AN INVESTIGATIVE RESEARCH INTO MERGER OF SCHOOLS PROGRAMMES IN THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION IN VHEMBE DISTRICT FOR THE ACADEMIC YEARS 2010 TO 2016

by

XINYATA NHLAZINI CARTSON HON'WANA

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SUPERVISOR: Dr N.F. LITSHANI
CO SUPERVISORS: Dr D.A. SINTHUMULE
Mrs R.M. MAKHWATHANA

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DECLARATION

I, **XINYATA NHLAZINI CARTSON HON'WANA,** declare that:

"**AN INVESTIGATIVE RESEARCH INTO MERGER OF SCHOOLS PROGRAMMES IN THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION IN VHEMBE DISTRICT FOR THE ACADEMIC YEARS 2010 TO 2016**"

... is my own work and all sources that I have used, have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

……………………………………………..   ………………………….

 XINYATA NHLAZINI CARTSON HON'WANA   **DATE**

DEDICATION

My research work was made feasible through people who exerted special efforts in my life hence I dedicate this work to them. They are: My late father, Ndhecheni Wright Hon'wana who was a role model and a motivational icon from my childhood; he used to promise that if I could pass at the end of the year, he would do everything possible to appreciate my achievements.

To my mother Khubani Yimisa Hon'wana who after the passing away of my father took all the responsibilities of raising us (with my brothers and sisters) under very difficult conditions. As an unemployed woman and a single parent, she managed to give us the necessary love and support until we all became adults.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to investigate the merger of schools' programmes in the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in Vhembe District for the academic years 2010 to 2016. When small schools are not merged, it is difficult for the Department of Basic Education to adequately allocate resources for effective and efficient teaching and learning. The study adopted Eisner's Connoisseur Model of Enquiry as its theoretical framework. Besides the theoretical framework, the study also adopted a legal framework: SASA, Act No. 84 of 1996. This study was conceptualised within the interpretive paradigm, subsumed under a qualitative research design. Data was collected through interviews and document analysis. The population of the study was eighty-five (85) schools identified for merger in the Vhembe District. Purposive sampling was used to select nine (09) principals from the merging schools, three (03) Deputy Manager Governance officials from the identified circuits and one (01) district governance official in Vhembe District. Hence the sample of the study was thirteen (13) participants. Data was analysed thematically. The study revealed that most schools identified for merger were merged prematurely; that is, schools were merged before the provision of relevant infrastructure and resources in the merging centres and this caused the communities to reject mergers. The study recommends that proper consultation with relevant local structures like traditional leaders in particular is crucial to ensure that the merging of schools is implemented with minimal challenges. Correct interpretation, implementation of policies and effective monitoring of programmes should be ensured to advocate for school merging.

Key words: Consultation, Merger, Rationalisation of schools, Resource mobilization, School twinning

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACRONYM	MEANING
CES	Chief Education Specialist
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DMG	Deputy Manager Governance
ERNWACA	Education Research Network for West and Central Africa
HOD	Head of Department
HIV/AIDS	Humanodeficiency Virus and Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
LTSM	Learner Teacher Support Material
MCRE	Ministerial Committee Report on Rural Education
MEC	Member of Executive Committee
MGT	Multi grade Teaching
MEDUNSA	Medical University of South Africa
MOE	Ministry of Education
NNSSF	National Norms and Standards for School Funding
NSNP	National School Nutrition Programme
RAU	Rand Afrikaans University
RED	Rural Education Directorate
RTE	Right to Education
SA	South Africa
SASA	South African Schools' Act
SEO	School Electoral Officer
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Body

SRC	Student Representative Council
TWR	Technikon Witwatersrand
UJ	University of Johannesburg
UK	United Kingdom
UKZN	University of Kwazulu Natal
USA	United States of America

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1   INTRODUCTION

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) realised the difficulty in adequately allocating and mobilising resources to ensure effective and efficient teaching and learning environment in small and farm schools. Such resources include among others; finance resources, human resource and infrastructure. Allocation of resources is determined by school enrolment. The higher the enrolment, the more the resources allocated and the lower the enrolment, lesser the resources allocated to the school. This means bigger schools ideally have more resources. The DBE also provides National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF) which is also based on school enrolment. In this case, big schools become well-resourced whereas small schools keep on dilapidating with subsequent underperformance. With little resources, it is difficult to provide enough learning and teaching materials to small schools which is key for learner performance while in big and well-resourced schools, repairs and maintenance of schools' infrastructure become easy. Other challenges of small schools include unnecessary educational costs (sometimes the cost of goods transported is lower than the transport cost), difficulties in allocation of resources such as staff members, NNSSF and National Schools Nutrition Programme (NSNP). After realising all the above and other challenges, the DBE came with an intervention strategy to merge small and farm schools by establishing a ministerial committee to look into the feasible ways in which schools can be merged. As a result, the Ministerial Committee on Rural Education (MCRE) was established in 2005.

1.2   BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The MCRE (2005) proposed that the Department of Education should provide guidelines for the rationalisation of small and farm schools including closures, mergers and expropriation. This led to the proclamation of Guidelines for the rationalisation of Small

or Non-Viable Schools (2009:07) in terms of South African Schools Act (SASA) (Act No.84 of 1996). Section 12A of the same Act provides for the merger of schools and Section 33 of the same act provides for the closure of public schools. Accordingly, and as per the mandate of Department of Education, the MCRE developed guidelines for merger and closure of rural and farm schools to provide a framework which will assist provincial departments of education to expedite the merging and closing of rural and farm schools to effectively start from 2010 to 2012 (Department of Basic Education, 2009:07). The guideline document was finalised and adopted in July 2009, stated above as Guidelines for the rationalisation of Small or Non–Viable Schools (2009:07). According to the guidelines, this merger and closure of schools are not limited to rural and farm schools but may occur in urban communities as well (Guidelines for Rationalisation of Small and Non-Viable Schools, 2009:07).

It is noteworthy to highlight that merger of schools has been and is being implemented in many countries around the globe. In most cases the purpose of merger of schools is restructuring the schooling system and equitable share of educational opportunities (Rodgers, Glesner & Meyers, 2014:1-2). In South Africa, the purpose of merger of schools is to collectively improve quality of education, to expedite resourcing of schools, to promote access to schools and to ensure retention of learners and teachers in Rural and Farm Schools (Guidelines for the Rationalisation of Small and Farm Schools, 2009:01).

Among other countries that implement merger of schools as the solution to challenges and problems in schools are: The United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK), Australia, Philippines, Singapore, China and India. The State of Vermont in USA had concerns about high educational costs and the ability of a decentralised system to equitably provide educational opportunities (Rodgers, Glesner & Meyers, 2014:1-2).

1.3   STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This is an investigative study into merger of schools programmes in the Department of Education in Vhembe District for the academic years 2010 to 2016. The problem of school merging manifests itself in small and farm schools where resources are to be allocated. The department experienced difficulties in allocating resources such as staff members, infrastructure, norms and standards for school funding (NNSSF), National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP) and curriculum consideration. Allocation of resources is based on the school enrolment, the higher the enrolment, the more resources allocated and the lower the enrolment, the lesser the resources allocated to schools. Small and Farm Schools are characterised by declining learner enrolment, especially in primary schools which culminates in closure or merger of some schools. This situation affects families whose children attend those schools.   In such situations, teachers find themselves relocated to distant schools where they need to adjust themselves to new environments while parents are expected to transport their children to those new schools (Nembudani, 2014:01).

The above challenges prompted the Provincial Departments of Education to embark on merger of schools. However, there is a very slow progress in Limpopo Province, Vhembe District in particular. The slow progress in this project manifested itself when the number of schools targeted for merging was not completely merged, instead of successfully merging hundred and fourteen (114) schools in Vhembe District by the end of 2012, only twenty-nine schools were successfully merged.

1.4   PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main aim of this study was to increase educational opportunities through merger of identified small and farm schools in Vhembe District. This aim is encapsulated in the four objectives below:

To identify perceptions of participants with regard to the importance of merger of their schools.

To identify challenges in the merger of the schools programme in the Department of Education in Vhembe District between 2010 and 2016.

To identify available resources to assist the process to unfold in order to promote effective teaching and learning.

To explore possible intervention strategies to be used to enhance successful merger of schools in Vhembe District

To achieve the above objectives, the following research questions were answered through literature review, interviews and merger documents consulted.

1.5   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question was: How can educational opportunities be increased through merger of schools programme of identified small and farm schools in Vhembe District?

The following research questions were raised to realise the four objectives of the study:

What is the importance of merger of schools?

What are the challenges in the merger of the schools programme in the Department of Education in Vhembe District between 2010 and 2016?

Which are the available resources to assist the process to unfold in order to promote effective teaching and learning?

What are the possible intervention strategies that could be used to enhance a successful merger of schools in Vhembe District?

1.6   THEORATICAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS OF THE STUDY

A theoretical framework is a "blueprint" for the entire dissertation inquiry. It serves as the guide on which to build and support one's study. In addition, the theoretical framework provides the structure to define how one will philosophically, epistemologically, methodologically and analytically approach the study as a whole (Grant & Osanloo, 2014:13). This study is informed by two frameworks, the theoretical and the legal one. The two frameworks are Eisner's Connoisseur Model of enquiry and SASA, 1996 and related sections.

1.6.1   Eisner's Connoisseur Model of Enquiry

Eisner's Connoisseur Model of Enquiry is the leading proponent of qualitative research approach generally known as connoisseurship. Eisner's approach is interpretive, but he makes room for critical approaches as well, hence his model has two major components: Connoisseurship and Criticism which together constitute an inquiry. Eisner's two aspects of qualitative research, Connoisseurship and Criticism are interrelated as explained below.

Connoisseurship

For Eisner (1997) a connoisseur in research is someone who has experience and skills to understand the subtle aspects of a situation that would be completely hidden to an observer who is not a connoisseur. The connoisseur in this study is the researcher, a governance section official whose responsibilities include implementing SASA 1996 Sections 12A and 33 on merger and closure of schools, sections 20 (1) – (11), 21 (1) - (6) on the functioning of interim SGB of the merged schools, sections 8 (1) – (5) on the adjustment of learners' code of conduct of the merged schools, section 6 (1)- (4) on determining the language policy of the merging centre, and section 7 on religious observances.

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Criticism as Qualitative Enquiry

Criticism in the arts and humanities forms the background of Eisner's ideas. Criticisms can be negative, positive or both. Different critics may offer quite different criticisms. Eisner (1997:32-40) Pointing out the importance of a qualitative inquiry (QI) in his model, Eisner (1997:32-40) asserts that "qualitative inquiry is presented in an expressive voice, with the researcher clearly present in the text." Eisner (1997) does not see qualitative research as a top-down or subject- object relationship in which the researcher finds the truth about the subjects. It is instead a transitive process that is the locus of human experience. He maintains that research is a product of the interaction of two postulated entities − the objective and the subjective. Eisner's emphasis in the transitive accounts is to make room for many different sources of knowledge.

This theoretical framework is more relevant in this research because it emphasises that affected people are at a better position to address the problem. The aspect of criticism in Eisner's qualitative inquiry allowed for participants to critically relate their experiences and to the researcher too, to critically inquire into participants' experience of merger of schools.

1.6.2 The Legal Framework

Merger of schools in SA are regulated by the South African Schools' Act (SASA), (Act no. 84 of 1996). Section 12A of the same Act provides for merger and Section 33 for closure of public schools. The Ministerial Committee Report on Rural Education (MCRE, 2005:09) in terms of (SASA), (Act No. 84 of 1996) developed Guidelines for the Rationalisation of Small and Non-Viable Schools including closures, mergers and expropriation served as the frame work against which the process of merging was to unfold. The Guidelines for the Rationalisation of Small and Non-Viable Schools (2009:13) provides for a framework which assists Provincial Departments of Education to expedite the merging and closing of farm and rural schools by 2012 Department of Basic Education (2009:07). The guidelines document further describes the process for merger and closure of schools. It

also embraces the important contribution that larger and better resourced schools can play in the development and poverty alleviation projects in rural areas. The Limpopo Department of Education Merger of Schools Manual (n.d) provides for the directives by MEC reasons for merger of small schools, establishment of coordinating structures and their responsibilities.

The two frameworks informed the role of the researcher, that is, as a critical connoisseur who engaged in the transitive process to solicit participants' experiences of merger of schools within the confinement of SASA, 1996. Hence, the frameworks played a complementary role that assisted the researcher to determine the scope of the literature review to respond to research questions. In addition, they guided the researcher in terms of choosing the relevant research paradigm, research design and the research methodology of the study in order to achieve the aim of this study.

1.7   THE CONCEPT OF MERGER OF INSTITUTIONS

In South Africa (SA), as stated previously and also with the proclamation of Guidelines for the Rationalisation of Small and/or Non–Viable Schools (2009), merger of schools is regarded as the best option in order to achieve the following: to improve the quality of education, to expedite the resourcing of schools, to promote access to schools, to ensure retention of teachers and learners in rural and farm schools, to achieve among others, increased educational opportunities while reducing cost and to achieve excellence in production. In addition, merger of schools has a purpose to dismantle the racial divides of apartheid and transform institutions of learning into public ones and to curb ineffectiveness and inefficiency that lead to poor performance in schools (Department of Basic Education, 2009).

As documented, merger of educational institutions is not new in SA, universities were merged between 2004 and 2005 and the process was done through Rationalisation and Incorporation in which the aim was to reduce the total number of institutions of higher

learning from 36 to 23 (University World News, 2010). The main aim of the initiative was to dismantle apartheid's racial divides and to transform the sector. Amongst the successfully merged institutions; the first group of institutions targeted for merging was the Rand Afrikaans University (RAU), Technikon Witwatersrand (TWR) and Soweto and East Rand campuses of Vista University. The newly merged institution is today known as University of Johannesburg (commonly known by the acronym UJ) which offers vocational and traditional qualifications.

The University of Natal and the University of Durban Westville were also merged on the 01/01/2004 and after the merger of these institutions, the newly merged institution is known as University of Kwazulu Natal (UKZN) (University World News, 2010). Be that as it may, the merger in higher institutions of learning such as the University of the North affectionately known as Turfloop and Medical University of South Africa (MEDUNSA) could not yield the expected results. In this case, merger compromised MEDUNSA's capacity to produce much needed black professionals (Maqutu, 2014).

