents and learners to interface with one another within a legitimate framework. Clustering is an effective management model that has also been implemented in developed countries such as England, the Netherlands and the United States of America.

The research study involved 60 principals as respondents to a questionnaire on the cluster system, its problems and prospects. The major findings indicate that clustering enhances the quality of education through sharing of resources, exchange of ideas among teachers, and closer cooperation between schools. The study identifies numerous challenges in the implementation of the cluster system. These challenges include disparity between schools in the rural and urban areas, lack of reliable transport, lack of facilities and teaching materials in most schools, large distances between schools, teacher isolation and increased workload among personnel.

However, if the challenges and prospects of clustering are put on a simple scale, the latter would probably outweigh the former completely. This means that clustering holds encouraging prospects for the education system in Namibia in general and Erongo Education Region in particular. An important finding in this regard is that the majority of the principals in the Erongo Education Region agree that the cluster system has the

potential to champion and transcend in effective management of all schools within cluster centres.

Keywords: clustering, effective management, cluster centres, cluster centre principal, collaboration, teamwork, network, partnership, integration and shared decision-making.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie navorsing is gebaseer op die groepstelsel-model vir die doeltreffende bestuur van skole in Namibië, met besondere verwysing na die Erongo Skolestreek. Die groepstelsel bied 'n nuwe perspektief op die wyse waarvolgens skole bestuur word. Dit verskil geheel en al van die gebruiklike afgesonderde skool wat individualistiese benaderingspraktyke toepas, gekenmerk deur sterk hiërargiese strukture en outokratiese besluitneming.

Die groepstelsel bepleit gedeelde besluitneming, spanwerk, samewerking, integrasie en ooreenkoms. Met ander word die groepvorming skep 'n uitnemende klimaat vir onderwysers, hoofde, ouers en leerders om met mekaar saam te werk binne 'n wetlike raamwerk. Groepvorming is 'n doeltreffende bestuursmodel wat ook in ontwikkelde lande soos Engeland, die Nederlande en die Verenigde State van Amerika toegepas word.

Die onderhawige navorsing het 60 skoolhoofde as respondente ten opsigte van 'n vraelys oor die groepstelsel, die vraagstukke en vooruitsigte daarvan, ingesluit. Die vernaamste bevindings dui daarop dat groepvorming die gehalte van onderwys verhoog deur die deel van middele, die uitruil van gedagtes tussen leerkragte, en die nouer samewerking tussen skole. Hierdie navorsing toon ook veelvuldige uitdagings aan in die toepassing van die groepstelsel. Sulke uitdagings sluit in ongelykheid tussen skole in plattelandse en stedelike gebiede, gebrek aan betroubare vervoer, tekort aan geriewe en leermiddele in die meeste skole, groot afstande tussen skole, die afgesonderdheid van onderwysers en die verhoogde werklading onder personeel.

Nietemin, indien die uitdagings en vooruitsigte teenoor mekaar opgeweeg word, laasgenoemde verreweg die swaarste sal tel. Dit beteken dat groepvorming bemoedigende vooruitsigte vir die opvoedkundige stelsel in Namibië as geheel inhou en vir die Erongo Skolestreek in die besonder. 'n Belangrike bevinding in hierdie verband is dat die meerderheid skoolhoofde in die Erongo Skolestreek saamstem dat die stelsel van saamgroepering die potensiaal bevat om die doeltreffende bestuur van alle skole binne sulke groepe te bevorder en sukses te behaal.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

FIGURES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ATs: Advisory Teachers

AIDS: Acquired Immuno Deficiency

CCs Cluster Centre's

CCPs Cluster Centre Principals

CMC: Cluster management committee

GTZ: Germany technical Co-operation

HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus

LEAs: Local Education Authorities

MBESC: Ministry of Basic Education, Sport & Culture

MEC: Ministry of Education and Culture

NGOs Non-Governmental organisations

NIED National Institute for Educational Development

ROs Regional Offices

TRCs Teachers Resources Centres

APPENDIX

CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION

1.1 Introduction

When Namibia attained her independence in 1990, the country was immediately confronted by numerous challenges in education (Cohen, 1994:385). There were eleven ethnic education departments before Namibia's independence. Having integrated these previously segregated departments into single unified education system, we have surged ahead in improving education (Strategic Plan, 2001-2006). The causes of some of the problems were emanating from the colonial era, where schools had been fragmented along ethnic lines (Auala, 1989:73; Botha, 1987:115). Cohen (1994:1) cites some of these problems, among others, as disparity in terms of curricula, access to education, expenditure per student and laws regarding education requirements.

Some of the above-mentioned factors such as access to education and expenditure per student, including many other challenges such as telephone communications, inadequate classroom facilities and shortages of textbooks remain persistently the same and become topical issues among educators, professionals and other stakeholders. Postlethwaite (2001: 690) argues that although Namibia started independence with a better base for educational development than other African countries, available resources inthe form of classrooms, teachers and equipment are inequitably distributed. Apart from these problems, the most sobering thing about these disparities is that they created a gap between schools in terms of service delivering. The Presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Training (Presidential Commission Report, 1999) concludes that the children of the poor communities attended schools which are totally inadequate for their needs, without toilets, telephone communications, adequate classroom facilities, textbooks and writing materials. The same though, cannot be said about the schools attended by children of the more affluent communities.

The above-mentioned conditions such as inadequate classroom facilities and shortage of textbooks and materials encountered in some schools triggered such a degree of concern and scepticism among teachers, professionals and other stakeholders that they called for educational reform in Namibia. Dittmar, Mendelsohn and Ward (2002:3) argue that the growth of cluster system has mainly been driven by needs from within the schools and the regional offices. Therefore, although not fully specified yet, it appears that the cluster system moves in the direction of an educational reform process, and will hopefully be *de rigueur* of the education system in the country.

1. 2. Statement of the problem

The previous fragmentation of education in eleven departments had an adverse impact on the management and quality assurances in schools, simply because they lack cohesiveness and uniformity exacerbated by an acute shortage of basic teaching aids such as textbooks and stationeries. Cohen (1994:133-166) and Newberg (1995:75) elaborate on some of these problems as follows:

- disparity in funding;
- shortage of qualified teachers;
- skewed learner-teacher ratio and
- shortage of resources.

These factors thus portrayed both a bleak and gloomy future for the education system in the country. The apparent aspirations and expectations embraced by many educators and other stakeholders at the dawn of national independence were cast in doubt. Cohen (1994:385) states that the newly created ministry of education, culture, youth and sports of Namibia committed itself at independence in 1990 to restructuring, rationalizing and unifying various entities to create a common system of educational administration in the country. But in practice, the process of implementation thereof was both bureaucratic and cumbersome. According to the Presidential Commission Report (1999), Namibia has made commendable progress in improving access to basic education. The same cannot be

said of equity and quality which are closely linked to the disadvantage of groups (MBESC, 1999:15). Admittedly, Dittmar *et al.* (2002:29) notes that Namibia shows one of the highest disparities between rich and poor. Since education is regarded as one of the key weapons in the fight against poverty, this lack of equity in the distribution of wealth increases the challenges facing the provision of basic education in particular, which is seen as contributing directly to the government's development goals.

Indeed, the government's goals are the focal point in both the Constitution (Namibia, 1990) and the Education Act 16 of 2001 (Namibia, 2001). In terms of the Article 20(2) of the Constitution (Namibia, 1990), primary education is compulsory and the state shall provide reasonable facilities by establishing and maintaining state schools, whereas one of the objectives of the Education Act 16 of 2001 (Namibia, 2001) is to provide accessible, equitable, qualitative and democratic national education services. But still the new political dispensation did not bring the desired changes in the education system. Most schools remained both poorly managed and isolated. Dittmar *et al.* (2002: 4) argues that most principals and educators suffer because their schools are small, isolated and poorly supported and managed.

In an attempt to address the problems alluded to above, a system of clustering schools was formally introduced in 1996 (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:1). The same authors define cluster as the system that is geared towards improving teaching through sharing resources, experience and expertise among staff and to facilitate administration and to pool resources from several small schools. According to Ribchester *et al.* (1998:2), a cluster is a group of schools which cooperate for the events and activities to the mutual benefit of each participating school, mainly with the objective of enhancing learning among learners. Therefore, according to Dittmar *et al.* (2002:4), school clusters portray the following traits:

- They are groups of schools which are geographically close, and accessible to each other;
- Each cluster normally consist of between 5 and 7 schools;

- ❖ They should set good examples for management and teaching practices; and
- ❖ The cluster centre principal can be a strong and committed manager.

The cluster system presents a paradigm shift in the way schools are managed; removing the emphasis from the traditional top-down approach to a more democratic and participatory decision-making process in the education system. Van der Westhuizen (2002:3) maintains that the education system provides the opportunity to move from an iron-age value system to one that is democratic and rights based. Therefore it can be argued, that the cluster system is about to enhance decentralization and the devolution of power to the schools. The essence of decentralization is that there is a market shift of decision-making responsibility from central office to the individual school (Brown, 1990:130).

The school clusters have also come into focus in other countries in recent years and have been successfully utilized as a model of school organization. These countries include Britain (Ribchester & Edwards, 1998:281, Potter & Williams, 1994:141), Netherlands (Hofman, 1999:187) and Philadelphia, USA (Newberg, 1995:713). The underlying reasons that led to the success of some of the cluster centres can be derived from the following factors, as stipulated by Dittmar *et al.* (2002:13):

- ❖ Cluster school members form a unified front to deal with issues of mutual concern;
- ● All participants develop greater competence as they learn to make decisions in their clusters; delegation of authority to circuits and clusters empower principals and teachers; and
- ❖ Cluster centre principals are also able to visit schools to share ideas and solve problems.

Truly, the interaction among teachers creates healthy interpersonal relationships, which are illuminated in strong teamwork. Steyn and Van Niekerk (2002:113) list the successful teamwork as follows:

- Provides a clear, elevating goal;
- Is a result-driven structure;
- Develops competent team members;
- Unifies commitment;
- Creates a collaborative climate;
- Increases standards of excellence;
- Draws external support and recognition; and
- Provides principled leadership.

The cluster system leads to smooth administration and improves teaching-learning through interaction in schools. Equally, while teachers are setting the stage in building bridges to establish healthy working relationships among themselves in the clusters, they are also directly or indirectly levelling the playing field for learners to meet as equal partners in the learning process. Cohen *et al.* (1997:4) argues that the interaction among students occurs on an equal footing; that is, students are active and influential participants and their opinions matter to their fellow students. Teachers and students are an integral part of the school organization and are given the opportunity in the cluster to exhibit their respective capabilities in the decision-making process. The cluster system provides staff members with challenges in their work. They are given support and opportunities to learn and grow and, in this way, expand their skills and capabilities. It stands to reason that although the cluster system appears to be an elusive ideal, it remains viable to bring the desired change in the way schools are organized and administered.

Ribchester & Edwards (1998:10) point out that although clustering seems to be a sound management strategy in terms of addressing the problems of uneven distribution of resources, encouraging sharing of skills among both principals and teachers as well as promoting co-operation among schools it is faced with a number of problems, some of which are unique to Namibia.

One of its flaws is that schools that serve as centres for the cluster are neither fully equipped nor accessible to all the teachers, especially those from the rural areas (Ward & Mendelsohn, 1999:7). Underlying factors such as distance, transport and even lack of facilities cause problems. Another dimension to the problem is the increase on the workload of personnel such as a cluster centre principal who is also a principal of a regular school (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:33, Hofman, 1999:188).

The above-mentioned problems clearly demonstrate that further research is indispensable in the area of clustering of schools which would hopefully provide answers to some of the problems alluded to above. In view of the problem statement in section 2, the following fundamental questions have been posed:

1. What does the cluster model of school organization entail?
2. What problems are experienced in the implementation of clustering?
3. What guidelines can be provided in order to make clustering succeed?

The background concerning the education system in Namibia, as given in the introduction, provides a framework to understand the cluster system in its proper perspective.

1. 3. Aims of the research

With reference to the research questions mentioned above, the following general aims for the study can be formulated: firstly, the aim of this study is to explore the role, importance and impact of the cluster model in school organization. Secondly, to achieve this aim, the study has the following specific objectives:

1. 3. 1 To establish the nature and scope of the cluster model of school organization.

1. 3. 2 To empirically determine the problems encountered in the implementation of clustering.

1. 3. 3 To provide guidelines for the successful implementation of the cluster system.

1. 4. Method of research

In order to achieve the aim and purpose of this study, two methods of research were employed, viz. literature study and empirical research.

1.4.1 Literature study

A literature review was conducted to gain insight into the nature of the cluster model of organization. An attempt was made to conduct research and analyse the cluster model via a Dialog and Nexus searches using the following descriptors:
clustering, effective management, cluster centres, collaboration, networking, partnership, principal, cluster centre principals, school management, restructuring and integration.

1.4.2 Quantitative research method

The quantitative research method was employed in order to collect data on the experiences of respondents concerning the nature and implementation of clustering in Namibia. A well-structured questionnaire was provided to the respondents in order to easily analyze the samples.

1.4.3 Population and Samples

The research was conducted in Namibia and sixty principals from the Erongo Education Region were involved in the study. The sixty principals included principals of regular schools and principals of schools serving as cluster centres.

1.4.4 Statistical technique

The North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus) was approached to assist in the statistical analysis of data. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means and percentages were used in the ordering and analysis of data..

1. 5 Division of chapters

Chapter one: Orientation

Chapter two: The nature of the cluster model of school organization

Chapter three: Problems encountered in the implementation of clustering

Chapter four: An empirical investigation into the cluster system, presentation and interpretation of data.

Chapter five: Summary, findings, guidelines and recommendations

1.6. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter dealt with an orientation to the research. It provided a blue print which directs the research. A historical background of the Namibian education system was provided in order to give a framework to understand the context of the cluster system. The problem of the research was then dealt with and then research questions and aims, method of research and tentative division of chapters were elucidated.

The nature of the cluster model of school organisation will be dealt with in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

THE NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE CLUSTER SYSTEM

2.1 Introduction

According to Genck (1990:3) and Dittmar *et al.* (2002:3), schools in the past were managed predominantly in the traditional authoritarian manner as opposed to modern times where schools are rightfully viewed as open institutions that include parents, learners, teachers, principals, teacher educators, the business community and other stakeholders in governance and management. This concurs with Sergiovanni's views (2000:23) that schools need to bond parents, teachers, students and their families into "us" and transform them from a collection of individuals to a collective with shared interest.

With the dawn of the cluster system, schools are fostered in closer working relationships, which enable teachers and principals to pool from divergent resources and skills of all stakeholders for mutual benefit. The cluster system introduces a completely new and fresh way of managing schools.

In this chapter the nature of the cluster system in its different manifestations will be illuminated in order to give readers a clear perspective on the entire cluster model.

2.2 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

A number of definitions have been offered to clarify the concepts and to throw more light on the study in order to understand it. The core concepts include the following:

2.2.1 **Cluster system**

The concept *cluster system* consists of two words, namely **cluster** and **system.** A cluster refers to a group or parts which are either created or joined together to serve common purpose. In the context of this study, a cluster refers to individual schools which are grouped together for common objectives such as to enhance teaching and learning.

Dittmar *et al.* (2002:1) support this statement when they point out that neighbouring schools are grouped around a large nucleus school in order to form a cluster. Lunt, Norwich and Varna (1995:162) refer to cluster as the organisational networks or federation, while Fullan (1991:114) is of the opinion that a cluster involves school-based management.

A **system,** on the other hand, is defined as a number of interdependent components that form a whole where all components interact to attain a common goal (Grobler, 2003:2). According to Evers and Lakomski (1996:46-47) and Sweitzer and King (2004:135), a system can be interrelated, self-regulatory and goal-oriented. For purposes of this study, a cluster can be regarded as a system which can relate to its social partners like parents and the business community.

A **cluster system** describes a group of schools that are interconnected and where anyone else's actions influence the other within the system. (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002: 4 and Sweitzer and King, 2004:135).

A **cluster centre** is a school that forms the nodal point for the meeting of personnel from the schools in the cluster. The principal of the school chosen as a cluster centre, becomes the cluster centre principal in addition to his/her duties as principal of that school.

2.2.2 School

Various authors refer to *school* as a learning organisation, which relates to people who are working towards a shared goal (Dalin & Rollf, 1993:2; Bush and West-Burnham, 1994:26; Donald, Lazarus & Lolwane, 2002:145 and Van der Westhuizen (2002:69). The same authors explain that a school establishes relationships with parents and the community, which enables them to serve the school, determine students' learning outcomes in line with the shared goals of the community and foster professional networking between teachers and with other agencies like churches. In this sense, a school represents teachers, learners and the community, and it is only when these different entities interact, that a school can manifest itself as a learning institution.

Cheng (1996:7), on the other hand, regards the school as an organisation bounded with limited resources and which involves multiple constituencies such as education authorities, school administrators, teachers, students, parents and taxpayers, which gives the school its social character. This is why Morrison (2002:26-27) is refers to a school as a human entity, which relies on the support of people for effective communication and functioning.

Dittmar *et al.* (2002:17) argue that individual schools can be combined to establish clusters so that the learners, parents and teachers can cooperate in order to benefit from all the cluster schools. For example, parents can send their learners from primary cluster schools directly to the secondary schools within the same cluster, instead of sending them to more distant schools, which can be costly.

Thus in the cluster system a school reveals itself as a learning institution and a human entity which establishes cooperative working relationship with the broader community in its surroundings in order to harness resources for the betterment of education in the cluster schools.

2.2.3 Management

The term *management* is regarded as the human process among people through which objectives are established and developed and desired results accomplished (Entwistle, 1990:378). Both Blandford (1997:1) and Williams (2000:4, 7) are of the opinion that management has to do with getting things done through people. It encompasses aspects such as planning, resourcing, controlling, organising, leading and evaluating. Therefore in the context of the cluster system, management can refer to organising and arranging the educational activities and programmes in such a manner that aspects such as teaching and learning, meetings and lesson planning can be internalised and implemented through people in the entire cluster centre.

Management also refers to harmonising the interactions between cluster schools in order to avoid overlapping or duplication of activities. Engelbrecht and Green (2001:39) support this argument when they state that management is about ensuring that the school community achieves its vision by keeping the structures in place, so that things can operate smoothly, while the well-being of those in school are catered for. Management is applicable to the cluster of schools in that various role players exercise collective management practices.

2.3 RATIONALE OF SCHOOL CLUSTERING

2.3.1 Background

The idea of clustering of schools did not happen overnight, neither did it come by surprise, but its existence was a direct result of deliberate and intentional effort by some educators to address specific problems encountered in schools. Some of these problems can be categorized under the following headings, namely, isolation of schools, size of schools and organisational problems (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:3).

2.3.2. Systemic problems in Namibia

2.3.2.1. Isolation of schools

Too often the isolation of the schools is caused by both practical and developmental problems, with adverse consequences for learners. For example, Dittmar *et al.* (2002:3) are of the opinion that the isolation of schools is the result of lack of frequent visits by teachers among themselves and with other schools, and absence of inspectors and advisory teachers.

2.3.2.2. Size of schools

Some schools are small, and as a result, have a very small number of learners and staff complement too, which hardly makes collegial support among teachers possible. For example, in a scenario of a primary school with only five teachers including principal, and each teacher taking two subjects to impart, would make opportunities to share subject related problems more difficult. Scheerens and Bosker, (1997: 81) opine tiny schools are lead to professional isolation of teachers, especially from people who teach the same subjects to the same grade. Speaking of schools in Namibia, Dittmar *et al.* (2002:3) concurs with this statement and adds that some of the support staff use the size of the schools to justify their inability to pay regular visits to schools.

2.3.2.3. Organisational and management problems

Most schools are characterized by the top-down approach based on a bureaucratic system,

making the principal the sole responsible person for the smooth running of the school (Engelbrecht and Green, 2001:38). Obviously, such management styles give teachers and learners very little opportunity to participate in the decision-making process of their own school while, at the same time, a principal is being robbed of the golden opportunity to benefit from divergent ideas his/her colleagues could offer when involved.

The organisation based on centralized hierarchical structures with clear-cut levels of authority only discourages teachers from involvement and affect the development of schools in the long run (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:4; Engelbrecht & Green, 2001:38).

Based on these arguments it is evident that teachers and schools suffer because they are confronted by chronic isolation, lack of support, being small and managed along autocratic organisational structures. Therefore on the strength of problems alluded to in the preceding paragraphs, the purpose and aims of school clustering can be summarized as indicated below (Dittmar et al., 2002:4):

- To facilitate support and cooperation between schools in the same geographical area in order to curtail barriers caused by isolation;
- To enhance quality teaching and learning in the classrooms and foster good management practices in the cluster schools;
- To facilitate sharing and exchanging experiences, ideas, skills and information between learners, teachers, principals, parents, inspectors, advisory teachers and other stakeholders in education; and finally,
- to inculcate democratic cultures in schools through promoting participatory decision-making concept in all matters concerning education.

Therefore, the purpose of the clustering of schools is to harmonize all the activities of the school in the cluster by establishing specific criteria and standards as benchmarks which would eventually turn cluster schools into centres of excellence.

2.3.3. ADVANTAGES OF THE CLUSTER SYSTEM

The cluster system can yield the following benefits for the participating schools (Dittmar *et al*, 2002:14, Hofman, 1999:195, Potter & Williams, 1994:145; Ribchester & Edwards, 1998:288):

2.3.3.1. Improved teaching and learning practices

Teachers and principals within the cluster can learn with and from each other by working together. Brighouse and Woods (1999:97) argue that teachers are natural researchers in the sense that all the teaching activities are based on inquiry, and the responses of the pupils provide ready evidence of the effectiveness of various teaching and learning approaches. In clustering teachers are able to compare the effectiveness of their teaching on learners of different schools. An improved teaching and learning practice can lead to professionalizing teachers in that they learn new skills and techniques from their counterparts.

The process of teaching and learning in the cluster system can further be enhanced by teachers observing one another in classrooms, engaging in peer coaching and mentoring practices, organizing study groups, disseminating work done on in-service training courses and teaching classes other than their own (Craig, 1990:17; Bush *et al.*, 1999:103).

Learners and schools can benefit from the improved skills of teachers gained in the cluster, as they may contribute to quality passes in their respective schools.

2.3.3.2. Ensured equity in curriculum

Craig (1990:17) points out that very few teachers are experts in all parts of the curriculum, hence necessary support from their colleagues is essential. Within the cluster system various subject teachers are afforded the opportunity to pool their ideas and discuss and interpret all the important aspects of the curriculum. Through the information sharing sessions, cluster teachers can be able to draw up common schemes of work and

set better examination papers with a broader range of questions which can ensure equity and can benefit learners as they are exposed to high standards.

Through the exchange of ideas and information sharing, a curriculum can be enrichedand teachers' morale boosted. Consequently confidence can set in over time.

Equally, learners can be afforded the opportunity for collective learning through peer coaching and mutual support which may encourage them to take their studies more seriously in a healthy competitive environment, created by the cluster system. Through interactions and cooperative learning with fellow learners, most learners can develop independent ideas which may motivate them to make genuine choices about their studies for future career development (Castello *et al.* 1992:273).

2.3.3.3. Improved management practices in the cluster schools

School clustering facilitates and creates opportunity for cluster schools to conduct inter-school visits to establish and improve relationships between teachers and principals. Thus principals and teachers of small and ineffective schools can learn and benefit fom outstanding schools within the cluster centre, sharpen their teaching skills and emulate good management practices. Bush *et al* (1999:211) argue that it has become imperative for the management to forge relationships through a variety of partnerships within schools, between school staff, school boards or governing bodies, among neighbouring schools as in cluster arrangements, pupils, inspectors and ROs. The same authors added that there is greater mutual dependence between those responsible for and affeded by management, requiring a substantial degree of participation

2.3.3.4. Sharing resources

Sharing resources is the crux of the cluster system. Both material and human resources can be shared in the cluster centre. Teachers can make use of the available facilities at the cluster centre, such as photocopy machines, overhead projectors and computers to

enhance their teaching.

It is also easier and more practical for both advisory teachers and inspectors to channel their inputs via the cluster centre to all the subject group teachers and principals, instead of driving to individual schools, which seems to be time-consuming and costly.

2.3.3.5 Better opportunity for involvement of teachers, parents and learners in decision-making

Holmes (2003:89) states that ultimate sharing of knowledge is a collective process where everyone in an organisation is involved and willing to take part in the school programmes. Therefore the advice would be to share knowledge as widely as possible and maintain a network of knowledge source, for holding back on it is an increasingly counter-productive mindset, as it fails to demonstrate one's capabilities and skills to other colleagues, managers and potential employers. This statement of Holmes underscores the whole idea of school clustering where principals are encouraged to involve members of the school community in the decision-making process in order to inculcate a sense of belonging and even pride in them towards their own cluster schools.

Finally, it suffices to say that involvement allows and promotes interconnectedness between principals, parents, learners and teachers in the cluster which can mould them into dedicated functional members of cluster centre schools.

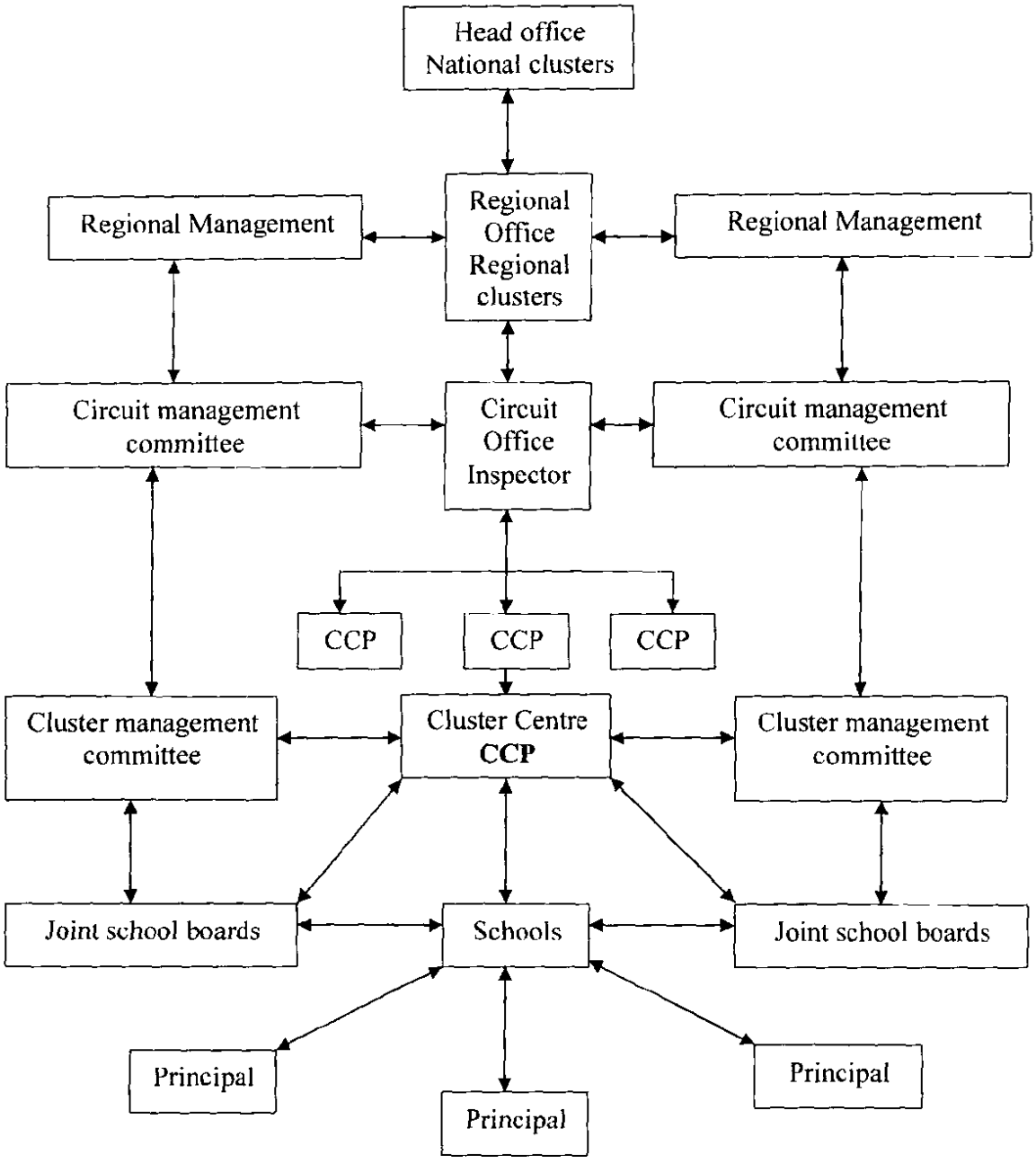
2.3.4. Conclusion

In this section, an investigation has been conducted into the rationale behind the establishment of the cluster system in schools. The point to drive home is that the cluster system seems to be a promising and valuable option for the enhancement of teaching and improved management practices in all cluster schools.

2.4 THE MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE OF THE CLUSTER SYSTEM

The management structure in the context of this study is aimed at empowering all educators and stakeholders through information sharing and involvement. This kind of management strategy differs drastically from the traditional coercive, authoritative and command-and-control styles schools used to be governed by (Morrison, 2002:57). The sharing style mentioned above is applicable to the cluster system in that cluster centres have become a focal point for contacts, interactions and coordination of many cluster schools (BEP, 2004:28) so that the emphasis on a high degree of productivity and provision of quality education outcome (Carl, 1995:269; Calitz *et al.* 2002:262) expected from all schools can be achieved. The various structures enumerated and discussed below serve to facilitate interactions between teachers and parents in order to energize the activities of the cluster schools.

Figure 2.1 Cluster management structure



Source: Adapted from BEP, 2004:37

2.4.1 The cluster centre principal (CCP)

A CCP is an ordinary principal with his/her regular school, but who also serves as head of the cluster centre. As a result of his/her dual responsibility as both principal of the regular school and cluster centre, he/she is formally referred to as cluster centre principal. Although most cluster centre principals are appointed and are content to serve, they are not remunerated for these additional responsibilities (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:33).

As head of the cluster centre, the CCP has a very vital role to play in the lives of all cluster schools within his/her jurisdiction, therefore he/she needs to develop a shared vision with fellow principals, teachers and the broader community. Some of the explicit functions the CCP has to fulfil within the cluster centre can be summarized as follows:

- **A CCP should be a strong and committed manager.**

First and foremost, the CCP is required to set good management practices in areas such as human, financial, physical and administrative matters which can be emulated by other regular principals. He/she can assist and advise teachers and principals on a wider range of issues such as the staffing norms, ordering stationary and textbooks and ensuring equitable distribution of teachers and other personnel to cluster schools (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:25). According to Macbeat (1998:148), good leaders should lead by managing, motivating and inspiring through one-to-one interactions with teachers, pupils, parents and school boards. This is also applicable to the CCP. Through his/her leadership skills, a CCP can contribute a great deal to maximising the diverse leadership qualities of others and to acclaim leadership within their areas of expertise. Daft (1999:45) argues that today's leaders need to share power with everyone within the schools in order to increase the institutional brainpower, instead of hoarding it. This should be done by the CCP.

- A CCP should coordinate and harmonize activities within the cluster centre.

Dittmar *et al.* (2002:24) accentuate the fact that a CCP forms a link between cluster schools and regional education offices; therefore he/she should maintain sound working relationships with everybody under his/her jurisdiction. It can be done by conducting regular visits to the cluster centre schools in order to discuss and share possible problems

and concerns encountered by teachers and principals, and seek solutions for them timeously. Engelbrecht and Green (2001:39) argue that a principal sets the tone of the schools to develop the culture of harmony and initiate the process of shared vision-building. This means that the CCP also, as a principal, has to ensure effective and efficient functioning of all structures of the cluster centre, while encouraging members to follow proper communication channels.

- A CCP should promote and protect principles of democratic participation.

It is one of the fundamental aspects the CCP has to bear in mind in order to facilitate broad participation through the creation of functional structures such as the establishment of joint school boards, joint learners' representative councils, joint subject groups and joint teachers and parents forums, so that the people at grassroots can level have an input in the running of the cluster schools (Dittmar *et al.* 2002:27). Therefore the CCP should create impetus within cluster schools that encourages and enables all the role-players to play an active part in their respective cluster schools. Nixon, Martin, McKeown, Ranson and Ranson (1996:94) argue that the task of the senior manager is to ensure that everyone on the staff feels valued and that what each contributes to the life of the school is fully acknowledged. The CCP should fulfil this task of the senior manager with respect to the staff in the schools within the cluster.

Finally, the CCP should keep up-to-date in order to keep his/her finger on the pulse, and hence duty-bound to maintain links with everybody, become accessible, approachable and empathetic, but firm!

2.4.2 The cluster management committee (CMC)

The principals of different schools within the same cluster centre automatically are the members of CMC with the CCP as the chairperson. The CMC is a very important organ of the cluster centre, in the sense that it serves as a watch-dog over all the activities that take place within the cluster schools. To ensure uniformity in the cluster centre, the CMC coordinates and monitors the implementation process of all cluster programmes.

As has been pointed out in this chapter, a cluster system introduces a paradigm of shared leadership; therefore the CMC is there mainly to support the CCP to run the cluster schools successfully. Macbeat (1998:148) argues that in order to achieve national goals and high performances, it is imperative to create professional relationships with colleagues in the schools. This agrees with the notion that the CMC serves as the forum where principals of different cluster schools can inform one another and learn best practices from more experienced principals (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:24).

The CMC can be regarded as the backbone of the cluster centre as it spearheads the activities of cluster schools. To succeed in her tasks the CMC should establish various committees within the framework provided by the cluster system that facilitate broader participation of all stakeholders in educational matters. According to Dittmar *et al.* (2002:27), such committees may include joint school boards, cluster library committee, counselling committee, disciplinary committee, financial committee, subject group committee and sport and culture committees.

The participants of these committees can be drawn from the representatives of parents, teachers, learners, the business community, town counsellors and church leaders so that the cluster schools can benefit from a wide range of divergent ideas and experiences. Various principals of cluster schools may serve as the chairpersons of these committees in order to ensure that the proceedings of the meetings are well minuted and copies sent to the CCP, inspectors and regional offices (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002: 24).

2.4.3 The circuit inspector and circuit management committee

The circuit inspectors are in charge of all the cluster schools within their area of jurisdiction. According to Dittmar *et al.* (2002:22), the circuit inspectors form the link between cluster schools and regional offices; therefore they are also responsible for the distribution of information, circulars and equipments via the CCPs.

In order to cope with their manifold functions, the inspectors are supported by the circuit management committee, which is comprised of all the cluster principals in the circuit. This committee convenes under the chairmanship of the circuit inspector and mainly deals with matters referred to them by cluster management committees. Other functions of the committee are to exchange ideas relating to the administration of cluster schools and to inspire CCPs to deliver effective services to their respective cluster schools. The committee also discusses and resolves issues concerning educational matters in the whole circuit, such as examinations, distribution of teaching materials and collection of information (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002: 23).

In line with cooperative and staff development strategies of the cluster system, the inspectors are substituted by CCPs when they are either away from their offices or re-assigned for other national duties. That is the fundamental paradigm shift in the role of the inspectors when compared to the past where they were viewed as `police` and most of their interventions regarded as `subjective` (Morrison, 1998:84).

