



Effects of Merging Schools on the Performance of Teachers in Classrooms

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ABSTRACT A quantitative descriptive design was employed to explore the effects of merging schools on teachers in South Africa. Twenty-five teachers working in four secondary schools which were purposefully selected for their merged status participated in the study. The population comprised of all teachers in merged schools. The respondents completed self-administered questionnaires. The findings revealed that most of the respondents consider the merging of schools as an invaluable practice, but with fewer benefits for teaching and learning. However, this phenomenon does not offer any professional development opportunity for teachers. It was further revealed that the performance of teachers is negatively affected by the closing and merging of schools. The paper recommends that urgent strategies should be crafted and implemented for teachers to cope with the effects of school merging. The paper also recommends that the merging and closing of schools should be thoroughly reconsidered to allow for the provision of adequate educational resources.

INTRODUCTION

Merging of schools is a contentious issue with several stakeholders expressing their opposition to such an undertaking. Merging of schools is also characterised by cutting of staff or redundancies of staff programmes and resources, and eventual school closure (Jimerson 2006). Nitta et al. (2010) consider the word “merging” as it refers to the phenomenon of combining schools to achieve efficiency in administration and the improvement of social and academic experiences of learners in sparse population locations. However, the policies for merging schools have tended to negatively affect the organisation of public schools dating back to the 20th century. Some education policy studies suggest that merging of public schools save resources (Karakaplan and Kutlu 2019).

In 2008, South Africa had 25 866 ordinary schools, of which 1147 (4%) belonged to schools which were independent. A majority of these institutions were in the provinces of KwaZulu Natal (5893, which made up 23%) and the Eastern Cape (5732 which made up 22%). About 600 (2%) schools were in the Northern Cape in 2010. The Gauteng province hosted 415 independent schools, followed by KwaZulu Natal with 132 ordinary independent schools in 2008. There were 243 fewer schools in South Africa in 2008

than in the previous year (Department of Basic Education 2010).

The proponents of merging of schools such as Nitta et al. (2010) view the practice as a way of making sure there is equality in education and efficiency in the use of resources. The economies of scale and broader curricula issues are also cited as evidence supporting the merging of schools. Those against this approach cite the negative effects that the merging of schools has on rural communities, especially the social and economic well-being of the immediate community of a school (Lyson 2002). Cartwright et al. (2007) advocate that employers who warmly accept merging of their schools develop a positive attitude and reduce stress at workplaces.

The Department of Basic Education has identified 308 schools in the Limpopo province of South Africa that need to be merged with other larger schools which are geographically close to them. These are schools with low learner enrolments that render their management educationally unsound. The schools have an inadequate number of teachers to manage the curriculum, mostly with only two or three teachers at the school, practice multi-grade teaching which impacts negatively on the quality of teaching and learning and experience many different subject combinations (Patel and Cummins 2019; SAPA 2010).

Gelb (2002) states that learners in small schools perform better than learners in large schools that are merged as a result of a better quality of instruction. In addition, learners in primary and high schools obtain better grades, have lower dropout rates and a high likelihood to proceed to universities than those from large schools which are created from mergers. School merging is associated with changing the social dynamics among staff and learners (Patel and Cummins 2019).

Purpose of the Paper

The purpose of the paper was to investigate the effects of merging schools on teacher performance. The research questions listed here-under also applied.

Research Questions

This paper was guided by the following research questions: How does the merging of schools affect the performance of teachers? What are the feelings of teachers about the merging of schools? What difficulties do principals encounter in managing schools that are merged? What strategies can teachers use to cope with the challenges of merging schools?

Statement of the Problem

Despite the benefits of merging schools, teachers have a more difficult time adjusting to the merger than learners, especially teachers who move from smaller schools that were annexed into larger ones (Nitta et al. 2010). There is clear evidence in South Africa that merging of schools causes stress among teachers. This affects their performance as they struggle to adjust to their new schools and new routines. Teachers find it difficult to acclimatise to the new work stations (SAPA 2010). The effects of merging schools on teachers are a cause for concern. In this paper, the researchers investigated the effects of merging schools on the performance of teachers.

Theoretical Framework

The Nelson-Oppen (NO) combination theory underpinned the study. The NO theory pro-

vides a simple solution for the combination of two or more disjointed theories. Similarly, two or more schools can be combined into one. The conditions under which the disjointed schools exist may cause the Department of Basic Education to merge them. The merging of schools may mean that schools of low enrolment will be integrated with schools with higher numbers which, in turn, may improve the teacher-pupil ratio in the high enrolment schools (Malkarnekar 2012).