After the above initiatives to merge institutions of higher learning, Limpopo Department of Education also embarked on an intervention strategy to improve quality of education, to expedite resourcing of schools, to promote access to schools and to ensure retention of learners and teachers in rural and farm schools (Department Basic Education, 2009:09). The Limpopo Department of Education started merging programme in 2010 which was meant to be completed in 2012 in terms of the plan (Department of Basic Education, 2009:7). The project started with a smaller number of 113 schools which later rose to 226 and further escalated to 301 to be merged in the province (Mandiwana, 2015). By June 2015, in Limpopo Province, only sixty-one schools were successfully merged. Of the total number of schools to be merged, Vhembe District had 114 schools to merge of which by June 2015, only 29 schools were successfully merged, and eighty-nine schools were still outstanding (Mandiwana, 2015).

The above report on the merger programme in Limpopo clearly indicates that the Department of Education in Vhembe District could not meet the deadlines for merger of schools as per the Guidelines for the Rationalisation of Small Schools or the Non-Viable (Department of Basic Education, 2009:07) which stipulates that the programme was meant to start in 2010 and to be completed in 2012 hence this research. This research study is also meant to investigate successes and non-compliance to the set due dates. Non-compliance undermines the vision and plans of the government whereas compliance promotes quality education. Even though the deadlines for the completion of the project was meant to be 2012, however, the department allowed time for merging of schools which were already in the process before the end of 2012 to continue (Department of Basic Education, 2009:07). Hence districts and circuits were allowed to carry on even beyond 2015. This is a cause for concern when the programme has no longer timeframe, no monitoring, and no urgency to see the programme to its completion. This left the researcher with no option than to address this gap as a Deputy Manager in governance

1.8   DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

For better understanding of this study, the following concepts are defined:

Merger

Davare (2014:03) asserts that merger means one of the governmental entities from the original group remains. In school's terms, merger of schools implies the combination of two or more schools with the intent of eliminating an administrative group and/ duplicate programme. Wheelen and Hunger (2004:139) define merger in business context, as "a transaction involving two or more corporations in which stock is exchanged, but from which only one corporation survives." Meanwhile David (2001:182) states that "a merger occurs when two organisations of about equal size unite to form one enterprise". Mergers are usually between firms of somewhat similar size and are usually friendly (David, 2001:182).

The South African Department of Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 defines a merger as the process contemplated in section 23 in terms of which two or more public higher education institutions that lose their status as juristic persons on the date that they are merged into a new juristic person. Two or more schools merge for restructuring the schooling system, equitable distribution of resources, to reduce unnecessary educational costs, to achieve effectiveness and efficiency, to address educational disparities of rural and urban areas in terms of workload and to achieve excellence in production (DHE, Act No. 101 of 1997).

Resource Mobilisation

The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) (2010:04), defines resource mobilisation as management of process of identifying people who share the values of one's organisation and take steps to manage this relationship.

It involves the development of capacity to "steal the donor's heart" by winning them over to the cause of the organisation. These resources are divided into three categories: Cash resources; Non- monitory resources and triangle of resource mobilisation.

According to Education Research for West and Central Africa (ERNWACA), (2010:07), resource mobilisation refers to all the means that an organisation should acquire to implement its action plan. It entails obtaining various sources from multitude of partners, by different means. Thus, resource mobilisation in this study is seen as a combination of the following resources: mechanisms and partners in order to provide excellent service.

1.8.3 Consultation

According to Sourcebook Working Document (2007:02) consultation is a "process through which subjects or topics of interest are discussed within or across constituency groups." It is a deliberation, discussion and dialogue. Consultations are more formal and

interactive than dialogue. The objective of consultation is to seek information, advice and share an opinion. In any consultative process, the convener is not only gathering inputs, but sharing information as well. The organiser seeks to identify and clarify interests at stake, with the aim of developing a well-informed strategy or project that has a good chance of being supported and implemented.

Backer (2008:02) defines consultation as "the process by which management and employees or their representatives jointly examine and discuss issues of mutual concern." It involves managers actively seeking and then taking account of the views of employees, either directly or through their representatives, before making a decision. Meaningful consultation depends on those being consulted, having adequate information and time to consider it. It is important to remember that merely providing information does not constitute consultation. Department of Basic Education provides and shares information on the guidelines of merger of schools, which is seen as the foundation of an effective consultation process in this study.

1.8.4 School Twinning

According to Belgrade (2006:04) twinning means "making a twin of" someone, schools twinning is an arrangement where schools interact with each other in many different levels. The interaction levels are: Schools participate in a formal or informal network or association; staff from one school talks with the other staff from the other schools at national, regional and international conferences; one school contacts the other for specific information or for a copy of a resource; a mentor school shares knowledge and skills with a younger; smaller or newly formed school or school unit; two or more schools work together on a particular project.

Department of Basic Education (2014:3) defines twinning of schools as pairing of schools with different backgrounds through the creation of a single school governing body and sharing of resources. It is envisaged that this process may result in increased access to

school resources through sharing and efficiency gains in administration and control; improved teaching due to shared capabilities and expertise; improved cultural awareness due to exposure to different cultures and experience as well as furthering aims of equality by embedding notion of social responsibility in learners.

Based on the above definitions and for this study, twinning aims at sharing resources, good practices, improved teaching methodologies and techniques. Both twinning and merger have some attributes in common; both are aimed at sharing of resources, the improvement of results, sharing of good practice, and the enhancement of culture of teaching and learning.

1.8.5 Rationalisation of Schools

Bhawan (2017:15) defines rationalisation of schools as a participatory and consultative process for re- assessing the need of school within the stipulation of Right to Education Act, (RTE Act, 2009) in each habitation. The need for rationalisation arises since schools established more than a decade ago or even before may have undergone a change in terms of demand and supply. It is a process of working with parents, teachers, children and communities to improve the functioning of schools and better use of the assets in the present context. In addition, rationalisation of schools is a collective effort undertaken to promote access to schools, to expedite resourcing of schools, to improve the quality of education and to ensure the retention of children in schools. The end results of the process of rationalisation of small schools will vary from one habitation to another depending on local specific situation. Rationalisation may establish the need for opening a new school in one habitation, to maintain status quo in another habitation, merging more than one school into one bigger school in another habitation and/ or relocation of a school from one habitation to another. The primary aim of the process of rationalisation of small and farm schools is to ensure placement of every child to a fully functional school in terms of availability of teachers, infrastructure and other resources as mandated under RTE Act (2009:15).

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1.9   RESEARCH PARADIGM, DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research paradigm, design and methodology of the study are discussed hereunder.

1.9.1 Research Paradigm

A paradigm is a comprehensive set of assumptions or belief system, world view, or framework that guides research and practice in a field. Walter (2012:78) concurs that paradigms are fundamental belief that affect the way to conduct a social research, including the choice of a particular research methodology. Guba and Lincoln (2009:5) add that researchers are guided by philosophical frameworks, which are called "paradigms".

This study is informed by the interpretive paradigm. This paradigm claims that researchers believe reality consists of people's subjective experiences of the external world; thus, they may adopt an inter – subjective epistemology and ontological belief that reality is socially constructed (Makue, 2015). This paradigm was adopted as it was considered suitable for the nature of the formulated research questions, the data collection instruments, which included interview schedules and documents analysis.

1.9.2 Research Design

According to Kothari (2004:31), a research design is a plan, a roadmap and blueprint strategy of investigation conceived to obtain answers to research questions; it is the heart of any study. Research design is a model or action plan upon which the entire study is built; it dictates the way a study is conducted and provides the roadmap of a study in terms of the sample, data collection instruments and analysis procedure. Burns and Grove (2003:195) define a research design as "a blue print for conducting a study with maximum control over factors that may interfere with the validity of the findings". For Durrheim (2004:29), a research design is a strategic framework for action that serves as

a bridge between research questions and the execution, or implementation of the research strategy. A research design can be qualitative or quantitative or mixed (Creswell, 2003).

In this study, a qualitative research design was used. The qualitative research design allows theory to emerge from data that is collected from the perspective of the participants. This theory follows a systematic yet flexible process to collect data, code the data, make connections and see what theories are generated or are built from the data. Basically, a qualitative research design allows for the simultaneous collection and analysis of data using a process known as thematic analysis.

1.9.3 Research Methodology

Schwardt (2007:195) defines research methodology as a theory of how an inquiry should proceed. It involves analysis of the assumptions, principles and procedures in an approach to inquiry. Kothari (2004) defines research methodology as a systematic, theoretical analysis of the procedures applied to a field of study. Research methodology involves procedures of describing, explaining and predicting phenomena to solve a problem; it is the 'how' of the process or the techniques of conducting research. A research methodology does not set out to provide solutions but offers the theoretical underpinning for understanding which procedure, set of procedures can be applied to a specific case (Kothari, 2004). It encompasses concepts such as research designs, target population, sample size and sampling procedure, data collection instruments and data analysis procedure. In this study, qualitative research methods were employed. The main aim of qualitative research methods was to collect details for the understanding of human behaviour where direct interaction with participants through individual interviews was the focus. In this study, interviews and documents analysis were used as qualitative research methods:

1.9.3.1 Interviews

Interviews provide access to what is in a person's mind and allows one to measure what a person knows. For this study, interview schedules were developed to conduct face to face open ended interviews with participants. Interviews were used to discover experience of participants accumulated over years. The data collected consists of information and direct quotations from participants, concerning their opinions, feelings and knowledge of merger of schools.

1.9.3.2 Documents analysis

Documents are a means of tracking change, development and verification of findings. Documents further reveal what people do or do not do and what they value (Bowen, 2009:29). Policy documents provided background and clarity as means of providing supplementary data. Documents analysis targeted statistics on merger process, SGB minutes, roll call and invitation letters on merger of schools and related records.

1.10 POPULATION, SAMPLING AND SAMPLE

A population is all the individuals or units of interest; typically, there is not available for almost all individual in a population (Halon & Larget, 2011:07). The population of this study is eighty-five (85) schools identified for merger in Vhembe District.

1.10.1 Sampling Procedure

According to Robinson (2013:25) sampling is central to the practice of qualitative methods. Sampling process integrates theory and process for defining a sample universe as follows: By way of specifying inclusion and exclusion criteria for potential participation and deciding upon a sample size. According to Gentles, Ploeg and McKibbon (2015:1775) sampling in qualitative research is the selection of specific data sources from which data are collected to address research objectives.

The sampling procedure used in this study was purposive. Purposive sampling is based entirely on the judgment of the researcher, in that a sample is composed of elements which contain the most characteristics, representative, or typical attributes of the population (Singleton et al, 1998).

1.10.2 Sample

A sample is a subset of the individuals in a population; there is typically data available for individuals in samples (Hanlon & Larget, 2011:07). For this study, the researcher purposefully sampled thirteen (13) participants. The sample consisted of one (01) district official responsible for governance issues, three (03) circuit officials (Deputy Managers Governance) responsible for governance issues from the sampled circuits and nine (09) principals from the sampled schools. The selected governance officials are responsible for governance issues which include consultation with SGBs and parents.   Principals from the nine schools were identified because they are the accounting officers in their respective schools, they are ex-officio members of the school governing bodies and that they were part of the process of merger.

1.11   DATA ANALYSIS

Flick (2013:05) defines qualitative data analysis as the classification and interpretation of linguistic (visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning making in the material and what is repeated in it. Qualitative data analysis is also applied to discover and describe issues in the field or structures and processes in routines and practices. Often, qualitative data analysis combines approaches of a rough analysis of the material (overviews, condensation and summaries) with approaches of detailed analysis (elaboration of categories, hermeneutic interpretations or identified structures). The final aim is often to arrive at generalisable statements by comparing various materials or various texts or several cases.

Zikmund, Babin, Carr and Griffin (2013:459) explain the stages of data analysis of raw data as editing, coding and creating an electronic data file. Symbols are assigned to raw data, especially when computer data files are used in analysis or for classifying and interpreting data. Depending on the goal and the way the data will be analysed, data analysis in research is known to be qualitative or quantitative in nature.

1.12 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF QUALITATIVE DATA

Rule and John (2011:107) assert that trustworthiness is a concept that promotes values such as scholarly vigour, transparency and professional ethics so that the study itself gains high level of trust and fidelity. The study ensured trustworthiness of data based on Guba's (1981:20) criteria, namely: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (see chapter 3 item 3.8 in detail).

1.13 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2010:63) delimitations are those characteristics that limit the scope and define the boundaries of one's study. Delimitations are in one's control. Delimiting factors include the choice of objectives, the research questions, variables of interest, theoretical perspectives that one adopted and the population that the researcher chose to investigate.

In this study, only schools affected by merging in the Vhembe District Department of Education were targeted; Circuits with schools targeted for merger, circuits with serious challenges and those with minor ones; the choice of the problem statement - the departmental challenges in allocating resources in small and farm schools were singled out; the investigation focused on participants who are professionals and directly responsible with merger of schools. Below is the map of Vhembe District that shows municipalities in which the research population is based.

Figure 1.1: The Map of Vhembe District

1.14 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Research ethics refer to the widely accepted moral principles and rules that guide research. Research ethics prevent research abuses by placing emphasis on the humane and sensitive treatment of participants (Strydom, 2005:63). Qualitative researchers therefore need to be sensitive to ethical principles because of their topic, face to face interactive data collection, an emergent design and reciprocity with participants. According to Mbatha (2005:16) ethics can be seen as a system of moral principles that is based on values relating to human conduct, with respect to the rightness or wrongness of certain actions and to the goodness and badness of the motives and ends of such actions.

In compliance with ethical considerations, the researcher received an Ethical Clearance Certificate as a permission to conduct research from University of Venda (Appendix B); the researcher was given an approval letter to conduct research in the sampled schools

within Vhembe District by the District Director (Appendix D), participants signed consent letters (Appendix E) to assure participants to take part on voluntary bases. Participants were also assured of confidentiality of their names. All these reinforced trustworthiness of the study as discussed above.

1.15   SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is aimed to investigate merger of schools in Vhembe District Department of Education in the academic years 2010 to 2016 and its findings are significant for the following reasons:

1.15.1 The researcher stands to benefit in terms of research knowledge and skills needed to conduct research professionally.

1.15.2 The researcher acquired skills in writing credible research articles for presentation and publication.

1.15.3 Policy makers will gain more insight in terms of understanding the checks and balances when developing polices on merger of small schools and farm schools.

1.15.4 Teachers, community leaders and ordinary parents will gain better understanding with regard to the importance of merger of schools.

1.15.5 The Department of Education will ensure that before implementation of a project such as this one, readiness in terms of provision of the necessary resources is a prerequisite.