2.4.4 Regional Offices (ROs) and Advisory Teachers (ATs)

The ROs represent the top structure of the cluster system within a given educational region, and should in this context, provide clear directions to all the cluster schools in the region. This office can solicit funds for the cluster activities and ensure that cluster centres are sustainable in the long run.

To promote the activities of the cluster centre, the regional offices can count on the support of the regional management team. The latter can liaise with inspectors, CCPs and ATs for more information concerning the cluster activities within the region as these officials are in close contact with the cluster schools.

2.4.5 Head office

The head office represents the top brass of the government officials like the permanent secretary and the minister of education. It is where mostly political decisions on educational issues are taken. Hence the regional offices should ensure that the cluster system is formalised and institutionalised at head office level in order to secure sufficient funding for the cluster programme. Already, there is a sense of consensus among politicians that the cluster system is indirectly linked to the broad decentralization policy of the Namibian government where management of education and the decision-making process are devolved upon 13 political regions of the country (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:21)

2.4.6. Conclusion

The cluster system introduces a new perspective on the management of cluster schools, which differs from the historical management practices which is characterised by strong hierarchical structures and top-down decision-making (Van der Westhuizen, 2002:298).

2.5. THE DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES OF THE CLUSTER SYSTEM

When the cluster system was introduced in Namibia in 1996, the idea was not embraced in all education regions at once. It was a rather slow process, as many stakeholders had to be consulted, hence it took longer then expected (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:1, 6). Thus, most schools remained single and operated on their own before they decided to connect with other schools through various stages discussed below (Scheerens & Bosker, 1997: 81; Hopkins, Aiscow & West 1994:91).

2.5.1 The single school

In the past, individual schools used to function on their own. Although regular sport meetings were held between schools, cooperation on educational matters was relatively

elusive, if not difficult. In the main, aspects such as the subject meetings, setting of examination papers, to mention but a few, were hardly shared between schools.

Even though the schools were in the same geographical area, town or city, it did not change the situation at all. Dittmar *et al.* (2002:3) argue that in most schools teachers prepared lessons and presented their lessons and set examinations in isolation year after year. They were unable to benefit from experiences of colleagues. As a result, syllabi were interpreted differently, which led to setting different standards of examinations and influencing results of national examinations adversely.

Quite evidently, many learners and teachers bore the brunt of working alone as they were badly affected academically. In order to illuminate this argument, Hopkins *et al.* (1994:90-91) describe four different isolated schools and their respective traits as follows:

- A stuck school

The stuck school is basically a failing institution, because its conditions are poor, teachers are isolated and a sense of mediocrity and powerlessness pervades.

- Wandering school

The staff members of wandering schools are often experienced and innovative, but little really changes in the school, which causes exhaustion and frustration among the staff. Too often the staff is fragmented because of lack of agreement about unity in purpose as individuals within the school are pursuing own aims.

- A promenading school

The teachers are living on past achievements, are very much traditional and reluctant to change. Although the school can attract best pupils, who produce quality passes, the value teachers made towards such success is questionable.

- A moving school

The staff of the moving school is active and adapts to a changing environment, and generally the staff keep abreast of new developments. The traits portrayed by stuck, wandering and promenaded schools are typical of most single schools that got stuck and stagnated because they are not susceptible to new ideas. Macbeat (1998:46) is of the opinion that the principals who are estranged in isolation established themselves as strong

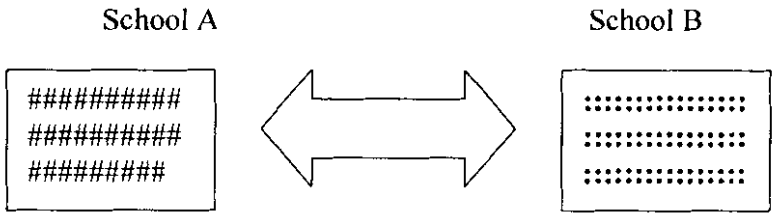
and independent and become dominant leaders, which is counter-productive to democracy in schools.

At the dawn of the cluster system, the viability of single schools working alone becomes eroded and has little chance of succeeding without support from all the stakeholders of education. Thus the cluster system can be compared with moving schools which are dynamic, vibrant and can traverse in future with confidence through partnership.

2.5.2 Twinning of schools

The idea of twinning of schools was enhanced by the emergence of the cluster system concept in countries such as Namibia where small rural schools started to cooperate as a baseline project (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:1). Initially, two to three primary schools which were in close proximity to each other came together for training purposes with the intention to expand to other schools later. The diagram in Figure 2.2 demonstrates the simplified process of twinning.

Figure 2.2 Twinning process



Key: :: ## indicates the individual school's unique character such as culture, ethos etc.

Source: Adapted from Brooks (1985:30

Twinning can either take place between any two schools of equal status or between a non-performing (stuck school) and an achieving (moving school) or even between two schools from different towns. At the initial stage, the twinning can be a simple and spontaneous arrangement between any two schools without the interference of either

CCPs, inspectors or the department of education. It is because most teachers may feel ashamed or intimidated to admit failure, or a sense of inadequacy may set in, especially in the presence of senior officials, and it may jeopardize the very objectives teachers intend to achieve through twinning. Fullan (1991:135) notes that teachers are happiest in the social interactive environment that is characterised by mutual dependence where they help each other to cope with high, but attainable standards and provide one another with oases of calm in their hectic job.

In whatever way teachers and principals intend to twin their respective schools, is not the major concern, but the bottom-line issue is that schools can benefit from mutual support. Kelly (2001:31) argues that potentially everyone is a source of learning to somebody else. For example, teachers from achieving schools can provide valuable hints and leadership on quality teaching practices to their colleagues in the non-performing school to emulate. At the same time, the teachers of non-performing schools can share their hardships, challenges and general problems that might have a negative influence on their poor performances with their counterparts, in order for them to be more vigilant in future.

Alternatively, the principals of both achieving and non-performing schools can swap their respective schools for some time as each one of them can bring unique experiences to their respective "new cluster school." According to Fidler and Atton (2004:233), a principal or teacher who moves from school to school which provides him/her with practice at organisational socialization, can widen experiences of different ways of doing things and give him/her a necessary edge in future career progression.

What can make twinning even more exciting, effective and relevant is the fact that it is relatively school-based; less complicated and can take place between people who are exposed to and share the same working environment daily. Packard and Race (2000:57), for instance, argue that teachers in one school can avail their teaching materials, overheads, handouts and exercises to the colleagues in another school, invite colleagues to participate in and observe some of their lessons and similarly respond to the request by colleagues to sit in on their lessons and give feedback, kindly and supportively.

Therefore the idea of twinning between two schools can be regarded as the first real move towards school clustering, because it can transform schools so they no longer alienate teachers, learners and principals, but "free" them to interact with one another professionally.

2.5.3 Area clusters

The area cluster centres consist of groups of schools that are geographically as close and accessible to each other as possible. According to Dittmar *et al.* (2002:4), one of the schools in each cluster is selected as the cluster centre. Normally a principal of the selected cluster school also serves as the cluster centre head that performs cluster duties besides his/her responsibilities as the principal of the regular school. Each area cluster comprises between 5 and 8 schools, referred to as the cluster schools, while there can be between 4 and 10 area clusters on average in a district or region.

The important traits of the area clusters are that they should be centrally located and readily accessible to the cluster schools in order to render support to teachers, learners and principals and the broader community. Naturally, area clusters should serve as good examples to principals and teachers in both administrative and management and teaching practices. Therefore in practice, it is possible that different clusters within the same region can cooperate and keep regular contact for the common interest. Forexample, in a scenario where there are five primary schools and one senior secondary school in one cluster, and within the radius of between 20 km and 30 km, another area clusters with three senior secondary schools and three primary schools.

2.5.4 Regional clusters

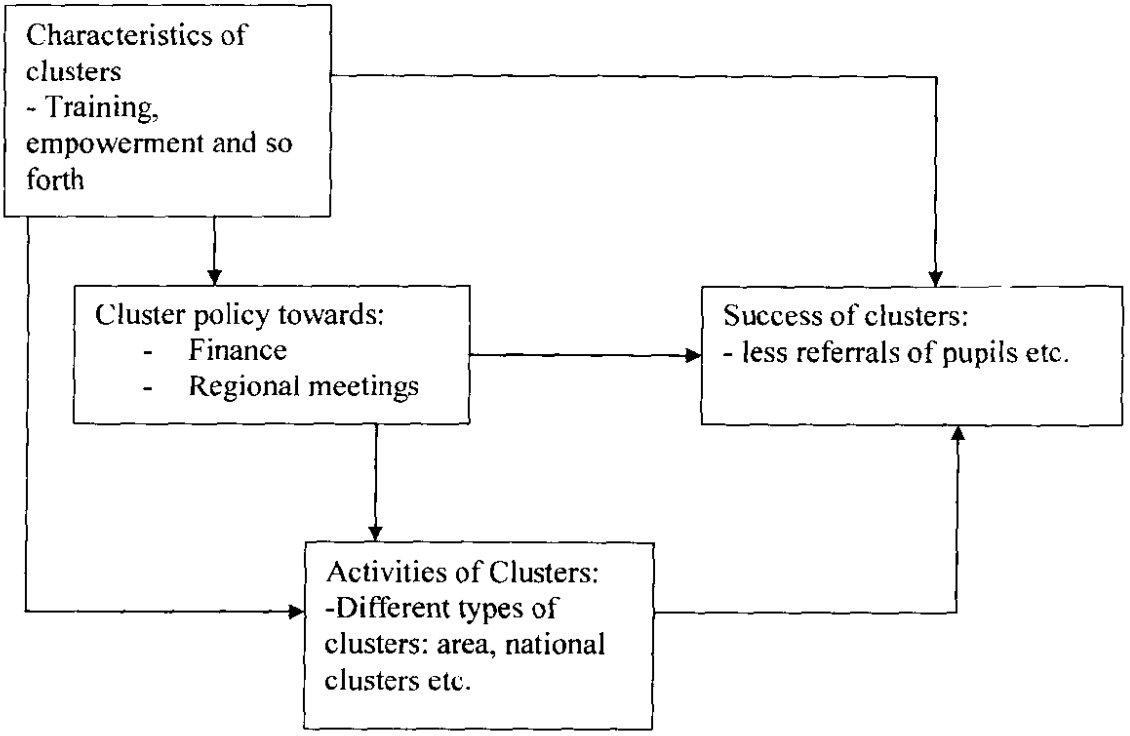
The regional clusters have been introduced in countries such as Namibia and the Netherlands to provide support and to interface with teachers (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:1 and Hofman, 1999:89).

The regional clusters, unlike the area clusters, consist of all the area cluster schools in the given region or district. The size of the regional cluster schools depends on the total number of area cluster schools in the region. In order to share responsibility, as advocated in the cluster system, schools in the regional clusters are further sub-divided into circuits under the leadership of circuit inspectors. Thus, each circuit within a given regional cluster consists of between 3 and 5 area cluster schools (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:22).

The main purpose of the regional clusters is to coordinate the activities of the cluster schools in the region and bring equity in terms of the distribution of resources. It can also serve as a focal point of the growth of area clusters, in the sense that every new school that is built in the region connects and teachers integrated within the existing cluster structure.

Therefore CCPs and circuit inspectors meet once or twice a year under the leadership of either the regional director or the regional education officer to share policy issues and discuss performances of regional cluster schools. Figure 2.3 depicts a good example of the regional clusters.

Figure 2.3 Regional clusters



Source: Adapted from Hofman (1999:189); Rogers (2002:143)

This regional cluster offers a good example of the application of the cluster system in schools. The one depicted in the diagram was specifically introduced in the Netherlands in 1993 to integrate regular and special schools (Hofman, 1999:187). The underlying reason for the regional clusters was to encourage cluster schools to cooperate in order to stop the outflow of learners from the ordinary schools to special ones. The aspects such as the characteristics, policy, activities and success as indicated in the diagram underscores the functions of any typical cluster; hence it will be dealt with quite succinctly under relevant subheadings elsewhere in this chapter.

2.5.5 National clusters

A good example of national clusters is found in the countries such as Namibia where the cluster system has been expanded over the entire country in a relatively short period of

time. For example, cluster centres expanded quite rapidly from 260 clusters in 2002 to 272 towards the end of 2003 (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:5; MBESC, 2003:55).

The national clusters give an indication of how the cluster system can enhance the management of schools in the country through the decentralization policy. In order to be successful, the national cluster management committee can be established to advise the government on all educational issues that affect teachers, learners, principals and other educators, parents and other stakeholders in the country.

Well-organized national clusters can enhance both the government's and educationists' desire to ensure uniformity of standards and create equal opportunity for all the learners and teachers in both rural areas and cities.

2.5.6. Conclusion

The developmental stages discussed above demonstrate that no recipe based on individualistic approaches can actually work in education. Therefore, according to Grace (1995:23), the notion of `my school` can no longer be maintained, as the power of relations of school leadership is moving towards other groups such as parents and learners who were historically excluded from decision-making. As the schools move closer to working together, cluster centre principals and other educators should create enabling environments to cement positive relations between cluster schools for common interest.

2.6 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CLUSTER SYSTEM

The central role of the cluster system is to promote and enhance interactions between teachers, parents, learners and educators in education. Secondly, it embraces the notion of participatory democracy in all cluster schools. Various authors (Elmore, 1990:24; Gerber, 2003:175; Corson, 1995:31; Lunt *et al.*, 1995:162; Fullan, 1991:168 and Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:11) support these arguments and give a succinct description of traits that are generally desired in schools and are also applicable to the cluster system In the main,

most authors make persistent reference to the specific characteristics which should be associated with the cluster system.

For instance, Jensen and Walker (1998:158) view interactions in schools as contacts between human beings, especially between teachers and principals. It underscores the fact that teachers have a shared technical culture which is built on the norms of interactions among themselves as colleagues and with students (Leithwood, Begley & Cousins, 1992:129).

According to Carl (1995:269), staff development is a process of empowerment and growth, while Daresh and Playko (1992:129) argue that staff development should be a definite priority in schools.

Rogers (2002:145) and Dunham (quoted by Steyn and Van Niekerk, 2002:113) refer to teamwork as a protocol of colleague support which promotes mutual respect and regard among teachers.

Steyn and Van Niekerk (2002:111) are of the opinion that the idea of decision-making should be moved from being taken at the top management level to the lowest possible level in schools. Blase and Kirby (1992:39) concurs and states that a shared decision-making process which draws upon the expertise of many teachers as the professionals in a given school are superior to individual decisions made by an administrator.

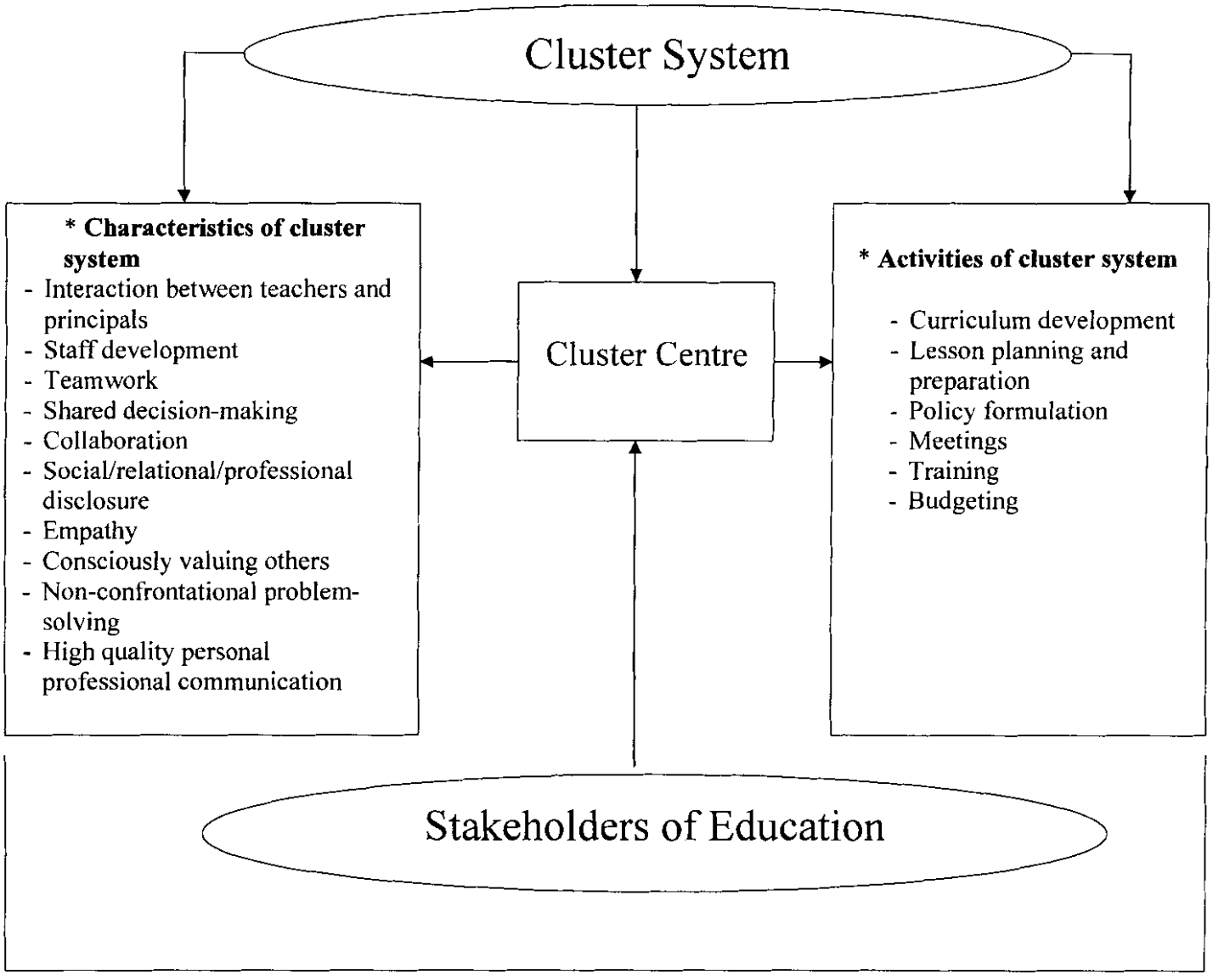
According to Bush and West-Burnham (1994:39) and Engelbrecht and Green (2001:23), collaboration is the most appropriate way to manage schools. Therefore collaboration promotes a widespread involvement of educators to enhance ownership and effectiveness.

The cluster system can serve as the catalyst to facilitate the unique characteristics in the cluster schools to enhance cohesiveness. Some of these traits can be summarized as follows:

- Interactions between teachers and principals
- Promote staff development;
- Establish teamwork;
- Encourage shared decision-making;
- Enhance collaboration;
- Social/relational/professional disclosure;
- Empathy;
- Consciously valuing others;
- Non-confrontational problem-solving; and
- High quality personal professional communication.

Obviously, the cluster system is not limited to the afore-mentioned characteristics only. However, for purposes of this study and due to limited space, they are briefly discussed in the chronological order indicated above. The diagram depicted in Figure 2.4 of the characteristics and activities of the cluster system below is derived from the Regional clusters (Figure, 2.3). Each aspect of characteristics and the activities of the cluster system will be discussed as outlined in the diagram.

Figure 2.4 DYNAMICS OF A CLUSTER SYSTEM



Source: Adapted from Hofman (1999:189)

2.6.1 Interactions between teachers and principals

The nature of the profession makes interaction between educators indispensable, even more so between teachers and principals in the same clusters. According to Fullan and Hargreaves (1992:25) and Hopkins *et al.* (1994:71), teachers and administrators or principals frequently observe each other's teaching, providing each other with useful evaluation of their teaching, design and research, and prepare teaching material together. Although, historically, the different roles teachers and principals are playing according to their line functions are emphasised (for instance, principals are responsible for the administration of the entire school while teachers are mostly responsible for classroom management) they interact intermittently within the cluster system to complement each other for the benefit of the entire cluster schools.

The kind of relationship between teachers and principals in the cluster system is more about creating opportunities to engage in hands-on activities such as workshops, seminars and initiating discussion groups. Dittmar *et al.* (2002:11) argue that now, within the cluster system, principals and teachers meet in committees and learn from each other, sharing experiences and assist each other with problems, consulting and cooperating at all levels.

However, teachers' willingness to interact in the cluster centre can very much depend on the attitude of principals and cluster centre principals. According to Macbeat (1998:148), most teachers appear to be more willing to partake in all the school programmes if they perceive their relationships with their principals as open, collaborative, facilitative and supportive.

2.6.2 Staff development

Staff development within the cluster system means developing teachers in order to transmit skills, knowledge and expertise among themselves, which can enable them to become independent and effective in their work environment. To achieve this, teachers

are given more freedom to discuss and identify their own development programmes, because they are well positioned to know their shortcomings best than anybody else. Although principals and CCPs can be involved, they cannot be prescriptive, but can assist teachers so that their development programmes conform to the broad staff development objectives of the Ministry or the Department of Education. Blandford (1997:190) argues that staff development is about working with staff to identify their professional needs and to address the goals of the institution.

The staff development activities of the teachers within the cluster centres should be goal-oriented. In order to succeed in their quest for the goal-oriented staff development programmes, teachers can meet in small committees which may consist of all the participating cluster schools. Such staff development committees can design programmes that focus on the professional development skills of teachers which may include aspects such as instructional methods and techniques, computer usage, peer coaching and mentoring and developing personal traits of teachers. Both Steyn and Van Niekerk (2002:247) and Hayes (1998:1) are of the opinion that staff development should enhance teachers' critical inquiry into practices and principled innovations of education in general.

Thus staff development activities in the cluster system enable teachers, principals, learners and parents to develop intentionally and deliberately and encourage them to engage in life-long learning. It is imperative that staff development programmes of the cluster centres be sustained and not be stopped at any arbitrary point. According to Steyn and Van Niekerk (2002:250) and Donald *et al.* (2002:259), professional development of teachers is an on-going process and lifelong journey.

2.6.3 Teamwork

Normally teachers appear at school as a team in that they are all members of the staff, but it does not necessarily imply that they are engaged in teamwork. For example, although teachers may have the same ultimate aim to lead learners towards sensible adulthood, the ability to work as a team may be a detrimental factor as every teacher is preoccupied with

his/her own work. Crawford, Kydd and Riches (1997:10) argue that teamwork is required in many tasks, assignments and even where it is not strictly required. Working in a team can transport performances and enhance job satisfaction.

In the context of the cluster, teamwork reveals characters such as to inculcate team spirit, unity in purpose among teachers and to encourage them to strife towards collective effort which can boost a sense of camaraderie in the cluster schools. Steyn and Van Niekerk (2002:113) maintain that teamwork coordinates work of teachers, generates ideas and provides moral support to all members involved. Even the principals and CCPs are regarded first as colleagues, and secondly as leaders on whose support teachers and learners of different cluster schools can count and to which they can relate.

In practical terms, teachers within the same cluster centres can promote teamwork quite well if they can form subject groups from the range of courses offered in the cluster schools. Teachers who may serve on the cluster subject groups should be people with common objectives, who possess different areas of expertise and who are committed to work together cooperatively on a common and shared task (Morrison, 2002:43). In the different subject groups they can build on one another's capacity, because within small teams teachers can learn how to work in groups or teams and feel more relaxed and willing to express them instead of working individualistically.

Teamwork within the cluster is not necessarily limited to the academic life of the cluster schools only, but can cover other areas such as sport, culture and fundraising. For example, if one of the cluster schools organised a bazaar, or a concert, the rest of the cluster schools may lend a hand in many ways such as selling refreshments to parents and other stakeholders. Through this, teamwork can become norm and modus operandi among teachers in all cluster schools. Morrison (2002:43) argues that in teamwork it is about commitment and building positive interpersonal relations, not just procedures.

2.6.4 Shared decision-making

Shared decision-making in cluster means that everybody within the cluster school makes an input and has a stake in the discussions and is equally accountable for the outcome of the resolutions taken. It implies that a traditional top-down approach of mostly male-dominated administrations in schools, where decision-making was seen as the sole responsibility of one individual, like the principal at the helm of the institution, is no longer valid in the cluster schools.

Through the cluster system, teachers, learners and parents can come together at the cluster centre where open debate can be initiated, encouraged and promoted because all the participants can have equal status to air their views and opinions before final judgment is made. Simply put, in the cluster system, it is possible to facilitate shared decision-making through horizontal, lateral and egalitarian processes of communication (Harris, Jamieson & Russ, 1997:68).

Although shared decision-making can be a time-consuming and bureaucratic process, in terms of ensuring broad base consultations between different role players in education, it still remains the best possible way to engage all the stakeholders in the cluster. It is quite achievable within the cluster schools, because most cluster schools are in close proximity of the cluster centres. MacPherson and Duignan (1992:65) and Chapman, Frounmin and Aspin, (1995:51) argue that democratically minded leaders should take a lead in building partnership between schools and broader educational environment which facilitates a synergy of intellectual brain power and shared decision-making.

Finally, when teachers are involved in decision-making within the cluster, they are eager, keen, enthusiastic and prone to do their level best. According to Dittmar *et al.* (2002:12), school cluster can work best when they are accompanied by as much decentralised and participatory decision-making as possible.

2.6.5 Collaboration

Caldwell and Spinks (1988:20) and Donald *et al.* (2002:16) argue that collaboration serves to give members of school communities a sense of purpose and unity to work together in partnership, as opposed to a feeling of fragmentation and disunity.

Within the cluster schools, collaboration manifests itself through dialogue and cooperative learning among pupils and teachers with and from each other (Harris et al, 1996:88). Holly and Southworth (1993:10) argue that teachers are increasingly learning together in collaboration in order to achieve certain objectives they set for themselves. For instance, teachers of the various cluster schools can decide to turn their cluster schools into centres of excellence.

Although they may initially be reluctant to collaborate, it is possible that a culture of collaboration that they establish through the cluster system can persuade teachers in the cluster to shoulder any tasks together until its logical conclusion. According to Dittmar *et al.* (2002:13) and Engelbrecht and Green (2001:23), collaboration can motivate teachers to flourish, if their authority and contribution is recognised by all the stakeholders in education.

2.6.6 Social/ relational and professional disclosure

The cluster centre, like a school, is a social entity (2.2.2), it implies that teachers and principals can make regular contacts with each other in the cluster where they may reveal a high degree of interdependence. Through social disclosure, teachers can be afforded the opportunity to get to know each other well in terms of respective talents, experiences and abilities and make them available to individual teachers and pool their expertise, which may benefit every member in the cluster.

Within the cluster, a teacher or principal can no longer be an island on his/her won, because now they have the opportunity to relate to one another and portray a spirit of

caring. Through relational disclosure teachers can develop an emotional bond in order to attain common goals in the cluster centre, for instance, teachers in the cluster may join forces to ensure quality passes in mathematics and science subjects in all the cluster schools.

Teachers and principals can also disclose themselves as professionals in the cluster, which is based on the ethics and code of conduct governing their behaviour at the work place. They can advance teaching as a noble profession and set high standards for themselves, which may protect professional stance of education within the cluster. Together, they can work systematically and modelling expected outcomes, and become professionals who conscientiously practice and live up to the required code of conduct in the teaching profession and the community they serve.

2.6.7 Empathy

The premise of empathy within the cluster is to listen and have a deep understanding of others feelings. For the teachers and principals who belong to the cluster, empathy implies to share both successes and achievements together joyfully, but also to understand and share one another's problems as colleagues in times of grief or sorrow. The German word for empathy, "Einfuhlung", which means to feel within for others is significant in this context (Neukrug, 2004:99), because it can refer to the emotional part of teachers and principals as human-beings, as they are also in need of empathy, sympathy and encouragement in their daily work situations.

In the cluster, showing empathy between teachers can also be regarded as one of the important principles of human relations. Thus, in the cluster system empathy is embedded in people such as teachers, parents, learners and broader community and therefore it may shape the emotional boundedness of all the role players.

2.6.8 Consciously valuing others

Within the cluster, teachers and principals present themselves as nurturers of values. Each person's contribution, how little it may be, is valued and kept in high esteem. The fact that their contribution is valued by both their counterparts and their leaders, such as cluster centre principals and principals, can make teachers become effective and efficient and may encourage them to delve deeper into their hidden talents and unlock their potentials and abilities to the benefit of all in the cluster.

By valuing others consciously, principals can encourage the development of the open-mindedness among teachers, which may make them sensitive about the integrity and dignity of others, such as parents and learners who they serve in the cluster.

2.6.9 Non-confrontational problem-solving

As opposed to reactive ad hoc problem-solving (3.5.10), non-confrontational problem-solving can flow naturally in the cluster, because the knowledge and disposition that various people bring to the process of problem resolution can enrich and sustain decisions taken jointly.

In fact, non-confrontational problem-solving within the cluster can elude all forms of confrontation, because problem is seen and treated as "our problem" rather than "your problem". Looking at a problem in the cluster from the perspective of "your problem" might be construed as a signal of blaming or looking for culprits, which may invite unnecessary confrontation. Conversely, in the cluster system teachers and principals can take a more moderate and pro-active problem solving approach by working conjointly to identify and manage problems without being critical and judgmental.

Furthermore, a non-confrontational problem-solving approach in the cluster perceives any form of confrontation such as differences and disagreements as an opportunity to show respect for others' divergent points of view. Such an approach, may encourage

teachers and principals to raise their concern without fear of being threatened or victimized by their senior members of staff, because they are aware that their problems can be resolved together, objectively and rationally.

Therefore together, teachers and parents and even learners can give structure to the process of non-confrontational problem-solving and arrive at better solutions, which may be rewarding and beneficial to all at the end.

2.6.10 High quality personal professional communication

Contrary to the small talk based on selective communication networks (3.5.9), the high quality professional communication can break down semi-permeable boundaries between educators in the cluster, and allow regular professional communication. High quality personal professional communication in the cluster is therefore unconditional, open, based on mutual respect and avail equal opportunity to every member to express him/herself without tarnishing the image or character of colleagues or other stakeholders.

High quality personal professional communication can also promote brainstorming among teachers and principals as a vehicle to generate as many ideas as possible to foster open debates in the cluster. Through brainstorming exercise they may cherish the idea or notion that communication is an essential tool which can promote harmony in schools within a cluster. For example, according to Neukrug (2004:96), when human-beings communicate, 80% of the meanings of their messages is derived from non-verbal language, which implies that what teachers and principals say and how they act is crucial in the quality personal professional communication.

2.6.11 Conclusion

To sum up, the characteristics of the cluster system discussed so far are the clear testimony of what can happen to principals and teachers when democratic culture is nurtured and embraced in schools through the cluster system. If the afore-mentioned

characteristics are applied in the cluster schools, many leaders such as the CCPs, ATs, teacher educators and inspectors can spontaneously move away from their usual stentorian behaviour and become sentient, who provide support to galvanize the teachers in the cluster.

Thus elements or characteristics can give new momentum to cluster schools, as most teachers and principals can be exposed to new ways of working together. Blase and Kirby (1992:39) point out that words such as "shared decision-making", "empowerment", "people-centering", "involvement", "teamwork", "collaboration", "participatory management", "flat structure" and "shared governance" have been internalised in many schools. Through the enabling environment the cluster system presents itself in afore-mentioned characteristics, many teachers can model themselves. Therefore the challenges are directed at the cluster centre principals and other educational leaders to ensure that the traits of the cluster system are applied and implemented in all cluster schools to enhance good governance.

2.7 THE ACTIVITIES OF THE CLUSTER SYSTEM

The cluster centre can be regarded as the life-blood of the cluster system, because the activities of the cluster schools (Figure 2.4) are planned and organized at this centre. In the main, most cluster activities are directed through academic rationality and theoretical logic, as teachers converge at cluster centres to take educational decisions with strong emphasis on teaching and learning. Various authors (Carl, 1995:268, Bubb, 2002:144; Brighouse and Woods, 1999:85; Kelly, 2001:35; Loock, 2003:66 and Berkhout & Berkhout, 1992:54) identify the following activities that are generally performed in schools and are applicable to the cluster system:

- Micro-curriculum planning;
- Lesson planning;
- Policy formulation;
- Meeting;
- Training; and
- Budget

2.7.1 Micro-curriculum planning

According to Carl (1995:268), one of the specialists in curriculum development, the teacher's involvement in curriculum design and development is essential because they will be the eventual implementers and will therefore experience the problems first-hand. Although curriculum development normally is the responsibility of the Ministry or the Department of Education, teachers still derive their schemes of work/syllabi through the micro-curriculum planning process that takes place at school level (Carl, 1995:82).

When teachers meet at the cluster centre, they use models to discuss curriculum Normally teachers converge at the cluster centre in subject committees or groups to draw up common schemes of work and discuss, analyze and interpret syllabi together (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:11). Most of their discussions during micro-curriculum planning may centre on six components but not exclusively on them alone, namely goals, content, objectives, methods and techniques, learning activities and evaluation (Carl, 1995:258; Tight, 1996:110). Each one of the afore-mentioned components of the micro-curriculum planning will be discussed briefly.

2.7.1.1 Goals

In the cluster system, teachers create opportunities through open debate to articulate clear goals, which are congruent to the broad national curriculum guide of the Ministry of Education. Such goals should address and develop cognitive, affective and psycho motor skills, and live up to the expectations and philosophy of the community, parents, teachers and government (Carl, 1995:87; Van der Westhuizen, 2002:7).

2.7.1.2 Content

A content of the micro-curriculum should have clear objectives, based on careful identification of the needs of all cluster schools. Carl (1995:51) argues that personal

feelings, inclinations, values, expectations and experiences of various role players in education can be regarded as part of the content of curriculum. However it should be stressed that the personal vision and ambition of an individual need not override the collective aspiration of the group within the cluster centre.

One of the main functions of teachers within the cluster system is to help learners to understand the complex, and at times sophisticated, content of the curriculum by breaking it down into simple and practically workable units (schemes of work).

2.7.1.3 Objectives of the curriculum

Each unit of the schemes of work, which is derived from the curriculum at cluster level, should be clearly defined and relevant, as it deals with the learning outcomes in the classroom situation. Carl (1995:103) is of the opinion that the objectives of the curriculum are connected to the learners' behaviour and indicates what level of achievement under what conditions need to be achieved by them. Van der Westhuizen (2002:7) concurs with this view and states that objectives refer to the expected results of all the activities in the education system.

When related to clusters, the subject groups can ensure that the objectives of the micro-curriculum is balanced in all respects, and that the set standards are attainable and conform with both national and international requirements of the broad curriculum.

2.7.1.4 Methods and techniques of curriculum

Specific teaching methods or techniques teachers employ in the classrooms can have a tremendous influence on the performances of learners. Within the cluster system, the methodology and techniques become transparent, which opens avenues for consultation between teachers and learners to clarify their expectations and determine learning outcome.

Hence in the cluster system learners are also afforded the opportunity to discuss the teaching strategies in the classrooms, such as practical skills and activities, group and individual discussions and general problem-solving techniques with their subject teachers. Hopkins *et al.* (1994:53) state that teachers should commit themselves to communicate and address both higher and lower levels of the cognitive development with their learners and accept responsibility for learning outcomes and provide regular feedback to learners.