Since 2010, the South African government has shut down more than 4500 public schools in the country, with hundreds more still facing closure. The most affected schools have been in townships and rural areas where the majority of such schools have become “white elephants”.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A quantitative survey design was adopted in this paper. A quantitative research is a formal, objective, systematic process to describe and test relationships as well as to examine cause-effect interactions among variables (Burns and Grove 2011). In this paper, the information was collected through self-administered questionnaires. A descriptive survey design was selected because it provides an accurate display or account of the characteristics of interest, such as behaviour, opinions, abilities, beliefs and knowledge of an individual, situation or group. This design was chosen to suit the objectives of the paper which focused on determining the feelings and views of the respondents regarding the effects of merging schools on the performance of teachers.

Data Collection Procedure and Instrument

A questionnaire was designed to collect data from the teachers who were affected by the merging of schools. A five-point Likert scale was designed to solicit information from the respondents. The questionnaires were distributed and collected personally in the process. Self-administered questionnaires were used in this case because they are cost-effective and reduce the risk of the researchers to influence the respons-

es of the respondents. They also encourage respondents to give adequate responses. In addition, self-administered questionnaires allow enough time for respondents to complete the prepared schedule in their free time.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics refer to the responsibilities that researchers have towards those who participate in the research, research sponsors and those who are potential beneficiaries of the research (Monette et al. 2008). The researchers requested permission from the Department of Basic Education to carry out this study. No names or forms of identification were used as all the information that was received was treated with confidentiality to ensure that the privacy of each respondent was not infringed in anyway. All respondents were informed of their rights to voluntary consent or refuse to participate and to withdraw participation from the study at any time without attracting a penalty.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Data was analysed statistically through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). This data was presented in the form of percentages, tables and graphs. The discursive method was also used to complement the quantitative data analysis.

RESULTS

The research respondents that were sampled from the population were given questionnaires to complete. The sample consisted of 25 teachers from the merged schools. Data was quantitatively analysed and interpreted. Processing of the data from the questionnaires was done through descriptive and inferential statistics. Seventy-six per cent of the teachers were at post-level 1 grade, which is a grade for ordinary teachers while 16 percent were post-level 2 (departmental heads) and 8 percent were post-level 3 (deputy principals and principals).

In addition, all of the respondents were South Africans who were permanently employed. Eighty-eight per cent of the respondents were retained in their former positions prior to

the merging of schools, while only 12 percent of the respondents were not retained in their former positions. According to the Department of Basic Education (2010), teachers who are declared additional to the post establishment before the merging of schools should be retained without changing their post levels. Those who were placed or assigned temporarily would be part of the new rationalisation process after the merging of schools. Interestingly, from the above information, all teachers were absorbed into their new reporting stations. No teacher was found to be additional to the posts at the new staff establishment.

Table 1 shows that 24 percent of the respondents indicated that they had an average of 0–20 learners in their classes prior to the merging of schools, while only 20 percent of the respondents had an average of 0–20 learners in their classes after school merging. Of the total respondents, 16 percent indicated that they had an average of 20–40 learners in their classes prior to the merging of schools, while only 12 percent of the respondents had an average of 20–40 learners in their classes after the merger of schools. However, 20 percent of the respondents indicated that they had an average 40–60 learners in their classes prior to the merging of schools, while only 12 percent of the respondents had an average of 40–60 learners in their classes after the merging of schools.

Table 1: Number of learners in class before and after merging

Average number of learners	Responses prior school merging		Responses post school merging	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
0-20	6	24	5	20
20-40	4	16	3	12
40-60	5	20	3	12
60-80	5	20	4	16
80-100	5	20	5	20
Total	25		25	

Furthermore, 20 percent of the respondents indicated that they had an average of 60–80 learners in their classes before the merging of schools while only 16 percent of the respondents had an average of 60–80 in their classes after the merging of schools. Moreover, 20 percent of the re-

spondents indicated that they had an average of 80–100 learners in their classes before merging of schools while another 20 percent of the respondents had an average of 80-100 in their classes after school mergers. In addition, none of the respondents indicated that they had an average of above 100 learners in their classes prior the merging of schools. Twenty percent of the respondents had an average of above 100 learners in their classes after the merger of schools.

Based on the above information, the average number of learners in classes increased drastically due to the merging of schools. This may have a negative impact on teaching and learning as teachers would struggle to execute their professional duties in overcrowded classrooms.