1.15.6 Lastly, local leaders will know what to contribute in the process of merger of schools.

When schools are successfully merged, there will be no more multi-grade teaching in schools, and this will enable the teacher to focus on one grade and not two or more grades in one classroom. This directly benefits both the teachers and learners because there will be no more divided attention during lessons. In terms of National School Nutrition Programme, in some instances very small quantities of food are delivered while the expense incurred in transportation of this food is higher than the amount spent to buy the

food delivered thereby making no economic sense for service providers, so, if such small schools can be merged, there would be economic sense in the programme. Norms and standards for school funding is meant to provide funds to run these schools and the funds are based on the enrolment of the school, the smaller the school, the less the allocation, and with less funding, schools cannot run smoothly. The introduction and correct implementation of the project would make things easier for schools and the above citations indicate how the department is going to benefit as one of the beneficiaries in the merger of school's project.

When things are in order at school with enough classrooms, the Department of Education will be able to provide enough support in terms of norms and standard for school funding, nutrition programme and effective management of Schools by Management Teams (SMT's). There will be discipline and as a result, effective and efficient teaching and learning will take place. Where there is effective and efficient teaching and learning, results will improve and communities as one of the beneficiaries will be happy.

1.16 CHAPTERS OUTLINE

Chapter 1: Discusses the introduction and background to the study, statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, and other related topics.

Chapter 2: Provides literature reviewed on merger of schools, purpose, challenges and strategies to expedite merger of schools.

Chapter 3: Presents research paradigm, research design and the research methodology used to investigate merger of school programme in the Department of Education in Vhembe District.

Chapter 4: Presents the analysis and interpretation of data.

Chapter 5: Gives the general summary, conclusion and recommendations of the study.

1.17 CONCLUSION

This chapter introduces the study, the background of the study, statement of the problem, aim of the study, research tools and related items to lay a firm foundation of the study. Chapter Two reviews literature of the scholars to develop and support the researcher's arguments.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses literature review and the focus is on the following sub headings: Merger of schools in selected countries, the importance of merger of schools, challenges of merger of schools and intervention strategies in merging of schools.

2.2   MERGER OF SCHOOLS IN SELECTED COUNTRIES

The above merger was meant to provide equitable educational opportunities which are still a challenge in South Africa because we still have well-resourced schools while others suffer in dilapidated and poorly resourced conditions. One of the reasons for merger of schools in South Africa was to reduce unnecessary educational costs. In some instances, very small quantities of food NSNP are delivered, while the expenses incurred in the transportation of these food is higher than the food quantities bought, this does not make any economic sense (Limpopo Province Merger of Schools Manual, n.d).

In Singapore merger of schools was resisted by the public, however, like in South Africa, merger of schools was meant to reduce unnecessary educational costs as a result of falling students' cohorts (Lim & Kelly, 2017). The Ministry of Education (MOE), referring to the Junior Colleges (JC), indicated that merging small schools was a difficult undertaking but a necessary decision to provide the kind of opportunities and range of choices to the future students to come (Hoong, 2017:01). The MOE added that one key consideration was to be responsive to the changing demographics and community needs, whilst providing an optimal student experience at all times. However, the public, especially from students and alumni of the affected schools reacted by raising questions on issues of lack of consultation of the affected communities (Hoong, 2017:02).

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The Singapore merger above is regarded as the largest merger exercise conducted in the past five years. The Ministry of Education (MOE) contends that, the Singapore's declining birth rate over the past two decades has led to a similar decline in demand for school places and in turn led to a significant excess of secondary schools' enrolment spaces at a national level. Seven of the 22 schools did not receive any secondary school student for 2016 (Lim & Kelly, 2017).   Merger of schools resulted to about 38 000 students posted to secondary schools after this exercise.   Merger of schools in Singapore was mainly based on the declining enrolment because of Singapore's birth rate over the past two decades as stated previously. The same problem of dwindling enrolments is also experienced in South Africa but in this case, as a result of exodus of young educated generation from deep rural, rural and commercial farming areas to urban areas. The exodus of young elite generation to urban areas leaves rural and farm schools with low enrolments. In such rural communities, pensioners remain alone, and schools' enrolments continue to decline.

Merger of primary schools in China started in 2001 in order to improve quality and equity in education. The proponents of merger in China claim that school merger programme improves educational quality by enhancing equity through providing poorer children with access to schools that are supported with better educational resources (Liu, Zhang, Luo, Rozelle & Loyalka, 2010:570).   The programme is theoretically supposed to make education more efficient by taking advantage of economies of scale under the assumption that the government is allocating more investment to the new merging schools – which is part of the merger programme package. In contrast; critics of school mergers argue that while the number of students in the central schools' increases, the number of teachers, the size and quality of the teaching facilities do not rise enough. In such cases, teaching and administration in merged schools get compromised.

In India like in South Africa, the merger of schools took a form of rationalisation process where teachers were redeployed as a result of low enrolments (Rao, Ganguly, Singh &

Dash, 2017:01). Redeployment and Rationalisation are processes that take place in South Africa because of falling enrolments in some Farm and Rural Schools.

2.3   THE IMPORTANCE OF MERGER OF SCHOOLS

Hentschke, Jacobs, Ladd and Parthenon (2017**:**23) assert that all mergers harbour the potential for a range of gains and costs that should be weighed against each other. Gains include opportunities for realising financial savings, leveraging greater size and scale in multiple areas, and re-deploying stakeholders. Mergers allow institutions to eliminate redundant administrators and their staff and leverage scale in order to reduce the aggregate cost of administrative services and infrastructure (Hentschke et al., 2017:23). Merger of schools involves change. Howkins, Bond and Scott, (2005:12) argue that there are key change lessons for a successful merger; the process of merger must be evidence based by referring, depending on change concerned, to anyone or a mix of the following: robust tracking of data on performance, satisfaction and impact, external benchmarking and strategic intelligence.

Some of the above-mentioned reasons for merger by these scholars apply in South Africa. The fact that the process of merger must be evidence based by making references carries more weight because a successful merger must be a product of thorough research. However, Department of Basic Education (2014:4) provides the following factors as important for merger of schools: infrastructure, staff allocation, multi-grade teaching, National Schools Nutrition Programme (NSNP), National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSF), Learner and Teacher Support Materials (LTSM) and Learner Transport. However, infrastructure provisioning comes after a thorough research, planning and strategic intelligence.

2.3.1 Infrastructure

In merging schools, there would be a need to establish if there is enough accommodation at receiving school since these schools might require additional infrastructure and human resource to take up the additional number of learners. There is a need to consider the ongoing maintenance of the receiving school which can be adjusted in terms of the existing norms and standards of provincial allocation to the receiving school (Department of Basic Education, 2014:4). In merging schools some alterations and additions to the receiving schools will need to be recorded and submitted for inclusion on the National Education Infrastructure Management System (NEIMS) database as well as the asset register in the province (Department of Basic Education, 2014:4).

2.3.2 Staff Allocation

Every public and independent school needs teaching and support staff to execute the responsibility of educating learners and do other operational duties that support education of a learner in general. Staff allocation is done according to the number of learners (enrolment) in a school (Motshekga, 2012). This means that if a school is small, the number of teachers allocated will be smaller. The allocation of teachers is done according to teacher learner ratio of one (01) is to forty (40) and thirty-five (35) in primary and secondary schools respectively (MEC, 2010). This means that if a school has fifty (50) learners it would qualify for one and half teachers and the arrangement in the department then was that no school should have less than two teachers. The staff allocation to those schools was therefore a minimum of two and for schools to get more teachers they should have more than fifty (50) learners. Such allocation where less than two teachers were allocated was educationally unsound as one teacher could not carry the entire curriculum of the school. Merging of small schools would provide an opportunity to get more teachers.

2.3.3 Multi Grade Teaching (MGT)

Few teachers allocated in a small school would be unable to carry the school curriculum hence they resort to a technique called Multi-Grade Teaching (MGT). This system brings learners from different grades to one classroom and are taught by one teacher. Merger of these small schools will ensure that learners of the same grade are accommodated in their own classrooms and that programmes and lessons that are specifically designed for a grade will be provided to that grade only. The merger will therefore ensure maximum use of school time and human resources (Limpopo Merger of Schools' Manual, n.d).

2.3.4 National School Nutrition Programme (NSNP)

Allocation, distribution and management of food parcels to learners are difficult to administer. In some instances, very small quantities of food were delivered while the expense incurred in transportation was far much higher than the money spent on buying such food parcels. The service providers started to reject contracts to these schools as they could not make business and therefore merger of these schools would ensure that management of NSNP is improved (Limpopo Merger of Schools' Manual, n.d).

2.3.5 National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF)

Funding that is allocated to a school is commensurate with the enrolment of the school. In small schools, this funding is not able to achieve objectives of all educational programmes and projects that are directed from time to time (Limpopo Merger of Schools Manual, n.d). Merger in this case will assist in terms of making schools to get a bigger share. Merging assists schools that are unable to maintain themselves. It provides availability of resources in the form of norms and standards for school funding and number of teachers assisted by merging with other schools. This means more learners and norms and standards. The merging of schools also ensures curriculum coverage and reduces teacher workload.

2.3.6 Learner Teacher Support Material (LTSM)

The nature of the books and learner-teacher support-materials to be supplied to the receiving school might also constitute a challenge in terms of adjusting the amount of books to be supplied. The upstream planning in provincial departments will have to make provision for such eventualities (Department of Basic Education, 2014:5). When schools are merged, learners' performance improves because there will be enough teachers who will stick to their subjects of specialisation. In the merging centres there will be sufficient classrooms and multi-grade teaching will stop. Lastly, learner/teacher support material will be centralised and shortage of books will no longer be a problem. The availability of the resources above will enhance effective teaching and learning thereby improving performance.

2.4   CHALLENGES OF MERGER OF SCHOOLS

Merger of schools programme is faced with challenges in many countries that opt for merger as a way to resolve educational problems.

2.4.1 Desegregation

Desegregation is the process of ending the separation of different races, religious, or cultural groups. In rural Mississippi Delta in USA, consolidation of two district schools prompted district leaders to create desegregation plan (Jackson, 2013). The desegregation policy was implemented but failed to achieve its objectives because in Mississippi Delta students have generally been divided between a Black public school and an all- White private academy. Merging Black and White schools was a common desegregation method in the 1960's and 70's. Desegregation lawsuits never ended in some places (Jackson, 2013). Ecks (2005) revealed that, white parents in Delta County chose not to send their students to traditional public schools because they perceived

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disciplinary problems, less challenging academics, and fewer extra – curriculum opportunities which are barriers.

In South Africa, according to Phatlane (2007:1) racism (in the 20th century) was enshrined in the constitution and enforced – the aid of legislation- by successive white-only governments from 1948. What made South Africa a racially segregated country of a special kind, was the fact that unlike other countries that practised segregation, the so called politically powerless races were in the majority.   Before and during apartheid, South African public schools were "strictly" segregated according to race (Steyn, Steyn & de Waal, 1998:38).   Learners attended separate schools according to the four main population groups: Blacks, Whites, Coloureds and Indians (Steyn et al., 1998:24).   Racial segregation was the defining feature of schools during the colonial and apartheid eras.

Christopher (2001) currently indicates that, analysis of the results of the 1996 census reveals a general decline in urban racial segregation levels in South Africa since the end of legal apartheid in 1991, however, the trends are not uniform with whites remaining both more segregated and less open to change than other groups.   Africans have become more integrated, but the majority are constrained in their choice of residential options by the general level of poverty.

2.4.2   Legal Challenge

Global studies on merger reveal that there are legal challenges attached to merger of schools. Parents have to be consulted before arriving at a decision. Black (2016) reported about the legal challenge to merger of Belfast's Little Flower Girls' School and St Patrick Boys College in UK. The parents of Little Flower felt their school was not supposed to merge with another because the school performs well and is financially stable. Parents felt that their school was being penalised by merger despite meeting the department's definition of a sustainable school. The parents' representative indicated that Little Flower was financially stable, its performance was good, and the school was even used as an

example of a successful secondary school in the national media. The parents also complained about the speed at which the process was being driven saying that the process was being rushed through. Despite all the challenges expressed by parents, the Ministry of Education indicated that amalgamation would take place in September 2017. The above situation affects some schools in the merger of schools' process in South Africa, parents from one of the identified schools for merging reject merger because of the same reasons cited above. This arises from the issue of management, performance and discipline. Parents normally do not want the culture of their schools to be diluted by poor performance, ill-discipline and the failure on the part of a school to manage itself.

2.4.3   Redeployment of Teachers

Lim (2017) maintains that school mergers as a transition for teachers can be challenging. He claims that there is a need for a "bridging" programme in place to assist in the process of merger. The recently announced school mergers in Singapore have led to some teachers redeployed to teach at lower levels, and those who have made a similar transition said it is not easy to adjust to younger students (Lim, 2017). With mergers, some teachers would also be redeployed from junior colleges to secondary schools. Redeployed teachers complain of how to cope with young children when it comes to remedial work e.g. secondary schools, when learners do not do their homework, they are told to remain after school to do their work but that cannot materialise in primary schools (Lim, 2017).

2.4.4   Transport, Accommodation and Costs

In South Africa, a great number and variety of learner transport provisions exist across the country. These initiatives range from generic provincially subsidised programmes to locally implemented projects, to address location specific challenges of transportation. The city of Cape Town, for example, has implemented "non-motorised network planning and recently proposed a learner transport project that it will administer with the institute

for transportation and development policy and the University of Cape Town (Behrens, 2005:275).

Hongyong (2018) wrote, any effort at school restructuring must emphasise the renewal of rural schools, whose students' numbers are in the dozens, not the hundreds. He says that the move to close and merge schools seems to reflect the so-called hollowing out of rural villages. In China learners left the countryside and followed their parents in China cities, to schools that are educationally well resourced. Hence, urban area schools became increasingly concentrated and the number of village schools started to dwindle. Other challenges of merger include the following: Governments save money if they run fewer schools, but these costs are often passed on to remote families who then have to spend more on, e.g. boarding schools far from homes. Forcing young students to leave their families and live at school puts them at higher risk of developing mental health problem; and finally, replacement bus design to ferry children to and from distant schools have a track record of being unsafe.

Some of the challenges indicated above affect South African Educational environment; Vhembe District in particular, transport becomes a challenge when schools are not properly located in relation to school going population they serve. Both learners and parents experience problems regarding access to schools as some children are forced to travel longer distances to school (Nembudani, 2014:11).