In order to become successful in their methodology and techniques in the teaching and learning interactions in the cluster, teachers and principals need to devise strategies that involve all the students in the lessons, such as the learner-centered interventions, as opposed to teacher-centred strategies. Gravett (2001:46) argues that challenging interactions provide both learners and educators with opportunities to scrutinize beliefs and actions which confront learners with alternative and opposing views that trigger cognitive disequilibria. Such interventions can be achieved through using of variety of activities such as questioning techniques to probe knowledge and understanding of the learners, giving clear instructions and explanations and listening and responding to learners (Bubb, 2002:156).

2.7.1.5 Learners' activities of the curriculum

It is imperative that the learners experience the classroom activities interesting, stimulating, challenging and pleasant enough to attract and keep their interest. The syllabi/schemes of work should produce specified learning competencies and accommodate diversity in the learning rates and styles of learners. Brighouse and Woods (1999:86) state that the creation and maintenance of a stimulating learning environment such as effective classroom organisation, interactions and innovative climate are of absolute necessity in schools.

Within the cluster schools, schemes of work/ syllabi can be designed to become more learner-friendly so that learners are given the opportunity to discuss and debate the

subject matter, listen to and talk to each other and not only to teachers, but to take initiative to contribute to the success of the lessons. Bubb (2002: 144) argues that learners can be interested in their school work when teachers recognise their achievement, liaise effectively with them and parents by providing information on the progress and discussing appropriate steps with learners to ensure that they can improve in their learning activities.

2.7.1.6 Evaluation

The micro-curriculum planning is a never-ending process, which implies that it is subjected to constant changes to keep abreast with latest developments. It is very important that the curriculum be evaluated as regularly as possible, so that its weaknesses and strengths can be monitored on a constant basis and, when necessary, corrective actions taken timeously.

Therefore, according to Carl (1995:212), curriculum evaluation can make a very substantial contribution to curriculum development in terms of empowering teachers as agents of micro-curriculum development.

2.7.2 Lesson planning and preparation

One of the activities done in the cluster system is lesson planning. Teachers from various cluster schools come together in their subject groups to plan and prepare lessons in accordance with agreed schemes of work/syllabi and curriculum.

The lesson plan in the cluster should not be a vague and esoteric vision of the future, but a well thought through action plan which focuses on the real classroom activities. According to Bubb (2002:144), teachers should set clear targets for improving learners' achievements and therefore any lesson planning calls for meticulous planning and preparedness on the part of the teacher to ensure that learners are given the opportunity to meet their potential.

Lesson planning and preparation is a highly creative activity which compels subject teachers to plan and prepare together in order to explain to learners what they have to learn, what their contribution in the teaching and learning process would be and what the required learning outcome would be after every lesson presented. According to Bush and Bell (2002:285), teachers need to be able to project a vision that excites students and inspires their enthusiasm for a topic or activity, as well as do lesson planning that creates learning opportunities for them in each lesson. Teachers can debate and assist one another with the logical break-down of components such as the objectives and aims of the lesson, learning activity, learner's role, strategy to be employed by the teacher and the desired learning outcome.

In most cluster systems, teachers can benefit from planning and preparing their lessons together, for example, novice subject teachers may learn from their more experienced counterparts. Bubb (2002:155) argue that the inadequate knowledge of subject teachers, lack of basic skills that impede effective imparting of subject, poor lesson planning and weaknesses in the classroom control, which can lead to insufficient time on task, can be identified and eliminated through sharing respective teaching experiences among educators in schools, and the clusters are no exception in this regard.

2.7.3 Policy formulation

Although most policies, including curriculum development, are determined by the Ministry or Department of Education, Dittmar *et al.* (2002:31-32) argue that policy formulation at the cluster level can include aspects such as the decentralization policy, Education Act, Public Service Act and other documents. At the same time, it can also apply to the unique circumstances facing the cluster schools. For instance, at the cluster centre, teachers, parents and principals can formulate own policies such as the code of conduct of learners and teachers, disciplinary actions, the usage of equipment and facilities and finances, which are compatible with the policies of the Ministry. It means that the formulation of policy in a cluster system should not be in opposition to the policy

set by the Ministry or Department of Education.

It is the responsibility of the CCPs and cluster management to ensure that policies are discussed as widely as possible by all stakeholders of education within the cluster. Through joint ventures, policies can be embraced and entertained by many as the shared philosophy of every school which belongs to the cluster. Both Brighouse and Woods (1999:85) and Nixon *et al.* (1996:98) subscribe to this view when they state that any policy without the agreement and backing of the entire school community is of little value.

2.7.4 Meeting

Holding regular meetings within the cluster between teachers, principals, inspectors and advisory teachers is the key, as it enhances information sharing, encourages cooperation and enables teachers to discuss common problems and seek solutions to them jointly (BEP, 2003:35). In this context, the routine internal memo's, departmental circulars and other official documents are not sufficient and less effective than face to face contact one makes with colleagues through regular interventions in groups. Thus cluster meetings can be conducted as many times as the need warrants it, but at least two mandatory meetings per term or trimester may be effective - to keep closer ties between educators. In order to ensure that the cluster meetings are successful, a thorough preparation beforehand is crucial, where aspects such as the invitation, purpose and expected outcome of the meetings can be sorted out prior to the actual meeting. Kelly (2001:35) argues that the personnel engaged in cooperative networking should prepare for each meeting, as it is not helpful if the representatives from one school are less prepared than others from partnering institutions.

All the cluster meetings should be recorded to serve as the reference documents for both new and old members and to assess the extent to which decisions taken by members during cluster meetings are implemented. Kelly (2001:32) supports this argument and notes that well-documented meetings make it much easier and less time-consuming for

new personnel to join in and carry the process forward when it becomes necessary.

The cluster meetings can yield positive outcomes for teachers in the long run. For example, it serves to bring the cluster teachers together where a wide range of knowledge and experience is formed in order to make decisions, influence policies, allocate resources, evaluate current activities and build partnerships with colleagues, while at the same time individual and organizational disintegration is prevented (Brooks, 1985:156; Brighouse & Woods, 1999:156; Van der Westhuizen, 2002:109).

2.7.5 Training

According to Reeves, Forde, O"Brien, Smith and Tomlinson (2002:25) and Loock (2003:66), the training of teachers who already in service, is the most effective and economic way of improving the quality of education in the schools, and at the same time, raising the standards, morale and status of the teaching profession. According to Brooks (1985:33) a training intervention, be it for an individual or a group of people, needs to focus on the future outcomes required.

Within the cluster centre, most training occurs in groups, which is a more comprehensive and coordinated way in which teachers are given the opportunity to visit their counterparts at other schools, participate in project teams and peer appraisal and attend conferences, which makes them staff developers for every one else (Brighouse and Woods, 1999:96; Kelly, 2001:118).

The educational leaders at the cluster centre level such as the CCPs and cluster management committees should be vigilant and guard against dictating or imposing training programmes upon teachers without their input and blessings, as it may impact their effectiveness adversely. Dittmar *et al.* (2002:16) argue that both teachers and CCPs can assess training needs in the clusters together, rather than having a uniform training programme for the whole region, which may not necessarily address the immediate shortcomings of the cluster schools.

The cluster centres should therefore have annual training programmes in place which can address the needs of the cluster schools and keep teachers up to date with the new teaching practices. According to Brighouse and Woods (1999:97), ideally all members of the staff should have an annual training plan which can improve their skills and assist them towards greater expertise. Therefore, if the need for quality assurances is the lever for improvement in the cluster centres, then teacher training is its fulcrum.

2.7.6 Budget

One of the key aspects of the cluster is to determine the income and expenses of the activities of all schools within the cluster in order to match it with the intended programmes. Most of the cluster activities centre on training workshops for teachers, learners and parents, meetings, transport, administration, computer equipment, telephone and faxes, examinations and duplicating papers, which need to be catered for in the cluster budget. Both Brooks (1985:133) and Bush *et al.* (1999:17) support these views when they state that schools should have a medium budget plan which indicates the intended use of the resources in order to achieve their educational goals. Through cost-benefit analysis the cluster management can determine the cluster budget which may focus on some of the basic fundamental questions as explained below:

- **Who should be involved in the budgetary process?**

Seeing that the cluster activities are about teamwork and partnership, a budget process creates another opportunity for the parents, learners and teachers to plan their own finances together. To plan the budget together gives them a chance to understand the possible limitations of their cluster funds and helps them to prioritize the cluster activities accordingly.

- **Who should benefit?**

A cluster fund should mainly benefit learners, as every activity conducted within the cluster is about enhancing the teaching and learning in the cluster schools. The cluster

fund should primarily support and enhance the programmes the cluster centre sets for itself in order to implement them practically. Therefore the CCPs are duty bound to ensure that the cluster fund is managed in such a way that it provides a springboard for the development of teaching and learning, of which the learners should be the major beneficiaries (Bush *et al.* 1999:219).

- **What roles should the CCPs play in the management of the cluster fund?**

The first and most important task of the cluster centre principal is to establish a financial committee, which can consist of the representatives of parents, learners, teachers and principals to administer the cluster fund (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:27). Such a committee should prepare the budget and submit it during the last cluster meeting of the previous year for endorsement before the funds are disbursed according to the framework of the budget.

As the cluster fund is normally derived from the participating cluster schools, it is vitally important that the cluster financial committee generates own funds through selling refreshments and charging entrance fees during the sport and cultural events organized by cluster schools. Additional cluster funds can be solicited from lobbying other social partners such as households, state, interest groups, international organisations and churches in order to become self-reliant in the long run (Berkhout & Berkhout, 1992:4; Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:27).

As the head of the cluster schools, the CCPs can keep an eagle eye on the activities of the financial committee to ensure that they keep a tight reign on the cluster fund and that the books are audited, and that all stakeholders are annually provided with the necessary financial statements. Through ensuring checks and balances, the management encourages the finance committee to be as transparent as humanly possible in order to instil trust and confidence in the social partners of education which may motivate them directly and indirectly to continue to invest in the cluster system to the benefit of cluster schools in future.

2.7.7 Conclusion

The cluster activities discussed in this section are elevated above personal interest of teachers and principals. Although teachers are the main initiators of the activities within the cluster centre, their sacrifices and commitment should be seen as a well-calculated move to ensure better education for all the schools within the cluster.

Furthermore, the success of the activities relies heavily on the power of interactions between parents, learners and the educators in order to advance the course of education. But above all, teachers can contribute fundamentally in aspects such as curriculum development, lesson planning and policy formulation, as they are the prime implementers of any cluster activity. Therefore teachers can act as gatekeepers to the knowledge and to power of discernment, which may help learners to gain and use it to their own advantages.

2.8 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CLUSTER SYSTEM IN OTHER COUNTRIES

School clustering has been applied in other parts of the world for years. Although the purpose and emphasis of the introduction of the cluster system differs from country to country, the importance of the system in schools cannot be overly emphasized. A brief analysis will be made of the cluster system in Wales and England, the Netherlands and Philadelphia (USA). These countries introduced clusters in schools in order to address specific needs and to tackle problems from respective vantage points. It must, however, be stressed that this work does not offer a detail historical account of the rise of clusters in these respective countries. In fact, such a study deserves its own volumes. Rather, the perceptive taken only focuses on the purpose and organizational theory of the cluster systems in the respective countries.

2.8.1 Wales and England

Although the sizes of the population of England and Wales differ, the two countries of the United Kingdom still have almost the same education system, and will therefore be dealt with congruently. Already in 1983, the Schools Council Committee for Wales initiated a programme that focused on the elimination of isolation of rural schools, which eventually culminated in the formation of school clusters from 1984 onwards (Hofman, 1999:143-144).

Three factors underlie the formation of the cluster system in the two countries under review, which can briefly be summarized as follows:

- **To minimize the isolation of rural schools**

A number of primary schools in the two countries were perceived as having serious organisational problems fuelled by inadequate numbers of learners in the schools. By 1991, the small numbers of teachers and learners made it very difficult for the subject teachers to articulate their problems related to teaching practices.

For example, Potter and Williams (1994:142) mention that there were 109 primary schools of which 34 (31%) had less than 50 learners on the roll, while 74 (68%) of the schools had less than 100 learners and three full-time teachers. Thus the isolation of teachers was inescapable. Apart from that, most teachers were unwilling to accept posts in the isolated schools. These problems were further exacerbated by the relatively small size of classes and few staff complement, which contributed directly to the professional isolation of teachers.

- **To explore ways in which rural schools can harness the resources of the communities they serve**

The cost of providing expensive teaching equipment and materials was very high, making it difficult for the teachers to present a broad and balanced curriculum for the pupils. Indeed, the lack of resources to a certain extent, coupled with poor conditions of buildings was too far ineffective to attend to the special needs of the pupils. Ribchester and Edwards (1998:281) argue that through increasing the range of resources and

enlarging staff and learner groups, many challenges related to isolation of teachers and schools could be adverted.

- **To achieve educational goals which were beyond the reach of teachers and schools when they act individually**

According to Potter and Williams (1994:143), the small schools and teachers needed help and support from advisory teachers as well as opportunities for association with other teachers and schools. Therefore, in a nutshell, the cluster system in the two countries was introduced to promote cross-fertilisation of ideas between teachers and to maximize the use of buildings, materials and equipment. Ribchester and Edwards (1998:281-182) argue that the rationale behind the establishment of small school cluster groups was based on the fostering cooperation among schools through increasing the resources.

The Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in respective countries become sufficiently convinced of the value of the school clusters as a vehicle for promoting in-service education and training for teachers. Ribchester and Edwards (1998:282) argue that the proponents of the small school educators in the two countries have eagerly embraced school clustering. As a result of that, the clusters also grew rapidly. According to Potter and Williams (1994:144), 83 primary schools from the total of 115 were members of 13 clusters by 1986, and towards the end of the same academic year, all original 115 schools became members of 17 cluster groups. Ribchester and Edwards (1998:282) support the notion of the rapid expansion of the clusters in the two countries when they stated that there were very few counties left where clustering could not be found. In the LEA area, the small cluster groups comprised 4 schools and larger clusters 15 schools.

The cluster groups were very much autonomous in many respects, because historically, state participation in both England and Wales was minimal (Husen & Postlethwaite, 1994:6515). In fact, the so-called "consumer choice" became a watchword which gave parents even more right to choose between various schools in the countries and the management and the governance of schools, including the cluster activities, were in the hands of the governing body. The latter comprised the equal number of learners, parents and nominees of LEAs. Therefore the cluster groups were responsible for determining,

planning, implementing and managing all their in-service activities. Apart from that, each cluster could determine its own management style with the support of advisory teachers. The local LEA could advise, but not direct or give instructions (Potter & Williams, 1994:144). However and quite interesting enough, the LEA was responsible for funding all cluster activities. What made clustering even more attractive in the two countries was the huge financial infusion to boost the functioning of the system. Potter and Williams (1994:144) point out that funds were derived from various sources, namely the Local Education Authority Training Grants Scheme (LEATGS), Education Support Grand (ESG), Early School Council and Welsh Office Project. Between 1988 and 1989, the primary clusters were converted into secondary school catchments groups. The headmasters of all the primary schools within the catchment groups met once a term for an entire day under the guidance of an LEA advisor to consider management issues and budget to finance in-service training programmes.

Finally, the success and effectiveness of the clusters had relied heavily upon members of staff taking a leading role in spearheading the inter-school cooperation, which can open doors for teachers and learners to benefit immensely from the cluster system through joint curriculum development and implementation strategies. Such joint ventures could improve learning experiences for pupils and better environment for teacher development and support (Potter & Williams, 1994:150; Ribchester & Edwards, 1998:283).

2.8.2 Philadelphia (USA)

Traditionally, teachers in Philadelphia have viewed their roles in education from a narrow perspective. Newberg (1995:714) argues that elementary school teachers appear to define themselves by the grade they teach, while secondary school teachers are likely to identify themselves with discipline or only the subject they teach. It implies that there was no sense of cooperation or cohesiveness between teachers and schools, or the support for student's special needs.

In Philadelphia, schools started with a feeder pattern cluster in 1987 through launching a

project entitled "Bridging the gap." Through this project, eight elementary and three middle schools respectively were co-coordinated to form so-called community schools (Newberg, 1995:715). The bridging the gap programme was designed to improve student's achievement through increased community among school professionals. These processes led to the development and creation of what Newberg referred to as the "safety nest," which was formed by teachers who were concern about the progress of learners in schools. Through safety nests activities, teachers formed synergy in an attempt to take collective responsibility for students' performance over their entire school career (Newberg, 1995:713). This approach in itself can be seen as the first signals of clustering of teachers for the advancements of the interest of their students in the teaching process. Therefore it can be argued that the ultimate objective for the establishment ofthe cluster model in Philadelphia was to sensitize the teachers and administrators to have an ethic of caring towards students' development over extended periods of time in their entire school career.

Newberg (1995:713) mentions that Philadelphia has made substantial progress in creating small and more caring educational units within their schools. To achieve that, schools were organised into feeder pattern clusters that provide a system of coordination and allow systematic movement of students from elementary to middle and high schools. The teachers from various cluster school levels could then monitor students' progress more effectively so that all children would achieve in their schools individually and collectively. It was also one of the driving forces behind the School District of Philadelphia to reorganise schools into cluster configurations and to set for itself a target to establish 22 clusters by the end of 1996 (Newberg, 1995:717).

According to Newberg (1995:715), transition teams at cluster level consist of principals, teachers, counsellors, school boards for both primary and secondary schools, and parents. Each transition team can elect a leader among themselves, meet twice a month to discuss the progress of the cluster activities and provide suggestions for new interventions, while the principals convene their meetings at least once a month in order to prepare agenda for cluster meetings. Through such meetings various role players in the cluster schools can

ensure that human resources (i.e. teachers, parents, learners etc.) and material resources (i.e. buildings, facilities, equipment etc.) are shared and students' entire development considered (Newberg, 1995:716). Yes, to ensure that learners benefit from school clustering, the government provided substantial financial contribution, but not without a controversial element. According to Husen and Postlethwaite (1994:6543), traditionally, the federal government has maintained that the United States is among the countries that spends most on students in the public education system. But the same dissenting opinion has it that among the 16 industrial nations, the USA ranks 14th in expenditures on all levels of the education system. However, the bottom line is, funds are provided for education, which strengthen cluster system in schools.

Finally, the cluster system in Philadelphia is about recognizing the fact that students are at the centre in the school enterprise and that the cluster configuration organises teachers` work across school boundaries and enhances a collective sense of responsibility for student learning.

2.8.3 The Netherlands

The regional clusters in the Netherlands had been installed in 1993 under a large-scale educational project entitled `Together to School Again` (Hofman, 1999:187). In fact, the Netherlands is one of the few countries, which introduced regional clusters at school level. Other countries that followed suit were England and Wales in 1994 and Namibia in 1996 respectively (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:1; Potter & Williams, 1994:144). Figure 2.3 and Table 1 elsewhere in this chapter provide further illumination of regional clusters.

The government of the Netherlands introduced regional clustering of schools for two main reasons, namely to enhance the integration of pupils with special needs into regular schools and to ensure enabling conditions for improvement of professional skills in regular schools in order to develop adaptive teaching (Hofman, 1999:187-188). The same author stated that Dutch children between ages 4 and 19 (4%) were educated in special schools for primary and secondary education. The majority (2,8%) are children with

intellectual, social or behavioural handicaps. Thus the cluster system was created in order to integrate both physically and mentally challenged learners into the main stream through the educational project entitled "together to school again initiative" (Hofman, 1999:187). It can be argued that the `together to school again` initiative provided learners across the boundaries of various school levels to maintain continuity in the curriculum throughout their entire school career. Husen and Posthethwaite (1994:4073) maintain that the project provided learners with equal educational opportunities, the improvement of educational quality and development of personal and civic responsibilities - which are guiding principles in education, which is heavily funded by government.

The regional school clusters were so popular in the country that within four years, since the system had been launched, the network of clusters had expanded to 272 regional clusters nationwide by 1997. Each of the regional clusters consists of 25 regular schools and two schools for pupils with special schools (Hofman, 1999:188). The regional cluster schools cooperate in order to enhance educational participation between teachers from regular schools and special schools. According to Hofman (1999:144), teachers meet in clusters to share resources, discuss staff employment, exchange expertise to acquire skills in adaptive teaching and assist with policy formulation and implementation thereof.

The governance of the clusters is in the hands of the coordinator of the cluster who can either be a principal of a regular school or special school, assisted by members of school boards, expertise in special education and the representatives of the participating regional cluster schools. The coordinator of the cluster school spends 40 hours per month - that is 10 hours on average per week on cluster activities, besides his/her duties as school principal (Hofman, 1999:190). The Dutch government is responsible for funding the development programmes for each school within the cluster. According to Hofman (1999:193), the actual resources each cluster receives depend on the number of pupils both in regular and special schools within the cluster.

Finally, seeing that the main focus area for the creation of the regional clusters was to integrate the pupils from special schools into the mainstream schools, the success of the

whole cluster system in the country can actually be judged against the extent the integration has been rooted and implemented throughout the national education system. However, according to Hofman (1999:196), it is clusters with schools and teachers who show greater expertise and who are more capable of accomplishing adaptive education, that seem to be more successful, which provides a framework or agenda for future development plans for teachers in the cluster schools in the country.

2.8.4 Conclusion

In this section a brief synopsis was given on the purpose and organisational arrangements of the school cluster system in England and Wales, Philadelphia and the Netherlands. What is worth mentioning about all these countries, is the presence of the strong element of financial support from both the respective governments and other educational agencies to the benefit of the learners in particular and educators in general.

Another element that came to light is that all countries introduced the cluster system to address specific pressing needs in education which varied from isolation of teachers and lack of resources (England and Wales), to integration of learners with special needs into the regular schools (the Netherlands) and promotion of ethics of caring for students in Philadelphia. Such unique approaches applied by these countries proves one fundamental aspect in education today, namely that collaboration between schools, teachers, parents and governments can bolster any challenges in education and can confront them head-on in order to overcome, which implies that no problem is insurmountable in the face of unity.

2.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The cluster system is discussed at length in this chapter from different angles. Firstly the definition of basic concepts such as cluster system, school and management (2.2) was given. Secondly, the following aspects were illuminated: the rational of school clustering (2.3), the management structure of the cluster system (2.4), the development stages of the

cluster system (2.5), characteristics of the cluster system (2.6), activities of the cluster system (2.7) and the cluster system in other countries (2.8).

The cluster system provides a superb climate for the social basis for teachers, principals and parents to pool resources in order to push towards excellence in their respective schools. Equally, the supportive nature and creation of a conducing environment for harmonious working relationships within the cluster system allows the transmission of tacit craft knowledge through sharing information and exchanging ideas among different role payers.

Therefore the managerial approaches advocated in the cluster system can make collective decision-making in the cluster centre so much easier and ensures sharing of the discourse of management, which enables all schools and communities to socialise themselves as colleagues into the officially legitimated framework such as the cluster system. Reeves *et al.* (2002:35) argue that commitment to development of every member of the staff and support staff frequently leads to the creation of an open, supportive and collaborative culture. Hence the leaders such as the CCPs, teacher trainers and inspectors should be educative leaders in intent and outcome. They should take initiative in building a strong partnership between the cluster centres, schools and the wider educational environment, which facilitates frank communication. As leaders, they should have the sense of imagination that sparks and imbues the vision that wins the trust and commitment of learners, teachers, fellow principals and the broader parent community in the cluster centre and unites them in a shared dedication to excellence.

Chapter 3

IMPLEMENTATION OF CLUSTERING IN NAMIBIA

3.1. Introduction

The cluster system was formally implemented in Namibia as a baseline project in 1996 (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:i). At the initial stage of the implementation process of the cluster system it was predominantly only concentrated on one of the 13 (thirteen) educational regions only, namely the Rundu education region. Since the inception of the cluster system, the Namibian government has been instrumental to and on the forefront of support for this system. The rationale of the government support lies in the fact that the cluster system is viewed as the vehicle to enhance and advance the decentralisation policy of the government (Strategic Plan, 2001-2006). According to Dittmar *et al.* (2002:21), the government established decentralisation structures which were based on the cluster system such as the circuit offices and cluster management committees in order to effectively manage the education in the country (cf. 2.4).

The successful implementation of the cluster system in Rundu in terms of networking and facilitating training for the teachers in the same geographical areas (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:1) encourage the Namibian government to expand the same system to all the educational regions in the country. Through the Ministry of Basic Education, Sport and Culture, the government encouraged, motivated and allowed some principals of different schools and Regional office management teams to undertake a familiarisation visit to the Rundu Education Region. The Ministry also issued various circular letters and arranged information meetings throughout the country in order to promote and bolster necessary support in favour of the cluster system.

In close collaboration with its partners such as the GTZ (German Technical Cooperation), the Namibian government provided financial and human resources in order to boost the implementation process of the cluster system countrywide. It therefore came as no

surprise that the cluster system was fully implemented in Namibia in all 13 educational regions towards the end of 2002 (MBESC, 2004:2).

In this chapter, a brief exposition of problems emanating from the implementation of the cluster system will be given. At first, the problems of the Teachers' Resource Centres (TRCs), as the forerunner of the cluster system, will be discussed and thereafter the remaining problems (3.3) related to clustering in Namibia.

3.2. Problems related to the TRCs

With independence there seemed to be an embryonic need for educational reform in Namibia. As first step in that direction and indeed, in a quest to curb some of the problems, TRCs were established in the country in 1991 (MEC, 1996: iii). Therefore the creation of the TRCs marked the beginning of the process which ushered in the cluster system.

3.2.1 Structure of TRCs

The TRCs in the country are coordinated by NIED (National Institute of Educational Development) in Okahandja. In order to fulfil its coordinating role for all the TRCs in the country, NIED established the National TRC managers and Regional Advisory committees (MEC,1996:47).

Although the management is highly centralised, most TRCs are manned at different regional offices by TRC managers. Each TRC manager has its own management committee at local level, which is charged with supervising and monitoring the activities, and linking up with the schools and community in the immediate vicinity (MEC, 1996:6). In this context, TRCs augers well with the decentralization policy of the Namibian government which is aimed at bringing the decision-making to the lowest possible levels, namely the schools (Strategic Plan, 2001-2006: 13).

3.2.2 Functions of the TRCs

The ultimate objectives of these centres are to initiate a communication process, linking an emitter, in this sense, the TRC, with the receivers, namely teachers, learners, community and other professionals. The TRCs should therefore be seen as the catalysts to close the existing communication gap between teachers among themselves and between schools, Regional offices (ROs) and advisory teachers (ATs) in general in order to promote networking among these key role-players for mutual benefit.

Thus, TRCs have an explicit function and advantage for many schools and teachers which subscribe to the principles of networking of all the educators and stakeholders in Namibia (MEC, 1996:4-5). Some of these explicit functions of the TRCs are briefly outlined and discussed below:

- To establish the broader network between schools and learners

One of the explicit functions of the TRCs remains to promote networking between as many schools as possible in the entire country. Most educators realise the fact that equity and quality education can only be achieved (Strategic Plan, 2001-2006) if all the schools and teachers are exposed to better ways of imparting lessons in the classrooms. Cheng (1996:145) is of the opinion that individual schools, colleges, education departments and other organisations can join together to form a teacher education network.

- To facilitate change through exposing teachers to new ideas, especially teaching practice

Today teachers are challenged by fast explosion of knowledge and an ever-increasing demand for and threat to mastering new technology such as computers as the basic educational tools needed to enhance their job. Through new technology, such as computers, teachers can be able to change their teaching practices.

- To provide teachers with access to up-to date printed and audio-visual educational resource materials.

Nowadays most schools in rural areas do not have the necessary equipment to support and enhance their lesson presentation, but they may have access to some of the up-to-date printed and audio-visual resources through the TRCs in their proximity. But in the main, TRCs make their facilities available to the schools and teachers in urban areas to prepare quality and standardised lessons in the afternoons, where they can be assisted by well-qualified staff at these centres.

The significance of the TRCs lies in the fact that even the schools which are marginalised in terms of lack of the necessary resources can actually utilize facilities at these centres. However, the accessibility of resource centres such as TRCs or cluster centres is determined by the distances and geographical location of these centres.

- To monitor the reform process

The success of the support of the TRCs they give the educators and schools can only be judged through continuous assessment of the services they delivered. Through regular monitoring action of the programmes, the TRC management can take stock of their own performances and determine whether all the schools have access to these centres, and if not, what measures need to be taken to involve all the schools in the country.

Therefore to monitor its own reform process and measure success, each TRC manager in the country should submit an annual report, apart from monthly statistics to both Regional education officers and NIED (MEC, 1996:45). The nucleus of such reports should focus on the strengths, weaknesses, problems and general progress TRCs are making in their respective towns and areas.

- To coordinate regional science fairs

Most TRCs are instrumental in spearheading the science fairs for the secondary schools at regional level. Due to the importance government attaches to science and technology in

the country (MHETEC, 2003:30-31), science fairs are coordinated and organised annually by TRCs in order to expose learners at secondary school level and assist them with their respective career choices.

In order to ensure that the regional science fairs are successful, the TRC managers are normally networking with various role players such as the sponsors, the business community, principals and regional offices. Through such interactions, existing working relations with schools and the broader community are cemented, while the TRCs get the golden opportunity to showcase their programmes during the annual science fairs.

- To facilitate training workshops for teachers

Facilitating teachers' training lies at the heart of the TRCs, hence arranging workshops remains one of the core functions of these centres. For example, in the Keetmanshoop educational region alone in 2002, the TRCs hosted 96 regional workshops and 80 meetings, while the TRC library recorded 1 332 and 775 visits by the teachers and learners respectively (MBESC, 2002:55).

TRCs in Namibia have proven to be good locations for providing short in-service training programmes for the teachers. In this context, the TRCs position themselves well and have laid a good foundation in both teacher support and training programmes in the country. Middlewood and Lumby (1998:ix) argue that the pace of teacher training will increase in future, therefore the need for training educators is stronger than ever before to enable them to serve their institutions better.

Finally, in addition to some of the explicit functions of the TRCs referred to above, these institutions also hold specific advantages for the country, which can be summarized as follows. They:

- provide teachers with help in solving classroom problems
- allow teachers to explore and develop material to use in the class;

- give teachers contacts so that they can share ideas and resources;
- provide classroom advisory assistance;
- help teachers to understand the teaching-learning process;
- encourage acceptance of responsibility for self-directed professional growth; and
- give teachers experience in leadership for in-service programs (MEC,1996:5; Pfeiffer & Dunlap, 1982:38).

3.2.3. Limitations of TRCs

Although the TRCs made remarkable contributions to the improvement of education, and despite the fact that the reform in education has yielded positive change, such as an increase in pupil enrolment by 21% and schools by 16% respectively (Foskett & Lumby, 2003:159), it soon became clear that these institutions experience some problems. According to (Gerber, 2003:174; MEC, 1996:iv; Dittmar, 2002:2), the problems emanate from the size of the country.

The fundamental question here is whether the TRCs have managed to reach out to all the schools in the country, in order to provide much needed support and advice to the teachers. Although the TRCs in Namibia have proven to be effective in the areas where they are centrally located to the schools, these centres terribly fall short in meeting the pressing needs of all the schools in the country. In fact, the TRCs have never been used on a daily basis by more than a handful of the most dedicated professionals living within a short distance from these centres (NIED, 1998:57).

Furthermore, one of the outstanding flaws of the TRCs were their insignificant numbers in the country. For example, by 1996 there were only 22 TRCs in the country as oppose to 1 584 schools, 18 782 teachers and 517 079 learners these centres were supposed to serve (MEC, 1996:iv; Census, 2001:xxv). Obviously, the reason why these centres were initially planned to concentrate more on the strategic places such as the local, school, district and regional levels has much to do with the size of the country, which of course has a detrimental effect on most schools and teachers in the rural areas.

Apart from that, the TRCs were sparsely distributed, and in the main, limited to the larger towns and very few rural areas. As a result, most TRCs are very far from the schools and teachers which they intended to serve. Dittmar (2002:54) states that the poorly distributed TRCs and restricted access for teachers to these institutions, has resulted in a generally poor application of advisory services in Namibia.

Another limitation of TRCs can be directly attributed to the size of the country. According to Dittmar *et al.* (2002:3) and Husen and Postlethwaite (1994:1259), Namibia is a vast country of 824 000 square kilometres, scattered, and has the small population of 1,9 million people. As a result of the size of the country, an average distance between most towns and rural areas in Namibia is in the range of 100 km – 200 km, as opposed to countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, where average distances between towns and cities vary between 10 km – 20 km (Grobler et al., 2003:212).

As a result of the size of the country, the distances between schools and the TRCs became large, which caused disconnectedness between various role players. Furthermore, the long distances can have far-reaching implications in terms of service delivery, such as limiting access to either TRCs or cluster centres. Dittmar (2002:2) supports this argument when he states that distances between schools and service points from which schools should benefit are often great and difficult. For instance, ATs are based at Regional Offices in many regions, rather than at the TRCs or circuit offices where they are preoccupied with general issues instead of concentrating on their key functions, namely the professional development of teachers.

Therefore some educators argue that educational leader often use the size of the country as an excuse or scapegoat to exclude the majority of principals and teachers from crucial decision-making processes. In fact, large distances between schools and service points such as the TRCs can lead to lack of support and neglect to schools in remote areas.

3.2.4 Future role of TRCs

Since its inception in 1991, the TRCs have moved from the realm of good ideas into viable organisational development centres. In the areas where these centres are centrally located, they can provide necessary assistance for instance the provision of teaching aids such as overhead projectors, photocopy machines and educational videos to the educators (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:2). In this sense, TRCs remain an indispensable source of support to teachers in the schools in the future. Through providing such tangible support programmes, these institutions can bring teachers and other professionals together to encourage one another on a continuous basis for personal growth and renewal in the teaching profession.

It is therefore evident that the TRCs have a definite place in the educational reform process in Namibia, though additional centres need to be established in the rural areas hitherto not reached. In the main, the experience gained through the creation of these centres in the context of wider inter-school linkages, management and keeping teaching aids and equipment at one central point (TRCs) can provide a framework for the success of the clustering of schools. In this context the TRCs can complement cluster centres and not act antagonistic in terms of service delivery in the schools.

TRCs no longer have a significant role to play in education since the introduction of the cluster centres in schools. The establishment of cluster centres renders TRCs either ineffective or redundant because the activities of the two institutions overlap. There seems to be an abrasiveness of much of discourse over the direction and purpose of the TRCs in future. The debate on the viability of TRCs in schools will certainly continue for an unforeseeable time in future while, at the same time, the creation of the cluster centres did not necessarily provide effective solutions to all the problems experienced by teachers and general staff of the ministry of education in Namibia.

To sum up, TRCs were created to network teachers in order to improve their teaching practices in the classrooms. Cheng (1996:145) argues that teacher education network

centres (i.c. TRCs) can be established to support all school-based or external development activities by providing in-service teachers with various forms and opportunities for professional development.