The Effects of Merging Schools on Teachers and the Teaching Environment

This section focused on the effects that the merging of schools create with regard to academic climate, interaction between teachers and learners, teacher relationships, teaching facilities, teacher collaboration and challenges faced by principals in managing schools which result

from a merger. The survey results for questions 1-10 are represented in Table 2.

Merging of Schools as an Invaluable Practice

The findings revealed that 52 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that merging of schools is an invaluable practice, 20 percent agreed, creating a sum of 72 percent of the respondents who generally agreed with the statement. 8 percent of the respondents were not sure whether the merging of schools is an invaluable practice. Similarly, 8 percent of the respondents disagreed that the merging of schools is an invaluable practice while the remaining 12 percent of respondents strongly disagreed with this statement. The mean of 2.08 and standard deviation of 1.44 suggest that a majority of the respondents feel that merging of schools is an invaluable practice, but with few benefits to teaching and learning. This is shown in Table 3.

Merging of Schools Offers Professional Development Opportunities

Forty-eight percent of the respondents strongly disagreed that the new school which

Table 2: Views of respondents on the effects of merging schools (n=25)

Items	Strongly agree		Agree		Not sure		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
Q1	13	52	5	20	2	8	2	8	3	12
Q2	5	20	3	12	1	4	4	16	12	48
Q3	5	20	5	20	5	20	5	20	5	20
Q4	5	20	5	20	2	8	5	20	8	32
Q5	19	76	1	4	1	4	2	8	2	8
Q6	12	48	5	20	3	12	3	12	2	8
Q7	4	16	5	20	3	12	3	12	10	40
Q8	19	76	1	4	1	4	3	12	1	4
Q9	5	20	5	20	5	20	5	20	5	20
Q10	5	20	3	12	2	8	5	20	10	40

Table 3: Views of teachers regarding the effects of merging schools

Variable: Merging of schools is an invaluable practice.
Mean=2.08 SD=1.44

	Value	Frequency	Cumulative Frequency	%	Cumulative %
Strongly agree	1	13	18	52	52
Agree	2	5	23	20	72
Not sure	3	2	25	8	80
Disagree	4	2	27	8	88
Strongly disagree	5	3	30	12	100

results from a merger offers more professional development opportunities while 16 percent of the respondents disagreed with the statement. Only 4 percent of the respondents were uncertain about whether or not the new merged school offers more professional development opportunities to them. However, 20 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that the new merged school offers more professional development opportunities while 12 percent of the respondents confirmed that they are professionally capacitated.

Influence of School Merging on Academic Climate

The respondents were generally not sure whether schools that result from a merger have an improved academic climate. Twenty percent of the respondents strongly disagreed that the academic climate at their new merged schools had improved from their previous stations. Twenty percent of the respondents also disagreed with this statement. Another 20 percent of the respondents were not sure whether the academic climate at their new schools had improved after the merger of schools. Twenty percent of the respondents strongly agreed that the academic climate at their new merged schools had improved from the merger while the last 20 percent of the respondents, again, agreed that the new merged school offers a better academic climate for them.

Interaction between Teachers and Learners

Most respondents revealed that interaction between teachers and learners improved after the merging of schools. Thirty-two percent of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement while 20 percent agreed. In addition, only 8 percent of the respondents were not sure whether the interaction between them and learners had improved from the merging of schools. 20 percent of the respondents disagreed that the interaction between teachers and learners improved after the merger while the remaining 20 percent of the respondents also disagreed with the statement. This implies that teachers in merged schools easily relate with learners in a way that ensures that they are no distractions in their instructional delivery.

Forming of Relationships in Merged Schools

Seventy-six percent of the respondents strongly agreed that teachers find it easier to form relationships with each other at their new merged schools while only 4 percent of the respondents agreed with this statement. A further 4 percent of the respondents were not sure about the statement. Only 8 percent of the respondents agreed that teachers find it easier to form relationships with each other at their new merged schools while another 8 percent of the respondents also disagreed with the survey item. The ability of the teachers to work together in the merged schools indicates the extent with which the practice of merging of schools is embraced in the South African education system.

Nature of Teaching Facilities in Merged Schools

Many respondents generally disagreed with the statement that their new merged schools offer better teaching facilities than their old schools. Forty percent of the respondents strongly disagreed while only 12 percent of the respondents disagreed. Twelve percent of the respondents were not certain while 20 percent of the respondents confirmed that the schools that come from mergers offer better teaching facilities than unmerged but ineffective schools. The final 16 percent of the respondents also strongly agreed with this statement.