2.4.5 Disruptions of Community Routines

Merger of schools have a potential of causing disruptions in communities especially where planning is poorly done. Between 2001 and 2005 during the merger of tertiary institutions in South Africa, Goldman and Van Tonder (2006:151) wrote on Individuals' reaction to the merger, specifically disagreement with the reasons provided by government. The overwhelming sentiment failed to comprehend how a merger between

a technikon and a university can be successful, given the differences in terms of nature, culture, ethos and operations between a traditional university and a technikon.

In Limpopo and Vhembe District in particular some individuals and organisations mobilized communities to rise against merger, citing problems such as poor consultation, merging schools from different cultures and traditions. Some communities ended up organising an industrious action which culminated in serious community disruptions. The industrious action brought normal routines such as teaching and learning, economic activities including transportation system to a stop.

2.4.6 Twinning of Schools

In 2016, the Gauteng MEC for Education implemented his vision to have a truly non-racial schooling representation and the improvement of academic performance. At first, schools agreed to be twinned and share governing bodies, infrastructure such as libraries and sports fields while the actual twinning had to start later-on. School twinning reveals contrary perceptions from affected stakeholders. There are clear signs of reluctance by some teachers and officials to share resources with other schools. This appears to be based on the remnants of apartheid legacy and, racism that still exist in our country and ownership of properties. There are still leaders and management of institutions who think that they own these institutions and infrastructure (IOL News, 2014).

2.5   INTERVENTION STRATEGIES IN MERGING SCHOOLS

The focus in education is a child and wherever problems and challenges arise, necessary intervention strategies should be sought and employed to defuse such challenges.

2.5.1 Integrating Schools by Race

Among others, an intervention strategy in terms of desegregation is racial integration in schools. According to Naidoo, Pillay and Conly (2018:02) international studies have established that the dominant approaches of assimilation, multicultural education and antiracist education, underpin the debates on managing racial integration in secondary schools. These approaches explain the complex interrelatedness of socio economic, historical and cultural values and how they influence the school life of learners and educators. In integrating schools by race, effective structures such as School Management Teams (SMT's), School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and Students Representative Councils (SRC's) should be put in place. The SGBs should develop policies that address segregation and structures such as SMT's and SRC's to implement without compromising.

Moody (2001:679) argues for racial-mixing theories as the way to go. He maintains that those who are responsible with conducting merger of schools should understand differences in racial mixing across settings, that is, at behaviour and organisational levels. At behavioural level, homophiles and social balance are tendencies known to affect friendship structure. At the organisational school level, student mixing opportunity, school policy and cultural setting likely determine friendship segregation. From a policy standpoint, school administrators have more control over organisational features than over student behaviour. As such the will of the administrators through the development of relevant policies can be among the solutions to desegregation. Student behaviour can be dealt with through the combination of the will of the parents at home and the establishment of extra- curricular activities that compel students to mix by the school.

2.5.2 Setting Objectives for Merger

The proponents behind the merger of schools should do a due diligence to be followed by setting of objectives for the project. Arnolds, Stofile and Lillah (2013:03) citing

Thompson, Strickland and Gamble (2005) address the notions of strategic management, job performance, organisational commitment and merger goals. The strategic management function of an institution consists of five phases, namely: Developing a strategic vision, setting objectives, creating a strategy to achieve the objectives and the vision, implementing and executing the strategy and monitoring developments and evaluating the performance and making corrective adjustments. According to Arnolds et al. (2013:03) all South African Higher Education Institutions, including the merged ones, have been drawing strategic plans which were supposed to be aligned with the vision and strategic direction of education restructuring set by the South African Government.

Merger of schools also involves management of the transition and there must be people to take up this core responsibility. A relevant example is Atlanta Public Schools (2015:03). More emphasis was on the core responsibilities that Offices of the Superintendent and Deputy Superintendent are responsible for leading the turnaround strategy and transition efforts. The offices are also responsible for the development and implementation of robust communications and engagement plan that outlines how students, parents and the community will stay informed about the transitions. Another major responsibility of the team is to facilitate the community involvement process, which will involve soliciting inputs from a variety of internal and external constituents.

Setting of objectives for merger of schools and leading the turnaround strategy need high level of commitment from both the vision holder and the implementing team. The vision holder after a thorough research and due diligence should stick to the vision while taking the implementing team on board for them to co-own the vision. Having the better understanding of the vision, the implementing team leads in terms of consultation. The team should establish more inputs from students, parents, staff members including other interested individuals and structures. One of the structures that needs closer involvement are School Governing Bodies (SGB's), Civic Organisations and Tribal Councils. Governing Bodies represent parents of the students and are among the most influential

structures in the community. These SGB's must know the objectives as set and also be skilled in terms how to present and defend the vision.

2.5.3 Mentorship Programme

Ragins and Kram (2007:05) define mentoring as a developmental relationship that is embedded within the career context. While learning, growth, and development may occur in many different types of work and close personal relationships, mentoring relationship are unique in that the primary focus of the relationship is on career development and growth. During merger of schools, the Department of Education should alley fears and assure job security by instituting mentorship programmes to take teachers through the process of merging. Mentorship should embrace retention of workers and the value of teachers within the department.

Other important interventions to help affected teachers include the support that school management teams should provide, the school management should also give them time and space to adapt to the different changes they had to face. The department should also allow these teachers to indicate their preferred postings through ministry's annual internal posting exercises.

2.5.4 Boarding School System

Hongyong (2018) in his analysis, Hongyong asserts that a one size- fits- all policy of mass closures fails to account for rural China's great diversity of communities and terrains points out that there are some after effects because rural schools continue to disappear; students spend more time commuting to and from schools in remote mountainous areas. This presents parents and students with serious safety challenges. Hongyong (2018) suggested that the only viable short-term solution in this issue is to improve the country's boarding school system while considering ways to revive rural schools on a smaller scale.

Furthermore, exposing elementary school children to boarding school life at young age can be cruel, but now it is the lesser of the two evils (walking long distances and safety challenges). Hongyong (2018) further points out that while academics and officials disagree about how to confront the challenges of mass migration, any policy shift must bear in mind the well- being of the school children in the countryside. If people become too dogmatic in their approach, the community will be done more harm than good. Ellis, (2013) indicates that South African Secondary Boarding School Sector has become more competitive as schools attempt to attract and retain learners. Management of such schools must not only address educational and boarding needs of learners, but also apply appropriate management and marketing principles to compete effectively with boarding schools throughout the country and beyond.

2.5.5   Judicious use of Resources

Chowdhury (2017) points out that mergers can do more harm than good. In addition, he claims that some mergers in the past made enrolments to drop. However, the state governments' main aim is to have a pool of resources in one centre to assist learners effectively. Governments are using merger as a pragmatic move that encourages judicious use of resources.   Merger of schools and twinning have similar objectives in that both intend to improve performance and resourcing of schools. When schools are twinned especially a well-resourced and a poorly resourced school, the new school becomes more resourced in terms of skillful teachers, enough classrooms, furniture and financial resources.

2.5.6   Twinning of Schools

The aim of twinning is to create an environment in which best practice and resources are shared across the schools; to address the apartheid representation of the system; to twin the well- resourced schools with the poor schools; and to improve academic performance (MEC for Education-Gauteng, 2016). Mtshali and Ndaba (2015) promote that "school

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twinning" is the way to non-racialism. The two authors made comment on the Gauteng MEC's intention to twin (twinning is the same with merging) some schools to achieve a truly non-racial schooling representation and the improvement of academic performance.

2.5.7 Merger of Governance Structures and Codes

Merger of governance structures and codes are based on South African Schools Act (SASA) Act No. 84 of 1996.

- **Legislative background**

Merger of schools in South Africa is seen as an option to provide quality education, to expedite resourcing of schools and to fight inequality in terms of infrastructure allocation in schools. In order to achieve the vision of quality education, equality in terms of resources and infrastructure, such transformation requires that legislation be followed. In 2004, the Minister of Education appointed an inter-ministerial task team (Ministerial Committee Report on Rural Education MCRE, 2005) to look into ways that could be used in the development and transformation of rural education.

The Ministerial Committee Report on Rural Education (MCRE, 2005) met with several provinces while gathering challenges from each province. It took some months for the committee to round up and collate information from the provinces. In 2005 the report was sent to the minister. The report provided recommendations and among the recommendations, the committee recommended a schooling that will promote quality education for all learners in rural areas in ways that are consistent with the government integrated approach to poverty eradication and rural development. It also recommended for the development of guidelines on the legal procedures required to expropriate land on which public schools are located. The report further recommended the provision of guidelines on the rationalisation of farm schools in a district where contracts have not been signed: options include closures, mergers and expropriation.

The Guidelines for the Rationalisation of Small and or Non-Viable Schools (2009) provides a framework which will assist provincial Departments of Education to expedite merging and closing of schools of farm and rural schools within a preset time frame. The guidelines which were meant for all provinces came with a programme that merger of schools should start from 2010 and to be completed in 2012. For better implementation of the guidelines, Limpopo Department of Education adjusted the guidelines for better implementation and Limpopo Province Merger of Schools Manual (n.d) was developed.

The manual outlines the processes and procedures to be followed when schools are to be merged in Limpopo Province. The manual also provides for the establishment of facilitating team from the Province down to the circuit level. These teams were given responsibilities and among these responsibilities, the teams had to start by merging governance structures; the School Governing Bodies (SGBs). SASA (Act No. 84 of 1996, Section 12A (6) (a) requires that governing bodies of the schools that are merged must have a meeting before the merger to constitute a single governing body comprising all the members of the governing bodies concerned.

- **Constitution of interim governing body**

For the above activity, it is the responsibility of the Head of Department (HOD) to appoint the School Electoral Officers (SEO's) in terms of regulations relating to school governing bodies (Gazette 530 of 2000). The SEO must ensure that interim SGB office bearers must consist of at least 40% of each of the schools merged. The SEO must constitute an election committee comprised of the representatives from the merged schools and thereafter facilitate elections of other office bearers in terms of gazette 530 especially where there will be nominations and elections. The latter shall be conducted through a secret ballot and the elected interim governing body executes their responsibilities as per the relevant Act. The responsibilities and functions of School Governing Body (SGB) are enshrined in (SASA, Act No. 84 of 1996, Section 20 (1) - (11) and Section 21(1) (6)) and are as follows:

The merged schools had their respective budgets before merger process and after merger the budgets are disclosed and consolidated into one budget to cater the newly established school.

The School Governing Body (SGB) constitution; (SASA Act No. 84 of 1996 section 18 (1-3) says: "subject to this act and any applicable provincial law, the governing body of a public school must function in terms of the constitution which complies with the minimum requirements determined by the Member of Executive Council by notice in the provincial gazette". Since the merged schools had their different SGB constitutions; these constitutions are consolidated into a single viable SGB constitution to serve temporarily as the new constitution.

Subject to any applicable provincial law, the governing body of a public school must adopt a code of conduct for learners after consultation with learners, parents and educators of the school. Based on the above section, learners' code of conduct from the merged schools are scruitinised, adjusted in order to suit the interests of the merged schools (SASA Act No. 84 of 1996, section 8 (1) – (5)). In case the merger involves schools that are fee paying, the interim SGB discusses and reaches an agreement in terms of the amount of money to be paid by parents for school funds. In a situation where a fee paying and no- fee paying schools are merged, the community in which the merging centre is found decides whether school fund should be paid or not.

(SASA Act No. 84 of 1996, section 6 (1) – (4)) stipulates that the governing body of a public school may determine the language policy of the school subject to the constitution. This act and any applicable provincial law on School language policy is basically guided by the departmental language policy; the SGB considers the material condition in terms of the home language spoken by the majority of learners and then agrees on first additional language of the school.

The SGB has the responsibility of determining the school uniform and in this case, the SGB agrees which uniform to use. They can agree to adopt one from another school among those that are merging.   The interim SGB has the responsibility of deciding on the extra mural activities of the newly established school. The interim SGB guided by the new vision and mission of the school, agrees on the lesson starting time and knock off times. The times include breaks, lunch and time for special activities such as morning and afternoon studies.   Establishment of governing body committees (sub committees) should be based on the school SGB constitution. The interim SGB decides on the SGB committees, the committees include among others; finance committee, School safety committee, fundraising committee, depending on the number of committees agreed upon.

SASA Act No. 84 of 1996, section 7 stipulates that subject to the constitution and any applicable provincial law, religious observation may be conducted at a public school under rules issued by the governing body. Among the policies that SGBs develop, is the religious policy. The policy must be guided by right to religious practices as per Chapter Two of the South African constitution. HIV/AIDS policy also needs an undivided attention of the SGB and must be guided by the constitution of the Republic of South Africa. It is also the responsibility of the SGB to ensure that school funds are managed as per Public Finance Management Act, Provincial Prescripts for the Management of School funds and the school policy developed in accordance with the Act and the prescripts.

SASA, Act No. 84 of 1996, section 51-4 stipulates that a public school must admit learners and serve their educational requirements. The SGB develops its admission policy based on the above section. This policy also caters for learners who are differentially gifted, these are learners with some disability. The policy should make it easier for these learners to attend, read and write without difficulties. In merged schools too, learners are always expected to be safe, while at school, to and from schools and the policy should consider such situation for the safety of learners. In case there is no agreement about any of the above policies, the HOD will determine how the school should be governed in that area pending the resolution on policy development.

- **Resources to assist the process of merger and their roles**

According to Atlanta Public Schools (2015), merger of schools should have transition planning teams to manage merger process. Atlanta public schools indicate that one of the first steps in the process of a physical closure of a school is to convene transition planning teams to guide the work of the district and the community. The following teams should be in place to manage closure, mergers and launches of new schools: District Steering Committee, District Project Team, Community Launch Team and School-Based Community Team.

2.6   THE PROVINCIAL COORDINATING TEAM

Azziz, Hentschke and Jacobs (2017:20) assert that a vision should clearly articulate why merger is 'the thing' for all stakeholders. Structures such as the coordinating teams should be able to take stakeholders about the good and essence of merger. The above scholars point out critical elements of merger success: a compelling unifying vision, a committed and understanding governing body, the right leadership, the appropriate sense of urgency, a strong project management system, a robust and clear communication plan and sufficient dedicated resources.

According to the Limpopo Department of Education, Limpopo Province Merger of Schools Manual (n.d) the Provincial Coordinating Teams were established to guide the merger and closure of school's process. Each team consists of key stakeholders within the Provincial Department of Education dealing with for example; rural education coordinator, human resource, finance, legal services, physical planning, curriculum, scholar transport, school nutrition etc. The team reports directly to the HOD regarding progress on merger and closure process in the province. The Provincial Coordinating Team serves to establish provincial database of all public schools in farms and rural areas that includes inter alia infrastructural, as well as legal ownership of the property. The team consists of provincial stakeholders such as rural education coordinator, human resource, finance etc. The team establishes a list of schools that qualifies for merger (schools with 50 learners

and less). The team also establishes another list of schools built in farms and the lists are directly submitted to MEC. (Limpopo Province Merger of Schools Manual, n.d).