However, as the TRCs are very much limited in terms of numbers, but in the main, confine to major towns and cities, teachers from rural areas were mostly unable to reach the centres due to circumstances beyond their control. Factors such as the size of the country as well as widely scattered schools exacerbated communication and hampered access to the TRCs. Therefore if TRCs were established to enhance the capacity of teachers, particularly with the emphasis on the remote areas, they may have failed dismally in extending their services to all the teachers and schools in rural areas.

Despite these challenges, the TRCs laid a strong foundation for the establishment of the cluster system in the schools in Namibia. The support and assistance provided by these institutions to schools in the country sparked an unprecedented educational renovation– which opens doors for the establishment of the cluster system. If TRCs are utilized effectively, they can become national assets in their own right!

3.3 PROBLEMS RELATED TO SCHOOL CLUSTERING IN NAMIBIA.

Although the cluster system has been portrayed as a successful system, which could be a panacea in education, no system is ever perfect or without limitations. In fact, the cluster system has been plagued by perennial problems. Various authors (Gerber, 2003:174; Fidler, Russell & Simkins, 1996:196, Hofman, 1994:190; Headington, 2003:10; Reeves *et al.*, 2002:174; Daresh and Arrowsmith, 2003:94-95; Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:3) identify the following problems experienced in school systems of the Third World generally and which may be experienced in Namibia:

- Lack of communication between teachers
- Shortage of transport in the cluster
- Lack of financial resources in the cluster

- Lack of basic facilities in the cluster

In order to forestall these problems, which may have a direct and indirect impact on the proper functioning of the cluster centres it is imperative to subject them to a close scrutiny one by one.

3.3.1 Lack of communication between teachers in the cluster

Although communication can be regarded as a glue, which can blend people together within the cluster system, factors pertaining to the shortage of transport, lack of basic facilities such as telephones and fax machines and lack of financial resources can be the main barriers to effective communication, especially for most cluster schools in remote areas (Grobler *et al.*, 2003:14-15; MBESC, 2002:58; Education Statistics, 1991-2001: 82).

Interpersonal communication process is the hallmark of human relations, however Grobler *et al.* (2003:133) argue that lack of communication between educators can inhibit the ability of educational institutions such as the cluster centres to morph into high performances. Communication can be rightfully regarded as the foundation of interpersonal relations, where lack thereof can have disastrous consequences for all the role players in the cluster system. In general and with pertinent references to Namibia, communication between schools and Regional offices (ROs) seems to be a serious stumbling block towards progress, development and the successful implementation of the cluster system in schools. For example, according to the annual educational report (MBESC, 2002:53, 58, 93), five of the thirteen educational regions reported in 2002 that the communication system and information technology need to be upgraded, particularly within Regional offices in order to create better lines of communication with schools, head offices and all other partners in education.

Most Namibian schools represent rural schools, and lack of communication impact their performances adversely, especially when it comes to the teaching and learning process in

the classrooms. Dittmar *et al.* (2002:3) are of the opinion that most teachers prepare and present their lessons in isolation year after year. They are unable to share their ideas with other teachers who are doing the same work or to benefit from the experiences of colleagues. As a result, different standards are set for examinations, which contributes to poor results of national examinations in the end. Obviously, teachers and learners who find themselves in such precarious situations can regard themselves very unfortunate, because most people learn through communicating with others. According to Fraser and Hetzel (1990:ix), teachers have an insatiable desire for a sense of involvement through communication, especially when they realize that what they do can make difference in the lives of other people, like learners.

It can therefore be argued that teachers who are unable to communicate with their colleagues are left to rely heavily on themselves, which can lead to self-directedness, egotism and eventually culminate in developing a limited scope and perspective in their teaching profession. On top of that, such teachers can also become ill-equipped in their respective areas of specialization, which may contribute to low achievement among learners.

Being alone, and teaching at a specific level where one does not have anyone to communicate with, can make sharing and cooperative learning impossible for both learners and teachers, as everyone may be pre-occupied with his/her own workload (NIED, 2004:6). According to Macbeat (1998:28), individual teachers who are alone in their respective classrooms are not challenged to reflect on their basic assumptions and values, and are therefore not only less able to cope with imparting skills, but less able to help their pupils better.

3.3.2 Shortage of transport in the cluster

In the main, the shortage of transport aggravates not only the networking between cluster schools, but hampers the effective functioning of the support staff such as Advisory Teachers (ATs), inspectors and education planners. One of the educational regions,

namely the Keetmanshoop education region, summarizes these problems as follows: "The school visits in the region depend largely on the availability of vehicles. The limited number of vehicles affects the proper execution of advisory, monitoring and inspection processes by support personnel in schools negatively. (MBESC, 2002: 58). For example, without reliable transport, inspectors and advisory teachers could hardly be able to carry out regular visits or make timely interventions. It resulted in situations where a support staff or officials can be available to a school, but insufficient travel funds or shortage of transport may hamper such officials to visit and work with the school and provide the support required.

The transport problems alluded to above are quite prevalent in Namibia, and have the potential to cripple the networking of the various stakeholders in the cluster schools. For instance, according to the Annual education report (MBESC, 2002:68, 86, 93), some of the education regions in the country listed problems related to transport as follows:

- For a successive number of years, the regions had to cope with a shortage of reliable vehicles;
- Delays in repairing vehicles by the government garage causes shortage of transport, which hampers progress in executing of work;
- Unreliable vehicles allocated to some inspectors cause frustrations and hamper their efforts towards visiting many schools, and
- Transport is a very serious problem, as it curtails the mobility of the regional HIV/AIDS coordinators and Peace Corps volunteers to promote awareness campaigns in schools.

3.3.3 Lack of financial resources in the cluster

The lack of financial resources can be viewed as the single most serious barrier and indeed, a threat to the provision of quality education in the cluster schools in Namibia. Fidler and Atton (2004:95) argue that the lack of money becomes a problem for the people such as teachers and learners in any school environment.

Educational institutions consume resources, such as human, premise, accommodation, equipment, furniture, supplies and other expenses (Panda, 2003:109). Thjis may be a problem in clustering because the resources of the cluster centre may be depleted when used by many schools. Most teachers and learners want to become successful in their cluster schools, and yet the investment in educational needs does not always advance their noble cause. Miller-Lachmann and Taylor (1995:346) argue that lack of financial resources compelled many teachers to use additional materials, besides those already available in the classrooms, or to spend their own money to provide their students with books and other materials. Even though Cheng (1996:20) argues that a school is effective if it can acquire all resources it needs, it remains an elusive dream for most educators in Namibian cluster schools today.

Financial resources are the primary source of investment in education and the lack of it on the part of the government often creates serious implications for most cluster schools. It is a well-known fact that too often governments claim that they do not have enough money to spend on one sector such as education only, but have other priority areas to fund as well (Panda, 2003:110), but still education deserves a better deal in governments' priority lists.

The scarcity of financial resources unarguably puts both teachers and learners within the cluster centres in a disadvantaged position in terms of service delivery and performance. For instance, although Graham-Brown (1991:303) argues that education should be a precondition for development, many clusters are either under-funded or not at all supported financially, which leads to poor performances and lack of motivation among some teaching staff. To substantiate this argument, references can be made to the annual report of the Ministry (MBESC, 2002:52-93) which identified the following limitations in many schools. Such limitations include the following:

- Lack of funds for renovating school buildings and hostel facilities can lead to the deterioration of buildings which can pose a serious danger to learners;
- Training material for the visually impaired promoters is not easily available;
- Inadequate infrastructure and facilities limit learners' access to quality education;

- Most training programmes cannot be implemented due to budgetary constraints; and
- Finally, the lack of funds hampers the upkeep of computers and the purchase items such as television sets, videos and cassette recorders.
-

What can still be regarded as a cause of concern for educators in most cluster centres is the fact that there is no clear-cut policy for supporting these institutions financially in future. Currently, cluster centres receive their funds from the member schools or GTZ (German Technical Cooperation, 2004), which is often not adequate to meet all the needs of the clusters. Froyen (1988:258) argues that the stringent funding for education coupled with cost-cutting measures increased class sizes, reduced expenditure on books and teaching materials, and spending on the maintenance of buildings decreased, and simultaneously it all undermines the effectiveness of teachers and principals.

In addition to that, the scarcity of resources can create unnecessary tension and conflict among teachers, which can be very destructive in any educational institution. In fact, Caldwell and Spinks (1988:186) note that conflict might occur when the resources of the schools are insufficient to meet the requirements of individuals or groups in the schools. Bush (1995:149), on the other hand, argues that when funding is limited, the possibility of the reduction in real resources such as staff, books and equipments can take place, while at the same time increasing the levels of conflict of both teachers and administrators. In this context, any conflict can have the potential to erode the very foundations of harmonious working relationships between teachers from various cluster schools, and if not managed constructively, may hamper meaningful interactions between educators within the cluster.

3.3.4 Lack of basic facilities in the cluster

Lack of basic facilities in the cluster may remain a consistent cause of concern and has the potential to undermine the Namibian government's philosophy of ensuring equity, access, democracy and quality education in all the educational institutions in the country (Strategic Plan, 2001-2006). Unfortunately, education in some clusters still takes place under trees or prefabricated buildings, which are not often safe and suitable for effective teaching and learning processes. For example, according to the Education Statistics (2001:82), most cluster schools are overcrowded, do not have toilets or adequate potable water resources, which implies that teachers and learners attached to such cluster schools may be demoralized, while education can suffer in the end.

In the absence of basic amenities, it is not only learners who suffer, but equally teachers are at the receiving end. For instance, too often lack of teachers' housing is cited as the major constraint in attracting quality teachers to some of the cluster schools, especially the cluster schools in the northern part and other remote areas of Namibia (Education Statistics, 2001:90).

Other dimension of the problem of lack of basic facilities can directly be linked to the problems pertaining to infrastructure. For example, where a cluster school in a remote rural area is not connected to telecommunication networks, such as telephones, faxes and internet facilities, teachers and learners may lose the opportunity to be exposed to modern technology, which is indispensable in any educational institution today. But above all, the most painful reality can be that even when a cluster school has computers to its disposal, such valuable educational tools cannot be used due to lack of electricity or power generators.

It can therefore be argued that no cluster centre can improve in terms of classroom management, subject management and general management of the clusters if these centres, as the focal point of coordination between schools, lack necessary facilities. Yes,

to be effective, cluster centres need proper facilities. According to the training document for cluster centre principals (MBESC, 2004:23), the cluster centres should have facilities, which may include the following:

- Proper meeting place for cluster schools;
- Computer facilities;
- Communication facilities;
- Duplicating facilities; and
- Safe storeroom facilities

Besides these facilities, basic necessities such as furnishers, overhead projectors and funds, to mention but a few, still remain dreams for some teachers within clusters, which has a negative bearing on the service delivery within the clusters.

To summarize, the problems discussed in the preceding paragraphs, namely lack of communication, shortage of transport, lack of financial resources and lack of basic facilities are real challenges confronting cluster centres, mostly schools in the rural areas, and if not properly addressed, they can have disastrous consequences for the education as a whole in the country. In this context it is crucial to heed to the advise proffered by Dittmar *et al.* (2002:23) when they argue that to improve working conditions of educators and advance good quality education, most cluster centres need additional facilities such as meeting venues, audio-visual aids, flip charts and duplicating facilities.

Unfortunately, many teachers and principals are confronted by harsh working conditions under which they have to execute their work on a daily basis, such as overcrowded classes, shortage of textbooks and stationery and long working hours. Sadker and Sadker (1997:36) argue that to equip people for modern life requires the most advanced educational methods, techniques and equipments. Seemingly, within the cluster system teachers are entitled to good classrooms, adequate teaching materials, teachable class size and administrative protection. Hence managing the economic and social role of schooling and promoting the recognition of the personal and community gain from education in the

context of poverty reduction remains one of the major challenges for the cluster schools, which seems to be far beyond the simple legislation (Foskett & Lumby, 2003:158).

3.4. WORKLOAD AMONG SOME EDUCATIONAL PERSONNEL

With the implementation of cluster system, workload becomes eminent in most educational institutions, including cluster schools in Namibia. Although workload becomes prevalent among the work force at all levels in the country, the most affected groups seem to be principals, teachers, inspectors and advisory teachers (Day, Hall & Whitaker, 1998:5; Middlewood & Lumby, 1998:178; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992:10; Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:33).

3.4.1 Workload among principals

The debate whether principals should be managers and administrators of the clusters and schools or mere implementers of curriculum would certainly continue in the years to come. The fact of the matter is that most principals are still classroom teachers and secretaries to a lesser extent than they are managers. Schuttleworth (2003:140) states that some principals are still ordinary class teachers, whereas the emphasis of school leaders have already shifted from that of practicing teachers with added technical responsibilities to that of full-time professional manager of human, financial and other resources, staff evaluation, budget management and community relations officers. According to Du Preez (2003:61), the teaching load of principals in South Africa varies between 10% and 92% at primary level and between 5% and 60% in the secondary schools respectively. It implies that quite a considerable proportion of the principals' tight schedules, as administrators of cluster schools, is still devoted to teaching as well. As if that is not enough, the principal's job has been transformed from being that of a leading professional, to now being more recently described as more akin to that of a chief executive officer, where the element related to teaching has become a relatively a small part of his/her job (Fidler & Atton, 2004:61).

In addition to that, the application of staffing norms in Namibian schools does not improve the working conditions either, but has altered the position of principals and cluster principals to a total nightmare. For instance, the application of staffing norms in most clusters are responsible for overcrowded classes, shortages of both teaching staff and institutional personnel, while teachers are living in constant fear, as they may be transferred from one school to another, which normally coincides with financial losses. Often the undivided time and energy of principals are needed to recommend personnel, while at the same time they have little power to influence the decisions taken by Ministry of Education. For example, principals within the cluster have to advertise vacancies, organize meetings with school boards, screen, compile shortlists and submit recommendations to the Regional Offices via circuit inspectors, which is often a time-consuming process. The extensive experience of the researcher as both principal of a regular school and of a cluster centre bears testimony of these conditions in the clusters and schools.

Most principals do not question the employers about their new responsibilities as cluster centre principals (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:13), most probably because they may be afraid to air their discontentment, or they may want to appease them. But be it as it may, the fact of the matter is that the ever-increasing workload of principals can have an adverse impact on some principals. Fidler and Atton (2004:14) are of the opinion that if the principals have a choice, they would not have preferred any additional work. It therefore creates a strong impression that had the principals the courage to discuss their concerns with the employers, one of their main concerns would have been work overload. Often rather than always, an excessive work demand prevents some principals from executing their tasks effectively because, according to Fullan (2003:14), effectiveness of work decreases as the size of the work increases.

With the dawn of the cluster system, the workload of principals undoubtedly showed a marked rise, quantitatively. For example, Dittmar *et al.* (2002:33) note that the cluster centre principals (CCPs) have additional responsibilities, which are directly related to the entire clusters, apart from their normal responsibilities as principals of regular schools.

For instance, apart from their ordinary tasks at schools such as class visits, management of personnel, physical, financial and public relations, most cluster principals are required through school clustering to pay attention to the following:

- Train other principals;
- Order and distribute supplies - should collate, submit and follow up on orders of all schools in the cluster;
- Allocate teachers;
- Organize class groups;
- Do micro-planning;
- Visit schools and supervise, support and evaluate other principals and teachers within the cluster;
- Promote community participation by ensuring that school boards function properly;
- Provide general leadership and supervision of all the activities in the cluster; and
- Ensure that staff follows correct communication channels through the cluster (Dittmar *et al.* 2002:24; Ward & Mendelsohn, 1999:81).

Apart from the above-mention responsibilities, cluster centre principals are required to perform special duties in the cluster centre (MBESC, 2004:9) which may include the following:

- To play the role of coordinators and facilitators within the cluster;
- To provide linkage between schools and circuit offices;
- To promote sharing of ideas and mutual support through the clusters;
- To facilitate efforts to improve performances; and
- To involve and activate the cluster management committee in order to ensure efficiency amongst cluster schools

Undoubtedly, the additional duties elucidated above have the potential to increase principals' workloads. Unfortunately, for most principals, the demands and pressure exerted upon them by the very people who are supposed to support them within the clusters, such as parents, school boards and inspectors, has increased dramatically in

recent years. Fidler and Atton (2004:229) argue that staff, pupils, parents, school boards, inspectors and even the government are the primary source of pressure in the job of any principal. For example, in the clusters parents are required to support principals with the discipline of learners, while inspectors are the backbones of principals' support on matters such as the appointment of staff in the schools within the clusters. It goes without saying that most principals are still shouldering all these responsibilities all on their own, simply because they lack support.

Fullan (2003:14, 24), writing from the United States of America, provides the following statistics to support the fact that the workload of principals has increased substantially in recent years:

- Principals' time demand to deal with parents and the community increased by 92% on average, while the time to work with students and staff increased to 83% and 79% respectively;
- Their administrative activities shot up by 88%;
- On average, 90% of all the principals confirmed increment of their workload, while only 9% of them cited decrease; and
- Therefore general perceptions of principals' effectiveness showed 61% decrease, their authority and decision-making capacity shrank by 84%, while, unfortunately for them, the assistance and support from their immediate supervisors dropped by 61% as well.

If the afore-mentioned statistics are anything to go by, principals are pressurized to bear the brunt of workload alone, which is completely against the letter and spirit of the cluster system, which advocates mutual support and collaboration in the clusters. Conversely, when workload and demand increases, it is typical of human nature that people like principals desperately seek support and understanding from the significant others to be able to cope. Goodson and Hargreaves (1996:224) point out that the studies conducted among 2 638 head teachers of both primary and secondary schools in the UK, confirm claims that occupational supports are needed for the principals in a managed way,

because workload and handling staff matters become the biggest job stressors of most cluster centre principals.

As a remedy to escape workload and other work related pressure, most principals in the cluster can resolve to quit the teaching profession through opting for early retirement rather than taking a mandatory retirement or looking for greener pastures or simply resign. Various authors are consistently unanimously in support of these arguments. According to Elmore (1990:2), the teaching force, including principals, will loose a large proportion of the current teaching force through retirement in the next decade. Cohen (1994:165-166) is of the opinion that virtually every successive year since 1980 there was a marked rise in the resignation of teaching corps which resulted in acute shortages during the period 1985-1989 in the countries such as Namibia. These trends continue unabated in the clusters, for instance towards the end of 2002, approximately 290 teachers and principals had resigned, 200 had retired (including both early and ordinary retirements) and 136 had left the profession on account of ill health. These figures excluded staff members who were either dismissed or transferred to other ministries (MBESC, 2002:45). Fullan (2003:23) makes a general prediction about the shortage of teachers by stating that more or less 80% of the current elementary and secondary school principals will have retire by 2009, of whom two thirds will be leaving towards the end of 2006! This might not, however, be true of the Namibian situation.

The intensity of the workload exerted upon the principals can also provide them with sufficient grounds to leave education. For example, principals may be persuaded either by factors that are directly related to their immediate work environment or by reasons of a more personal nature to escape the scourge of work overload. Jones and Walters (1994:217) and Fullan (2003:14) support these arguments when they identify differences between work related and personal reasons for early retirement among teachers and principals. Work related problems such as conflict with leadership (i.e. inspectors, school boards), disciplinary problems, transfers (i.e. staffing norms) and too many extra duties and personal problems such as poor health, tiredness due to work stress and desire for

less stressful work can give any principal within a cluster centre sufficient grounds to quit the education profession.

3.4.2. Workload among teachers

Teachers' work also increased by leaps and bounds during recent years. Within the clusters, most teachers become mentors to one another. For instance, when teachers converge at the cluster centres, they draw up schemes of work, plan lessons together, engage in demonstration lessons, set question papers, assess and moderate them in groups and discuss and solve problems together (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002: 11). Although Fullan and Hargreaves (1992:138) and Hargreaves and Evans (1997:4) are of the opinion that teaching will always be a draining job for teachers, the never-ending educational reform has intensified their work and added huge burdens to a job that is already excessively demanding. According to Fullan and Hargreaves (1992:2), teachers are dangerously overloaded because, apart from their daily preparations, marking of scripts of learners, dealing with over-crowded classes, attendance to afternoon studies, which include remedial teaching or compensatory education, they are also required to discharge extra-mural activities parallel with the academic activities in the afternoons. For instance, within the cluster, teachers are now expected to promote inter-cluster school sport days, debate evenings, culture days, besides their roles as coaches in different sporting codes at cluster level.

Speaking about the workload of teachers in general, Headington (2003:10) argues that teachers may have up to 200 days a year with their classes, over 1 000 interpersonal exchanges in a day, asking on average 348 questions a day, spending up to 75% of their time of trying to keep order and allow on average one second between a pupils' answer and their own next statement. These duties may increase when they work in the cluster schools.

Today, most teachers are burdened with an endless stream of workload of different natures, especially within the cluster in Namibia, but not necessarily limited to this

country alone, educators have more "social work type" of responsibilities, greater accountability to deal with a wider range of responsibilities, such as HIV/AIDS, drugs and sex education and computer training. These "new roles" compelled teachers to play the role of counsellors and school psychologist to deal with children with anti-social behaviour patterns in the cluster schools. It appears that most parents shift their parental care and responsibilities onto teachers. According to Foskett and Lumby (2003:182), some parents and families spawn problem students into educational institutions. They added that under such circumstances, the school has become a sort of surrogate parent to many teenagers as the parents simply pass their "problem" children on to schools and expect teachers to take full care of the students. In the light of these challenges facing the young people in the schools today, teachers are required by the virtue of their profession to re-evaluate their mission as educators in terms of how to deal and cope with violence, teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, drugs, alcohol, prostitution and sexually related issues (NIED, 2003:28). It is in strong contrast with the past where teachers escape making any contact with anyone, except with pupils. Now they are forced by circumstances to attend frequent meetings with parents and other stakeholders in education to inform, guide and advise (Prosser, 1999:73).

Most parents and communities, more than ever before, exert pressure on teachers, while the creation of the cluster system has led to the unprecedented demands for high quality education for their children in the cluster schools. In other words the increasing expectations by both parents and potential employers in the labour market has created ambivalence between the eagerness of the teachers to match the growing demands of the social partners in education and the increasing workload. Too often, the dichotomy between the two leads to tension, frustration and despair among teachers. Fullan and Hargreaves (1992:10) state that overload of expectations and fragmented solutions remain the number one problem for the teachers.

Workload can also affect the young and energetic teachers adversely, because their early fervour for teaching can vanish or loose faster than they join the profession, and their

dreams can be smothered by too much paperwork and excessive demands within the classrooms (Froyen, 1988:262).

Finally, as teachers, both young and old, face up to the rising increase in overload as a result of innovations in the clusters, it is important that they work and plan more with their colleagues, sharing and developing their expertise together, instead of trying to cope with the demands alone. But more than that, teaching alone is no longer enough, therefore teachers need to refine and redefine their responsibilities in order to face the challenges of education as a whole in the new millennium.

3.4.3 Workload among inspectors

Also the inspectors of schools did not escape the scourge of workload, especially during the periods prior to the formation of the cluster system in schools. In 2002, one inspector was responsible for 24 cluster schools on average in the Khorixas education region alone. By 2004, the total number of schools dropped slightly to 17 schools from the 24 schools on average per circuit inspector (Circular letter, Khorixas Region: 2002/03/06). This drop in the number of the cluster schools under the jurisdiction of a single circuit inspector in 2004 can be ascribed to the fact that the former Khorixas education region has been divided into two separate education regions, namely the Erongo and Kunene regions, which is in line with government policy of decentralization that seems to have taken faster in the education sector than any government ministry in the country (Strategic Plan, 2001-2006:13). But still, in general the situation in terms of workload of inspectors did not change much. In fact, the number of cluster schools allocated to inspectors in other educational regions in the country remains at 17 schools on average or even more per inspector, which is still too many for a single individual to handle.

If the total number of schools under the jurisdiction of the single inspector, as pointed out in the preceding paragraph, as well as the nature of their work is taken into consideration, they seem to have a daunting task. Especially in the clusters, inspectors are required to ensure proper functioning of the clusters by guiding and supporting cluster

centre principals, to coordinate activities of the circuit through the circuit management committees, to provide a link between regional offices and clusters, to distribute information and equipment amongst clusters and to facilitate the use of advisory teachers in the clusters (MBESC, 2004:9). These responsibilities are in addition to the tasks inspectors have in general, for example, according to Middlewood and Lumby (1998:178), the group of inspectors observe and conduct a wide range of activities such as observe lesson presentation of teachers, inspect a sample of pupils' work, interview staff and pupils and collect extensive documentation relating to the school, including the school development plan. Apart from these activities, inspectors inspect and monitor the administrative and general management of the school programmes and offer necessary advice to principals, management, school boards and teachers, which makes their work not only demanding, but also exhausting.

Although the skills and experience of those holding the position of circuit inspector in the cluster is often of a high standard, the mere fact that the increase of workload would in all likelihood influence their ability to attend to all the schools in the clusters is very much possible. Dittmar *et al.* (2002:4) support this view when they note that the survey done in 1995 brought to light that on average each school in Namibia was only inspected more or less every two and a half years, while some schools had never ever seen an inspector. It creates a situation where some teachers and principals are without much needed support, and therefore confronted by psychological pressure, which stretches their capabilities to the limit.

Sometimes inspectors have to blame themselves for the unnecessary workload they create within the cluster. Currently circuit inspectors intend to do everything for themselves during the visits at the cluster centres, which does not do justice to quality service delivery. Most of their responsibilities such as doing class visits, controlling subject files and continuously assessing cumulative test records of learners and implementing the curriculum can effectively be handled by subject specialists such as the advisory teachers, subject heads and relevant heads of department at cluster level. Such an approach may not only promote smart partnership between educators, which is advocated in the cluster

system, but can empower teachers to become effective. At best, inspectors can then focus on the general administration and management, supervision and monitoring of all the programmes within the clusters.

Unfortunately, things do not always take a logical sequence as one would like to see. For example, although Dittmar *et al.* (2002:22) are of the opinion that when inspectors intervene at individual cluster, they should do so in collaboration with the CCPs (Cluster Centre Principals), often in practice it does not work that way. In fact, some inspectors operate individualistically, without the involvement of the CCPs, simply because it is very difficult for these inspectors who have been accustomed to conducting so-called 'fault-finding' missions in schools for years, and whose sole purpose it was to infuse fear and dish out reprimands and warnings to teachers and principals, instead of rendering support as heralded in the cluster system, to adjust. Too often inspectors are more concerned about the smooth running of school programmes only, when visiting clusters without taking the well-being of those working at the educational institutions into consideration. But above all, what seems to be the central feature of their problems is the way some inspectors conduct inspections at cluster schools.

Most inspectors tend to become authoritarian experts – who concentrate on teaching teachers and principals about the "correct" way to do things, rather than on helping everyone in the cluster schools, including themselves, to gain insight into and views on the cluster school organisation as a whole. Such approaches employed by inspectors within the cluster schools can be counter-productive and may jeopardise the whole inspection process. For example, Hargreaves and Evans (1997:5) argue that an inspection process contributes to the deprofessionalization of teachers. For those educators who are subjected to inspection often display negative traits such as fear, anguish, anger, despair, depression, humiliation, grief, dehumanisation, reduced autonomy, loss of confidence in fully professional role and weakened commitment. If this should take place in the clusters, the ultimate purpose and objective of the cluster system as the catalyst for better management approaches within the cluster schools will suffer.

It therefore stands to reason that although the cluster system has been implemented in schools, the approaches applied by some inspectors are still out of touch, and can inhibit teachers to discharge their responsibilities well. Certainly, nobody can deny the need, value and importance of conducting regular inspections in the cluster schools, but it should be done in a friendly and honest manner, with a larger degree of circumspection, where the superseding idea is to assist and support teachers. Being an inspector does not make one an automatic expert in the field of education, but in fact, most teachers are well vested in sound teaching and learning skills and practices through their long years of experience. It is only through mutual support that inspectors can also gain experiences. Gunter (2001:83) points out that being appointed to a particular post, with a particular job description does not automatically confirm the person as having the capacity to exercise leadership in a particular context and at a particular time.

3.4.4 Workload among Advisory Teachers (ATs)

The increased of workload of Advisory Teachers (ATs) can mainly be attributed to the shortage of these personnel in the clusters. But above all, the bureaucratic processes involved in the Ministry to appoint additional staff in time causes problems. For example, according to Dittmar *et al.* (2002:38), there were 125 vacant posts for advisory teachers in 2002 in Namibia, of which 100 ATs posts were immediately needed for deployment in about 50 circuit centres throughout the country. As a result of the technicalities surrounding the appointment procedures such as time and recruitment procedures, most of the existent ATs are heavily overloaded. Too often ATs are fragmented between regions of which some regions are well supplied while other regions are confronted by an acute shortage (MBESC: 2002:2).

The afore-mentioned problems caused by the dragging of feet on the part of the Ministry to effect appointments as quickly as possible, explains the reason why the tasks of some ATs are hectic and become unbearable at times. In fact, most advisory teachers are involved in many other activities which undoubtedly limit their time needed to concentrate on their key functions, namely to assist and give advice to teachers in the

clusters to improve skills in their respective subject areas (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:22). Not only that. In any instances where a skeleton staff of the ATs do manage to render support to the teachers within the cluster schools; it would hardly have the same impact as when they are fully staffed. Therefore if the ATs are regarded as the backbone of teacher support; any shortages of this vital support personnel can rob teachers and learners from benefiting from these vitally important services.

To engage others in supportive and collegial interactions in the clusters will not only alleviate the workload of all key role players referred to above, but will promote the spirit of teamwork and the high level of efficiency in the cluster schools. Spear (1994:180) supports these views and states that real quality in education cannot be achieved unless each individual who works within an institution such as the cluster schools accepts personal responsibility for delivering the services to the learners and community at large.

Furthermore, the increase of workload among ATs is the direct result of demands for the effectiveness of clusters in the context that schools should be encouraged to re-double their effort to improve learning and quality passes for the learners. The increasing demands of parents and other stakeholders of education for good education for their children is closely linked to the evolution of workload for many ATs within the cluster centres. Tomlinson (2004:75) maintains that there is a strong focus within the teaching profession concerning the teacher workload issues, and ATs are no exception.

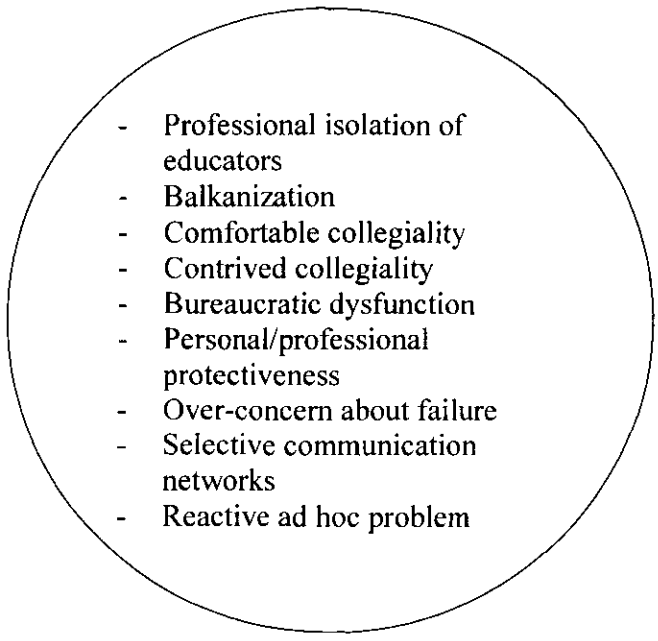
The increase in workload among ATs also raises questions as to whether the teaching profession has reached a crossroads in terms of service delivery, and whether educators can be retained in the profession in future. But having analysed the workload and the conditions under which these professionals have to labour on a daily basis, undoubtedly painted a bleak picture for the education sector as a whole in the future. For instance,the education sector may face mass exodus and an accelerated high turnover of educators annually.

However, a well designed job description and clear-cut demarcation of the boundaries of the responsibilities of teachers, principals, inspectors and advisory teachers and support within the cluster may not only unburden their workload, but make them more effective and efficient in the execution of their jobs.

3.5 FACTORS THAT IMPEDE COLLABORATION AMONG TEACHERS WITHIN THE CLUSTER

Although collaboration among teachers could naturally be a good approach, ironically, it is not always the case. In fact, spontaneous collaboration is an elusive phenomenon, which betrays the nature of human relations in the cluster school. There is a saying that where people are, so are problems, hence one needs to be cautious about over positivism concerning collaboration.

Figure: 3.1 Unsupportive model of collaboration within the cluster system



Source: Adapted from Rogers (2002:143).

Not all the interactions among teachers are automatically good; some educators may only be interested in collaboration in order to promote self-interest and objectives. Davies and

Ellison (1997:114) argue that the larger and more diverse the group is, the greater the potential for conflict and lack of collaboration, because diversity among members or groups results in differences in goals, perceptions, preferences and beliefs. Teachers of cluster schools need to guard against those who intend to promote self-interest, deviating from purpose, aims and objectives of collaboration. Fullan (1991:136) argues that several forms of collaboration and collegiality involving assistance, sharing of experiences and story-telling represents weak ties and are likely to be inconsequential and has little impact on the improvement of schools.

Collaboration within the cluster can be plagued by oscillation combinations of individualism and rebelliousness by some educators in various manifestations, namely balkanization, comfortable collaboration, contrived collegiality, bureaucratic dysfunction and centralisation of power (Fullan, 1991:136; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992:71; Kelly, 2001:120; MBESC, 1999:14; Rogers, 2002:142). Each one of the factors that impede collaboration depicted in Figure 3.1 in unsupportive model will be discussed.

3.5.1 Professional isolation of educators

Although Davies and Ellison (1997:114) argue that schools and teachers cannot develop in isolation, the paradox here is that isolation can take place within the cluster centre, which may have an adverse bearing on the effectiveness and general performances of the learners in the cluster schools. In the main, three distinct factors underlie the problems of isolation of educators, namely the nature of the teaching profession, attitudes of the teachers and stress (Macbeat, 1998:28; Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:3; Rogers, 2002:141; Van Denberghe & Hubbert, 1999:40; Froyen, 1988:260).

3.5.1.1 Nature of the teaching profession

According to Rogers (2002:141), teaching can sometimes be experienced as a lonely profession, because for the better part of the day teachers are cut off from their adult peers, the very people whose support can make a difference to their professional assurance and development. It implies that although the nature of work makes teachers social beings and despite the fact that schools are social institutions, teachers really have little time to interact with one another during school hours as well as after hours. Froyen (1988:261) is of the opinion that teachers spend most of their day with students, read papers and prepare lessons. Their so-called free periods are used to assist individual students and break times are used for playground duties, while the available time in the afternoon is set aside for coaching sport.

Sometimes teachers find it very difficult to interact with even their students, as they would love to do, as they are under tremendous time pressure to complete syllabi or the schemes of work. For example, according to Weis, Altbach, Kelly, Hugh and Saughter (1989:110), most teachers labour in isolation in the self-contained classrooms, where they put notes on the chalkboard to be copied by their students who, for the most part, are expected to absorb chunks of the state-mandated curriculum that has to be covered according to the specific time schedules.

Although the cluster system makes a great stride in terms of grouping cluster schools within the same geographical areas together, it does not necessarily address the problems of how to connect various cluster schools and teachers. For instance, it is possible that teachers belonging to different clusters may become confined to their respective cluster schools only, and that lack of cooperation across the clusters can lead to isolation among the teachers in future.