Collaboration of Teachers in the Merged Schools

In Table 4, a vast majority of respondents (76%) strongly agreed that the collaboration of teachers in the new merged schools easily entailed while 4 percent of the respondents agreed with this statement. Four percent of the respondents were unsure whether the collaboration of teachers in the new merged schools is easily realised. Only 12 percent of the respondents disagreed while 4 percent of the respondents also strongly disagreed. The mean of 1.64 and standard deviation of 1.25 suggest that most of the respondents feel that the collaboration of teachers in the new schools which are a result of a merger easily unfolds and teachers find it very

Table 4: The unfolding of teacher collaboration in the merged schools

Variable: Teacher collaboration
 Mean=1.64 SD=1.25

	Value	Frequency	Cumulative Frequency	%	Cumulative %
Strongly agree	1	19	19	76	76
Agree	2	1	20	4	80
Not sure	3	1	21	4	84
Disagree	4	3	24	12	96
Strongly disagree	5	1	25	4	100

easy to work with each other irrespective of other effects of merging of schools. This means that the merging of schools has no clear effect on teacher collaboration.

Merging of Schools Improves the Use of Instructional Technology

Twenty percent of the respondents strongly disagreed that merging of schools offers teachers better instructional technology than in their old schools while 20 percent of the respondents also disagreed. Twenty percent of the respondents were not really sure that merging of schools offers teachers better instructional technology. However, 20 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that merging of schools provides teachers with better instructional technology than in old unmerged schools while another 20 percent of the respondents felt that merging of schools avails better instructional technology.

Principals Encounter Difficulties in Managing Schools that are Merged

Finally, 40 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed that principals are facing difficulties when managing schools which are merged. 20 percent of the respondents disagreed with this statement, making a total of 60 percent of the respondents that basically disagreed. 8 percent of the respondents were not really sure if principals are facing difficulties in their day-to-day management of schools which develop from a merger. Twelve percent of the respondents agreed while the final 20 percent of respondents strongly agreed that principals find it difficult to manage merged schools.

DISCUSSION

Consultation of teachers in the process of merging schools was a source of concern. Teachers were rarely consulted in the process of merging schools. Eighty percent of the teachers revealed that they are not consulted in the process of merging of schools while 8 percent were uncertain on this survey item. Only 12 percent confirmed that they are adequately consulted. Regarding the question: *Do you feel that you were adequately consulted before your school was merged?* The following responses were obtained as mirrored in Table 5.

Table 5: Consultation of teachers on the merging of schools (n=25)

Response	Freq	%
Yes	3	12
Uncertain	2	8
No	20	80

According to Karakaplan and Kutlu (2019), school merging transform the education market structure and policy makers do not pay much attention on it. This paper addressed challenges surrounding the process of merging of schools. The paper will empower teachers, communities and the Department of Basic Education with knowledge to better understand the effects of merging schools on the performance of teachers. The paper will also assist teachers with strategies on how to cope with problems which emanate from the merging of schools.

According to the Department of Basic Education (2010), a reduced total number of schools in South Africa from 2007 to 2008 could be associated with the merging of very small schools

by the provincial education departments. John (2012) reports that a decrease of 9 percent was realised in the number of public schools in South Africa from 2000 to 2011. This reduction was from 26 789 to 24 365. The reduction in the number of schools was mainly attributed to the closing and merging of schools (John 2012). Harrison (2012) observes that many schools which are faced with closure and merging are small farm schools in rural areas with low enrolment numbers and multi-grade classes, while others are those schools in urban areas largely plagued by a decline in the number of learners. Rooney and Augenblick (2009) indicate that the merging of schools involves closing one or more schools and shifting its student population to another school or schools.

After studying the relationship between merging of schools and the educational achievement of learners, Howley et al. (2000) conclude that there is a strong relationship between school size and student achievement. However, Bard et al. (2006b) found that learners going from a small school to a larger school suffer isolation and disconnect and may not participate in many co-curricular opportunities. In their work on merging of schools, Bard et al. (2006a) also substantiate the claim that small schools have advantages over larger schools.