2.6.1 The role of Provincial Coordinating Team

The team has the role to facilitate publication of notices, inviting comments from the public and explain the reasons of the proposed merger in a local newspaper. This team also receives representations from SGB's of the schools in question and from any other interested person. The team also responds to the representation and report to the MEC. The team has a responsibility to eliminate hindrances that can impede the process of merger. The team is also responsible for providing legal assistance to the districts during merger and closure of schools.

2.6.2 The District Coordinating Team

According to the Limpopo Province Merger of Schools Manual (nd), the district team operates in terms of the provincial operational plan. The language of communication should take local needs into consideration to allay unnecessary misinterpretation. Written communications must be in any of the eleven official languages to be easily understood by all parties concerned. This team is led by the District Senior Manager (District Director).

- **The role of district coordinating team**

The role of District Coordinating Team is to establish database of all public schools. The list of identified schools should be accompanied by the list of infrastructures and its conditions. The team considers and makes recommendations regarding the position of the principal, other school management positions and the allocation of teaching positions and this must be done as per the requirements of labour law. The team provides assistance and professional support for educators, learners and parents moving from small rural or farm schools to new schools.

The team has responsibilities of keeping the records of all processes regarding the merger and or closure of schools, to monitor and evaluate the outcome of merger and closure process and make additional recommendations to the provincial coordinating team. Of great importance, the team should consult with local municipalities and traditional councils in order to ensure that the closure and mergers of schools are aligned with the municipal integrated development plans (IDP's). The team has a responsibility to provide written notices to the schools in question of the intention to merger or close them and conduct infrastructure audit.

- **Conducting Infrastructure Audit**.

When schools are merged, the merging centre must have sufficient infrastructure. Before an agreement is made on the school to become a merging centre, an audit of the available infrastructure must be made. The infrastructure includes but not limited to; the condition of the school buildings, the availability of enough classrooms, the condition of chalkboards and stationery. In case the merging centre meets some requirements but fails on the less important ones, the interim SGB must ensure that means are made to fix or maintain those facilities before learners move to the merging centre.

- **Merger of Schools Process**

According to Azziz, Hentschke, Jacobs, Jacobs, Ladd (2017:2), merger of schools proceeds in three phases: The first phase is "before"; during this phase an option of merger is being considered and vetted. At this stage merger is not yet officially announced. The second phase is called "during". At this phase, an official announcement of the intent to merge is made. This is the time at which demonstration of readiness is made, which also suggests that at this time, proper consultations will have taken place. The last phase is called "after". During this phase merger has taken place and all plans are starting to be implemented. Brews (1993:1) also identify three phases in merger of schools and the first one is formulating the merger strategy, followed by screening and evaluation of potential candidates and lastly is implementing and integrating merger.

Meanwhile in South Africa, a step by step process is followed when merging Small and Non-Viable schools and in Limpopo Province the process is guided by a guideline document called Limpopo Province Merger of Schools Manual. The Limpopo Province Merger of Schools Manual (n.d) provides the following step by step process for merger of schools:

- **Identification of schools**

At this level, circuits identify possible schools to be merged and thereafter conduct consultative meetings with parents of learners at the school, community organisations such as SANCO and Traditional Councils of the identified schools.

- **District consultative meeting**

The Districts conduct consultative meetings with stake holders and role players within its jurisdiction. Stakeholders include representatives of Traditional Councils, SANCO structures etc.

- **Submission of lists**

After the District Consultative meetings, the District Task Teams submit lists of schools identified for merging to the office of the MEC.

- **MEC consultative meeting**

The MEC conduct imbizos (meetings where all relevant structures are invited) as consultative process to check, confirm and verify if the process and consultation was conducted at the District and Circuit levels as per the Limpopo Province Merger of Schools Manual.

- **Release of notice**

Before merging, the MEC issues written notice to the schools in question of the intention to merge them. The MEC publishes a notice on newspapers circulating in the area where the schools in question are situated for them to accept or reject merger.

- **Receipt of representations**

The SGB's of schools in question and al the interested persons are afforded an opportunity to make representations within a period not less than ninety (90) days from the date of published notice and the MEC considers the representations thereafter.

- **Notices to private property owners**

The MEC also notifies owners of private properties if one or more schools that are to be merged are public schools in private property.

- **Notice in provincial gazette**

The MEC may issue a notice through a Provincial Gazette to merge schools after successfully following the processes in the above paragraphs and that would be the starting of the merging process.

2.7   CONCLUSION

It is a general understanding that merger of schools is seen as a solution or intervention strategy to address poor results, ineffective management and inadequate allocation of resources, around the globe. In selected countries that implement merger of schools, there are problems and challenges and these challenges are dealt with by the respective structures concerned. Limpopo Department of Education in South Africa also implements merger of school as an intervention strategy to the above-mentioned challenges and has put systems that govern and manage the process of school merging in place.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH PARADIGM, RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research was to investigate merger of schools programme in Vhembe District Department of Education for the academic years 2010 to 2016. For this purpose to be achieved, the researcher had to choose the relevant research paradigm, research design and research methodology to determine the parameters of the study.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

Kivunja and Kuyini (2017:26) citing Lincoln (2000), define paradigms as human constructions, which deal with the first principles or ultimate procedures indicating where the researcher is coming from so as to construct meaning embedded in data. Paradigms are thus important because they provide beliefs and dictate or influence what should be studied, how it should be studied, and how the results of the study should be interpreted. Walter (2012:78) asserts that paradigms are fundamental beliefs that affect the way to conduct a social research, including the choice of a research methodology. Guba and Lincoln (2009:5) add that researchers are guided by philosophical frameworks, which are called "paradigms".

This study is informed by the interpretive paradigm. Willis (2007:04) defines an interpretivists as people who believe in an understanding of the context in which any form of research is conducted which is critical to the interpretation of data gathered. He further points out that in order to explore understanding of participants, an interpretive methodology provides a context that allows one to examine what the participants in my study have to say about their experiences. Thomas (2003) maintains that qualitative methods are usually supported by interpretivists, because the interpretive paradigm

portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex and ever changing (Thomas, 2003:6). Since interpretive paradigm (as an inquiry) is concerned with understanding the world as it is from subjective experiences of individuals. They use meaning (versus measurement) orientated methodologies, such as interviewing or participant observation, that rely on a subjective relationship between the researcher and the subjects. This paradigm was adopted as it was considered suitable for the nature of the formulated research questions, the data collection instruments, which included interview schedules and document analysis. In this study the researcher had to source out data from participants who had first- hand experience of what happened in their schools. After the collection of data, through research design, the researcher had to come with a strategic framework to pursue the research further.

3.3   RESEARCH DESIGN

Durrheim (2004:29) defines research design as a strategic framework for action that serves as a bridge between research questions and the execution, or implementation of the research strategy. According to Kothari (2004:6), research design is a plan, a roadmap and blueprint strategy of investigation conceived to obtain answers to research questions; it is the heart of any study. A research design is a model or action plan upon which the entire study is built; it dictates the way a study is conducted and provides the roadmap of a study in terms of the sample, data collection instruments and analysis procedure. A research design may adopt quantitative or qualitative approach or both. This study adopted a qualitative research design because it provides an opportunity to the researcher to discover the participants' inner experience, and to figure out how meanings are shaped through and in culture (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). A Qualitative design has a flexible structure as the design can be constructed and reconstructed to a greater extent (Maxwell, 2012). The study followed a qualitative research design because of its potential of providing participants to create meaning out of personal experiences.

3.4   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Schwardt (2007:195) defines research methodology as a theory of how an inquiry should proceed. It involves analysis of the assumptions, principles and procedures in an approach to inquiry. Research methodology concerns the perspective or the angle that the researcher wishes to take on the question being asked. Richards and Morse (2007:93) assert that when the research problem is complex or if one method or strategy may not comprehensively address the research problem, multiple research methods or approaches are used. According to Polit and Hungler (2004:233) methodology refers to ways of obtaining, organising and analysing data. Methodology decisions depend on the nature of the research questions. Henning (2004:36) describes methodology as a coherent group of methods that complement one another and that has the ability to fit to deliver data and findings that will reflect the research question and suit the research purpose.

Jackson, Drummond and Camara (2007:21) point out that qualitative research is primarily concerned with understanding human beings' experience in humanistic and interpretive approach. According to the two scholars Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) there are five major types of qualitative research: Phenomenology, ethnography, case study research, grounded theory and historical research. All the above approaches are similar in that they are qualitative approaches. Based on their distinct characteristics and for this research, qualitative research methods determine data collection. First, they determine, for example, what population is relevant for the study, sampling and sample of the study (Kovacs et al., 2012). Secondly, in both quantitative and qualitative research, methods outline research processes, including the role that natural setting plays in the research design, the role of the researcher as both observer and participant, how subjects influence the content of a communication study, the influence of the subject intentionally on the research report, and the pragmatic uses of qualitative research (James, Chesebro & Deborah, 2007:3-14). In this study, the researcher observed participants during

interviews while participating in the process. He then generated an opinion/view out of what he got from the participants hence this report.

3.4.1 Data Collection Instruments

According to Abawi (2013), accurate and systematic data collection is critical to conducting scientific research. It allows us to collect information that we want to collect about our study. Methods of data collection include: documents review, observation, questioning, measuring, or combination of different methods. In this study, interview schedule and documents analysis were used to collect data. Faroog (2013) defines interview schedule as a set of questions with structured answers to guide an observer interviewer, researcher or investigator. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:267) interviews are ways for participants to get involved and talk about their views. In addition, interviewees can discuss their perception and interpretation in regard to a given situation. It is the expression from their point of view. The interview is not simply concerned with collection of data about life, it is part of life itself, its human embeddedness is inescapable (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000:267). According to Akbayrak (2000) an interview is a controlled conversation that the interviewer uses to obtain data required from the respondent by means of asking serious questions verbally. There are many reasons to use interviews for collecting data and using it as a research instrument.

- **Interview Schedule**

The most obvious difference between interview and questionnaire is in the gathering of data (Cohen & Manion, 1982:243). An interview schedule provides access to what is inside a person 's mind, it makes it possible to measure what a person knows, what a person likes or dislikes (values and preferences) and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs). The researcher developed an interview schedule in order to conduct face-to-face open-ended individual interviews with 13 participants (Tuckman, 2001:216). Tuckman (2001) further states that interviews can be used to discover what experiences have occurred and what is taking place at present concerning the phenomenon under

study. The data collected consisted of information and direct quotations from the participants concerning their experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge about the problem.

- **Documents analysis**

Documents analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents – both printed and electronic material (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Documents analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (ibid:2008). Documents provide the background and clarity as a means of providing supplementary data. They are a means of tracking change, development and verification of findings especially where events can no longer be observable or when participants have forgotten the events. Documents reveal what people do or do not do and what they value (Bowen, 2009:29). Documents analysis targeted statistics on merger, SGBs minutes of meetings for merger, invitation letters to meetings, attendance registers and the availability of policy documents such as Guidelines for merger of schools and Limpopo Province Merger of Schools' Manual.

3.5 POPULATION, SAMPLING AND SAMPLE

Data was collected from the specified population below through the sampling procedure to establish a sample of the study:

3.5.1 Population

A population is all the individuals or units of interest (Halon & Larget, 2011:07). It is a collection of objects, events or individuals having some common characteristics that the researcher is interested in studying (Mouton, 1996:134). The population of this study is eighty-five (85) schools identified for merger in Vhembe District.

3.5.2 Sampling Procedure

According to Mouton (1996:136), "the most key concept in sampling is representativeness. Unless the sample from which we will generalise truthfully" or "faithfully" represents the population from which it was drawn, the results can be refuted. The sampling procedure used in this study was purposive. Purposive sampling is based entirely on the judgment of the researcher, in that a sample is composed of elements which contain the most characteristics, representative, or typical attributes of the population (Singleton et al., 1998).

3.5.3 Sample

In qualitative research, people, events, activities, times and documents may be sampled, and sampling is purposeful rather than random (Cobb & Forbes, 2002). For this study, the researcher employed purposive sampling to identify a sample of thirteen (13) participants: the sample consisted of one (01) district official responsible for governance issues, three (03) circuit officials responsible for governance issues from the identified circuits and nine (09) principals from the schools identified for merger.

3.6 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Procedures for collection of data start from receiving the ethical clearance letter from the university (Appendix B). The researcher sought permission from relevant structures of the department at district level – permission from District Director (Appendix C), circuit and school level (Appendix D). Permission was sought through writing of official letter to the District Director of Vhembe Department of Education indicating the intention, schools to be visited and time frame.

3.7   ANALYSIS OF DATA THEMATICALLY, AND DETAILS

Marshall and Rossman (1999:150) describe data analysis as the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of the collected data. It is described as messy, ambiguous and time consuming, but also as a creative and fascinating process. Broadly speaking- while it does not proceed in linear fashion, it is the activity of making sense of interpreting and theorising data that signifies a search for a general statement among categories of data (Schwardt, 2007:6). Data of this study was analysed thematically. In this case, the following themes were identified and discussed from document analysis: End of Multi-Grade Teaching, Incapacity to employ legal framework of merger of schools, Capacity building, merger of schools destroys the traditional legacy, Disintegration of schools cultures, Safety and security concerns, misconception about merger of schools, dispositioning in promotional posts and tribalism

3.8   TRUSTWORTHINESS OF QUALITATIVE DATA

Rule and John (2011:107) assert that trustworthiness is a concept that promotes values such as scholarly vigour, transparency and professional ethics so that the study itself gains high level of trust and credibility. The study ensured trustworthiness of data based on Guba's (1981:20) criteria, namely: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Shenton (2004:64) cites Guba (1981:20) who proposes four criteria that he believes should be considered by qualitative researchers in pursuit of a trustworthy study. By addressing similar issues, Guba's (1981:20) constructs correspond to the criteria employed by the positivist investigator: Credibility (in reference to internal validity), Transferability (in reference to external validity, dependability (in reference to reliability) and Confirmability (in reference to objectivity). The criteria are discussed below:

3.8.1 Credibility

Credibility is defined as the confidence that can be placed in the truth of research findings (Macnee & McCabe, 2008:14). Credibility establishes whether the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original data and is the correct interpretation of the participants' original views. It is the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings. Korstjens and Moser (2018:121) also argue that credibility establishes whether the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original data and is the correct interpretation of the participants' original views.