3.5.1.2 Stress

According to Van Denberghe and Hubbert (1999:36), stress is any demand, pressure, tension or force one experiences when the body responds to changes in internal environments. Education is one of the stressful professions, especially when teachers tend to work alone without any support from colleagues or principals. In other words the more isolated a teacher is, the more stressful the teaching profession becomes. But above all, most educators are often stressed because they encounter a lack of practical and moral support from their colleagues and are generally caught up in a total state of loneliness.

Teaching can be a profoundly emotional activity (Hargreaves & Evans, 1997:109). As pointed out in the preceding paragraphs, teachers in most instances are engaging in teaching situations alone in the cluster schools where they can encounter intense emotional labour on a daily basis. If they do not seek or receive support from their colleagues, teachers in the cluster schools can over-extend themselves. Fidler et al. (1997:239) argue that isolation and fragmentation among teachers can dissipate energy and enhance stress. But one must hasten to point out that stress per se is not bad at all for an individual, including educators. According to some of the leading researchers in education (Froyen, 1988:257; Cangelosi, 2004:136; Fidler & Atton, 2003:211), stress actually enables individuals to do their work as long as it is within the manageable levels to cope. Based on this argument one can distinguish between desirable stress and harmful stress which teachers encounter in their work situations in the cluster school.

Although it is clear that teacher isolation and stress can hardly be separated, still it can impact on the performances of any teacher or principal adversely, however certain stresses are inextricably linked with the nature of the job teachers are doing whether in the cluster or other schools. According to Van Denberghe and Hubbeman (1999:40), such stressful events may include the following elements:

- Core stress: includes minor stress or daily hassles, for instance, an over-head projector is not in place to be used by the teacher for the next lesson;

- Ambient stress: includes biographical life events such as transfers to another school or continuous interpersonal conflict experienced by teachers;
- Anticipatory stress: includes the unpleasant events anticipated by the teacher, such as an upcoming talk with a principal or an inspector;
- Situation stress: includes the present mood of the teachers at work place; and
- Retrospective stress: includes the way the teacher evaluates personal stressful events or experiences. In other words the teacher's emotional status, along with the mood created by the stress, is manifested by the self-presentation in aspects such as his/her voice and body language, which can potentially affect the interactions with other teachers in the cluster schools and healthy partnership in education in general.

But there are also some stressful events which are chronic, recurrent and therefore have the potential to affect the emotional and mental fabric of educators at cluster school level. At worse, stress in this category can lead to burn-out among some educators and reduce their productivity or their levels of performance in the cluster schools. For example, Fullan and Hargreaves (1992:138) are of the opinion that exhaustion may occur among teachers as a result of lonely battles, unappreciated efforts, losing ground and a growing and gnawing feeling of hopelessness. According to Fullan (1991:124) and Kyriacou (1992:194-195), teachers are constantly confronted by stressful events which are related to both internal and external factors, which include the following:

- Time pressure, too much marking, lesson presentation and administrative deadlines;
- General work overload and conflict with colleagues;
- Discipline, attendance problems, student confrontation;
- Student's lack of administration motivation, apathy, negative attitudes and misbehaviour;
- Lack of administrative support, general poor administration;
- Colleagues` negative attitudes, incompetent and poor teachers;

- Poor working conditions, lack of security, redundancy, declining enrolments which cause transfers;
- Large class size, which contributes to over crowdedness;
- Ministry's or Department's directives, policies, changing curriculum, course content; and
- Lack of public and parental support as well as general negative attitudes towards education. Thus teachers experience stress because of uncertainty over their own future, and extra work in preparing a response and coping with enquiries from parents exacerbated the strain for the head teachers (Wallace & Pocklington, 2002:29).

Based on the above-mentioned reasons, one may argue that the isolation among teaching corps and other professionals in the cluster schools will always remain an obstacle to co-operation. Hopkins *et al.* (1994:199) state that isolation of teachers is a major barrier to improvement in schools. However, at times it seems that cluster schools are deliberately organized to inhibit meaningful collaboration. For example, some schools are relatively small and offer different field of studies (i.e. social sciences, natural sciences, mother tongue etc.), which may discourage teachers from different schools to remain separated instead of collaborating. It is therefore an indictment of some education systems that many teachers do not have the opportunity to observe their colleagues at the work place and in classrooms.

3.5.1.3 Attitudes of teachers

Most educators have attitudes that reflect the opposite extreme such as abrasiveness, which can obstruct collegiality in the cluster schools. Robbins (2003:27) argues that the attitudes that people exhibit determine their actions; hence the educators within the cluster schools are no exception in this regard. Although Hopkins *et al.* (1994:44-45) are of the opinion that teachers who work with colleagues do not only dispel feelings of professional isolation, but also receive support and assist each other to enhance teaching

practices, however, quite surprisingly, most teachers isolate themselves from their colleagues deliberately and intentionally. Why?

The isolation of teachers encountered at work places can directly be attributed to attitude problems such as selfishness, self-aggrandizement and self-assertiveness. Such negative attitudes or practices among educators can lead to straining working relationships in the cluster schools. As a result some teachers can become reluctant to exchange ideas or even to share teaching aids with colleagues within the same cluster school, or with other cluster schools in the same town or rural area. Rogers (2002:141) notes that some schools have the practice of treating the classroom as a place of professional privacy.

The negative attitudes of teachers within the cluster schools can have serious implications for wider interactions and positive engagement among themselves. In this context, it can drive teachers apart, and destroy cooperation. Fullan and Hargreaves (1992:10-11) support these views when they state that the so-called social etiquette that existed among educators in the past, where assistance of colleague is perceived as an implication that one is ineffective, is basically strengthened by the negative attitudes.

The negative attitudes among teachers can also breed individualism in the cluster schools. Bowring-Carr and West-Burnham (1997:154) and Pedersen and Digby (1995:111) argue that isolation between teachers can lead to the delusion of culture of individualization which means that most teachers are content to do their main work, the classroom teaching on their own, mainly to advert negative attitudes from their colleagues. That in itself leads to isolation, loneliness and lack of practical and moral support, but it also means being able to have one's own way without interference or hindrance from a co-professional.

Hence it is quite evident that when teachers find themselves lonely in their job wittingly or unwittingly, a high risk and a heavy price to pay is always involved, but teachers pay them willingly. For example, Rogers (2002:141) notes that loneliness and isolation are high prices to pay, but teachers invite such situations to prevail, when the alternative is

seen as exposure and censure. By following the privacy rule, teachers forfeit the opportunity to display their success, but they also gain the "security" of not having to face their own failures publicly, hence avoid losing face.

It is therefore not surprising that many teachers feel ambivalent about the professional autonomy, but will not readily choose to work with fellow teachers in the cluster school or classroom because of its high risk of tension, disagreement or conflict. Such tendencies and attitudes are further limiting teachers' access to new ideas and better solutions, fail to recognize and praise success, permit incompetence to exist and persist to the detrimental effect of pupils, colleagues and the teachers themselves (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992:10-11).

Finally, the nature of professional isolation of teachers within the cluster school appears to be a deep-seated phenomenon. The architecture often supports it, the timetables at the cluster schools reinforce it, overload sustains it and the governments legitimate it (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992:12). If educators in the cluster schools cannot surmount the obstacles posed by isolation, they can become short-tempered and may lash out at learners in the classrooms or other social partners for a minor disturbance (Froyen, 1988:263). Therefore the only agents to turn around teacher isolation are none other than the educators themselves.

3.5.2 Balkanization

A balkanization or division of educators into small interest groups within the cluster schools can take place when collaboration is embraced as the vehicle for collegiality and conveniences in order to advance groups' interest only, and not to the benefit of the whole cluster schools. It simply means the segmentation of teachers in groups with whom they work most closely, spend most of the time and socialize most in the staffroom (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1992:71). Such tendencies among staff lead to the creation of cliques within the same schools or in relation to other cluster schools as well. Forming of cliques within a cluster centre or cluster schools can lead to hostility, friction and

favouritism among educators. According to Frase and Hetzel (1990:29), teachers are profoundly embedded, affected and influenced by the social matrix in which they find themselves.

The logical result of segmentation of teachers can cause the breakdown of collaboration within the cluster schools, which is detrimental to team spirit and networking. Fullan and Hargreaves (1992:72) note that like-minded teachers often cluster in subgroups that impede school-wide acceptance of particular practices and inhibit the open discussion that might eventually lead to the creation of a whole school perspective.

3.5.3 Comfortable collaboration

Naturally, collaboration between educators in the cluster schools should be relaxed and free from any kind of constraints or limiting factors. It is generally expected that comfortable collaboration might be bounded, meaning that it can be extended to classroom settings where teachers within the cluster can be involved in joint teaching. However, according to Fullan and Hargreaves (1992:74), in comfortable collaboration there is no talk of and no place for sharing, exchange of ideas, reflecting and engaging in dialogue as positive and worthwhile activity.

Thus comfortable collaboration can be false and may often be driven by attitudes and perceptions amongst educators and other stakeholders of education. It is often said that it is the attitude and not the aptitude that determines one's altitude. For instance, the perception of some educators of the other members of the community such as the parents leaves much to be desired and can become a significant stumbling block in the creation of healthy home-school collaboration. Too often teachers in the cluster schools seem to act differently when they need financial support from parents, while in reality they have wrong perceptions about parents. Day *et al.* (1998:203) concur with this view and state that most teachers view parents as adversaries, energy sappers of educators, interrogators and therefore need to be kept at a professional distance by all means.

The negative impact comfortable collaboration can have in the practical working relationship between parents and educators is best describe by Calitz, Fugelstad and Lillejord, (2002: 17). They state that in many schools teachers, principals, learners and parents can turn schools into a battleground. Each group can blame others for the breakdown of the culture of collaboration of teaching and learning and lack of respect. Under such circumstances, collaboration in general can pervade, and wild accusation between educators and learners can be the order of the day. For example, principals may claim that students and teachers are failing to do their work. Teachers, on their part, may complain that principals are both incompetent and authoritarian, while learners may accuse teachers of sexual harassment, of corporal punishment, of being unprepared for classes and of lack of caring.

Indeed, comfortable collaboration may be effective for short periods of time, but can have a flaw in the long run. For example, quite recently the researcher read the following rather unusual statements in one of South Africa's printed media: "**Our schools need responsible leaders**" and "**Dismiss shameless, uncaring teachers**" (Tshihonga & Ha-Vhangani, 2004:31). What transpired these two rather radical statements was that two educators beat up a twelve-year-old learner at a school. Without indulging in the merit of the incident, or attempting to determine the guilty or innocent party, it suffices to note that collaboration between parents and teachers or principals can turn into an emotional affair, especially when teachers take disciplinary actions against learners without involving the parents.

It can also be inferred from this incident that the normal communication channels between parents and teachers seem to be blocked, obviously due to lack of collaboration. Otherwise, whatever the wrong doing on the part of the learner which may have triggered the punitive action of teachers against the learners a moderate avenue between the two parties could have been explored, and the case of beating a learner would not have invited an uproar in the newspaper, had the teachers invited the parents of the learner concerned in advance along the existing channels to discuss problems encountered.

This specific incident therefore may underline the typical mistake some educators can make in the absence of collaboration with parents within cluster schools - , it is taking action against learners, and then expecting parents to endorse their actions automatically. Such approaches between schools within a cluster cannot only be wrong, but may be counter-productive and detrimental to the spirit of smart partnership the cluster system intends to promote in schools today.

Miller-Lachman and Taylor (1995:371) argue that in a productive school-home partnership, parents will be able to participate in decision-making in addition to their other school functions. The same authors added that one of the most important factors in schools are, and the cluster is no exception, that teachers accept the fact that parents too have expertise which they can share with teachers and principals. In fact, in the cluster misunderstandings as demonstrated by the above-mentioned incident, which may potentially impede collaboration can be avoided by using joint school boards (Dittmar *et al.*, 2002:27) which comprises both learners, parents, teachers and principals. In the cluster, all have equal voice to raise their concern or problem without fear for victimization.

Finally, educators should guard against short sighted views of comfortable collaboration, and if possible avoid it in the cluster schools, because the learners, more than anyone else, will suffer when collaborations between educators and parents fail. Bush (2003:83) maintains that the collegial collaboration depends on the attitudes of educators among themselves and in relation to the other members of the community such as the parents.

3.5.4 Contrived collegiality

A contrived collegiality is a type of collegiality that is imposed on people and where people are forced either by legislation or structural arrangement to act in a collegial manner. Contrived collegiality is administratively regulated, fixed in time and has predictable outcomes, instead of being spontaneous and based on open discussions Hargreaves (quoted by Bush & West-Burnham, 1994:40); Bush (2003:84). In fact, not all

the educators are as keen to embrace collegial approaches but remain sceptical and negative about it. Such tendencies among educators can limit collaboration and make it clumsier, cumbersome and slow, which may lead to vast amounts of paper work (Morrison, 1998:184).

The contrived collegiality can also create conflict within groups in the cluster schools, especially if the problems run into days before either being resolved or members of the staff being engaged in a constructive debate or dialogue. Morrison (1998:185) argues that contrived collegiality can produce high stress levels among teachers, if collaboration relies solely on compliances with decisions without accommodating divergent ideas.

3.5.5 Bureaucratic dysfunction

According to Fullan and Hargreaves (1992:71), a bureaucratic procedure involves clear job descriptions and programmes. Bureaucratic dysfunction means that teachers are not allowed discretion but must function in accordance with fixed job descriptions and programmes. Lunenberg and Ornstein (1991:29) point out some elements of bureaucratic dysfunction as follows:

- It causes a high degree of division of labour, which reduces the challenge and novelty of many jobs, and leads to reduced performances, absenteeism and turnover;
- It is heavily reliant on bureaucratic rules, which can cause inertia and lack of creativeness among teachers;
- It has a hierarchy of authority which has mainly a downward communication function; and
- The impersonal nature of bureaucracy leads to rigidity and control-orientation over people.

In the fast moving world, information needs to be disseminated as quickly as possible, or problems resolved as a matter of urgency, especially in the cluster schools. Following the

so-called red-tape may to slow response of teachers to problems. Instead, a system of decentralisation, which is incorporated in the cluster system, may counteract bureaucratic dysfunction. Lunenberg & Ornstein (1991:25, 56) point out that decentralisation uses human resources better, unburdens top-level administrators, ensures that decisions are made close to the firing line by personnel with technical knowledge and therefore permits more rapid response to external changes.

The bureaucracy has become the scourge of all teachers in recent times, as they are not consulted on the things that really matter to them (Prickett and Erskine-Hill, 2002:147 and Froyen, 1988:261). Understandably, most teachers complain about autocracy and the bureaucratic way cluster schools are still run. For example, within any strong bureaucratic system, a Ministry of education can make sole decisions in considerable details concerning aspects such as curricula and teaching material to be used by teachers, prescribe methods, appoint staff, describe admission requirements for students and do inspection (Bush, 2003:11).

It is not necessarily the fact that the Ministry initiates the decisions that make educators discontented, but the slow processes that are normally associated with bureaucracy cause problems in service delivery in the cluster schools. For instance, if the Ministry delays the appointment of teachers, while their services are needed as a matter of urgency, a bureaucratic process can render schools ineffective, in the sense that learners become idle without teachers for some time. According to the Presidential Report (1999), success in education is endangered by a suffocating form of bureaucracy which lacks urgency, responsibility or commitment to make decisions or solve problems immediately at the lowest possible levels (MBESC, 1999:14).

3.5.6 Centralization of power

Centralization implies the concentration of power or decision-making in one individual, as opposed to decentralization, which refers to the extent to which power is dispersed among many individuals (Brown, 1996:35). Hence both centralization and

decentralization represents opposite ends of a continuum, for example, sometimes principals within cluster schools hold unilateral sway in decision-making by side-stepping input from staff, which can cause teachers to be disdainful and even become hostile.

Furthermore, the cluster schools can suffer if some leaders such as principals and inspectors may resolve to cling on to power by employing arbitrary decisions while teachers, parents and learners are made to be mere passive implementers of such one-sided decisions. Hargreaves and Evans (1997:111) argue that when the desired outcomes of hierarchically imposed policies are not realized, policy makers blame the teachers who are responsible for implementing programmes, instead of blaming themselves for their inability to devise or pursue decentralized policy. They add that no one could be fully responsible for the results of practice when authority and responsibility are disconnected from one another. When authority is removed from school, so is accountability for learning and when authority for decision-making is far removed from practitioners and is regulatory by nature, change comes slowly, which may also happen in the cluster.

Often centralization can cause teachers and principals at educational institutions to show high degrees of resentment, frustration, aggressiveness, disloyalty, friction between staff and management, low performing learners and beleaguered parents, which can lead to general disintegration of the entire school cluster system. Obviously, centralization of power in education is pedagogically indefensible, especially in the cluster schools, where democracy is widely embraced. Fullan (2000:132) notes that fast-placed changes will require a decentralized and team-driven organizational response.

Currently, the cluster centres prove to promote broader participation of parents and learners through the joint school boards, but aspects such as the appointment of personnel are still centralized to the extent that schools wait for months until appointments are effected. Equally, through the cluster system the Ministry of Education has been decentralized in order to be transformed into a high performance organization which can focus on results and services, but its highly centralized administration contributes to lack

of urgency to do so (Strategic Plan, 2001-2006:10). Apart from that, according to Day et al. (1998:14), hierarchies and centralization pose many difficulties to those lower down the ladder of organization, namely that it creates:

- a sense of management isolation and inadequacy among the workforce;
- an increase in cynicism;
- feelings that one has, either to dominate or be dominated, and
- the feeling that new ideas can only come from top; thus centralization is indeed another example of collaboration, hence it is not surprising that most educational leaders are no longer prepared to talk about centralisation due to the negative connotation it has for collaboration among educators, as alluded to above (Heller et al., 1988:11).

Finally, it is evident that when collaboration among educators turn sour, tense and strained as a result of centralization, their performance can drop and learners may not benefit from the teaching and learning process in the cluster schools.

3.5.7 Personal and professional protectiveness

Some educators within the cluster schools find it very difficult to share their experiences with their colleagues and will rather avoid any form of contact with colleagues. Rogers (2002:142) is of the opinion that in some schools collegial support is incidental, ad hoc and only dependent on opportunity and trust.

The professional protectiveness was more prominent prior to the establishment of public schools; most schools were in the hands of individuals, and governed by either private persons or church institutions. Such individuals may not necessarily embrace the idea of collegiality or entertain collaboration, hence the attendance of students or even appointment of educators as professionals were treated selectively in order to protect the professional interests of both private and church schools (Glasman & Nevo, 1988:3).

3.5.8 Over-concern about failure

Normally ever-increasing workload coupled with evolving demand for quality education by parents and other social partners compel educators to move closer to one another, in order to avert failure, but if support and collaboration is lacking, they cannot escape the increased anxiety and hopelessness. Day *et al.* (1998:14) argue that educators, who experience lack of support from their colleagues become unable to express themselves, feel destructive and shut out and may hardly influence anyone, including their own learners. Such educators can unfortunately feel vulnerable, undervalued and become defensive as the feeling of inadequacy and disenchantment sets in (Prickett & Erskine-Hill, 2002:148).

To be over concerned about failure, can be self-defeating and can reduce self-confidence among teachers, especially those educators who fail to seek assistance or receive support. Therefore, to tie it up with the cluster system, a teacher who is very much concerned about failure can find teaching more threatening, especially when he/she is confronted with insufficient teaching aids and materials or even encounters lack of adequate subject knowledge he/she intends to impart to the learners.

3.5.9 Selective communication networks

Lack of support can also cause educators to withdraw from the mainstream because they may be afraid to be criticised when making mistakes, which can be embarrassing for them. As a measure of survival, some educators may seek recourse with their own trusted colleagues in search of self-confidence and promotion of self-efficacy.

However the social environment in which cluster schools operate is mostly influenced by a broader communication set-up, rather than the selective communication networks. Obviously the dichotomy between the two can develop a sense of unsupportive cultures among educators. For example, the selective communication in cluster schools can lead to a feeling among some educators that there is no way or need to communicate with

those at the top in education (Day *et al.*, 1998:14). For example, according to Nakamura (2000:193), some educational leaders and even teachers try to argue or defend their positions, rather than to focus on the underlying concern of all parties, which can usually jeopardize effective communication in cluster schools.

3.5.10 Reactive ad hoc problem-solving

Although Bush (1995:63) is of the opinion that the ad hoc working teams may be more effective than the standing committees, such an approach within the cluster system can be counter-productive, as it may rob teachers of an opportunity to contribute towards the solution of the problems of an institution where they are employed. Oppose to reactive ad hoc problem-solving techniques, the collective or all-inclusive problem-solving techniques can flow naturally in the cluster system, because the knowledge and disposition various people bring to the process of problem-solving, can enrich and sustain decisions make jointly.

Another flaw of the reactive problem-solving technique is that the decisions taken can be short-lived, if not rejected by the majority of the staff, simply because solution taken on an ad hoc basis may not necessarily offer best options. According to Nakamura (2000:193), or listening to or seeing the problem-solving techniques applied from another person's perspective creates an immediate understanding of the situation and can lead toa mutual perspective of the problem at the end. Although group problem-solving can be slower compared to problems being solved by a few individuals, it still is pivotal to be pro-active in problem-solving techniques by including everybody as far as possible. Spear (1994:51) argues that collective thinking and problem solving techniques need to be applied at all times. For example, if various minds contribute to the solutions to a problem, they will have a better understanding of the problems and might be more than willing to support them as they were party to the decisions right from beginning to end.

Finally, an unsupportive culture within the cluster system can provide a glimpse into the difficulties associated with fostering and sustaining significant support between educators

in cluster schools. This is particularly the case when collegial support is taken for granted instead of working very hard to maintain it.

In conclusion, the well-known phrase, "united we stand, divided we fall" seems to be relevant to the cluster system, and can serve as food for thought in the future interactions between educators in the cluster schools. Therefore within the cluster system, educational leaders as well as the teachers of schools need to develop synergies within the entire cluster centre so that work intensity does not become a hindrance to collaboration and mutual support, but become an impetus for them.

3.6 GENERAL PROBLEMS RELATED TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CLUSTERING OF SCHOOLS IN OTHER COUNTRIES

The cluster system concept is not limited to Namibia, but has been applied in other countries such as Philadelphia, the Netherlands, England and Wales, to mention but a few (Dittmar *et al.* 2002:36). But wherever the cluster system was established, it has revealed certain weaknesses of which the following are the key problems, as identified by various authors like Potter and Williams (1994:142), Ribchester and Edwards (1998:281), Newberg (1995:284); Hofman (1999:187).

3.6.1. It may contribute to the social and professional isolation of teachers, especially for those teachers who find themselves in differing clusters

The professional isolation of educators can take place if teachers and principals of different school clusters fail to network with their counterparts outside the boundaries of their own cluster centre, especially if such clusters are situated in the remote areas. In such instances, isolation of teachers can also lead to the division of clusters between the rural and town clusters, which may potentially impede inter-cluster cooperation. Macbeat (1998:28) and Dittmar *et al.* (2002:33) are of the opinion that professional isolation does not give teaching corps enough exposure to be challenged by colleagues to reflect on their basic assumptions and values, hence teachers are not only less able to cope with

changes and challenges in education, but are less able to help their pupils. One of the educators summarized the isolation between cluster schools as follows: "In the past we were divided as schools, but now we are isolated as clusters (Potter & Williams, 1994:151).

Thus the cluster schools and teachers can be isolated as networking can become difficult due to problems cause by distance. As a result of this, some educators may be unwilling to accept posts in the isolated cluster schools. When this happens, the very objectives of the creation of the cluster system can be undermined.

3.6.2. Cost of providing expensive teaching equipment and material to cluster schools can increase

The utilization of shared resources by cluster schools at the cluster centre may decrease the life span of equipment such as duplicating machines. The cost to replace such crucial educational tools may be high or not even budgeted for by governments. Such conditions may not only create differences among various cluster centres, but can affect teachers' skills and teaching practices, while learners' performances in cluster schools may be influenced adversely. But above all, expensive teaching equipment can bring disparity within the cluster schools, as teachers may not be exposed to similar teaching aids and equipments such as computers and internet facilities.

3.6.3. Effectiveness of clusters can be reduced if governments cease investment in the cluster system

The cluster activities can flounder because cluster schools depend heavily on governments for financial support during their teething stages and can be hard hit in terms of service delivery to learners if central governments withdraw funds. Lack of adequate funds can paralyze the organisational and administrative capacities of cluster centres and turn these institutions into another vapid organisational fad (Newberg,

1995:714). Lack of adequate funds may cause the cluster system to collapse, and eventually disappear from the face of Namibia.

3.6.4. Large cluster groups can cause administrative problems

When cluster groupings are large, it can cause administrative problems in terms of the arrangements for meetings and transportation of teachers and principals in cases where cluster schools are far from each other. According to Ribchester and Edwards (1998:288) and Potter and Williams (1994:147), the large distances principals and teachers have to travel either to attend meetings or to utilize shared resources at the cluster centre often make cluster centres inaccessible for educators. In this context, it can be very difficult for some cluster schools to achieve parity of input and benefit from the cluster system.

Another problem caused by large clusters is clearly demonstrated by disparity in number of cluster schools in countries such as Wales, where the smallest cluster groups comprises four schools, while largest clusters contained 15 school (Potter & Williams, 1994:147). Obviously, the CCPs (Cluster Centre Principals) of the largest cluster may encounter increased work pressure due to their additional commitment caused by cluster organisation, as oppose to their colleagues of the smaller cluster schools. Thus, it can be argued that although the problems of large clusters may not necessarily be insurmountable, it can be quite burdensome. Bush (1995:148) argues that in large institutions like secondary schools logical arrangements are usually complex and difficult, when comparing with smaller schools. This contention is equally applicable where a cluster is composed of many schools.

3.6.5. Fear of loss of autonomy

Inter-school liaison within clusters can be impeded by the fear of some cluster schools that they may loose autonomy. Such cluster schools may encounter difficulty balancing the interest of own schools against the common interest and needs of the cluster schools (Ribchester & Edwards, 1998:98).

As pointed out in this chapter, prior to the formation of the school cluster system, most schools were basically on their own because they feared loosing their " freedom" which seemed to have been entrenched in their school cultures for years. This view is in stark contrast with what Kelly (2001:117) says when he states that joint ventures and strategic alliance between schools become more common in education. Thus, the introduction of the cluster system did not automatically remove the fear of loosing autonomy among many cluster schools.

3.6.7. Conclusion

The challenges confronting the Namibian education system of which some have emanated from the creation of the cluster system were identified and deliberated upon in this chapter. The significance of this exercise is twofold: firstly, to make educational leaders, planners and teachers aware of the potential limitations encountered through the implementation of the cluster system in schools, and secondly, to indicate that problems are not necessarily bad, but are good yardsticks to determine the effectiveness of any system. Gaynor (1998:3) notes that managers and administrators have the special responsibility to know about organizational problems to ensure that something is done about it. It implies that good intentions and ideas such as the cluster system can only be transformed into actions and implemented if the root causes of the problems are understood and eradicated through diagnostically assessing the problems.

Although the cluster centres have the fundamental role of knitting all the cluster schools together, the effective and successful implementation of the cluster system cannot happen overnight, but given time, and through the necessary support from all the stakeholders of education, implementation of the cluster system may be successful. This implies that educational leaders and teachers should consistently embark upon taking corrective measures in close cooperation with stakeholders and in the true spirit of partnership in order to effect the implementation of any system, including the cluster system.

Sarason (1990:99) states that the process of implementation requires an understanding of settings in which these ideas have to taken root. Running the cluster system programme in Namibia could be an onerous and time-consuming activity, but through careful and meticulous planning, the implementation process can be continued, despite problems.

Finally, despite the challenges illuminated in this chapter, the cluster system proves to be a viable alternative system which has the potential to develop and transcend in effective management of all cluster schools in Namibia.

The next chapter deals with the empirical research.

CHAPTER 4
EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapters, a brief exposition of the study was made through a theoretical and relevant literature review, for instance in Chapter 1 the general evaluation of cluster system as well as research questions were outlined. Then the nature and scope of the cluster system was dealt with in Chapter 2, while in Chapter 3 the problems related to the implementation of the cluster system were discussed. In this chapter the purpose of the empirical research is espoused, the research instrument and design of the questionnaire are given and the interpretation of data is subjected to close scrutiny.

4.2 THE PURPOSE OF THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The purpose of this study can be summarized in three broad aims namely:

- to establish the nature and scope of the cluster system;
- to empirically determine the advantages of the cluster system, and
- to determine empirically the problems encountered in the implementation of clustering.

4.3 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design proceeded as follows:

4.3.1 Literature study

The literature study was conducted using the following descriptors:
clustering, effective management, cluster centres, cluster centre principal, collaboration, teamwork, network, partnership, integration and shared decision-making.

The purpose of the literature study was to establish the nature of the cluster system in general, and in particular as it was implemented in Namibia in 1996.

4.3.2 Instrumentation

Instrumentation consisted of a questionnaire derived from the literature study. An explanation of the rationale for the choice of a questionnaire, the questionnaire as a research instrument (its characteristics, advantages disadvantages and its construction) come under discussion in the ensuing paragraphs.

4.3.2.1. Rationale for the choice of the questionnaire

For purposes of this study, a structured questionnaire was selected as the research tool. The rationale for the use of the questionnaire is that the structured questionnaire has the advantage that it requires the respondents to respond only to statements and questions put to them by the researcher, which can save time, especially when data is needed from busy respondents like principals (Hittleman & Simon, 2002: 106).

Furthermore, the questionnaire was deemed to be the only suitable instrument because the researcher aimed at collecting as much data as possible over a wide area on investigation in order to gain an idea of the nature of the cluster system as it was implemented in Namibia. The study therefore serves as a baseline survey that would inform any further research on the topic. The data so collected would enable the researcher to generalise findings to the entire target population.

Additionally, the questionnaire was specifically suitable in this research for the following reasons:

- The area of investigation was too large and the population was sparse so that some of the areas were so remote that respondents could only be reached by mailed questionnaires.

- Financial constraints such as high costs of transport made it impossible for the researcher to approach each individual respondent
- Time factor. The questionnaire was distributed in January, which is normally the time when most principals are engaged in dealing with pressing needs at schools such as finalization of appointments of additional staff, subject panel, staff and parent meetings and athletics. Obviously, there was always a threat that the questionnaire would not be returned either due to time pressure or lack of interest among the respondents.
- Sparseness of the population. The fear of non-return of the questionnaire due to the dispersed nature of the population forced the researcher to collect the completed questionnaire himself and this caused delays in the collection of the completed questionnaires.
- Some respondents did not complete the questionnaires. On following up the noin-respondents, the researcher found that some schools were manned by either acting-headmaster or HOD, who were either hesitant to complete it or left it for the headmaster to complete when he/she returned.
-

4.3.2.2 The questionnaire as the research tool

Although a questionnaire has certain flaws (4.3.2.5), it seems to have specific benefits for researchers too. For instance, through the questionnaire any researcher can collect data concerning what he/she intends to find out. Anderson (1998:170) postulates that while the questionnaire can be a time-consuming exercise, it remains a good way to unlock what one needs to know and may largely facilitate the data analysis of the research. Studies (Anderson, 1998:170; Best & Kahn, 1993:230; Walker, 1990:91; Charles, 1988:206); Hittleman & Simon, 2002:106) show that the questionnaire today has become one of the most popular educational research tools. Thus through the use of the structured questionnaire, a researcher can reach as many respondents as possible in order to accumulate required data.

Various aspects of questionnaires, namely characteristics, advantages and disadvantages, construction of the questionnaire and the format will be briefly illuminated in the following synopsis.

4.3.2.3 Characteristics of the questionnaire

A well-designed questionnaire can be a useful data collecting tool and can boost the reliability of the final analysis of research findings. A good questionnaire should subscribe to the following basic traits (Best & Kahn, 1993:242; Bell, 1993:82; Beyers, 2001:77; Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:204; McColl, Jacoby & Thomas, 2001:271):

- should be short, relevant and attractive;
- should be arranged from easy to difficult;
- should be laid out in an organized fashion;
- should be clearly formulated and in a logical order;
- should be factual and objective;
- should invite interest of respondents; and
- questions should correlate with research problems

4.3.2.4 Advantages of the questionnaire

Anderson (1998:177) argues that an attractive, well laid out and easy to use questionnaire is taken more seriously by the respondents with the possibility of high response rate, than one which has been thrown together haphazardly with a minimum of thought. Various authors (Best & Kahn, 1993:230; Brynard & Hanekom, 1997:38-39; Gay & Airasian, 2003:283; Walker, 1990:91) outline the advantages of the questionnaire as follows:

- cost of sampling respondents over a wide geographical area can be low;
- time required to collect the data is much less;
- it can save time and energy;
- respondents have time to think about answers to the questions;

- is inexpensive, confidential, can easily be scored and standardized;
- is most useful when multiple interviews which deal with large samples are involved, which could have been difficult otherwise; and
- it can provide researcher with the easy accumulation of data.

4.3.2.5 Disadvantages of the questionnaire

Despite the advantages of the questionnaire enlisted in the preceding paragraph, it also reveals some weaknesses (Anderson, 1998:168; Keeves, 1997:422). Some of these flaws can be summarized as below:

- A lengthy questionnaire can invite low reaction from respondents;
- Respondents may show little interest;
- Respondents can be turned off by a sloppy, crowded and misspelled questionnaire
- Little can be done to rectify the misunderstandings of the questions after respondents have returned the questionnaire;
- Questionnaire does not necessarily give one an indication of how much information the respondents have;
- Respondent fatigue can set in: respondents can be tired and can lead to careless or inaccurate responses; and
- A tired respondent can at best return an incomplete questionnaire, and at worst a questionnaire may not be returned at all.

Finally, the afore-mentioned disadvantages did not affect the return of completed questionnaires and this was probably why a high response rate of 92% was achieved (cf. Table 4.1).

4.3.2.6 Construction of the questionnaire

Although the compilation of a questionnaire seems to be a simple and relatively easy process, the first-hand experience of the researcher of setting the questionnaire proved to

be a rather painstaking, exhausting and time-consuming exercise. In fact, much planning, energy and commitment is required for designing a quality questionnaire. It is therefore necessary to think through any questionnaire before finalizing it.

The questionnaire items in this research were carefully constructed, so as to meet the aims and objectives of the empirical research outlined in 4.2. Thus the exposition of the questionnaire of this study is outlined as follows:

1. Section A (Questions 1.1. to 1.9) comprises biographical and general information.

2. Section B (Questions 1 to 5) deals with the advantages of the cluster system.

3. Section C (Questions 1 to 15) contains aspects with regard to the activities of the cluster system.

4. Section D (Questions 1 to 16) deals with the problems of clustering.

4.3.2.7. Pilot study of the questionnaire

Anderson (1998:179) argues that a questionnaire needs to be tested prior to the distribution in order to locate any ambiguities and eliminate them. Gay and Airasian (2003:308) support this view when they state that the pre-testing of the questionnaire serves to eradicate deficiencies or irrelevant items and to ensure that what a questionnaire intends to measure is realized at the end.