Nitta et al. (2010) contend that there is strong evidence that merging of schools creates situations for a wide and diverse social experience for learners who also have more extra-curricular activities available to them, particularly in sports. In addition, Bloom et al. (2010) maintain that there is a significant negative effect of large schools on student achievement compared to the average-sized schools. The process of merging schools is inherently characterised by role players that are concerned about their schools being closed. The practice of merging schools is, however, a worldwide phenomenon which different countries have had to undertake at various points in the history of education. Malkarnekar (2012) states that year after year, many schools face a threat of closure because of dwindling numbers of learners and the consequent allocation of few teachers to manage business in such schools. This in turn, breeds some serious implications as the few teachers in the schools further reduce the enrolment of learners and the quality of teaching.

When the policy of merging schools was first mooted in South Africa in 2009, it was met with opposition from parents who protested the increased distances that learners were ideally to travel to the 'new school'. The parents withdrew their children to challenge the policy of merging of schools owing to a promise by the South African government to provide buses that will offer free transport to learners in the catchment areas of the new established schools. It is normal for two schools to be merged, but in some cases, up to three government primary schools can be merged with a high enrolment state-run school in the vicinity (Patel and Cummins 2019; Malkarnekar 2012). Sometimes the initial willingness to work on the merger may turn into fear and trepidation if the staff members are not well informed. Teachers, at times, seem not to know what the state is doing, with uncertainty surrounding the implementation of a school merger (Bullock 2009).

In South Africa, teachers are sometimes told that if enrolment numbers in their schools fall, more teachers will be "axed" (this being the Department of Basic Education's euphemism for retrenching extra teachers in low-enrolment schools). Dodson and Garrett (2002) posit that the merging of schools produces an equivalent level of output at a lower cost per student. In addition, merging of schools reduces costs and the need for excess teaching and administrative personnel. Self (2001a) asserts that lowering education budgets frees up funds that could be used to improve the quality of education by reducing operative expenses as well as the use of facilities. The merging of schools reduces administrative costs.

Dodson and Garrett (2002), however, argue that while merging of schools may offer some cost saving, it may also generate additional costs. Bard et al. (2006b) observe that there is scant evidence that merging of small schools into larger schools reduces fiscal expenditure per pupil. There is a higher percentage of money spent on maintenance and utilities as a result of merging of schools (Purcell and Shackelford 2005). Andrews et al. (2002) also support the claim that merging of schools can account for higher transportation and travel costs of learners which lead to less involvement in their academic work. Dodson and Garrett (2002) further contend that geo-

graphical constraints may make merging of schools impractical because of transportation costs.

Even early in the 21st century, merging was promoted as a way to reduce costs through economies of scale and to improve teaching and learning (Self 2001a). Economies of scale refer to a situation whereby larger organisations operate more efficiently than smaller organisations, so that an increase in size leads to a decrease in per-unit cost (Slate and Jones 2005). According to the guidelines for the rationalisation of small or non-viable schools in South Africa, the merger and closure of schools aim at improving the quality of education, expenditure of the resourcing in schools, promoting access to schools and ensuring the retention of learners and teachers (SAPA 2010).

Slate and Jones (2005) observe that a normal high school is expected to enrol between 1000 and 2000 learners. Schools that have less than 1000 learners experience difficulties in purchasing goods in bulk and encounter increased administration costs. In contrast, Self (2001b) contends that merging of schools is likely to produce greater efficiency or improved instructional results, particularly if it is an outcome of a state policy which is aimed at implementing forced merging of a large scale. Dodson and Garrett (2002) further maintain that the merging of schools which results from decisions that are made at a district level does not reduce educational expenditures. This is realised after comparing expenditure figures before and after the merging exercise.

Moreover, Holmlund and Bohlmark (2019) postulate that there are large consequences for learners' environments in affected areas as travel distances to school and the size of the school increased. Slate and Jones (2005) argue that the added costs of administration in high enrolment schools may undermine economies of scale in the same way as it happens in the world of business. Creating larger schools would decrease economic efficiency in case the schools adapt a similar pattern as other labour-intensive organisations. Phillips (2012) believes that the savings that are projected for numerous expenses do not happen in a high enrolment school. Additional savings are impossible once the class size has reached its maximum limit while a continual in-

crease in the size of the school increases the costs of administration.

Bailey (2000) posits that large schools which are products of a merger are superior owing to resources and curriculums that provide for deeper and broader education. Merged schools offer varied and expanded curriculums and provide more opportunities for learners than in small schools (Slate and Jones 2005; Self 2001a). Gardener et al. (2000) suggest that growth in the size of school is linked to various course offerings. This implies that large schools have more courses to cater for the size of learners.