In this study, the researcher ensured confidence by sampling participants who are directly responsible for merger of schools in their workstations, that is, officials from governance section at circuit and district level. The researcher also sampled principals of the identified schools for merger because they are the accounting officers and they represent the Department of Education at school level. To ensure credibility, the researcher recorded the participants during the interview from which he made findings.

3.8.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts with other participants – it is in the interpretive equivalent of generalisability (Bitsch, 2005; John & Begley, 2004). According to Bitsch (2005:85), the "researcher facilitates the transferability judgment by a potential user through thick description and purposeful sampling". The researcher ensured that the Department and of Education and any interested person will be provided with the research findings that are hoped to be of assistance in future endeavors of merger of small and farm schools.

3.8.3 Dependability

According to Bitsch (2005:86) dependability refers to "the stability of findings over time" Dependability involves participants evaluating the findings, interpretation and recommendations of the study to make sure that they are all supported by the data received from the informants of the study. Korstjens and Moser (2018:121) concur with Bitsch, that dependability refers to the stability of findings over time. It involves participants' evaluation of the findings, interpretation and the recommendations of the study such that all are supported by the data as received from the participants of the study.

Dependability is established by using an audit trail, a code-recode strategy, stepwise replication triangulation and peer examination or iterator comparisons (Ary et al., 2010; Schwandt et al., 2007; Chilisa & Preece, 2005; Krefting, 1991). The researcher also sent findings back to the participants to seek their views, honesty and consistency before writing the final report. After collecting the feedback from the participants, the researcher was given a thumb up without additions, subtraction or misrepresentation to continue with the final report.

3.8.4 Conformability

Conformability refers to the degree to which the results of an inquiry could be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers. Tobin and Begley (2004:392) define conformability as "concerned with establishing that data and interpretation of findings are not figments of the inquirer's imagination but are clearly derived from the data" (Tobin & Begley 2004: 392). Studies suggest that conformability of qualitative inquiry is achieved through an audit trail. According to Bowen (2009:307), an audit trail offers visible evidence – from process and product- that is, the researcher did not simply find what he/she sets out to find. For conformability, the researcher worked closely with his three professional supervisors who advised on literature review, research design and methodology,

research ethics, research language and data analysis. The supervisors worked hand in glove with the researcher and used to advice the researcher to submit progress reports at some intervals, the three supervisors kept on correcting the work of the researcher and ensured that corrections were indeed adhered to. Sometimes the supervisors had to invite the researcher to a one on one meetings which dealt with some crucial issues pertaining to the study. The researcher was also invited in the University's academic workshops and programmes.

3.9   CONCLUSION

Chapter Three dealt with research paradigm, research design and methodology in which design indicates the overall strategy that was used to integrate the entire research work and the methodology which explains the systemic and theoretical analysis of the procedures in the field of study. The chapter also outlined how population, sampling and sample was planned and done and further proceeded to explain how trustworthiness was ensured. The chapter ended by explaining the significance of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

4.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the presentation and analysis of data collected from interviews with thirteen (13) participants and documents analysis from the nine identified schools, three circuits and one district official. Analysis of data were based on the following four research questions:

- What is the importance of merger of schools?
- What are the challenges in the merger of the schools programme in the Department of Education in Vhembe District between 2010 and 2016?
- Which are the available resources to assist the process to unfold in order to promote effective teaching and learning?
- What are the possible intervention strategies that could be used to enhance a successful merger of schools in Vhembe District?

4.2   SCHOOLS VISITED

Schools visited were nine (09), out of 9, six (06) of these schools have not yet merged whilst three have merged. The nine schools can be divided into three groups (see Table 4.1 below).

Table 4.1: Schools Visited According to their Groupings

Group A	Group B	Group C
The schools in deep rural are characterised as:	The schools in semi-urban characterised as:	The schools in rural areas characterised as:
Schools not merged	Merged schools	Schools that could not merge
Old, poor and dilapidated buildings	Strong and attractive buildings	Buildings condition is acceptable
Poor or No resources	Well-resourced schools	Poor or no resources
Enrolment of less than 150	Enrolment of more than 300	Enrolment of less than 150
Less than five teachers	More than ten teachers	Less than five teachers
Multi grade teaching	Blame game based on culture of teaching and learning and discipline	Multi grade teaching

Note that this research does not only focus on schools that failed to merge because of challenges, but also schools that merged successfully. This is so because there are lessons to learn in terms of dealing with some of the challenges and better approaches hence the inclusion of group B schools in the research.

Group A consists of three schools located in deep rural areas, group B schools are located in semi-urban areas and group C schools are located in rural areas. Schools of group A are in deep rural, they are old and dilapidated and they are primary schools. Besides being in deep rural; they are the only schools in these villages. The villages are far away from each other, there are no secondary/ high schools and these primary schools are the only public facilities and a symbol of development.

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Meanwhile group B schools are found in semi urban areas with some of them separated by a fence. These schools are characterised by advanced resources such as technological machinery, sporting facilities and buildings that are strong and attractive. Some of these schools have administration clerks, gardeners and security guards that are either paid by the department or directly by parents. Besides these primary schools, secondary schools and other public facilities are found in these areas.

Group C schools are found in ordinary rural areas where villages are not very far from each other. The schools' buildings are in good condition although the enrolment is very low. Low enrolment renders the schools ineffective because the number of teachers is not compatible with the number of subjects taught. The schools have very little or no resources such as computers, photocopiers etc.

4.3   BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS OF PARTICIPANTS

In this study, participants were thirteen (13) professionals representing the Department of Education at district, circuit and school levels. The district was represented by the Chief Education Specialist (CES) who is, amongst others entrusted with issues of Institutional Governance which directly deals with merger of schools. He is among members of the District Coordinating team when it comes to merger of schools. At circuit level there are Deputy Managers on Governance (DMG's) who are also professionals; their job description is the same with that of the CES. The DMG's are also responsible for the facilitation, monitoring and support regarding merger of schools. Schools are represented by principals who are also professionals. Principals are accounting officers and represent the Department of Education at school level. During the process of merger of schools, they form part of people who are consulted.

4.4   PRESENTATION OF DATA

The results of the study were generated from the data collected through the selected individuals representing each level of the Department of Education from district down to the school level; these included interviews and documents analysis.

4.4.1   Presentation of Findings from Interviews

Presentation of findings from the interviews in this project was divided into five groups: Group A to E in which A to C groups were principals from three circuits, Group D represented circuit officials (Deputy Managers Governance) from the very circuits above. While group E represented the Chief Education Specialist Governance in Vhembe District.

Naming of participants for this study was as follows: Group A schools' principals were identified as PA1, PA2 and PA3; Group B schools' principals as PB1, PB2 and PB3; Group C schools' principals as PC1, PC2 and PC3, Deputy Manager Governors of the circuits as DMG1, DMG2 and DMG3. The district Chief Education Specialist as CES. During the interviews, participants responded as follows;

Research Question No.01- What is the importance of merger of schools?

GROUP A: SCHOOLS IN DEEP RURAL AREAS

PA1: On the importance of merger of schools, PA1 said:
> *"No one can deny that merger of schools is important, to me, merger of schools is important because the enrolment of small schools will be bigger after merger and the number of teachers will also grow and make teaching and learning easier…"* He further indicated: *"in small schools, teachers are forced to combine classes of different grades*

in one class and this type of teaching intrudes on concentration and proper learning so in this case; teaching is no longer effective and efficient…"

PA2: *"Merger of schools is important because it addresses the problem of shortage of teachers."*

He further indicated that since National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF) is allocated as per school enrolment, the bigger the enrolment, the more funds are allocated to the school: "*so low allocation of funds can be addressed by merger of schools."* The principal went on to say that because National Schools Nutrition Programme (NSNP) is also determined by school enrolment, merger of schools can resolve low allocation of food and food handlers in small schools. The principal further indicated that merger of schools addresses multi grade teaching because when schools are merged, the enrolment rises, and the number of teachers increases thereby addressing shortage of teachers (2.2.2; 2.2.3 & 2.3.4).

PA3: Mentioned two things about the importance of merger of schools:
> *"Merger of schools reduces workload for teachers because when you have a bigger enrolment, the number of allocated teachers will be commensurate with the number of learners…"* (2.2.2)

He further pointed out that merger of schools enhances and encourages quality education. His emphasis was that when teachers have a reasonable number of learners to teach, their focus is not hindered, and they are able to provide special attention even to less gifted learners.

GROUP B: SCHOOLS IN SEMI-URBAN AREAS

PB1:

> *"Merger of schools is important because it minimises unnecessary departmental cost on infrastructure e.g. building a new school which will soon not be used because of low enrolment and the buildings become white elephants…"* *(2.2).*

According to the principal, bigger schools get better services such as National Schools Nutrition Programme (NSNP) and National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF) after merging (2.2.4 & 2.2.5).

PB2:

> *"Merger of school's address double or wasteful expenditure on similar infrastructural needs e.g. buildings such as kitchens…"* *(2.2).*

He further acknowledged that merger of schools reduces teacher workload in smaller schools. It assists in terms of upgrading the schools, when two or more schools are merged, the enrolment rises and the grade/level of such a school may change e.g. from level two (02) to level three (03).   Based on the new level, the principal is also going to be upgraded in terms of his/her salary:

> *"In a merged school, the management structure also grows and the bigger the management structure, the more the school management becomes easier."*

It is not only the principal who benefits in terms of growth, some ordinary teachers are promoted into Deputy Principals while others become HOD's and Senior Teachers. Where the school had only two food handlers, after merger the school may qualify to get more. This benefit is also shared by the community itself because when more people

from the community get employed, unemployment and poverty is minimised in such a community.

PB3: The principal said*: "Merger of schools is important because it reduces teacher workload; it   further addresses the problem of multi grade teaching..." (2.2.3).*

He said that when small schools are merged with bigger ones, enough and skilled educators are hired and therefore the quality of education is improved.

GROUP C: SCHOOLS FROM RURAL AREAS

PC1: The principal said: *"Merger of schools will improve the quality of education because it provides enough educational services …"*

When schools are merged, principals are relieved from administrative work because administrative clerks will be hired, and principals will be relieved of other governance functions because they can delegate such functions to other teachers. He said that principals can further be relieved of the number of periods that they teach per week and so they will find time to attend educational activities such as meetings and workshops.

PC2: The principal indicated that merger of schools addresses allocation of resources such as buildings, human resources, and etc.

> *"It is difficult for smaller schools to purchase resources such as computers, photocopiers etc. because of the small amount of money allocated to them…" H*e further said: *"In a smaller school, it is difficult to hire a security company to provide safety and security of the school and if such a school is merged, such a problem can be addressed because the financial allocation in terms of NNSSF will also rise and the school will be able to pay Security Company for its safety. If a small school is merged, the principal is relieved of number of teaching periods,*

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administrative duties, governance and other educational responsibilities." The combination of all the above improves quality and ensures safety in a school.

PC3: The principal responded and said: *"merger of schools is important because it addresses inadequate allocation of staff…"* He further pointed out that the lower the enrolment, the less the allocation of teachers, so if small schools are merged the problem is swimmingly dealt with. The principal further indicated that merger of schools resolves the problem of multi grade teaching which compromises learners a great deal in terms of curriculum delivery. Merger of schools reduces teacher workload and enhances curriculum delivery and quality education.

GROUP D: DEPUTY MANAGER – GOVERNANCE

DMG 1: The official said: "*merger of schools is important because it improves the quality of education…"* The deputy manager maintains that schools are merged to create bigger ones so that such schools can be easily resourced. *"Allocation of teachers become simple in bigger schools*…" and lastly, he indicated that bigger schools get enough funds in terms of National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF) and provision of other resources such as kitchens become easier.

DMG 2:

> "*Most schools that are merged are separated by a mere fence meaning that they are as good as situated in one yard and in such cases, provision of resources to both the schools' amounts to wasteful expenditure…"*

He further indicated that resources such as buildings, administrative clerks and general workers can be easily allocated in bigger schools.

"Merger of schools addresses Rationalisation and Redeployment (R & R) and brings stability in schools that are merged…." He further indicated *"it is simple for parents to attach bad attitudes towards teachers in small schools, but it is not the case in bigger schools…"*

DMG 3: He indicated that schools that are understaffed will be able to provide quality education in a merged school. He continued:

"Gifted learners are able to excel in a bigger school than in a small school because teachers are equal to the task; they are able to focus; are able to unleash their potential; they have enough time to prepare and have time for individual attention…"

GROUP E: CHIEF EDUCATION SPECIALIST

CES: Responding to the question he said*:*

"Merger of schools assists in terms of allocation of resources such as human and infrastructure…. In secondary schools, merger of schools encourages subjects' specialisation which further promotes quality education…".

He further indicated that most teachers contract illness such as stress, high blood etc. in small schools while merger of schools relieves teachers not only from workload, but also from dreadful diseases such as those mentioned above.

Research Question No. 02 – What are the challenges in the merger of schools' project in the Department of Education in Vhembe District between 2010 and 2016?

GROUP A: SCHOOLS FROM THE DEEP RURAL AREAS

From the above research question, the following responses were recorded:

PA1: There were challenges during the process of merger of schools and this how the principal responded:

> *"One of the challenges is that most schools are named after the names of traditional leaders' fore fathers and that merging a school named as such is tantamount to wiping out the maintenance of legacy of such a traditional leader …"*

The principal indicated that the parents argued that the legacy of the traditional leaders should always be recognised. He further said:

> *"Communities see a school as part of development and when a school is to be closed, to them is like taking development away and so they reject merging…"*

My follow-up question wanted to know about his feeling on the provision of scholar transport and he said:

> *"In schools where the department provides scholar transport, parents blame the department for failing to guarantee consistency in terms of availability of transport and safety for their children…"*

They further blame the department for allocating money for scholar transport instead of using the money to hire more teachers because according to two principals:

> *"The monthly R40 000, 00 that is paid to a bus which transports learners to the merging centre amounts to R480 000.00 a year while this money could be used to pay two more teachers an amount of R20 000.00 monthly each for the whole year…."*

PA2: The principal said:

"The community leaders feel their school cannot be merged with a school from another village that is outside the periphery of their traditional leadership boundaries".