In conformity with the afore-mentioned requirements by Anderson (1998) and Gay and Airasian (2003), the pilot questionnaire was first discussed with the experts such as the supervisor for this specific study, as well as a statistician at the Statistical Consultation Services of the North-West University for their input in terms of suggestions and amendments of the draft questionnaire. Also, the researcher requested five principals who were randomly selected in regions other than the Erongo Education District, because they

did not form part of respondents involved in the research, to respond to the questionnaire. Their inputs and responses were useful in pointing out uncertainties, unclear question items and reasonability of completing the questionnaire

4.3.3 POPULATION AND SAMPLES

The population involved in the research was as follows:

4.3 3.1. Total population

According to Spata (2003:13), population in research refers to a set of all the people the researcher is interested in knowing about. The total population consisted of all principals (N=1 500) in the 13 Education Regions of Namibia. The main reason for selecting the principals is that head teachers are the prime implementers of government policies at school level, and are often well acquainted with the ins and outs of any education system. Thus their vast experiences and knowledge in school organization, administration and implementation of policies such as the cluster system, make them a suitable population for this study.

4.3.3.2 Sample

The sample is a subset of the population which is selected from the total population to participate in the research project (Spata, 2003:13). From the total population of principals in Namibia, a convenient sample of all the principals (N= 60) in the Erongo Education Region was taken. It is a convenience sample as it consists only of the principals in the Erongo Education Region. This places the limitation that the results of the research will not be generalized to the entire population of principals in Namibia. The sample is small and deemed representative of the population in the Erongo Education Region alone, and by no means of all thirteen Educational Regions in the country. Table 4.1 below clearly illustrates that from the sixty selected respondents only fifty-five eventually participated.

Table 4.1 Response rate

Questionnaires distributed	Received	Percentage
60	55	92%

From Table 4.1 it can be seen that the response rate exceeds 70%, which conforms to the acceptable response rate (Anderson, 1990:167; Xaba, 1999:173), from which generalizations can be made for the target population.

4.4. ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

4.4.1 Approval from the Erongo Education Region

The Erongo Education Region was requested to give permission for administering and distributing the questionnaire to the target population in the Region (Appendix A). The necessary permission was granted (Appendix B), and the questionnaire (Appendix D) was then distributed to the target population.

4.4.2 Distribution of the questionnaire

According to Kirsten (2000: 94; Neuman (2000: 235), a postal questionnaire is regarded as the best possible way to attain information, as it enables researchers to collect data from most respondents. Similarly, the researcher distributed final questionnaires per mail, because most principals in the Erongo Education Region are dispersed across the entire region (cf. 3.2.3) and delivery by hand could not only have been a time-consuming exercise, but also costly. A covering letter was enclosed (Appendix C) which was aimed at orientating the respondents to the questionnaire and to assure them of the confidentiality and anonymity in the whole data collection process.

4.4.3 Collection of the questionnaire

Due to long distances between various schools in the Erongo Education Region, it was not possible for the researcher to collect questionnaires personally. Although the response rate was generally good, the long distances between educational institutions slowed down the collecting process, which compelled the researcher to make follow-up interventions through sending fax messages, making telephonic calls and personal contacts where it was possible to do so. This approach by the researcher seems to be congruent with the advice given by Leedy and Omrod (2001:206) when they state that one can increase response rate by sending follow-up reminders through letters and telephonic interventions. Finally, though the initial response rate was slow, patience paid off, as 92% of the respondents returned questionnaires (Table 4.1).

4.5. INTERPRETATION AND DATA ANALYSIS

This section presents the interpretation and analysis of the data collected from respondents..

4.5.1. INTRODUCTION

Leedy and Ormrod (2001: 212) argue that inexperienced researchers are often so embroiled with the collection, ordering and presentation of data that they forget the stage of interpreting data. The stage of analysing and interpreting data is very important in showing how the research problem and sub-problems were resolved Thus the collected data will be presented below in the form of pie-charts, histograms and tables and then analysed and interpreted using frequencies and percentages The analysis was done with the SAS programme (SAS Institute INC, 2005).

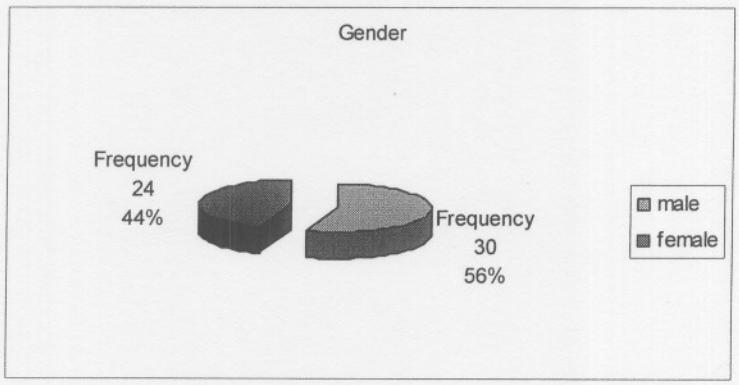
4.5.2. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION (SECTION A)

Section A of the questionnaire focuses on the respondents' biographical information which includes aspects such as gender, age, current level of post, experience as principal, number of schools in the cluster, type of school, number of learners and staff. Information

in these aspects will provide the researcher with handy information regarding the principals in Erongo Education Region. The responses to Section A of the questionnaire are summarized in different charts below.

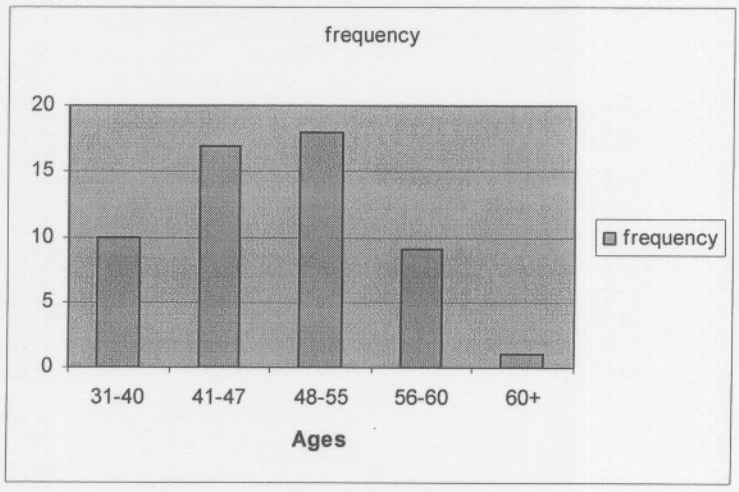
Table 4.2: Biographical and other information of the respondents

Gender of respondents (Question item A1)



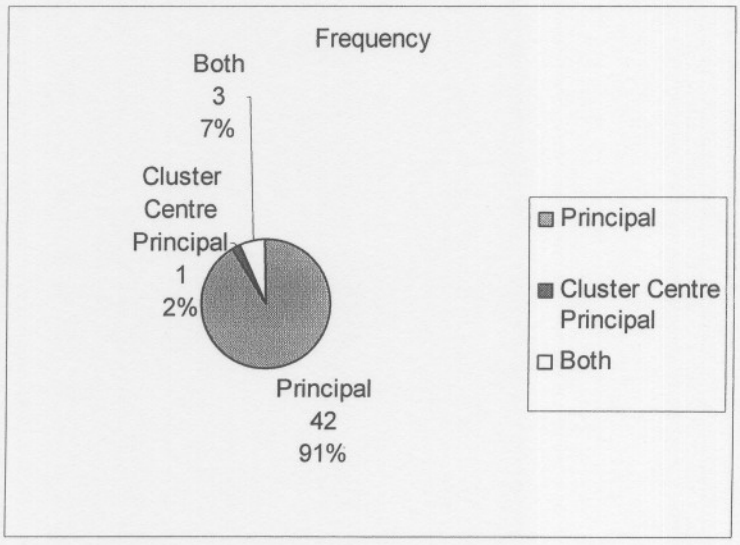
The results show that there are more male (55.6%) than female (44.4%) principals among the respondents. The literature study (cf. 2.6.4) revealed that managerial positions were dominated by males while women were acutely under-represented. However, a close analysis of the result may imply that women are gradually progressing into the positions of leadership and decision-making in the Erongo Region Education

Age in Years (Question Item A2)



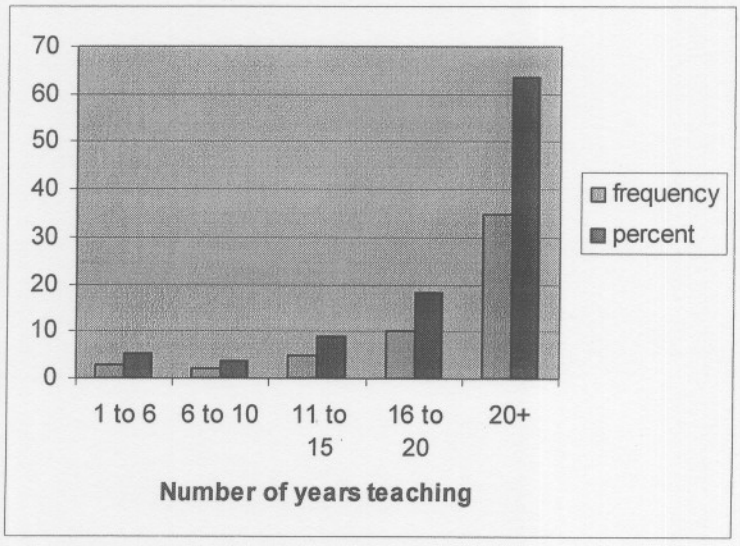
The results indicate that there seems to be a fair representation of old and young principals in terms of ages in the schools. Thirty comma nine percent of the principals are between ages 41 and 47, while 32.7% of the principals are between ages 48 and 55. The data denotes that the majority of the principals are older than 41 years, which is consistent with the general expectation that managerial positions are normally obtained through experience gained over years. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that there is a favourable balance between old principals (48-55) and younger ones (31-47), which implies that succession planning can be successfully implemented. This also implies that the cluster system can continue to be implemented in the area of investigation.

A3 Post Level (Question Item A3)



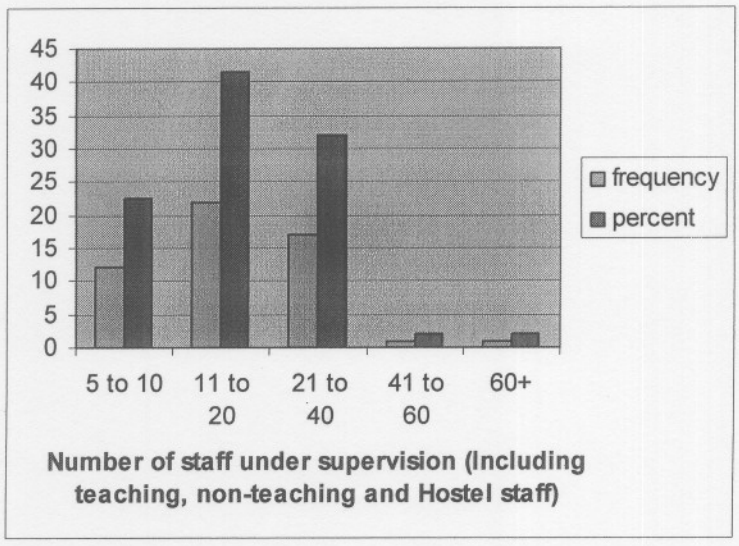
The results reveal that 91.3% are regular principals. It was disclosed in the literature study (cf. 2.4.1) that cluster centre principals are ordinary principals at his/her regular school. It was not quite clear whether the sole respondent (2%) who indicated to be a cluster centre principals only, did understand the question well, because only a principal of a regular school can be appointed to become a cluster centre principal, hence it is safe to assume that he/she could be an ordinary principal too. The results may suggest that the workload of some principals, with explicit reference to cluster centre principals, may increase due to the dual role, as they are now responsible for both cluster centres and schools, including his/her own school (cf.2.3.2.3.).**A4 Number of Teaching Years**

Number of years in teaching (Question Item A4)



The data denotes that most respondents are experienced principals. For example, according to the data of the total population, 63.6% are principals with more than 20 years' teaching experience. The significance of the results lies in the fact that it underscores the literature study (cf 2.3.3.3.), namely that often experience is a good yardstick and prerequisite for being promoted in a managerial position. Thus the results may suggest that most principals in Erongo Education Region are fairly experienced and could be well acquainted with the education system, including the cluster system in the country.

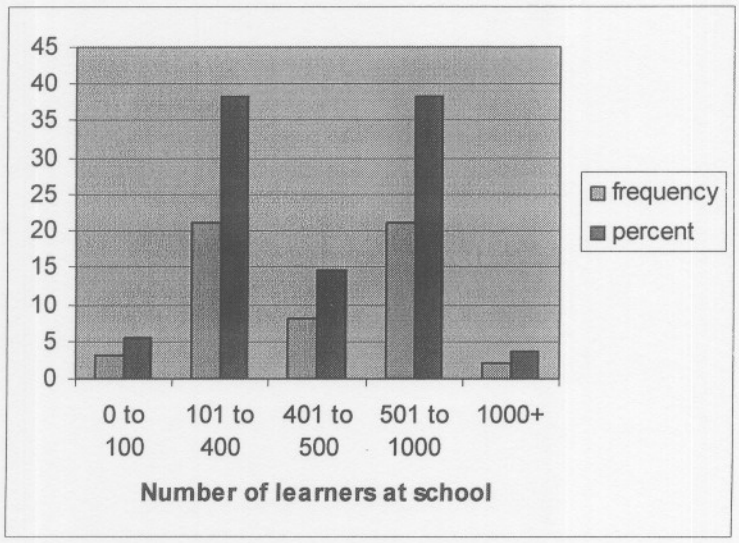
A5 Number of staff under supervision (Including teaching, non-teaching and hostel staff) (Question Item A)



The results revealed that the majority of the respondents (41.5%) in Erongo Education Region have 11-20 staff members who are directly responsible for school community inclusive of teaching, non-teaching and hostel staff. A significant number of principals (32.1%) are responsible for staff between 21-40 persons, while 22.6% of the principals cater for staff less than 11 people.

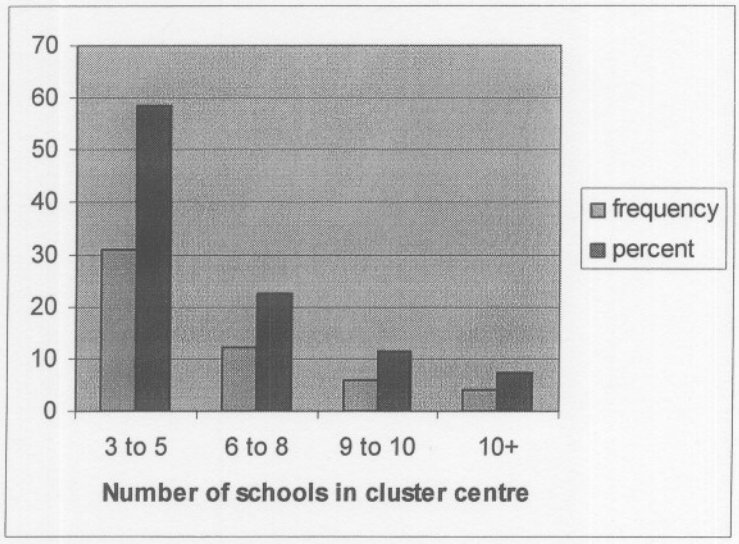
Based on the result in Question A5, one can argue that, if the number of learners are added to the burdening administrative and other daily responsibilities as principals, the implementation of the cluster system may increase workload and other diversified duties requiring expertise in many areas of administration which, of course, principals do not have (cf.2.3.2.2.).

A6 Number of Learners in School (Question Item A6)



The results show an equal representation of learners between 101-400 (38.18%) and 501-1000 (38.18%) respectively. The literature study (cf.2.3.2.2.) revealed that most schools in Namibia are small in terms of numbers of learners and teaching staff, which could be a true reflection of a relatively small population (1.9 million people) in the country. For instance, only 2 (3.64%) of the respondents who indicated number of learners in excess of 1000 could bear testimony thereof. The significance of the cluster system lies in the fact that individual small schools can network with each other in order to exchange expertise and share resources in the interest of mutual benefit.

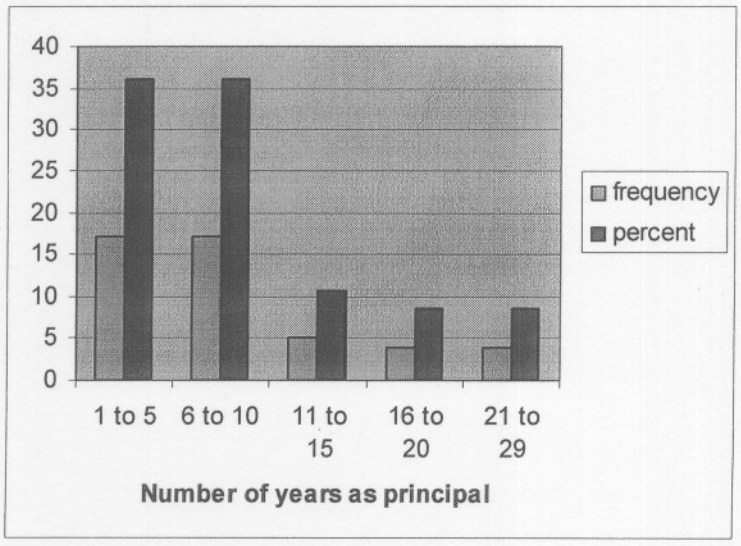
A7 Number of Schools in the cluster (Question Item A7)



The results reveal that the majority of the respondents are in charge of a very small number of schools, because 58.5% have clusters with 3-5 schools, while 22.6% of the respondents have 6-8 schools in the cluster. Very few of the respondents (11.3%) and (7.55%) indicated that a cluster consists of 9-10 and more than 10 schools respectively. This means that most cluster centre principals have an average of 5-7 schools. It was disclosed in the literature study (cf.1.2) that clusters should consist of 5-7 schools. -

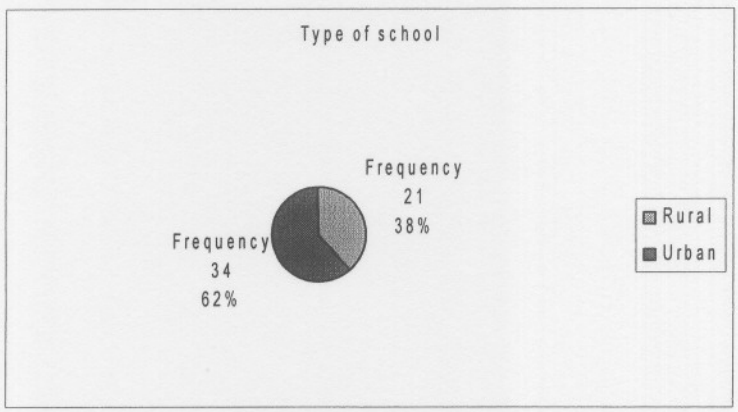
The result may suggest that a small cluster has the advantage that the logistical problems such as transport for teachers to the centre for subject meetings, or training purpose, as well as administrative and organisational problems (i.e. joint cluster examination papers, micro-curriculum planning, budgeting etc.) can be dealt with quickly and effectively, as oppose to a large cluster.

A8 Number of Years as Principal (Question Item A8)



The results reveal that 72% of the respondents, namely 34, have less than11 years of experience as principals, while 10.6% of the respondents have experience as principals, which varies between 11 and 15. Another group of respondents (8.5%) have 16-20 and 21-29 years of experience as school principals respectively. Judging from the small number of principals with more than 16-29 years of experience, one may deduct that the majority of principals in the Erongo Education Region have less than 11 years of experience as principals, and could be relatively inexperienced.

A 9 Type of School (Question Item A9)



The results show that 34 out of 55 schools are urban schools (62% are urban schools, while 38.2% are rural schools). It was disclosed in the literature study (cf. 3.3.1.) that most schools in Namibia are rural schools. In this region there is a discrepancy between the results and the literature study. However, it is important to note that this study focused on one of the 13 Education Regions (Erongo Education Region) only, therefore it can be reasonably assumed that the result could be different if the similar research study is conducted in other remaining Education Regions.

4.5.3. RESPONDENTS' RANKING OF THE ADVANTAGES OF THE CLUSTER SYSTEM (SECTION B)

In this section the respondents were required to rank the advantages of the cluster system in order of importance. That is, to place a 1 (one) beside the advantages they consider to be most important, a 2 (two) beside the next important advantage and so forth until all 5 advantages have been ranked. Through this exercise, the researcher wished to establish the extent to which the cluster system was appreciated in schools.

Table 4.3 Advantages of Cluster system

Item Question

Cluster System...		1		2		3		4		5	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
B1	....assists teachers to pool ideas and expertise	13	23.6	17	30.9	14	25.5	8	14.6	3	5.5
B2	....promotes collaboration between schools	14	25.5	10	18.2	16	29.1	8	14.6	7	12.7
B3	...increases quality of education because schools can share resources	22	40.7	14	25.9	7	13.0	9	15.7	2	3.7
B4	....enables teachers to plan and prepare lessons together.	2	3.6	9	16.4	9	16.4	16	29.1	19	34.6
B5	....enables learners to benefit through collective learning and peer coaching.	0	0	3	5.5	11	20	15	27.3	26	47.3

B1- assists teachers to pool ideas and expertise: Rank 2

The results revealed that large numbers of the respondents (30.91) rank this item second. According to the literature study (cf 2.3.3.2), schools are fostered in closer working relationships, which enables teachers to pool from divergent resources and skills for mutual benefit. Thus the result revealed one of the fundamental aspects of the cluster system, namely that where teachers can engage in peer coaching and mentoring in order to enhance their management skills and expertise.

The results could indicate that principals and teachers can now have the opportunity to learn new skills and techniques from one another, contrary to the past during which each school propelled on its own (cf.2.3.2.1).

B2 – promotes collaboration between schools: Rank 3

The results show that 29.09% of the respondents indicated that collaboration between schools is the third most important advantage of the cluster system. The literature study (cf 3.5) disclosed that collaboration remains the cornerstone of every activity that takes place in the cluster system. The high ranking of this item may suggest that the existence of unsupportive culture of collaboration identified in the literature review (cf.3.5) may not have an adverse impact on the cluster system.

B3 – increases quality of education because schools can share resources: Rank 1

A large number of the respondents (40.7%) indicated that the quality of education can increase if schools share resources, while 25.9% indicated it to be the second important advantage. The result proves to be congruent with the literature study (cf. 2.3.3.4), where it was indicated that sharing of resources and the resultant increase of quality of education in schools is the crux of the cluster system. Thus the result may imply that principals and teachers can promote quality passes in their respective schools in order to give parents value for their investment in education through the cluster system.

B4 – enables teachers to plan and prepare lessons together: Rank 4

The result revealed that the majority of the respondents (64%) ranked this item fourth or fifth. It was disclosed in the literature study (cf. 2.7.2,) that planning and preparation is very critical in the cluster system. The results indicate that teachers and principals think it is more important to pool ideas and expertise and collaborate and increase quality of education within the cluster, than to plan and prepare lessons together. The logical

inferences one can make is that large distances between schools or lack of financial resources most probably could have an influence on the responses (cf. 3.3.3).

B5 – Enables learners to benefit through collective learning and peer coaching: Rank 5

The results show that the majority of the respondents (74%) indicated that the least or second least important aspect is that learners do benefit from collective learning and peer coaching in the cluster system. This result indicates that the respondents considered the least important advantage of the cluster system to be that learners are afforded the opportunity of collective learning through peer coaching.

The result may suggest that learners benefit less from interacting with fellow learners where they can have the opportunity to develop independent ideas and make genuine choices about their studies in a healthy competitive environment with their counterparts.

4.5.4. RESPONSES OF PRINCIPALS WITH REGARD TO ACTIVITIES WITHIN THE CLUSTER SYSTEM (SECTION C)

In this section, respondents were asked to indicate either their agreement or disagreement by making a cross on the applicable number, which represents the following:

1. Strongly disagree
2. Disagree
3. Agree
4. Strongly agree.

The responses given will enable the researcher to establish the perception of principals concerning the cluster system in the Erongo Education Region.

TABLE 4.4: Responses of principals concerning the activities of the cluster system

Item Question

The Cluster Systems enables....		1		2		3		4	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
C1	...Teachers to discuss and draw up schemes of work together	1	1.8	8	14.6	34	61.8	12	21.8
C2	...Learners and teachers to engage in educational debate	2	3.8	18	34.0	32	60.4	1	1.9
C3	...Learners to be exposed to the same standards by writing common papers	1	1.8	3	5.5	18	32.7	33	60
C4	...Teachers to apply a learner-centred approach in classroom	0	0	8	15.4	30	57.7	14	26.9
C5	...Teachers and principals to formulate micro-curriculum policy	2	3.8	11	20.8	31	58.5	9	17.0
C6	...Collective planning of the budget for a group of schools	9	16.7	15	27.8	26	48.2	4	7.4
C7	...Teachers and principals to have regular training through workshops and seminars.	2	3.7	7	13.0	24	44.4	21	38.9
C8	...Teachers to sharpen their teaching skills through inter-school visits	3	5.5	6	10.9	3	60	13	23.6
C9	...Teachers and principals to interact professionally	2	3.6	2	3.6	26	47.3	25	45.5
C10	...Teachers and principals to collaborate and provide mutual support	1	1	3	5.6	28	51.9	22	40.7

C11	...Teachers to engage in staff development activities and life-long learning	1	1.9	7	13.0	26	48.2	20	37.4
C12	...Teachers to develop a sense of unity in purpose through teamwork	1	1.8	3	5.5	25	45.5	26	47.3
C13	...Teachers and principals to resolve differences in a non-confrontational manner	4	7.3	5	9.1	38	69.1	8	14.6
C14	....Teachers and principals to value each other as colleagues	2	3.6	4	7.3	28	50.9	21	38.2
C15	...Teachers and principals to share in decision-making concerning their schools	3	5.5	6	10.9	28	50.9	18	32

C1 Teacher to discuss and draw up schemes of work together

Eighty-four percent (84%) of the respondents indicated that they agree or strongly agree that the cluster system enables teachers to draw up the schemes of work together. It was disclosed in the literature study (cf. 2.3.3.2.) that the drawing of common schemes of work is one of the advantages of the cluster system. The results may suggest that the majority of principals are interested in working together, and in exchanging ideas by discussing the common schemes of work in order to harmonize and ensure uniformity within the cluster.

C2 Learners and teachers to engage in educational debate

The results revealed that the majority of the respondents (62%) agree or strongly agree that the cluster system enables learners and teachers to engage in educational debate. The result may suggest that learners are consciously encouraged by their teachers to articulate their wishes and aspiration without fear of being victimized in the cluster.

It is also interesting to note that a significant number of the respondents (33.96%) disagree that cluster system enables teachers to engage learners in educational debate. This result may reveal certain shortcomings encountered in the cluster system. That is, that some teachers are probably still struggling to accept that learners deserve to be given a fair chance in order to engage in educational debate with their educators.

C3 Learners to be exposed to the same standards by writing common papers

An overwhelming majority of the respondents (92.7%) agree or strongly agree that the cluster system enables learners to be exposed to the same examination standards by writing common papers. The result is consistent with the literature study (cf. 2.3.3.2). It is a striking result that probably indicates that learners and teachers from small and isolated rural schools and those from larger school can now be able to be exposed to similar standards within the cluster system. For example, naturally parents and learners perceive schools in urban areas as superior in terms of provision of good and quality education. However, in the cluster system opportunities are created to bring equity in education.

C4 Teachers to apply learner-centred approach in the classroom

The majority of the respondents (85%) agree and strongly agree with the statement. The literature study (cf. 4.3.3.1) revealed that the majority of principals are committed administrators and implementers of government policies in schools. It seems that the cluster system enables most principals in Erongo Education Region to apply the policy of a learner-centred approach in schools in letter and spirit.

The results may suggest that a learner-centred approach is central to the teaching and learning process in Namibia, and can therefore be regarded as a vehicle to enhance both analytical skills and independent thinking among learners in all the schools.

C5 Teachers and principals to formulate micro-curriculum policy

It was disclosed in the literature review (cf. 2.7.1. par1) that the formulation of micro-curriculum planning is one of the models teachers use to discuss in the cluster. The result shows that the majority of the respondents (76%) agree or strongly agree that, within the cluster system, teachers and principals are able to formulate micro-curriculum policy. It seems that the Ministry of Education allows teachers to discuss micro-curriculum at lower levels in accordance with their needs through the cluster system.

C6 Collective planning of the budget for a group of schools

The results show that the majority of the respondents (56%) agree or strongly agree that clustering enables collective planning of budget between groups of schools. According to the literature study (cf. 2. 7.6, par.1), one of the key elements of the cluster system is to determine income and expenses of cluster activities. The result may suggest that the majority of principals are willing to share their resources to the benefit of all the schools within the cluster.

C7 Teachers and principals to have regular training through workshops and seminars

The literature review (cf. 2.7.5. par) revealed that teachers and principals appreciate joint training opportunities offered within the cluster centres. The result indicated that majority of the respondents (83%) agree or strongly agree that the cluster system enables teachers to have regular training through workshops and seminars. This result may probably imply that training is critical within the cluster system, as teachers can converge at the cluster centres in groups where support staff such as advisory teachers, inspectors, and other personnel can meet and conduct training to a group of people simultaneously. For example, in the past, the inspectors and advisory staff used to visit individual schools to conduct in-service training workshops; a practice which was not cost effective, as the Ministry did not always have adequate funds.

C8 Teachers to sharpen their teaching skills through inter-school visits

The results show that the majority of the respondents (84%) agree or strongly agree that the cluster system enables teachers to sharpen their teaching skills through inter-school visits. This implies that the majority of the principals nourish the cluster system as a significant pillar for social interactive interventions, which is in line with the literature study. According to the literature study (cf. 2.3.3.3), clustering facilitates inter-school visits in order to enhance good management practices and sharpens teaching skills. Thus the result could be an indication that through inter-school visits teachers may develop fine arts of good teaching practices from one another.

C9 Teachers and principals to interact professionally

The results revealed that the majority of the respondents (93 %) agree or strongly agree that teachers interact professionally in the cluster. This is congruent with the literature study (cf. 2.6.1), where it was indicated that interactions between principals and teachers within the cluster system are fundamentally important. It seems that this result confirms the view that it is only through interactions that professional people such as principals and teachers discuss ideas, build on each others' expertise, use each other as sounding boards and work creatively as communities of learners in the cluster system.

The result may suggest that the cluster system is the mainstay to facilitate professional interactions between teachers and principals in schools.

C10 Teachers and principals to collaborate and provide mutual support to each other

The result shows that an overwhelming majority of the respondents (93%) agree or strongly agree that the cluster system enables teachers and principals to collaborate and provide mutual support to each other in cluster. The literature study (cf. 2..3.3.3.)

revealed that teachers and principals benefit richly through collaboration and mutual support within the cluster system. It seems that most principals and teachers probably realize the fact that, individually, they may fight a lost battle in education, and that collaboration and mutual support through the cluster system could be a viable alternative to succeed in the teaching profession.

C11 Teachers to engage in staff development activities and life-long learning

The literature study (cf. 2.6.2.) disclosed that the staff development processes within the cluster enables teachers, principals, learners and parents to engage intentionally and deliberately in life-long learning activities. The results reveal that majority of the respondents (85%), agree or strongly agree that the cluster system enables teachers to engage in staff development activities and lifelong learning. The result may suggest that teachers are given freedom to discuss their own staff development programmes in the cluster system.

C12 Teachers to develop a sense of unity in purpose through teamwork

The results show that the majority of the respondents (93%) agree or strongly agree that the cluster system enables teachers to develop a sense of unity in purpose through teamwork. It was disclosed in the literature study (cf. 2.6.8,) that, within the cluster system, principals and teachers regard each other as colleagues, which boosts unity and teamwork. The results may imply that the vast majority of principals agree that within the cluster system, most activities led themselves to teamwork and unity, which can inspire them to focus on common objectives as colleagues..

C13 Teachers and principals to resolve differences in a non-confrontational manner

The literature study (cf. 2.6.9) revealed that non-confrontational problem-solving techniques are pursued in the cluster system. According to the results, the majority of the respondents (84%) agree or strongly agree that teachers and principals resolve differences

in a non-confrontational manner. This result may imply that in the cluster system teachers regard each other as equal partners and observe conflict as an opportunity to appreciate divergent ideas, which enables them to resolve problems synergistic in an amicable fashion.

C14 Teachers and principals to value each other as colleagues

Eighty-nine percent (89%) of the respondents agree or strongly agree that the cluster system enables teachers to value each other as colleagues, which implies thatthe majority of principals and teachers are consciously valuing each other in the cluster. It was disclosed in the literature review (cf. 2.6.8) that in the cluster system professional and ethical values are sine qua non. The results may suggest that most principals and teachers are nurturers of a value system, which means that mutual respect, integrity and dignity of each person in the cluster is kept in high esteem.

C15 Teachers and principals to share in decision-making concerning their schools

The results show that the majority of the respondents (83%) agree or strongly agree that the cluster system enables teachers and principals to share in decision-making in schools. According to the literature study (cf. 1.2), there is a paradigm shift from an autocratic to a democratic decision-making process within the cluster system. The result may suggest that principals are prone to involve the entire staff complement, parents and learners in the decision-making process at schools in the cluster.

4.5.5. RESPONSES OF PRINCIPALS WITH REGARD TO THE PROBLEMS OF THE CLUSTER SYSTEM (SECTION D)

In this section, respondents were expected to indicate problems they encounter in school clustering as reflected in Table 4.5. The responses will enable the researcher to determine problems that are huge and those that are not huge in the implementation of the school cluster system in Namibia, with special reference to the Erongo Education Region.

Through the responses to this section, it will be possible to arrange the problems in a hierarchical order for purposes of prioritizing actions to solve them.