On the contrary, Lambert (2009) argues that small schools can provide high quality instruction by concentrating on the core curriculum and responding to individual interests and needs of learners. In addition, Gelb (2002) maintains that the number of courses that are offered in low enrolment schools serve learners well as majority of them can receive a comprehensive core curriculum. Ideally, small schools tend to discontinue the offering of programmes that are ineffective in comparison with large schools. In addition, learners may elect not to register for all the specialised courses that are provided in large institutions. In fact, a lot of content covered in specialised courses in big schools is also provided as part of regular courses in small schools. The smaller schools find it easier to organise learning programmes and opportunities that engage learners in a more rigorous and meaningful way. The adjustment of school organisation and the spill over of learners and teachers to other schools are some of the effects of school merger (Holmlund and Bohlmark 2019). Bailey (2000) concludes that smaller schools have potential to offer a variety of specialised programmes. This implies that an increase in school size, with a related increase in the number of offered courses, does not directly point to an improvement in the quality of the curriculum which is offered. Precisely, the size of the curriculum does not imply its superiority (Hobbs 2003).

Gladwell (2000) states that the participation of parents and their involvement in nurturing the educational aspirations of their children, providing financial support, facilitating school attendance and encouraging achievement in consolidated schools have positive implications for education. Removing schools from local com-

munities and locating them further away from their original environs lead to reduced participation of parents in schools (Patel and Cummins 2019; Nitta et al. 2010). Parents serve as educational allies by assisting teachers to develop the full academic potential of learners and to monitor the quality of teaching and learning strategies that are employed.

Duyar and Collins (2008) argue that merged schools create an impersonal school climate which cause learners to feel isolated and alienated. This results in lower parental involvement and learner participation. Teachers and learners are left with less support for effective teaching and learning (Nitta et al. 2010). Parents, just like learners tend to encounter transportation problems which can reduce their efforts to build needed relationships between schools and communities. In the current policy context of decentralisation, the presence of parents in the functioning of schools is required where they serve as decision makers. Those who appraise the merger positively experience less stress, are committed to their duties and less inclined to leave the teaching profession (Cartwright et al. 2007).

Bard et al. (2006b) suggest that issues such as declining populations, declining enrolments, financial cutbacks and educational reform seem to exert the strongest influences on school closures and school amalgamations. The benefits of a school in a community are, however, numerous. This naturally makes the events of school closure and school merger particularly devastating to residents (Onescu 2014; Kysilko 2003). Parker (2001) states that schools act as the social hub, where socialisation and community identity are strengthened. Schools, rural ones, often serve as the cultural, recreational and social centre of the community as they offer activities that contribute to the wellbeing of its members. Purcell and Shackelford (2005) also observe that schools are often the major industry in a rural community and contribute to the economic stability of a community. The closure of schools decreases the sense of community of residents (Holmlund and Bohlmark 2019; Onescu 2014). As a result of the closure of schools, the community experience diminishing civic engagement in the form of volunteerism, community recreation, participation and intergenerational relationships.

CONCLUSION

The paper concludes that while the merging of schools is undertaken with a view to improve teaching and learning in schools, there are other factors that make the implementation less successful than intended. It was established that the performance of teachers in classrooms is slightly affected by the process of merging schools. Merging of schools is a beneficial practice but presents fewer professional development opportunities for teachers. The academic climate of the schools and teacher-learner interactions are not significantly affected by a merger of schools. Teachers find it easy to form relationships with each other, to work with each other as well as with learners at their new merged schools. Moreover, it appears that merged schools offer no better teaching facilities for teaching and learning than non-consolidated schools. Adequate consultation of teachers prior to a merger of schools minimises the challenges that they usually encounter in the process. The paper also shows that principals do not face a lot of difficulties when managing schools that are merged.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers and principals are required to engage in well thought out strategies to cope with the effects of the process of merging of schools. Adequate consultation with teachers, learners, school administrators and the surrounding communities should be done prior to a merger of schools in order to clear some misconceptions which may have disastrous consequences on the process. The process of merging small untenable schools needs to be continued but well-handled to ensure the professionalism of teachers and their ability to collaborate with others are not affected. A merger of schools should also be done in a way that teachers retain the positions they held prior to the consolidation. This helps to reduce anxiety and fear that any change in the system normally attracts. Educational resources in small schools should be matched with those in large schools so that a smooth transition is realised when small schools are merged with bigger ones.

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