They also indicated that merging such a school is like the only school in the village is taken away to another village. Parents complain about the condition of the road and the principal said*:*

"The road to the merging center is very bad, it is via a mountain which is rocky and cannot be graded, the road is bushy and misty especially during rainy seasons and therefore accidents are unavoidable…"

Based on the above responses, the parents and community leaders therefore feel safety and security of their children is endangered. The principal further said:

"When scholar transport fails to come, there is no other alternative, remember primary school learners cannot attempt to walk the plus or minus seven (07) kilometres to the school through the only hazardous road because 'vha do ngalangala' meaning that they will disappear, raped or killed…"

PA3: The principal indicated that most learners use scholar transport to the school he said: *"But the road is not safe; it is mountainous, bushy and slippery especially during rainy seasons."* It is very difficult to access the school using a vehicle because even if it is not raining one cannot drive to the school (during my research, I had to leave my car somewhere at a distance and walk plus/minus hundred and fifty metres to the school).

GROUP B: SCHOOLS FROM SEMI URBAN AREAS

PB1:

"*Merging two or more schools from headmen or chieftainships has a lot of resistance of traditional leaders… Schools develop their culture as*

and when they grow, some teachers are used to come to school late, they dodge classes, poor performance and they do as they wish without any consequences and so forth while the other school may have school culture characterized by discipline, hardworking, excellent performance, cleanliness, etc."

PB2:

In some communities, there is of lack cooperation by traditional leaders of merging schools. From this point you find both sides not ready to compromise and brings the process to a stop. Another area is the SGB, there are diligent, and policy based SGB's and those who do as they wish, those who work hard and follow policy will resist merger because they do not want to mix with lazy members…

PB3:

I noted that during the merging process a lot of resources such as machineries and important records from the school to merge with disappeared, and my SGB felt that merging with such a school becomes a problem because at the end you will work with the same management and SGB which is not honest and trustworthy… SGB's and parents also resist merging their schools with poorly managed schools. e.g. the dress as you like fundraising strategy because most of learners depend on grants…

GROUP C: SCHOOLS FROM RURAL AREAS

PC1:

Parents resisted moving their children to another school based on safety reasons because their children are still very young, they cannot walk for three or more kilometres to a new school…

PC2: The principal said:

"This community is made up two official languages (Tshivenda and Xitsonga) and before this school was built, the community authority refused to allow Xitsonga to be taught in this school and now that they have built their (Xitsonga speaking people) school, they (Xitsonga speaking people) no longer want to be merged with the school that undermined their language".

He further indicated that during the process of consultation, the department could not clarify the positions of the principal and teachers after merging and this among others made the community to support the principal and add up to the rejection of merger.

PC3:

"*Some schools fail to differentiate between merging and assimilation…some school community leaders feel that they are assimilated and not merged and makes them feel undermined, on the other hand traditional leaders want to preserve their forefathers' names so they resist change…* This is the problem of uncertainty in understanding the purpose of merger.

GROUP D: DEPUTY MANAGERS - GOVERNANCE

DMG 1:

"*The process of merging schools threatens principals, and this makes them to be reluctant to serve under another principal and opt for resignation or apply for a post in another school, this pushed the SGB and community member to sympathise with their principal and the process deadlock…*

DMG 2*:*

> *The possibility is that they were against merger because they thought that they would lose their positions as principals and started influencing management and SGB's negatively. Another challenge was from teachers who earmarked positions in the schools to be merged and started to negatively influence SGB's and community leaders to reject merger…*

DMG 3:

> *Some traditional leaders do not want their legacy to change because some of them take a school as part of development, so they take a school as legacy and merging such a school with another from other villages is like taking development away. Uneducated communities concentrate mainly on the future teachers than those of learners and therefore do not understand the essence of merging.*

GROUP E: CHIEF EDUCATION SPECIALIST

CES - On challenges of merger, the CES said*:*

> *"The negative attitudes of some principals, teachers and community leaders towards merger of schools contributed in the rejection of merger…"*

He further mentioned that scholar transport was used as a scapegoat and said*:*

> *"Some communities wanted the department to sort out transport issue before merging; they also wanted the department to provide mobile classes in the merging centres before the real merging starts".*

Research Question No.03 – Which are the available resources to assist the process to unfold in order to promote effective teaching and learning?

GROUP A: SCHOOLS FROM DEEP RURAL AREAS

PA1: When responding to the question on available structures and resources in the school, the principal said:

> "A*s you can see, there are these four classes, desks and chairs, with regard to human resources; I can only talk of the three teachers …."*

PA2: In responding to the question, the principal had the following to say:

> "S*tructures in this school are the block of three classrooms, desks, and the three teachers, the building is also not in good condition…"*

PA3: Responding to the question: the principal said:

> "*It is difficult to say we have structures and resources because these four classes are also dilapidated; teachers are only three including the volunteer…"*

(In probing: I heard you mentioning insufficient classes and teachers. Don't you have other resources that can assist to promote effective teaching and learning once the schools will have been merged?).

PA1:

> *The current school enrolment is 59 with three teachers only including the principal; the school consists of eight Grades (R to 07) with four classrooms only; one teacher teaches Grades R to 03 in one class while the principal and one teacher share Grades 4 to 7 each of the two grades taught in one class… Results in all grades are poor because teachers*

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do not have time to prepare lessons. These teachers are always tired because they do not have even a single free period…

PA2*:*

The current school enrolment is 83 with only three teachers including the principal, the school consists of 08 Grades (R to 07) with three classes only, one teacher teaches Grade R to 03 while the principal and another teacher share Grade 4 to 7. Results are poor, when one teacher is sick, learners are released, teachers do not have time to prepare because they are always tired the principal is always stressed.

PA3*:*

Things are very difficult; the current enrolment is 56 learners with only two teachers and one volunteer. The school consists of eight grades with three classes only. The volunteer teaches all grades from R to 03 in one class while the principal and the other teacher share Grades 04 to 07. Each one of them teaches the two classes in one class. The school results leave much to be   desired… The school does not participate in extra mural activities.

GROUP B: SCHOOLS FROM SEMI-RURAL AREAS

PC3*:*

The enrolment is 147 with six teachers in this school, teacher/learner ratio is balancing, and teachers are coping with the workload…   The school academic performance has shown steadily improvement.   The school has….

PB1: When the principal responded to the question he said:

"The school has enough classrooms and teaching, and learning takes place without problems, however, previous culture of dodging still persists. There is remarkable improvement in learner performance and the traditional leaders and parents appreciate the initiative…"

PB2: Responding to the question, the principal said:

"Teachers are highly motivated, and this is evidenced by the teamwork. Because of unity among teachers and parents, people volunteer to clean classes and school yard. Academically, the school performance has risen, and our learners competed in speech competition in which they participated until national level…"

PB 3: The principal responded to the question in this way:

"Merging has mixed performance levels, learners from the other schools are progressing at a very slow pace whilst others are performing well. There was a smooth transition on Norms and Standards for School Funding (NSSF) and National Schools Nutrition Programme (NSNP). The school has enough infrastructures such as classes and furniture…"

(In probing: I heard you mentioning sufficient classes and teachers. Don't you have other resources that can assist to promote effective teaching and learning once the schools will have been merged?).

PB1:

The current enrolment is 800 learners with 21 teachers including the principal, the school has sufficient classrooms including staffroom for educators plus one principal's office… Teaching and learning takes place without serious challenges, however, there are remnants of resistance among some teachers…

PB2:

> *The school enrolment has gone up to 595 with sixteen teachers including the principal; management and teachers are highly motivated, committed and this evident because of the teamwork that they demonstrate… academic performance is high, and the previous year learners participated in speech competition until national level held in Kimberly and Durban. The school also won awards and prices on NSNP, cleanliness and beautification…*

PB3:

> *The school merged successfully, and the enrolment is at 630 with sixteen teachers including the principal and the transition with regard school properties, projects, NSNP, and finances went very well… The school is satisfied with the norms and standards that the department allocates, infrastructure such as furniture is also commensurate with to the number of learners. …*

GROUP C: SCHOOLS FROM RURAL AREAS

PC1: When asked about the available structures and resources, the principal said:
> *"The structures that we have are the three classes and this small office, educators are four, the school has no water and sanitation, and we buy water from the village this situation is unbearable…"*

PC2: The principal was found seated under a tree which according to him, that was his office and responded to the question as follows:
> *"The situation speaks for itself, you can see that there are only three classes plus this shark, we have three teachers and I'm the fourth, things are bad in this school…"*

PC3: When asked about the structures and resources, she answered:

"*I do not know why this department wants to merge this school because at the time when the process started, the school enrolment was 158 learners, look at this new building it consists of seven classes with two staffrooms. The school has electricity, water and pit toilets. There were six teachers with 147 learners...*"

The principal also indicated that even though new buildings were there, they were still waiting for furniture.

(In probing: I heard you mentioning sufficient classes and teachers. Don't you have other resources that can assist to promote effective teaching and learning once the schools will have been merged?).

PC1:

This school is among those that could not merge, and its enrolment is 108 with only four female teachers… The money cannot cater for educational services such as photocopiers, computers, electricity etc. The school does not have water and sanitation; we buy water from the neighbouring homesteads. The school has serious problems when it comes to safety and security because all teachers are females and the school cannot appoint a security personnel or company because of the little amount of money that we get from norms and standards… The school cannot conduct any extra mural activities and when one of them is sick, learners are released. School performance is always poor.

PC2:

The school does not have enough resources the school enrolment is 207 with only five teachers and two more teachers are needed, the school consists of three classrooms and two more are still needed, there are no machineries such as computers and photocopiers but although

the situation is bad in terms of resources, academic performance improved from 29% in 2016 to 85% in June 2017. Two new buildings with 06 classes with one staffroom and a principal's office.

GROUP D: DEPUTY MANAGERS - GOVERNANCE

DMG 1:

Mobilisation of resources is very difficult; staff allocation is difficult because of very few teachers and because of this deficiency, there is no effective teaching and learning in the small schools. Resources like buildings are very poor and dilapidated because the department focuses on big schools in terms of infrastructure development. The future of learners is severely compromised …

DMG 2*:*

I am satisfied because all identified schools have successfully merged… There are no more challenges with regard to school buildings, teachers, machineries because even the amount of money we get through norms and standards for school funding is enough… teachers' workload has been reduced and effective teaching and learning takes place, results in all schools have improved…

DMG 3*:*

What worries me most is that the enrolments of small schools decrease every time because progressive parents withdraw their children to better and well- resourced schools… In these schools Norms and Standards School Funding is little and cannot pay for educational services such as electricity, photocopying and teaching aids…

GROUP E: CHIEF EDUCATION SPECIALIST

CES:

> *Small schools are characterised by chronic underperformance and ineffective teaching and learning… Small schools are poorly managed because there are no management structures…*

Research Question No.04: What are the possible strategies that could be used to enhance a successful merger in Vhembe District?

GROUP A: SCHOOLS FROM DEEP RURAL AREAS

PA1: The principal acknowledged that consultation was done as per the departmental programme:

> *"However, teachers should have been taken on board first to take them into the confidence of the department and for teachers to speak the same language with the department…"*

PA2: Responding to the question, the principal said:

> *"The department should not come with a holistic approach in solving the problem of small schools, instead, there should be schools that are exempted on condition that merger only takes place after certain challenges will have been provided with total solution e.g. roads through rocky mountains, busy and mountainous and misty during rainy seasons because safety of learners cannot be guaranteed…"*

He further indicated that there are small schools that are far away from other schools; those that are more than five kilometres away but with serious problems when it comes to the condition of the roads, for example an only road on a mountain, bushy, misty atmosphere in the morning and during rainy seasons.

PA3: The principal responded to the question and said:

> *"Small and remote schools should be given special treatment and the teacher/learner ratio should be adjusted to suit those areas… The department should not just consult for the sake of consulting but should take recommendations from community leaders and parents…*

GROUP B: SCHOOLS FROM SEMI-URBAN AREAS

PB1: The principal presented his view as follows:

> "*The department should first study the school cultures of the schools to merge before the actual process starts… there should be special consultation in case merging involves two schools from different villages because different villages have different programmes when it comes to community development…"*

On the above statement, he further indicated that the merging process may proceed without problem but the intended aim of the programme may not be achieved and this may happen because if the two schools fail to forge unity and to share the same vision, it will take years for the new school to yield the expected results.

PB2: The principal commented mainly on consultation by the department and pointed out:

> *"That consultation should include all community stakeholders and not parents only, in some instance only parents were consulted, community leaders and teachers were not consulted, these consultations should be sufficient and not just a run through, consultation should end up where consensus is reached and in this case, stakeholders should be allowed to reach agreement…"*

PB3: The principal said:

"I made an observation that the department does not do consultation to make stakeholders understand the programme and its essence, but to fulfill the process and I therefore suggested that the programme should first seek to educate stakeholders and communities for them to understand the importance of merger of schools and this will make the process proceed smoothly…"

According to him, it is important for stakeholders to report back to their constituencies for them to listen to the people they represent for them to take an informed decision. In some communities it happened that a decision to reject merger was taken but later on the very same community went back to the department only to say that they are ready to continue with the process of merging schools.

GROUP C: SCHOOLS FROM RURAL AREAS

PC1: The principal suggested:
"The department should consider educating community leaders, SGB's and SMT's about the importance of merger of schools. The communities should also be taught about how they will benefit from the programme; some parents were worried about unreliability of the transport…"

The principal further said:
"According to my observations, where this type of transport is used, sometimes the transport does not come to collect the children. Sometimes the means of transport for example, a bus is very old and keeps on having breakdowns and end up failing to take learners to school in time whilst a bus can be in good condition but does not receive regular service…"

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Based on the above observations, the principal suggested that the department should provide regular monitoring with regard to time consciousness and vehicle roadworthy.

PC2: The principal presented his views as follows:

> *"The department should assure the community stakeholders and parents in particular about the reliability of scholar transport and safety of the learners…"*

On consultation, the principal said:

> "*The department should first consult the village executive council and the SGB before parents and the community, the two stakeholders should be educated about the essence of merger and thereafter the department and together with the council will meet the community and parents…"*

PC3: The principal said:

> "T*he first step by the department should be taking the community stakeholders and parents through a full process of the programme, educate them about the importance of merger and not instruct them. Communication should be official without undermining another school…"*

GROUP D: DEPUTY MANAGERS - GOVERNANCE

DMG 1: The deputy manager said:

> "C*onsultation should not include all stakeholders because some members of stakeholders such as political organizations have some hidden agendas e.g. a political party may want to cause chaos for the ruling party to be seen failing and useless in its programme…"*

He then suggested:

"The SGB's, biological parents and legitimate guardians should be the only structures to be consulted and during this consultation process, the department should strictly monitor attendance…"

DMG 2: Although all identified schools in the circuit merged successfully, the DMG had the following to say:

"During consultation by the department, advocacy campaign should be sufficient, and each stakeholder separately consulted for them to express themselves freely, he further indicated: *"consultation process should be free from distortion and intimidation…"*

DMG 3: The deputy manager said:

"*I observed an element of lack of education about the importance of merger of schools, and so i proposed that the community and the relevant stakeholders should be educated before the actual process starts…*"

He further indicated that the SGB's, should seriously be taken on board for them to be free from undue influence from principals and teachers.