TABLE 4.5: Responses of principals about problems of the cluster system

Item	Question	**Not a problem**		**Little problem**		**Problem**		**Great problem**	
		1		2		3		4	
D1	Lack of transport to carry out cluster activities (e.g. attending meetings)	F 9	% 16.4	F 8	% 14.5	F 14	% 25.5	F 24	% 43.6
D2	Lack of the financial resources for the Cluster	3	5.7	4	7.6	23	43.4	23	43.4
D3	Lack of basic facilities (telephone, fax and internet facilities)	15	27.3	11	20	20	36.4	9	16.4
D4	Lack of professionally suitable meeting venue	33	60	10	18.2	9	16.4	3	5.5
D5	Shortages of additional personnel (teaching, institution, secretaries).	6	11.1	19	35.2	15	27.8	14	25.9
D6	Increased workload among teachers and principals	9	16.2	12	21.8	17	30.9	17	30.9
D7	Large distances between schools and regional offices.	14	25.5	10	18.2	17	30.9	14	25.5
D8	Work related stress	5	9.1	20	36.4	14	25.5	16	29.1
D9	Negative attitude towards the cluster system	22	40.7	14	25.9	10	18.5	8	14.8
D10	Division of educators into	25	47.2	17	32.1	8	15.2	3	5.7

	small interest groups and cliques within the cluster								
D11	Lack of collaboration and supportive culture among teachers	15	27.3	19	34.6	12	21.8	9	16.4
D12	Unwillingness of Regional Offices to devolve power to the cluster centres	29	52.7	9	16.4	14	25.5	3	5.5
D13	Professional protectiveness due to the unwillingness of principals and teachers to share experiences, knowledge, skills and resources	26	47.3	18	32.7	8	14.6	3	5.5
D14	Limited access to the cluster centres in rural areas	14	26.9	7	13.5	16	30.8	15	28.9
D15	Using reactive problem-solving within the cluster	20	36.4	16	29.1	14	25.5	5	9.1
D16	Teachers electing to communicate only with those supporting them rather than with the extended group.	20	36.4	15	27.3	16	29.1	4	7.3

D1 Lack of transport to carry out cluster activities

Table 4.5 shows that 69% of the respondents indicated that they encounter problems or huge problems respectively with lack of transport. This is a significant result as it is congruent with the literature study (cf. 3.3.2) which revealed that the shortage of transport does not only hamper networking between schools and the cluster, but impedes the effective functioning of the support staff. The result may be ascribed to the lack of unreliable vehicles which could hamper visits by support staff such as circuit inspectors to the schools and cluster centres.

D2 Lack of the financial resources for the cluster

The results reveal that an overwhelming majority of the respondents (86.8%) who answered this question item either have problems or huge problems with lack of financial resources for the cluster. The result is congruent with the literature study (cf. 3.3.3) which indicated that the lack of financial resources remains one of the single biggest barriers to the provision of quality education in the cluster. The results may suggest that if governments or the social partner do not invest in school clustering, lack of financial resources can cause the cluster system to collapse and disappear completely.

D3 Lack of basic facilities

According to the results in Table 4.5, the majority of the respondents (53%) indicated that they encounter problems or huge problems with lack of basic facilities such as telephones, fax and internet facilities. The result seems to be congruent with the literature study (cf. 3.3.4.) where it was indicated that the lack of basic facilities has the potential to undermine the Namibian government's philosophy of ensuring equity, access, democracy and quality education in all educational institutions in the country. From the result it can be deduced that lack of basic amenities can undermine the provision of quality education in the cluster, while causing teachers and learners, especially in rural areas, to lose the opportunity of being exposed to modern technology.

It should be noted that 27.3% of the respondents indicated that they do not have problems with lack of basic facilities. This result may imply that the respondents could be from well-off urban or private schools, where facilities such as fax machine, internet facilities are regarded as basic tools to enhance education. Thus the result seems to point out the dichotomy or discrepancy that is prevalent between rural and urban schools in terms of facilities in the Erongo Education Region.

D4 Lack of a professionally suitable meeting venue

Table 4.5 shows that the majority of the respondents (60%) have no problems and 18% have few problems with a suitable meeting venue in the cluster. The literature study (3.3.4) revealed that cluster centres should have facilities like a proper meeting place. There seems to be a slight discrepancy between the literature study and the results. Thus the result may suggest that the quality of the meeting place is not the superseding idea among most principals, but the activity that takes place in the cluster.

D5 Shortage of additional personnel

The literature study (3. 4. 4.) revealed that the shortage of additional personnel can be attributed to the bureaucratic process involved in the Ministry of Education to appoint staff. According to the results, the majority of the respondents (54%) to this question item encounter problems or huge problems with the shortage of additional personnel. The result may suggest that provision of additional personnel to enhance the cluster system could probably be in short supply in most schools in the Erongo Education Region.

D6 Increased workload among teachers and principals

According to the results, the majority of the respondents (62%) encounter problems or huge problems in the cluster with increased workload among principals and teachers. The result concurs with the literature study (cf. 3.4.2.) which revealed that the workload of principals and teachers increased with leaps and bounds with the implementation of the cluster system, because in some schools principals are now full-time class teachers, secretaries and principals, all at the same time. This is a critical result, and could be an indication that principals and teachers are terribly overloaded, which is probably exacerbated by the application of staffing norms in all government schools in Namibia.

D7 Large distance between schools and regional offices

The result show that the majority of the respondents (56%) experience problems or huge problems with long distances between schools and Regional Offices (ROs). The results underscore the literature study (cf. 3.2.3, par. 6) which indicated that Namibia is a huge country and large distances between schools and Regional offices pose constant threats to network various role-players in education. The results may suggest that the principals of schools in remote rural areas may suffer as they may have access to resource centres such as ROs and cluster centres, due to long distances.

D8 Work related stress

The literature study (3.5.1.2 par. 1) revealed that education is one of the stressful professions, especially when teachers use to work alone without any support from colleagues. According to the results, the majority of respondents (55%) encounter problems or huge problems with the work related stress. This result could be expected, given the findings that headship already is a draining and stressful job, especially in the absence of support or isolation from colleagues which could exacerbate their situation further. The result may suggest that when work overload culminates, it dissipates energy and enhances stress among principals.

D9 Negative attitudes towards the cluster system

The results show that large numbers of the respondents (44%) encounter no problems with negative attitude concerning the cluster system, while 33% either have problems or huge problems. It is indeed a very surprising result, as most of the educators are known for their negative attitude towards any changes of which the cluster system could be one such a change. For example, it was disclosed in the literature review (cf. 3.4.1.3) that most educators have attitudes that reflect the opposite extreme, such as abrasiveness, which can obstruct collegiality in the cluster.

The remaining respondents (33.%) indicated that the principals experience negative attitudes towards the cluster system, one can infer that the cluster system is not necessarily without problems as indicated in the literature study (cf. 3.5). This is congruent with the literature study where it is indicated that negative attitudes towardsthe cluster system could advance individualism among educators (cf. 3.5.1.3).

D10 Division of educators into small interest groups and cliques within the cluster

The results show that the majority of the respondents (79%) indicated that they encounter no or few problems with division of educators into small interest groups or cliques in the cluster. This result could be an indication that most principals in the Erongo Education Region prefer to work in wider groups, irrespective of gender, cultural, ethnic or social status. One can deduce from the result that most principals realize the fact that division between educators within the cluster can lead to professional isolation of educators, as indicated in the literature study (cf. 3.5).

However, the results seem to be inconsistent with the literature study (cf. 3.5.2) which indicated that some principals invite division of educators into interest groups and cliques willingly in order to advance own cause, instead of the interest of all in the cluster. The small number of respondents (21%) who indicated that they either have problems or huge problems respectively could bear testimony of this fact.

D11 Lack of collaboration and supportive culture among teachers

The results show that a number of the respondents (38%) are of the opinion that lack of collaboration and supportive culture among teachers can pose problemsor huge problems in the cluster, while 27% of the respondents seem not to encounter any problems at all.

It was disclosed in the literature study (cf. 3.5) that spontaneous collaboration within the cluster is elusive, as it is based on promotion of own interest and objectives only. The

result may suggest that collaboration and supportive culture need to be nurtured and developed as it does not come spontaneously, but through dialogue.

With reference to 27% of the respondents who indicated that they encounter no problems with lack of collaborative and unsupportive culture among teachers in the cluster, one may infer that only a few principals grasp the essence of collaboration in the cluster, which is congruent with the literature study (cf. 3.5.3).

D12 Unwillingness of Regional Offices to devolve power to the cluster centres

The results show that the majority of the respondents (53%) do not experience problems with the devolution of power from the Regional offices to the cluster centre, while 31% indicated that they experience problems or huge problems with it. The literature study (cf. 3.5.3.)revealed that the cluster system can be regarded as the mainstay of decentralization in education in Namibia, despite the geographically dispersed nature of the country. The result may suggest that the devolution of power to the lowest level could be an indication that the decentralization policy of the Namibian government has taken root in the education sector, especially in the Erongo Education Region. However, 30.9% of the respondents experience problems with the unwillingness of Regional offices to devolve power to the cluster centres. This result may suggest that the devolution of power to the cluster centres, with special reference to the Erongo Education Region, can be impeded by the slow process of decentralization which, according to the literature study (cf. 3.4.6), cannot take place faster due to the dispersed nature of the country.

D13 Lack of collaboration and supportive culture among teachers

It was disclosed in the literature review (cf. 3.5) that collaboration within the cluster can be plagued by combinations of individualism and rebelliousness by some educators. The results reveal that the majority of the respondents (80%) encounter no or few problems with professional protectiveness due to the unwillingness of principals and teachers to share experiences, knowledge and skills. The result may suggest that most principals

realize that in the cluster, the most profitable way to break professional isolation is to interact with colleagues who trust and respect each other.

D14 Limited access to cluster centres in rural areas

According to the results, the majority of the respondents (60%) in Table 4.5 either have problems or huge problems with limited access to cluster centres in rural areas. The literature study (cf. 3.1.3) revealed that long distances can have far-reaching implications for the cluster schools in terms of services delivery and limited access to resource centres such as the TRCs or cluster centres. The result may suggest that the majority of the principals do not benefit directly from the activities that take place within the cluster centres due to limited access. Thus the results could be a clear illustration of the major challenges facing the Namibian education system in general and the Erongo Education Region in particular: that is to make cluster centres accessible to all schools in order to bring equity between rural and urban schools.

The result also indicated that 27% of the respondents experience no problems with the access to the cluster centre. It means that the principals who find themselves in this category could either be from urban areas, or their schools may be closer to the cluster centre or their schools could probably be financially sound, and can therefore afford transport to reach cluster centres.

D15 Reactive ad hoc problem-solving

An overwhelming majority of the respondents (66%), indicated having no or few problem using their active problem-solving technique within the cluster centre. The result may suggest that some principals probably use the accepted way of solving problems by employing impromptu problem-solving tactics through open discussions and interventions, as revealed by the literature study (cf. 3.4.10).

Thirty-five percent (35%) of the respondents in Table 4.5 also indicated that they either encounter problems or huge problems with using the reactive problem-solving technique within the cluster. According to the literature study (cf. 3.5.10), the reactive problem-solving technique can be short-lived because solutions taken on an ad hoc basis may not necessarily offer best options. It seems that reactive problem-solving as opposed to a non-confrontational resolution of differences in the cluster may cause problems, probably because principals do not often listen to the ideas and viewpoints of the staff (cf. 3.5.10).

D16 Teachers electing to communicate only with those supporting them rather than with the extended group.

The results show that the majority of the respondents (64.%), seem to either have no or few problems with teachers This result is consistent with the literature study (cf. 3.2.1) which indicated that the communication process prospers and flourishes in the cluster as it enhances broader communication.

The result in Table 4.5 also indicated that a significant number of the respondents (36.%) encounter problems or huge problems with teachers electing to communicate with those supporting them rather than with the extended group. According to the literature study (cf. 3.5. 9), lack of support can cause some educators to seek recourse by their trusted colleagues in search for self-confidence and promotion of self-efficacy. The result may suggest that principals and teachers can sever relations from colleagues once they realise that their contributions are ignored or not appreciated.

4.5.6. APPLICATION OF THE MEAN SCORE PROCEDURE

The data was further subjected to the mean score technique. It means that mean scores are arranged in descending rank order (from the highest mean score to the lowest). This technique was applied on Sections C and D. The value of this technique lies therein that it assists in identifying the most important and least important factors of the phenomenon.

4.5.6.1 MEAN SCORE RANKINGS OF RESPONSES OF PRINCIPALS TO THE ADVANTAGES OF THE CLUSTER SYSTEM (SECTION B)

TABLE 4.6: Mean score rankings of responses to advantages of the cluster system

Item	Question	Mean	Std	Ranking
	Cluster systems.....			
B3	... increase quality of education because school can share resources.	2.1	1.240	1
B1	....assist teachers to pool ideas and expertise	2.4	1.168	2
B2	....promote collaboration between schools.	2.7	1.342	3
B4	....enable teachers to plan and prepare lessons together.	3.7	1.205	4
B5	....enable learners to benefit through collective learning and peer coaching.	4.1	0.938	5

Table 4.6.1 shows that in a range of 2.1 to 2.7, items B3 and B5 are ranked highest and lowest respectively, which is consistent with the findings in Table 4.3. The high ranking of item B3 may suggest that both material and human resources can be shared in order to enhance quality of education within the cluster system. It seems that most schools and principals have moved away from historical individualistic approaches and are embracing collective approaches in the cluster system (cf.2.5.1).

The result may suggest that some of the respondents in the Erongo Education Region function in isolation, as they are unable to converge at the cluster centre to prepare and plan together. This result most probably clarifies the reason for the on-going debate about the disparity in terms of quality results between schools in the same cluster or between urban and rural schools in the same geographic area (2.5.1).

Finally, item B5 is ranked lowest of all the items in Table 4.6.. According to the literature study (2.7.1.5. par.2), learners can only overcome learning problems easier, when they talk together, share their thoughts, ideas and discoveries with others in order to complete individual tasks, which appears not to be taking place within the cluster system in the Erongo Education Region if the ranking of item B5 is anything to go by. The result may

suggest that subsequent collective learning and peer coaching is probably not regarded as a priority in the cluster system. Thus as opposed to the rankings of item C4 of Table 4.4, the result may be regarded as a setback for the learner-centred approach advocated in the Namibian education system.

4.5.6.2. Mean score ranking of the responses of the principals on the activities of the cluster system (Section C)

TABLE 4.7: Mean score rankings of responses to activities of the cluster system.

Item	Question	Mean	Std	Ranking
	Cluster systems enable....			
C3	...learners to be exposed to the same examination standards by writing common papers.	3.50	0.690	1
C12	...teachers to develop a sense of unity in purpose through teamwork.	3.38	0.680	2
C9	...teachers and principals to interact professionally.	3.34	0.725	3
C10	...teachers and principals to collaborate and provide mutual support to each other.	3.31	0.667	4
C14	...teachers and principals to value each other as colleagues.	3.23	0.744	5
C11	...teachers to engage in staff development activities and life-long learning.	3.20	0.736	6
C7	...teachers and principals to have regular training through workshops and seminars.	3.18	0.802	7
C4	...teachers to apply a learner-centred approach in the classroom.	3.11	0.646	8
C15	...teachers and principals to share in decision-making concerning their school.	3.10	0.809	9
C1	...teachers to discuss and draw up schemes of work together.	3.03	0.665	10
C8	...teachers to sharpen their teaching skills through inter-school visits.	3.01	0.757	11
C13	...teachers and principals to resolved differences in a non-confrontational manner	2.90	0.727	12
C5	...teachers and principals to formulate micro-curriculum policy.	2.88	0.724	13
C2	...learners and teachers to engage in educational debate.	2.60	0.599	14
C6	...collective planning of a budget for a group of schools	2.46	0.862	15

The high ranking of C3 implies that the majority of the respondents in the Erongo Education Region agree that the cluster system enables learners to be exposed to the same examination standards by writing common papers. This is a striking result which can have a far-reaching effect on the performance of schools in the Erongo Education Region. For example, according to the literature (cf. 2.5.1), historically each school was responsible for setting and writing of examinations, which led to the application of different standards in schools. It seems that such practices are becoming something of the past with the dawn of the cluster system, if the high ranking of C3 is anything to go by. The fact that item C3 is ranked high demonstrates the fact that within the cluster system teachers and principals at grassroots level support one another, which is tied in well with government policy of decentralization to the Regions, and subsequently to the cluster centres and schools.

It is also clear from the results that item C6 is ranked lowest of all the items in Table 4.7. The low ranking of item C6 could be an indication that collective planning of budget does not take place among schools in the cluster system. Again, it may have adverse consequences for the schools, which can probably include the following:

- Lack of unity among schools as opposed to item C12, which is ranked second in Table 4.7;
- The result could be an indication that some individual schools are still operating in isolation, despite the implementation of the cluster system;
- It would mean that, within the cluster system, some schools still fear loss of autonomy; and
- That individual schools still pursue own interest instead of harnessing mutual benefit promoted by the cluster system, as indicated in the literature study (cf. 2.3.1). All these factors seem to be counter-productive against the spirit of the cluster system, and could impede any progress in schools.

Finally, out of 15 items included in Table 4.7 of the questionnaire, 11 items fall within the range of 3.0 to 3.5 (agreement pole), while only 4 items are in the range of 2.0 to 2.9

(disagreement or neutrality). In the main, the low ranking of items (C2, 5, C6 and C13) respectively, could mean that the cluster system is not perfect, but equally the high rankings of the respondents regarding most aspects of the cluster system stress the fact that its strengths outweigh its weaknesses by far. It can therefore be deduced that most principals in the Erongo Education Region ranked the cluster system very high, which implies that the system can probably be regarded as a cornerstone in the Namibian Education Sector, and can make significant contributions in the lives of many schools in the country.

4.5.6.3. MEAN SCORE RANKINGS OF RESPONSES OF PRINCIPALS ON THE PROBLEMS OF THE CLUSTER SYSTEM (SECTION D)

TABLE 4.8: Mean score rankings of responses to problems of the cluster system

Item	Question	Mean	Std	Ranking
D2	Lack of financial resources for the Cluster.	3.24	0.829	1
D1	Lack of transport to carry out cluster activities (e.g. attending meetings).	2.96	0.121	2
D6	Increasing workload among teachers and principals.	2.76	1.070	3
D8	Work related stress.	2.74	0.985	4
D5	Shortages of additional personnel (teaching, institution, secretaries).	2.68	0.987	5
D14	Limited access to cluster centres in rural areas.	2.61	1.174	6
D7	Large distances between schools and regional offices.	2.56	1.134	7
D3	Lack of basic facilities (telephones, fax and internet facilities).	2.41	1.066	8
D11	Lack of collaboration and support culture among teachers.	2.27	1.044	9
D9	Negative attitude towards the cluster system.	2.074	1.096	10
D15	Using reactive problem-solving within the cluster.	2.072	0.997	11
D16	Teachers electing to communicate only with those supporting them rather than wider group.	2.072	0.978	11
D12	Unwillingness of regional offices to devolve power to the cluster centre.	1.836	0.995	12
D10	Division of educators into small interest groups and cliques with the cluster.	1.792	0.906	13

D13	Professional protectiveness due to the unwillingness of principals and teachers to share experiences, knowledge, skills and resources.	1.781	0.896	14
D4	Lack of a professionally suitable meeting venue.	1.672	0.943	15

Out of 16 items incorporated in this Section of the questionnaire, 7 items fall within the range of 2.5-3.2 (problems), 9 items are in the range of 1.5-2.4 (no to little problems). The overall results in Table 4.6.3 indicated that items D2 and D4 were ranked highest and lowest of all the items in terms of mean score respectively

The highest ranking of item D2 means that the majority of the principals encounter problems with lack of resources within the cluster, which is in line with the literature study (cf. 3.3.3). This result may suggest that lack of financial resources may most probably pose a serious threat to sustain the cluster system in the long run in the Erongo Education Region in particular, and in the country in general, which of course has detrimental effects on schools. For example, lack of financial resources could render clusters ineffective, which may lead to poor service delivery to schools.

Item D4 is rated lowest, which may imply that the meeting venue is not the superseding concern to most principals, but that the activity that takes place within the cluster matters.

4.5.7. THE TWO-WAY FREQUENCY PROCEDURE FOR BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS (SECTION A) AND ACTIVITIES OF THE CLUSTER SYSTEM (SECTION B)

The two–way frequency in Tables 4.9 and 4.10 was used to demonstrate the relationship between two different variables by using percentages and the phi coefficient (w), that can be used as a measure of the effect of relationship. For purposes of this study the two variables refer to the relationships between gender of principals and their ranking of the cluster system and also rural and urban schools and their ranking of the cluster system. Through this exercise, the researcher intended to establish whether relationship between

the two variables is practically significant. Ellis and Steyn (2003) provided the following guidelines for interpretation:

- small effect: w = 0.1 ,
- medium effect: w = 0.3 and
- large effect: w = 0.5 .

A relationship with w >0.5 is considered as practically significant.

4.5.7.1. The two-way frequency procedure according to gender (Section A) and responses to advantages of the cluster system (section B)

TABLE 4.9: Relationship between responses of male and female principals

Item A1 by B1

Gender	Item	Percentages					Phi Coefficient
	B1	1	2	3	4	5	
Male	30	13.33%	30.00%	26.67%	23.33%	6.67%	0.331
Female	24	33.33%	33.33%	25.00%	4.17%	4.17%	

Item A1 by B2

Gender	Item	Percentages					Phi Coefficient
	B2	1	2	3	4	5	
Male	30	16.67%	16.67%	36.67%	10.00%	20.00%	0.3828
Female	24	37.50%	20.83%	16.67%	20.83%	4.17%	

Item A1 by B3

Gender	Item	Percentages					Phi Coefficient
	B3	1	2	3	4	5	
Male	30	51.72%	24.14%	6.90%	13.79%	3.45%	0.2662
Female	24	29.17%	29.17%	20.83%	16.67%	4.17%	

Item A1 by B4

Gender	Item	Percentages					Phi Coefficient
	B4	1	2	3	4	5	
Male	30	6.67%	16.67%	16.67%	33.33%	26.67%	0.2532
Female	24	0.00%	12.50%	16.67%	25.00%	45.83%	

Item A1 by B5

Gender	Item	Percentages					Phi Coefficient
	B5	1	2	3	4	5	
Male	30		6.67%	16.67%	23.33%	53.33%	0.1829
Female	24		4.17%	25.00%	33.33%	37.50%	

Item B1 Gender by assisting teachers to pool ideas and expertise

According to Table 4.8.1, the majority of female respondents (66%) ranked item B1 as the most or second most important aspects of the cluster system. The result may suggest that the majority of female principals, as opposed to their male respondents (43%), ranked it as most or second most important aspect. The relationship between male and female principals and their ranking of the assisting of teachers to pool ideas might be of practical significance (phi coefficient = 0. 3).

Item B2 Gender, by promoting collaboration between schools

In Table 4.8.1, the majority of female respondents (58%) ranked item B2 as first or second, while only 33% of the males also ranked the same item first or second. The results may suggest that within the cluster system woman treasure promotion of collaboration between schools more than their male counterparts in terms of rankings. The resulting relationship between male and female and the ranking of collaboration between schools is (phi coefficient = 0.3), indicating a medium effect size.

Item B3 Gender, by increasing quality of education because schools can share resources

The result revealed that majority of male respondents (52%) in Table 4.8.1 ranked this item first, while only 29% of female respondents ranked the same item as first. This result may suggest that the majority of male principals benefit from sharing resources between schools, which is not surprising, their dominance in managerial positions taken into consideration. Thus the relationship between male and female respondents, and their ranking of increasing quality of education because schools can share resources, phi coefficient (p = 0,26), might be practically significant.

Item B4 Gender, by enabling teachers to plan and prepare lessons together

According to the results in Table 4.8.1, the majority of females (46%) ranked item B4 as least important advantage of the cluster system, while only 27% of males ranked the same aspect least important. The resultant relationship between male and female and their ranking of enabling teachers to plan and prepare lessons together is (phi coefficient = 0.25), which is small to medium. However the result may suggest that in practice more male than female teachers think it is important to plan and prepare lessons together among themselves.

Item B5 Gender by enabling learners to benefit through collective learning and peer coaching

There was no practical significant relationship between gender and enabling learners to benefit through collective learning and peer coaching. Thus phi coefficient = 0.18.

4.5.7.2. Two-way frequency according to location of the school (Section A) and responses to advantages of the cluster system (section B)

TABLE 4.10: Relationship between location of the school and advantages of the cluster system

Item A9 by B1

Type of School	Item	Frequencies					Phi Coefficient
	B1	1	2	3	4	5	
Rural	21	9.52%	33.33%	28.57%	19.05%	9.53%	0.288
Urban	34	32.35%	29.41%	23.53%	11.76%	2.94%	

Item A9 by B2

Type of School	Item	Percentages					Phi Coefficient
	B2	1	2	3	4	5	
Rural	21	28.57%	14.29%	33.33%	19.05%	4.76%	0.2252
Urban	34	23.53%	20.59%	26.47%	11.76%	17.65%	

Item A9 by B3

Type of School	Item	Percentages					Phi Coefficient
	B3	1	2	3	4	5	
Rural	21	42.86%	19.05%	9.52%	19.05%	0.00%	0.2802
Urban	34	39.39%	30.30%	15.15%	15.15%	0.00%	

Item A9 by B4

Type of School	Item	Percentages					Phi Coefficient
	B4	1	2	3	4	5	
Rural	21	9.52%	23.81%	9.52%	23.81%	33.33%	0.3219
Urban	34	0.00%	11.76%	20.59%	32.35%	35.29%	

Item A9 by B5

Type of School	Item	Percentages					Phi Coefficient
	B5	1	2	3	4	5	
Rural	21		4.76%	33.33%	19.05%	42.86%	0.2708
Urban	34		5.88%	11.76%	32.35%	50.00%	

Item B1 School, by assisting teachers to pool ideas and expertise.

The result shows that the majority of the respondents of urban schools (62%) ranked this item first or second. Only 43% of the respondents of rural schools ranked the same item first or second. This result may suggest that long distances between rural schools and the resource centres, like Teachers' Resource Centres or even Cluster Centres, could impede teachers to pool ideas and expertise. Thus the relationship between location of schools and their ranking of assisting schools to pool ideas and expertise (phi coefficient = 0.28) might be practically significant.

Item B2 School, by promoting collaboration between schools

The result shows that 18% of the respondents of urban schools ranked this item least important, while only 5% of the respondents of rural schools ranked the same item similarly. The relationship between location of schools and their ranking of promoting collaboration between schools is regarded small to medium and might be not practically significant (phi coefficient = 0.22).

Item B3 School, by increasing quality of education because schools can share resources

The results indicate that a large number of the respondents of urban schools (45%) ranked this item second or third, while only 29% of the respondents of rural schools ranked it similarly. The relationship between location of schools and their ranking of increasing quality of education because schools can share resources is medium (phi coefficient = 0.28), and might be practically significant.

Item B4 School, by enabling teachers to plan and prepare lessons together

The result shows that a large number of the respondents of rural schools (33%) ranked this item first or second, while only 12% of the respondents of urban schools also rated the same item first or second. This relationship might be important in practice (phi coefficient = 0.32).

Item B5 School, by enabling learners to benefit through collective learning

The results show that the majority of the respondents of urban schools (82%) ranked this item fourth or fifth, while 62% of the respondents of rural schools rated the same item in the similar way. The relationship between location of schools and their ranking of enabling learners to benefit through collective learning and peer coaching is indicating a medium effect size (phi coefficient = 0. 27), which might be practically significant.

4.5.8. Cronbach Alpha for internal reliability test for Sections B, C and D (Table 4.11)

Section	Cronbach Alpha
B	0,88
C	0,88
D	0,88

If interrelated items are summed to obtain an overall score for each participant as indicated in Tables 4.9.1 and 4.9.2, the Cronbach Alpha estimates the reliability of such scores and determine internal consistency of the section or average correlation of items within the section. Internal reliability of the sections of the questionnaire was established by using Cronbach Alpha for Sections B, C and D as illustrated in Table 4.11

Finally, the validity of the questionnaire was also established through a literature study and consultation with expertise and by conducting a pilot study, as indicated in 4.3.1.5.

4.5.9. Descriptive Statistics with regard to activities within the cluster system (Section C) and problems of the cluster system (Section D)

The descriptive statistics are used to organize and summarize large numbers of observations of respondents (McMillan and Schumacher, 1993:192), as illustrated in Tables 4.9.1 and 4.9.2 respectively. In this section the researcher intends to establish the differences of responses between male and female and rural and urban (A1 and A9) respondents respectively by using the mean scores and effect size. Ellis and Steyn (2003) provided the following guidelines for the interpretation of the effect size.

- small effect: d = 0.2
- medium effect: d = 0.5
- large effect: d = 0.8,

where large effect sizes are considered to be important in practice.

4.5.9.1. Differences in responses between male and female respondents and urban and rural respondents with regard to advantages of the cluster system (Section C) (Table 4.12)

A1					A9				
Male		Female		Effect size	Rural		Urban		Effect size
Mean	Std.dev.	mean	Std.dev.		mean	std.dev.	Mean	std. dev.	
3.11	0.45	3.08	0.45	0.05	3.21	0.39	3.02	0.46	0.42

Table 4.12 shows that the mean scores of male (3.11) and female (3.08) responses for section C did not differ, which implies that most principals, irrespective of gender, agree with cluster system, as depicted in Table 4.4

The mean scores of the rural (3, 21) and urban (3, 02) respondents as displayed in Table 4.12 respectively, showed a difference of 0,19, and a resultant medium effect size of 0.42, which is practically significant. Judging from the difference in mean scores, it appears that principals of the rural schools seem to agree more on the aspects of the cluster system than their counterparts in urban areas.

4.5.9.2. Differences in responses between male and female respondents and urban and rural respondents with regard to problems of the cluster system (Section D) (Table 4.13)

A1					A9				
Male		Female		Effect size	Rural		Urban		Effect size
Mean	std.dev.	mean	std.dev.		mean	std.dev.	Mean	std. dev.	
2.38	0.62	2.31	0.62	0.12	2.69	0.56	2,13	0,54	1.00

The data in Table 4.13 shows that the mean scores of both male (2.38) and female (2.31) respondents are below 3.0, which implies that principals, irrespective of sexual difference, encounter few problems with school clustering. This is supported by the effect size of 0.12, which implies that difference between man and woman is not practically significant, which could imply that problems in the cluster system is not gender-biased.

According to the data in Table 4.13, the mean scores of rural (2, 69) and urban (2, 13) schools differed, which is practically significant. The resultant effect size of 100 is large. From Table 4.9.2, it is clear that rural schools experience more problems in practice with school clustering than urban schools.

4.5.10. Conclusion

What emerges most noticeably from this study is that the cluster system is viewed by the respondents as a viable management strategy that may enhance the effectiveness of

schools in the Erongo Education Region. It does, however, not mean that the system is without problems, especially in its teething stage of implementation. But through the application of mean score ranking procedures (Table 4.6.2), problems of clustering were unearthed, which could possibly lead to finding solutions to them in future. Hence it stands to reason that from the perspective of the developing country like Namibia, the study is of overarching importance. For example, a cluster system model can serve as a viable alternative to effective and efficient management of schools and improvement of quality of education countrywide.

CHAPTER 5
FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUMMARY

5.1.INTRODUCTION

In this chapter summary, findings and recommendations based on the aims and objectives of the research study will be given.

5.2 SUMMARY

The research may be summarized as follows:

Chapter 1 outlined the rationale of this study, which includes aspects such as problem statement, aims and research methodology. The chapter aimed at guiding the reader to the content of the research project.

Chapter 2 elaborated on the nature and scope of the cluster system. Definition of concepts received attention where concepts such as cluster, system, schools and management were dealt with. The chapter highlighted advantages of the cluster system. A detailed account of the management structure of the cluster system was also given. This included an explication of the duties of the cluster centre principals, cluster management committee, circuit inspectors and circuit management committee. Other issues such as the rationale of clustering and the cluster developmental stages received attention. Cluster dynamics and characteristics also came under scrutiny. Towards the end of the chapter, a concise reference was made to the application of the cluster system in other countries.

In Chapter 3, the generic problems emanating from the implementation of the cluster system were presented. At first brief reference was made to the Teachers' Resource Centres as the forerunner of the cluster system, where its functions, problems, limitations and its future role were emphasised. The chapter highlighted the problems related to the implementation of the cluster system in Namibia, namely lack of communication between teachers, shortage of transport, lack of financial resources and basic facilities in cluster schools, increase in the workload among educational personnel and disruption of the

school programme. Furthermore, general problems associated with clustering of schools in countries such as the USA (Philadelphia), the UK (Wales and England) and the Netherlands were illuminated and discussed.

The empirical research design and data obtained from the study population was presented in Chapter 4. The questionnaire, as a research instrument used in this study, was analysed with emphasis on its advantages and disadvantages and its specific applicability in this research. The statistical techniques used, such as frequencies and percentages, mean score ranking procedures, phi-coefficient, two-way frequency procedures and Cronbach Alpha Co-efficient were used to analyse data.. The results of the study were presented in the form of pie-charts, histograms and tables. The findings emanating from the research dealt with advantages, problems, and activities of the cluster system. Differences between the responses of rural and urban respondents and between male and female respondents also came under the spotlight.

Chapter 5 provides a brief summary, findings, recommendations, limitations and directives for further research study. The main purpose of this chapter is to give the reader a general overview of the study and to cherish possible debates among educationist, students and scholars of educational management sciences.

Finally, while there is no doubt about an encouraging prospect of the success of the cluster system, the question though is what impact clustering could have on the quality education outcome in schools, and whether government will be able to muster enough resources in order to ensure its sustainability in future.

5.3 FINDINGS

The data corpus was drawn from a study conducted among principals in Namibia, with special references to the school managers in the Erongo Education Region. It will now be fleshed out by insertion of various substantive findings from the empirical research and literature study.

5.3 1 FINDINGS WITH REGARD TO RESEARCH AIM I

The first research aim was to establish the nature and scope ofthe cluster system (cf. 3.1).

The findings were as follows:

- With the dawn of the cluster system, schools were fostered in closer working units (clusters), for mutual benefit (cf. 2.1.).
- The cluster system holds promising benefits for schools (2.3.1 and 2.3.3) it, namely:
    - breaks barriers caused by isolation among teachers through knitting schools in the same geographical areas;
    - harmonises all cluster activities;
    - enhances quality teaching and learning practices;
    - ensures equity in curriculum; and
    - fosters good management practices

Furthermore, the cluster system:

- enables sharing of resources and increases quality of education among schools (cf. 2.3.3.4).
- assists teachers and principals to pool from divergent ideas and expertise (cf. 2.1).
- exposes learners to the same examination standards by writing common papers (cf. 2.3.3).
- promotes support and collaboration between schools (cf. 2.6.5..).
- encourages teachers and principals to interact professionally (cf. 2.6.6).

- enables teachers to engage in staff development activities and life-long learning (cf. 2.6.2).
- motivates teachers and principals to value each other as colleagues (cf. 2.6.8).
- provides opportunity for teachers and principals to have regular training through workshops and seminars (refer to 2.7.5).
- enhances shared decision-making between teachers and principals in the cluster (refer to 2.6.4).
- motivates teachers and principals to formulate micro-curriculum policies (refer to 2.7.3).
- promotes good management practices in both schools and cluster centres by creating open communication channels (cf. 2.1).
- develops and enhances quality leadership among principals, especially the cluster centre principals (cf. 2.4.1), whose key responsibilities should include the following (2.4.1.1):
  - should be a strong and committed manager;
  - should coordinate and harmonise activities within the cluster centre;
  - should promote and protect principles of democratic participation;
  - should be up–to-date and keep his finger on the pulse by keeping contact with everybody in the cluster; and
  - should be approachable and empathetic, but firm.

5.3.2 FINDINGS WITH REGARD TO RESEARCH AIM 2

The second research aim was to determine the problems emanating from the implementation of the cluster system (cf. 3.3).

The problems encountered with the implementation of the cluster system were as follows:

- Cluster centres lack financial resources (cf. 3.3.3).
- Schools in the remote (rural) areas have limited access to cluster centres (cf. 3.2.3).

- Distances between schools, Regional offices and cluster centres, coupled with the vastness of the country hampers effective service delivery (cf. 3.2.3).
- Lack of transport impedes visits to schools and cluster centres (cf. 3.3).
- Cluster centres lack basic facilities, which render these centres ineffective (cf. 3.2.4).
- The cluster system increases work overload among personnel such as principals, teachers etc. (cf. 3.4.1 and 3.4.2).

Other problems related to the implementation of the cluster system include the following:

- Learners benefit less, as collective learning and peer coaching within the cluster system is non-existent (cf. 3.3.1).
- Teachers are unable to plan and prepare lessons together (cf. 3.3.1).
- Negative attitudes towards the cluster system (cf. 3.5.1.1).

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1:

Cluster centres should be well-equipped and adequately funded by governments in order to be effective and functional.

Motivation:

Cost of providing expensive teaching equipment such as computers, photocopy machines and fax machines can increase, and could be out of reach for individual schools. The cluster activities can flounder if governments cease to invest in the cluster system.

Recommendation 2:

The resource centres such as the Cluster Centres and Teachers' Resources Centres should be accessible to all the schools, teachers, learners and the parent community.

Motivation:

Quality and equity in education can only be achieved if teachers and learners are exposed to the same facilities and opportunities. Disparity between urban and rural schools in terms of examination results can be effectively eliminated.

Recommendation 3:

Large distances between schools, Regional offices and cluster centres should be reduced by establishing telecommunication networks. Ideally, each educational institution should at least be provided with facilities such as telephones and fax machines.

Motivation

Namibia is a vast country with a dispersed population, and without effective communication networks, a regular contact with educational institutions could be a real challenge for the Ministry of Education. No educational institution is an island, hence communication remains indispensable.

Recommendation 4:

Government and Ministry of Education should provide sufficient and more reliable transport to cluster centres and Regional offices in order to render essential services to the schools.

Motivation:

Most schools and even cluster centres are isolated because they are not visited quite regularly, and the underlying reason for this situation can directly be attributed to shortage of reliable vehicles in the Educational Regions. Lack of transport may slow-down the government policy of decentralization.

Recommendation 5:

More realistic, acceptable and practically executable ways should be found to address the current scourge of workload experienced among educators such as principals and teachers.

Motivation:

Most experienced personnel are leaving the teaching profession on a daily basis due to the intensity of the workload. The application of staffing norms in schools where some principals are made to be a secretary and class teacher at the same time exacerbates the situation.

Recommendation 6:

Teachers, principals and learners among themselves should constantly be engaged in dialogue, dissemination of information and exchange of views and ideas within the cluster.

Motivation:

Educators and learners who interface respectfully in a dialogue can motivate one another and strive towards attainment of common objectives. The dynamics of quality ideas and creative thinking is feasible if people interact and engage with one another in a constructive debate, both inside the classrooms and in life interventions.

Recommendations 7:

Teachers should prepare and plan lessons together within the cluster.

Motivation:

The cluster system can only be meaningful if teachers can converge in meetings where experiences and skills are transmitted from one teacher to another in a spirit of real collegiality. Advantages that learners should gain from such exercises are enormous in terms of raising standards of performances in all the schools within the cluster.

Recommendation 8:

Cluster centres should be turned into centres of excellence, in order to counter any act of negativism among teachers in the long run.

Motivation:

Failure to deliver and live up to its requirements and expectations should invite negative criticism towards the cluster system from teachers, learners and the community. The activities within the cluster should not only be visible, but its benefits should filter through to the users such as learners, parents and teachers.

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

It should be noted that this study is by no means conclusive or without limitations. In fact, one of its flaws is that the study was confined to the one Education Region (Erongo Education Region) only, out of thirteen Education Regions in the country. As a result of this, the findings based on this research study might be construed by some critics as one-sided and not representing the views of the majority of principals. Other limitations pertain to the logistical and financial problems which warranted that the study was

limited to focus on specific sample population only, due to the vastness and the sparseness of the Namibian population. A large sample population normally goes hand in hand with complicated logistical arrangements, which is not only time-consuming, but costly as well.

Despite these limitations, much has been achieved in terms of pointing out the strengths and weaknesses of the cluster system in its various manifestations. Equally, another important dimension of the study is that it sets a stage in motion for further research and debates by educators, teacher trainers, students and various scholars in the field of educational management science.

5.6 DIRECTIVES FOR FURTHER RESAERCH

- A comprehensive model should be developed for effective clustering in Namibia.
- Different statistical methods should be employed to assess measurable variables in clusters such as:
  - student performances;
  - teacher motivation; and
  - effectiveness of the cluster system.
- An in depth study should be made to investigate how cluster centres should become self-reliant, purpose-driven and eventually turned into centres of excellence in future.

5.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Despite the problems elucidated in Chapter 3, a relatively high percentage of principals applauded the benefits of the cluster system, as it promotes links between schools in the same geographical location and serves as the framework – where the input of all stakeholders is valued. Teachers and principals within the cluster can now be able to assist each other through forming subject groups, planning and preparation of schemes of work, organising open discussion forums and supplementing one another's skills and expertise. Many people value being able to pass on what they know, especially when this is appreciated and others benefited from their knowledge and experience. Obviously, the cluster system seems to enhance such possibilities and harmonize working relationship within clusters. It also appears that the cluster system has a natural intuitive appeal to everyone, is easy to understand and provides freedom of opinion to people in cluster with divergent ideas and persuasions.

In the final analysis, a cluster system model can be regarded as a beacon for effective management of schools in Namibia, but it is not without a price – its sustainability should be assured first. This research study has pointed out quite extensively that lack of financial resources can paralyse the functional and operational capacity of the cluster system, and eventually render the entire system ineffective. But no problem is insurmountable. Indeed, when problems are perceived as challenges, they often offer better prospects to create opportunities for growth and progress. For example, if the problems identified in Chapter 3 can be addressed, the cluster system might most probably be treasured by many in years to come.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

ANNUAL REPORT **see** NAMIBIA

ANDERSON, G.J. 1990. Fundamentals of educational research. London: Falmer Press. 273 p.

ANDERSON, G.J. 1998. Fundamentals of educational research. 2nd ed. London: Falmer Press. 266 p.

AUALA, R.K. 1989. Supervision for educational excellence. Ondangwa: ELOC Printing Press. 181 p.

BELL, J. 1993. Doing your research project: a guide for first-time research in education and social science. 2nd ed. Buckingham: Open University Press. 176 p.

BEP **see** NAMIBIA. Basic Education Project

BERKHOUT, F. & BERKHOUT, S.J. 1992. The school: financial management tools. Pretoria: Van Schaik. 104 p.

BEST, J.W. & KAHN, J.V. 1993. Research in education. 7th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon. 435 p.

BEYERS, M. 2001. Problems experienced by women re-entering into the education profession. Potchefstroom: PU for CHE (Dissertation – M.Ed.) 152 p.

BLANDFORD, S. 1997. Middle management in schools: how to harmonise, managing and teaching for an effective school. London: Pitman. 256 p.

BLASÉ, J. & KIRBY, C.P. 1992. Bringing out the best in teachers: what effective principals do. Newbury Park, Calif.: Corwin Press. 135 p.

BOTHA, D.P. 1987. Education in Namibia: a few notes concerning the present situation. (*In* Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education. Institute for Reformational Studies. Educational challenges in Southern-Africa in a Christian-Reformational perspective. Potchefstroom: PU for CHE. Central Publications Department)

BOWRING-CARR, C. & WEST-BURNHAM, J. 1997. Effective learning in schools: how to integrate learning and leadership for a successful school. London: Pitman. 168 p.

BRIGHOUSE, T. & WOODS, D. 1999. How to improve your school. London: Routledge. 176 p.

BROOKS, B.S. 1985. Effective communication and feedback. USA. American Occupationa Therapy Association. 30 p.

BROWN, D. J. 1990. Decentralization and school-based management. London: Falmer. 284 p.

BRYNARD, P.A., & HANEKOM, S.X. 1997. Introduction to research in public administration and related academic disciplines. Pretoria: Van Schaik Academic. 76 p.

BUBB, S. 2002. Improving induction: research-based best practice for schools. London: Routledge/Falmer. 205 p.

BUSH, T., & WEST-BURNHAM, J., eds. 1994. Principles of educational management. Harlow, Essex: Longman. 404 p.

BUSH, T. 1995. Theories of educational management. 2nd ed. London: Paul Chapman. 164 p.

BUSH, T. 2003. Theories of educational leadership and management. 3rd ed. London: Sage. 209 p.

BUSH, T. & BELL, L., eds. 2002. The principles and practice of educational management. London: Paul Chapman. 332 p.

BUSH, T, BELL, L., BOLAM, R., GLATTER, R & RIBBENS, P., eds. 1999. Educational management: redefining theory, policy, and practice. London: Paul Chapman. 245 p.

CALDWELL, B. & SPINKS, J.M. 1988. The self-managing school. London: Falmer. 278 p.

CALITZ, L., FUGLESTAD, O.L. & LILLEJORD, S., eds. 2002. Leadership in education: productive learning cultures. Sandown: Heinemann. 282 p.

CANGELOSI, J.S. 2004. Classroom management strategies: gaining and maintaining students' cooperation. 5th ed. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley. 398 p.

CARL, A.E. 1995. Teacher empowerment through curriculum development: theory into practice. Kenwyn: Juta. 275 p.

CASTELLO, R.T., FLETCHER, M.R., ROSSETTI., A.D., & SEKOWSKI, R.W. 1992. School personnel administration: a practitioner's guide Boston, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon. 341 p.

CENSUS 2001 see NAMIBIA. Ministry of Basic Education, Sport, and Culture

CHAPMAN, J.D., FROUNMIN, I.D., & ASPIN, D.N. 1995. Creating and managing the democratic school . London: Falmer. 229 p.

CHARLES, C.M. 1988. Introduction to educational research London: Longman. 218 p.

CHENG, Y.C. 1996. School effectiveness and school-based management: a mechanism for development. London: Falmer. 210 p.

CIRCULAR LETTER KHORIXAS REGION see NAMIBIA. Ministry of Basic Education, Sport, and Culture

COHEN, C. 1994. Administering education in Namibia: the colonial period to the present. Windhoek: Namibia Scientific Society. 454 p.

COHEN, E.G., & LOTAN, R.A., eds. 1997. Working for equity in heterogeneous classrooms: sociological theory in practice. New York: Teachers College Press. 317 p.

CONSTITUTION **see** NAMIBIA. 1990.

CORSON, D., ed. 1995. Discourse and power in educational organisations. Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton Press. 348 p.

CRAIG, I., ed. 1990. Managing the primary classroom. 2nd ed. London: Longman. 188 p.

CRAWFORD, M., KYDD, L. & RICHES, C., eds. 1997. Leadership and teams in educational management. Buckingham: Open University Press. 196 p.

DAFT, R.L. 1999. Leadership: theory and practice. Fort Worth, Tex.: Dryden Press. 496 p.

DALIN, P., & ROLLF, H.-G. 1993. Changing the school culture. London: Cassell. 191 p.

DARESH, J.C. & ARROWSMITH, T. 2003. A practical guide for new school leaders. London: Paul Chapman. 128 p.

DARESH, J.C., & PLAYKO, M.A. 1992. The professional development of school administrators: preservice, induction, and inservice applications. Boston, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon. 189 p.

DAVIES, B. & ELLISON, L., eds. 1997. School leadership for the 21st century: a competency and knowledge approach. London: Routledge. 284 p.

DAY, C., HALL, C. & WHITAKER, P. 1998. Developing leadership in primary schools. London: Paul Chapman. 229 p.

DITTMAR, F. 2002. National consultative conference on the future of advisory services in Namibia at Midgard on 12-16 August 2002. 16 p.

DITTMAR, F., MENDELSOHN, J. & WARD, V. 2002. The school cluster system in Namibia. Windhoek: Raison.

DONALD, D., LAZARUS, S., & LOLWANE, P. 2002. Educational psychology in social context. 2nd ed. Cape Town: Oxford University Press. 378 p.

DU PREEZ, P.J. 2003. Principles of effective education management. Sandown: Heinemann. 120 p.

EDUCATION CENCUS **see** NAMIBIA. Ministry of Basic Education, Sport, and Culture.

EDUCATION STATISTICS 1999 & 2000 **see** NAMIBIA. Education Management Information Systems

ELLIS, S.M. & STEYN, H.S. 2003. Practical significance (effect sizes) versus or in combination with statistical significance (p-values), Management Dynamics, 12(4): 51-53.

ELMORE, R.F. 1990. Restructuring schools: the next generation of educational reform. San Fransisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass. 309 p.

ENGELBRECHT, P. & GREEN, L. 2001. Promoting learner development: preventing and working with barriers to learning. Pretoria: Van Schaik. 251 p.

ENTWISTLE, N.J. 1990. Handbook of educational ideas and practices. London: Routledge. 1140 p.

EVERS, C.W. & LAKOMSKI, G., eds. 1996. Exploring educational administration: coherentist applications and critical debates. New York: Pergamon. 292 p.

FIDLER, B. & ATTON, T. 2004. The headship game: the challenges of contemporary school leadership. London: RoutledgeFalmer. 248 p.

FIDLER, B., RUSSELL, S. & SIMKINS, T. 1997. Choices for self-managing schools: autonomy and accountability. London: Paul Chapman. 260 p.

FOSKETT, N. & LUMBY, J. 2003. Leading and managing education: international dimensions. London: Paul Chapman. 224 p.

FRASE, L.E. & HETZEL, R. 1990. School management by wandering around. Lancaster, Pa.: Technomic. 204 p.

FROYEN, L.A. 1988. Classroom management: empowering teacher-leaders. Columbus: Merrill. 324 p.

FULLAN, M. 1991. The new meaning of educational change. 2nd ed. London: Cassell. 400 p.

FULLAN, M. 2000. Educational leadership. San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass.

FULLAN, M. 2003. The moral imperative of school leadership. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press. 88 p.

FULLAN, M. & HARGREAVES, A. 1992. What's worth fighting for in your school?: working together for improvement. Buckingham: Open University Press. 145 p.

GAY, L.R., L.R., & AIRASIAN, P. 2003. Educational research: competencies for analysis and application: 7th ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Merrill/Prentice Hall. 605 p.

GAYNOR, A.K. 1998. Analyzing problems in schools and school systems. Mahwah, N.J.: Erlbaum. 298 p.

GENCK, F.H. 1990. Improving school performance: how new school management techniques can raise learning, confidence, and morale. New York: Praeger. 299 p.

GERBER, R., ed. 2003. International handbook on geographical education. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic. 344 p.

GLASMAN, N.S. & NEVO, D. 1988. Evaluation in decision making. Boston, Mass.: Kluwer Academic. 204 p.

GOODSON, I.F. & HARGREAVES, A., eds. 1996. Teachers' professional lives. London: Falmer. 238 p.

GRACE, G. 1995. School leadership: beyond education management: an essay in policy scholarship. London: Falmer. 230 p.

GRAHAM-BROWN, S. 1991. Education in the developing world: conflict and crisis. London: Longman. 332 p.

GRAVETT, S. 2001. Adult learning: designing, and implementing learning events: a dialogical approach. Pretoria: Van Schaik. 78 p.

GROBLER, B. 2003. Management of the school in context. Sandown: Heinemann. 74 p.

GROBLER, H.D., SCHENCK, C.J. & DU TOIT, A.S. 2003. Person-centred communication: theory and practice. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 241 p.

GTZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit). 2004. Training manual for cluster centre principals. Windhoek: Raison.

GUNTER, H.M. 2001. Leaders and leadership in education. London: Paul Chapman. 198 p.

HARGREAVES, A. & EVANS, R., eds. 1997. Beyond educational reform: bringing teachers back in. Buckingham: Open University Press. 133 p.

HARRIS, A., JAMIESON, I. & RUSS, J. 1996. School effectiveness and school improvement: a practical guide. London: Pitman. 157 p.

HARRIS, A., BENNET, N. & PREEDY, M., eds. 1997. Organizational effectiveness and improvement in education. Buckingham: Open University Press. 288 p.

HAYES, E. 1998. Effective teaching styles. San Fransisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass. 100 p.

HEADINGTON, R. 2003. Monitoring, assessment, recording, reporting and accountability: meeting the standards. 2nd ed. London: Fulton. 136 p.

HELLER, F., DRENTH, P. & RUS, V. 1988. Decisions in organizations. London: Sage. 250 p.

HITTLEMAN, D.R., & SIMON, A.J. 2002. Interpreting educational research: an introduction for consumers of research. 3rd ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Merrill. 439 p.

HOFMAN, R.H. 1999. Contribution of cluster of integration. *European journal of special needs education*, 99(3): 187-197.

HOLLY, P. & SOUTHWORTH, G. 1993. The developing school. London: Falmer. 165 p.

HOLMES, A. 2003. Smart things to know about life-long learning. Oxford: Capstone. 222 p.

HOPKINS, D., AISCOW, M. & WEST, M. 1994. School improvement in an era of change. New York: Teachers College Press. 230 p.

HUSEN, T. & POSTLETHWAITE, T.N. 1994. International encyclopaedia of education, (9): 4067-6522 p.

JENSEN, K. & WALKER, S., eds. 1989. Towards democratic schooling: European experiences. Milton Keynes: Open University Press. 199 p.

JONES, J.J. & WALTERS, D.L. 1994. Human resource management in education. Lancaster: Technomic. 304 p.

KEEVES, J.P., ed. 1997. Educational research, methodology and measurement: an international handbook 2nd ed. New York: Pergamon. 1054 p.

KELLY, A. 2001. Benchmarking for school improvement: a practical guide for comparing and improving effectiveness. London: RoutledgeFalmer. 170 p.

KIRSTEN, H.V.D.P. 2000. Bestuursfaktore wat die werkstevredenheid van hoofde van sekondêre skole in die Noord-Kaapprovinsie beïnvloed. Potchefstroom: PU vir CHO (Skripsie – M.Ed.) 151 p.

KYRIACOU, C. 1992. Effective teaching in schools. Hemel Hempstead: Simon & Schuster. 220 p.

LEEDY, P.D. & ORMROD, J.E. 2001. Practical research: planning and design. 7th ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Merrill Prentice Hall. 318 p.

LEITHWOOD, K.A., BEGLEY, P.T. & COUSINS, J.B. 1992. Developing expert leadership for future schools. London: Falmer. 303 p.

LOOCK,C. 2003. Education leadership. Sandown: Heinemann. 89 p.

LUNENBERG, F.C. & ORNSTEIN, A.C. 1991. Educational administration: concepts and practices. Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth. 557 p.

LUNT, I., NORWICH, B. & VARNA, V., eds. 1995. Psychology and education for special needs: recent developments and future directions. Aldershot, Hants: Arena. 246 p.

MACBEAT, J. 1998. Effective school leadership: responding to change. London: Paul Chapman. 176 p.

MACPHERSON, R.J.S. & DUIGNAN, P.A. 1992. Educative leadership. Great Britain. The Falmer Press.

MBESC **see** NAMIBIA. Ministry of Basic Education, Sport, and Culture.

MC COLL, E., JACOBY, A., & THOMAS, L. 2001. Design and use of questionnaires: a review of best practical applicable to surveys of health service staff and patience. 5 (31): 1-256.

MCMILLAN, J.H. & SCHUMACHER, S. 1993. Research in education: a conceptual introduction. 3rd ed. New York: HarperCollins College Publishers. 665 p.

MEC **see** NAMIBIA. Ministry of Education and Culture.

MHETEC **see** NAMIBIA. Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Employment Creation

MENDELSOHN, J., & WARD, V. 1999. Development needs of schools and clusters of schools in the Keetmanshoop Region. Windhoek: Raison.

MIDDLEWOOD, D. & LUMBY, J. 1998. Strategic management in schools and colleges. London: Paul Chapman. 210 p.

MILLER-LACHMANN, L. & TAYLOR, L.S. 1995. Schools for all: educating children in a diverse society. Albany, N.Y.: Delmar. 402 p.

MORRISON, K. 1998. Management theories for educational change. London: Paul Chapman. 242 p.

MORRISON, K. 2002. School leadership and complexity theory. London: RoutledgeFalmer. 215 p.

NAKAMURA, R.M. 2000. Healthy classroom management: motivation, communication and discipline. Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning. 352 p.

NAMIBIA **see** Republic of Namibia

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA. 1990. Constitution of the Republic of Namibia as adopted by the National Assembly on 9 February 1990.

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA. 2001. Education Act No. 16. Windhoek: Government Printer.

NAMIBIA. Basic Education Project. 2003. Management skills for cluster centre principal. Swakopmund: Namibia.

NAMIBIA. Education Management Information Systems. 1999-2001. Education statistics. Windhoek: Government Printer.

NAMIBIA. Education Management Information Systems. 2001-2006. Strategic planning. Windhoek: Solitaire Press.

NAMIBIA. Ministry of Basic Education, Sport, and Culture. 1999. Annual report. Windhoek: Government Printer.

NAMIBIA. Ministry of Basic Education, Sport, and Culture. 2001. Annual report. Windhoek: Government Printer.

NAMIBIA. Ministry of Basic Education, Sport, and Culture. 2002. Annual report. Windhoek: Government Printer.

NAMIBIA. Ministry of Basic Education, Sport, and Culture. 2003. Annual report. Windhoek: Government Printer.

NAMIBIA. Ministry of Basic Education, Sport, and Culture. 2004. Annual report. Windhoek: Government Printer.

NAMIBIA. Ministry of Basic Education, Sport, and Culture. 2001. Census 2001. Windhoek: Government Printer.

NAMIBIA. Ministry of Basic Education, Sport, and Culture. 2002. Khorixas Education Region. *Circular letter on the allocation of responsibilities to inspectors*, 1-8, 6 March.

NAMIBIA. Ministry of Education and Culture. 1996. The National Teachers' Resource Centre Network: a policy and procedures manual. Okahandja: Nied. 16 p.

NAMIBIA. Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Employment Creation. 2003. Annual report. Windhoek: Government Printer.

NAMIBIA. National Institute for Educational Development 2003. A journal for educational reform in Namibia. Okahandja: Nied.

NAMIBIA. National Institute for Educational Development 2004. A journal for educational reform in Namibia. Okahandja: Nied.

NAMIBIA. Presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Training. 1999. Report: towards a learning nation, meeting the challenges of change. Windhoek: Government Printer.

NEUKRUG, E.D. 2004. Theory, practice, and trends in human services: an introduction. 3rd ed. Pacific Grove, Calif.: Brooks/Cole-Thomson-Learning. 396 p.

NEUMAN, W.L. 2000. Social research methods: qualitative and quantitative approaches. 4th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon. 558 p.

NEWBERG, N.A. 1995. Clusters. *Phi delta kappan*, 95(9): 713, May.

NIED 2003 & 2004 **see** NAMIBIA. National Institute for Educational Development.

NIXON, J., MARTIN, J., MCKEOWN, P.& RANSON, RANSON. 1996 Encouraging Learning: Towards a theory of the learning shool. Buckingham. Open University press. 94 P.

PACKARD, N. & RACE, P., eds. 2000. 2000 tips for teachers. London: Kogan Page. 287 p.

PANDA, S., ed. 2003. Planning & management in distance education. London: Kogan Page. 288 p.

PEDERSEN, J.E. & DIGBY, A.D., eds. 1995. Secondary schools and cooperative learning: theories, models, and strategies. New York: Garland. 474 p.

PFEIFFER, I.L. & DUNLAP, J.B. 1982. Supervision of teachers: a guide to improving instruction. Phoenix, Ariz.: Oryx Press. 232 p.

POSTLETHWAITE, P. 2001. Educational system of education. International encyclopedia.

POTTER, A. & WILLIAMS, M. 1994. Clustering in small primary schools: an organizational case study. *School organisation*, 14(2): 141-152, June.

PRESIDENTIAL REPORT **see** NAMIBIA. Presidential Commission on Education, Culture and Training.

PRICKETT, S. & ERSKINE-HILL, P., eds. 2002. Education! education! education!: managerial ethics and the law of unintended consequences. Thorverton: Imprint Academic. 204 p.

PROSSER, J., ed. 1999. School culture. London. Paul Chapman. 182 p.

REEVES, J., FORDE, F., O'BRIEN, J., SMITH, P & TOMLINSON, H. 2002. Performance management in education: improving practices. London. Paul Chapman. 194 p.

RIBCHESTER, C. & EDWARDS, W.J. 1998. Cooperation in the countryside: small primary clusters. *Educational studies*. 24(3): 281, Nov.

ROBBINS, S.P. 2003. Essentials of organizational behavior. 8th ed. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson/Prentice Hall. 330 p.

ROGERS, B., ed. 2002. Teacher leadership and behaviour management. London: Paul Chapman. 160 p.

SAS INSTITUTE INC. 2005. SA user's guide: statistics. Cary:, N.C; SASA Institute.

SADKER, M.P. & SADKER, D.M. 1997. Teachers, schools and society. 4th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill. 633 p.

SARASON, S.B. 1990. The predictable failure of educational reform: can we change course before it's too late? San Fransisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass. 187 p.

SCHEERENS, J. & BOSKER, R.J. 1997. The foundations of educational effectiveness. Oxford: Pergamon Press. 347 p.

SCHUTTLEWORTH, D.E. 2003. School management in transition: schooling on the edge. London: RoutledgeFalmer. 169 p.

SERGIOVANNI, T.J. 2000. Leadership for the schoolhouse: how is it different? why is it important? San Fransisco: Jossey-Bass. 203 p.

SPATA, A. 2003. Research methods: science and diversity. New York: Wiley. 336 p.

SPEAR, C.E., ed. 1994. Primary management and leadership towards 2000. Harlow, Essex: Longman. 237 p.

STEYN, G.M. & VAN NIEKERK, E.J. 2002. Human resource management in education. Pretoria: Unisa Press. 451 p.

STRATEGIC PLANNING 2001-2006 **see** NAMIBIA.

SWEITZER, H.F. & KING, M.A. 2004. The successful internship: transformation and empowerment in experiential learning. 2nd ed. Belmont, Calif.: Brooks/Cole. 294 p.

TIGHT, M. 1996. Key concepts in adult education and training. London: Routledge. 180 p.

TSHISHONGA, T.E. & HA-VHANGANI, M. 2004. Our schools need responsible leaders. *Daily Sun*: 31, 13 May.

TOMLINSON, H. 2004. Educational leadership: personal growth for professional development. London: SAGE. 226 p.

VAN DENBERGHE, R. & HUBBERMAN, A.M., eds. 1999. Understanding and preventing teacher burnout: a sourcebook of international research and practice. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 362 p.

VAN DER WESTHUIZEN, P.C., ed. 2002. Schools as organisations. 2nd ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik. 355 p.

WALKER, D.F, 1990. Fundamentals of curriculum. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. 91 P.

WALLACE, M. & POCKLINGTON, K. 2002. Managing complex educational change: large-scale reorganisation of schools. London: Routledge/Falmer. 245 p.

WARD, V. & MENDELSOHN, J. 1999. Development needs of schools and clusters of schools in the Katima Mulilo Region. Windhoek: Raison.

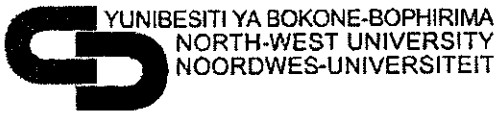
WEIS, L., ALTBACH, P.G., KELLY, G.P, HUGH, G.P. & SLAUGHTER, S., eds. 1989. Crisis in teaching: perspectives on current reforms. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York. 289 p.

WILLIAMS, C. 2002. Effective management. Cincinnati, Ohio: South-Western. 680 p.

XABA, M.I. 1999. Management development as a task of school managers at institutional level. Potchefstroom: PU for CHE (Thesis – Ph.D.)

APPENDIX A

LETTER TO ASK FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH



Private Bag X6001 Potchefstroom 2520
Tel +27 18 299 1111 Fax +27 18 299 2799
Republic of South Africa
http://www.puk.ac.za

School of Education and Training
Tel +27 18 299-1887
Fax +27 18 299-1888
E-Mail soomjm@puknet.puk.ac.za

Tuesday, 30 November 2004

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This certifies that Mr Michael Joseph Uirab is a bona fide student at the above university. He is registered for the M.Ed-programme in the field of educational management. His studies requires that he conduct research on the topic :

"Clustering as model for effective management of school in Namibia"

He requests hereby permission from your Department to conduct research in your Region by distributing and collecting questionnaires among principals of schools. Confidentiality of the respondents is guaranteed.

Kindly be of assistance to him by granting him written permission to conduct this research.

Yours faithfully

Prof M.J. Mosoge (Supervisor)

APPENDIX B

LETTER GRANTING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA
MINISTRY OF BASIC EDUCATION, SPORT AND CULTURE
ERONGO REGION

Private Bag 5024 *Telephone: 064-4105000* *Fax: 064-4105158*
SWAKOPMUND
Email: khawaseb@mweb.com.na

Enquiries: *J.Awaseb* *File No.: 12/2/4/4*

Date *14 December 2004*

Michael Joseph Ujirab
P.O.BOX 112
Usakos
9000

Dear Sir

Your Request for Permission to undertake a research study in Erongo Region has reference

Permission is herewith granted to conduct research as well as for the completion of questionnaires as requested in your letter.

You are, however, advised to conduct your interviews and/or filling in of questionnaires during breaks or after normal school hours so as not to interfere with the formal teaching processes at the schools.

Kindly liaise with the principals of schools for finer details and times of visits. I trust that you will receive the usual support from the principals

We wish you success with your studies

John /Awaseb
Regional Director (Acting)

APPENDIX C:
REQUEST TO PRINCIPALS TO COMPLETE QUESTIONNAIRES

P.O. BOX 112
Usakos
14 December 0'5
Namibia

To: all the principals of Erongo Education Region.

Dear colleagues

Re: Distribution of questionnaires.

1.1. I am conducting a research study titled: 'Clustering as model for effective management of schools in Namibia'. Currently my studies towards the completion of the MED- degree reached a critical stage, where I am required to administered questionnaire.
1.2. Permission has been granted by the Director of Education in the Erongo Education Region to distribute questionnaires among principals (see the attached letter). In the light of this you are kindly requested to complete the enclosed questionnaire and return to above-mentioned address on or before 31th January 2005.
1.3. The completed questionnaire as well as the information pertaining to the participants will not be divulged to any other person, hence confidentiality is assured.
1.4. As the study is very much relevant to the education system in Namibia, the result will be shared with all interested parties, principals, schools and beyond.

Very sincerely yours

Mr M.J. /Uirab (student)

APPENDIX D:

QUESTIONNAIRE ON CLUSTERING OF SCHOOLS IN NAMIBIA

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY
QUESTIONNAIRE NO

1. DIRECTIONS FOR COMPLETION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

- You need not enter your name, name of the school or stamp of the school. Thus, your honest answer will not affect yourself or your school negatively
- First of all, please read the instructions in each section carefully, before attempting to answer questions.
- Confidentiality of your responses is assured and guaranteed
- Please give frank and honest opinions when responding to the questions
- Thank you in anticipation for your cooperation and positive response

SECTION A: BIOGRAPICAL AND OTHER INFORMATION

Complete the following general questions by putting a cross next to the nu which corresponds 'with your choice.

1.1 Gender

Male		1
Female		2

(2)

1.2 Your age in years

31-40	
41-47	
48-55	
56-60	
60+	

(3)

1.3 Post Level

Principal	
Cluster Centre Principal	
Both	

(4)

1.4 Number of teaching years

1-6		
6-10		
11-15		
16-20		
20+		(5)

1.5 Number of staff under your supervision (Including teaching, non-teaching and Hostel staff)

5-10		
11-20		
2 1-40		
41-60		
60+		(6)

1.6 Number of learners in Your school

0-100	
100-400	
401-500	
501.:1000	
1000+	

(7)

1.7 Number of schools in your cluster centre

3-5	
6-8	
9-10	
10+	

(8)

1.8 Number of years as principal

1-5	
6-10	
11-15	
16-20	
21-29	

(9)

1.9 Type of school

Rural	
Urban	

(10)

Please turn over

SECTION B

RANK THE FOLLOWING BENEFITS OR ADVANTAGES OF CLUSTER SYSTEM IN ORDER OF IMPORTANCE FROM 1-5. THAT IS, PLACE A 1 (ONE) BESIDE THE ADVANTAGES YOU CONSIDER MOST IMPORTANT, A 2 **(TWO BESIDE THE NEXT MOST IMPORTANT**

ADVANTAGE AND SO FORTH UNTIL YOU HAVE RANKED ALL 5 ADVANTAGES. ..

Cluster system....	Ranking	
1. .. .assists teachers to pool ideas and expertise		(11)
2. ... promotes collaboration between schools		(12)
3.... increases quality of education because schools can share resources		(13)
4. ...enables teachers to plan and prepare lessons together		(14)
5. .. . enables learners to benefit through collective learning and peer coaching		(15)

PLEASE TURN OVER

SECTION C:

INDICATE YOUR AGREEMENT /DISAGREEMENT WITH EACH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS BY PUTTING A CROSS ON THE APPLICABLE NUMBER NEXT TO EACH STATEMENT.

1. 2.

1. Strongly disagree 3. Agree
2. Disagree 4 Strongly agree

Cluster System enables...	1.	2.	3.	4.	
1. .. .Teachers to discuss and draw up schemes of					
work together					(16)
2. ...Learners and teachers to engage in					
! educational debate					(17)
3. ...Learners to be exposed to the same					
examination standards by writing common papers					(18)
4. ...Teachers to apply learner-centred approach in					
classroom					(19)
5. .. Teachers and principals to formulate *micro-*					
curriculum policy					(20)
6. .. . Collective planning of a budget for a group of					
schools					(21)
7. ...Teachers and principals to have regular					
, training through workshops and seminars					(22)
8. ...Teachers to sharpen their teaching skills					
! through inter-school visits					(23)
9. ...Teachers and principals to interact					
i professionally					(24)
10. Teachers and principals to collaborate and					
provide mutual support to ea.ch other					(25)
11. Teachers to engage in staff development					
I activities and life-long learning					(26)
12. Teachers to develop a sense of unity in					
Durpose through teamwork					(27)

PLEASE TURN OVER

13. Teachers and principals to resolve differences in a non-confrontational way					(28)
14. Teachers and principals to value each other as colleagues					(29)
15. Teachers and principals to share in decision-making concerning their school					(30)

SECTION D:

INDICATE YOUR OPINION ABOUT THE PROBLEMS OF CLUSTERING. PUT A CROSS ON THE NUMBER THAT CLOSELY REPRESENT YOUR OPINION TO EACH STATEMENT.

1. Not a problem 3 Problem
2. Little problem 4 Great problem

	1.	2.	3.	4.	
1. Lack of transport to carry out cluster activities(e.g. .attending meetings)					(31)
2. Lack of financial resources for the Cluster					(32)
3. Lack of basic facilities (telephone, [ax and internet)					(33)
4. Lack of professionally suitable meeting venues					(34)
5. Shortage of additional personnel (teaching, institution, secretaries)					(35)
6. Increased workload among teachers and principals					(36)
7. Large distances between schools and regional office s					(37)
8. Work related stress					(38)
9. Negative attitude towards cluster system					(39)
10. Division of educators into small interest groups and cliques within the cluster					(40)