GROUP E: CHIEF EDUCATION SPECIALIST

Chief Education Specialist – The Chief Education Specialist said:

"The process of merger of schools has a lot of challenges and to avert some of these, the department should consider including political parties in the process because from the look of things, in some areas you will find that there is no political will for the process to continue…"

The Chief Education Specialist further indicated that he observed that since the beginning of the process, the department has been implementing one part of section 12A of SASA

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no.84 of 1996 (that speaks about merging only) and neglect the other one (section 33 of the same act) that speaks about closure of a school.

4.4.2 Presentation of Data from Document Analysis

In terms of contextualisation, verification and collaborating data collected through the interviews, the researcher visited sampled schools to examine and analyse documents that could shed light on merger of schools programme in Vhembe Department of Education as from 2010 to 2016. Findings from the analysis were compared to the participants' responses from the interviews. Document analysis also helped the researcher to gain more understanding regarding the policy provision on merger, the process that was followed, structures involved and the time frame of the programme. The following documents were identified, examined and analysed: South African Schools' Act (SASA) No. 84 of 1996, Guidelines for the Rationalisation of Small and/or Non-Viable Schools, Limpopo Province Merger of Schools Manual and Minutes held during consultation and decision-making process.

- **South African Schools Act (SASA) No. 84 of 1996**

This Act provides for a uniform system for the organisation, governance and funding of; to amend and repeal certain laws relating to schools; and to provide for matters connected therewith. Schools are therefore expected to have and implement the act. When the researcher visited the school; all schools had a copy of SASA, Act No. 84, 1996. The DMGs and the CES claim to be acquainted with the legal framework of schools' mergers. The researcher noted that some participants were not aware of the legality because their responses didn't cite SASA, 1996 sections which inform processes of merger of schools. Two sections of SASA, 1996 are crucial, sections 12A and 33. Nothing was explicitly stated with regard to section 33 of closure of small schools. SASA (Act No. 84 of 1996, Section 12A (6) (a) requires that governing bodies of the schools that are merged must have a meeting before the merger to constitute a single governing body comprising all the members of the governing bodies concerned. Schools A1 and A2 principals agreed

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that their schools have a copy, but they claim that they didn't discuss about the Act. A3 school principal claims that the school didn't receive the copy. Schools B1-3 and C1-3 have the act.

- **Guidelines for the Rationalisation of Small Schools or Non- Viable Schools**

The National Guidelines for the Rationalisation of Small and/or Non- Viable Schools is meant to contribute to our collective effort to improve the quality of education, to expedite the resourcing of schools and to ensure retention of learners and teachers in rural and farm schools. During Documents Analysis, the researcher wanted to know schools had the document, if they were trained on the document. All participants did not cite any training they underwent in terms of understanding these guidelines. Their responses does not indicate that they have knowledge of what they are expected to go through. Schools A1, A2 and A3 principals agreed that their schools haven't received a copy. Schools B1-B3 and C1-C3 have copies received and discussed during the consultation meetings.

- **Limpopo Province Merger of School's Manual**

According to the Limpopo Department of Education Merger of Schools Manual (n.d), Provincial Coordinating Teams were established to guide the merger and closure of school's process. Each team consisted of key stakeholders within the Provincial Department of Education dealing with for example; rural education coordinator, human resource, finance, legal services, physical planning, curriculum, scholar transport, school nutrition, etc. Schools A1, A2 and A3 principals claim that their schools haven't received a copy. Schools B1-B3 and C1-C3 have copies received and discussed during the consultation meetings.

- **Minutes of meetings held during the consultation and decision-making process**

In A1 school minutes are available, but not signed by secretary and chairperson of the SGB. A2 school minutes were said to be available but could not be traced because the

secretary was not available. A3 school minutes were available, but not signed by the SGB secretary and chairperson. B1 school minutes were available and signed by the secretary and the chairperson. B2 school minutes were available, but not signed by the secretary and chairperson. B3 school minutes were available, signed by the secretary and the chairperson. C1 school minutes were available but are not signed by the secretary. C2 school minutes are available, not signed by the secretary. C3 school minutes are not available, could not be traced because the SGB secretary was not around.

- **Attendance registers of SGB and community meetings**

A1 school SGB minutes were available. A2 school minutes were not available, they could not be traced because the secretary was not available. A3 school SGB minutes were available, but some members did not attend meetings regularly. B1-B2 schools SGB minutes were available, all SGB members attend meeting regularly, but B3 school minutes were available but one person doesn't attend meetings regularly. AC1-AC2 schools' minutes were available and all SGB members attend meetings regularly. C3 school minutes were not available, could not be traced because the secretary was not around.

4.5   DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Data was collected from thirteen (13) participants through an interview schedule consisting of four similar questions and data from documents related to merger of schools were collected, examined and analysed. After the qualitative data was collected, it was analysed thematically and the following themes were identified: Incapacity to interpret legal regulations, Capacity building, Merger of schools destroys the traditional legacy, Disintegration of schools' culture, Safety and Security concerns, Misconception about merger of schools, Dispositioning in promotional posts, Tribalism and Fear of the uncertainties.

4.5.1 Incapacity to Interpret Legal Regulations

There are challenges when it comes to interpretation of legal regulations such as SASA, principals fail or ignore their responsibilities in terms of SASA section 16(a) that guides on how principals should play their supporting roles to SGB's. Parents component in the SGB's demonstrate lack of training on the act, let alone on the Guidelines for the Rationalisation of Small /or non-Viable Schools. However, participants indicated that they trained. All participants underwent training (Appendix E) but still had many challenges of merger of identified schools. Legislative materials (2.4.7 of Merger of Governance Structures) and Appendix E are enabling resources for merger, etc. Surprisingly, participants mentioned physical and human resources only as resources to enable merger.

4.5.2 Capacity Building

Participants emphasised the need for capacity building in terms of a mentoring programme, adequate advocacy, stakeholders-participation, twinning of schools etc. Parents also demonstrated lack of understanding in terms of the benefits of merger of schools.

4.5.3 Merger of Schools Destroys the Traditional Legacy

Most of the public schools in our communities were initiated by traditional leaders with an aim of developing their communities. During the establishment process, such leaders were building their legacies. When merger of schools started, some community leaders felt that their traditional leadership legacy was under attack (was going to be wiped out) because in some instances the names of the schools named after their fore fathers were going to change and this made them to resist the merger process. Another principal stated that community leaders felt that their schools could not be merged with a school

from another village that is outside the periphery of traditional leadership boundaries (Appendix F, 133 -135).

4.5.4   Disintegration of School Culture

Every organisation has its culture which is either developed or adopted from other organisations with similar objectives. Schools also develop their cultures consciously or unconsciously so, some cultures are positive such as hardworking, discipline, cleanliness, etc. while others are negative such as laziness, late coming, dodging classes, and poor performance. When the merger process started, some schools were threatened thinking that their school culture was going to be affected negatively (Appendix F, 142 – 146). This theme affected mainly those schools whose teachers do as they wish, these are teachers who enjoy laziness, late coming and bunking of classes. Since these people also serve in SGB's they influence some members to reject merger.

4.5.5   Safety and Security Concerns

Safety and security concerns is one of the fundamental aspects that every parent is concerned about when taking their children to schools. Some parents and community leaders reject merger of schools because they are skeptical about safety and security of their children. One principal said: "when transport fails to come and collect learners, they are left with no other alternative and they knew that their primary school learners could not walk the plus or minus 07 kilometres to the school through the only hazardous road because "vha do ngalangala" …" meaning that they will disappear. Another principal who shared the same sentiments said: "some parents resisted merger because their children were still young and that they (children) could not walk the expected three (03) to four (04) kilometres to the new school…" (Appendix F, 172 – 174).

4.5.6 Misconception about Merger of Schools

When people are not taken through some sorts of induction workshop for them to understand certain programmes, they turn to misunderstand and misrepresent what unfolds at a given period. When the process of merger of schools was introduced, some community leaders thought that when their schools were to merge with schools from another area, their schools were simply assimilated and merged as they expected. One principal said: "some leaders failed to differentiate merging and assimilation…" (Appendix F, 167 -168). The above misconception led to rejection of merger by some parents and communities.

4.5.7 Dispositioning in Promotional Posts

Resistance for merger of schools did not only come from parents and community leaders, but from teachers also. Teachers from identified schools also resisted, although in a subtle way. This was done strategically by influencing parents and SGB members to resist. Some principals in the identified schools felt that their positions as principals were threatened because when their schools were to merge with another, the possibility was that they could no longer be principals anymore. Because they felt they could lose their positions, they resisted (Appendix F, 170 – 171).

4.5.8 Tribalism

Another challenge that contributed to defiance in the merger of schools programme is tribalism. In one instance parents rejected merger because the school that had to move to merge with another, was a newly built one. One principal said:

> *"This school was built because the predominantly Xitsonga speaking*
> *people wanted their language to be included in the school where their*
> *children attended but that was not allowed and then decided to build*

their own school where they will be able to teach Xitsonga to their children…" (Appendix F, 182 – 189).

4.5.9 Fear of Uncertainties

In some instances, resistance against the merger programme to continue was not from parents and traditional leaders "but teachers who simply had a negative attitude towards merger of schools…" (Appendix F, 193 -194).

4.6   SYNCHRONISATION OF DATA

The data collected from interviews and document analysis is synchronised in relation to the literature review, participants' responses and documents analysis as shown in the table below:

Table 4.2: Synchronisation of Data

Research Questions	Data Collected from Interviews	Data Collected through Documents Analysis	Literature Review
Why do you think merger of schools is important?	School principals maintain that Merger of schools resolves multi grade teaching, provide most needed educational resources and ultimately improves the quality of education. However, parents do	In terms of SASA no.84 of 1996, Guidelines for the Rationalisation of Small and Non-Viable Schools and merger of school's manual, is aimed at improving the quality of education.	According to Limpopo Department of Education Merger of Schools Manual (N.D), consultative process in the merger of schools; SGB's, parents and stakeholders should have been given

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	not understand the essence of merger.	However, some parents lack knowledge in terms of importance of merger.	enough time for more understanding in terms of the importance of merger.
What are the challenges of merger in your school?	Traditional leaders want to maintain the names of their fore fathers and refuse merging because such names will no longer be heard. Some parents want their schools to be accorded special treatment because of remoteness of the villages. Some parents are worried about safety and consistency in terms of scholar transport.	SASA no.84 of 19196 and the guidelines directs that governing bodies and interested persons should be given an opportunity to make representations within a period of not less than 90 days. For scholar transport, the manual prescribes requirements such as vehicle road worthy certificate, monthly inspection of the vehicle which will ensure consistency.	Based on the National Guidelines for Rationalisation of Small and Non-Viable Schools, (2009) SGB's and communities should have been notified as per the guidelines and given 90 days to make representations.
How is the current status of your school as it was supposed to	Of all the nine schools, six disagreed with merger and only three agreed. Out of the six only two schools performed at an	The guidelines indicate that identified schools should have been merged by 2012 in	Multi - grade teaching should have been dealt with and resources mobilised if the schools had agreed to merge.

have merged in 2012?	average level while the remaining four performed poorly. Resources are still a serious challenge and multi grade teaching continues stressing teachers.	order to address the challenges.	
What do you think can be the best way of facilitating the process of merger?	Principals indicated that consultation should start from teachers in which principals become part of the facilitating team. Principals of schools that are in remote areas indicated that the department should consider changing teacher/learner ratio to suit each school's needs. Principals pointed out that there is a need for special consultation in merging schools from different traditional leaders and lastly communities should be educated	South African Schools Act no.84 of 1996 has made provision for the strategic points to be considered. Through the Act, guidelines are in place and what is needed is the correct implementation.	The guidelines and merger of school's manual indicate all the steps that need to be followed in implementing the process, however, some steps were overlooked. Overlooking some steps in the process made stakeholders and parents to reject merger.

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	about the importance of merger of schools.		

4.7   CONCLUSION

In this chapter, findings of data collected from interview and documents analysis were presented. Research questions were presented through literature review and participants' responses. Findings were discussed and out of the research questions, themes from the interviews were identified and discussed. Research questions were categorised into groups which were also discussed, and the collected data was synchronised.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter summarises the findings as interpreted in the previous chapter. Besides findings, the chapter makes conclusion and recommendations for the entire research work. The requisite data collected during the research process led to the achievement of the research aims and objectives as outlined in Chapter One (01). The achievement of aims and objectives was made possible by discussions throughout Chapters Two (02), Three (03) and four (04) which focused on the following:

Literature review based on information collected from different sources, reviews of previous studies and other literature conducted to highlight important issues pertinent to the research work.

Presentation of research paradigm, research design, research methodology, population, sampling, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, ethical considerations and exposition of data analysis, interpretation and presentation of findings in the research from both primary and secondary sources.

The following topics seek to provide discussion and summaries of research findings, it also provides the conclusion and further makes recommendations in terms of developing an effective action plan for a programme, involving the Department of Education and community stakeholders in educating the targeted population for the success of the project.

5.2   OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The roles and responsibilities of principals in terms of providing leadership, managerial skills and support to the SGB's as per section (16A) of South African Schools Act No. 84 of 1996 was the focus during the review of literature, data collection, presentation, analysis and interpretation. Throughout the research process, the researcher kept on concentrating on the aims and objectives of the study. Through individual interviews and document analysis conducted, the researcher managed to present findings in chapter four (04) based on the collected requisite data. Collected data from interviews and document analysis were triangulated in order to arrive at the relevant major findings that addressed the research questions to achieve objectives of the study.

5.3   SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Data collected from participants through individual interviews are discussed in the following subsections:

5.3.1   The Importance of Merger of Schools

In terms of the National Guidelines for the Rationalisation of Small and Non-Viable Schools, the main aim of merger of closure of small rural and farm schools is to improve quality of education, to expedite resourcing of schools, to promote access to schools and to ensure the retention of learners and education in rural and farm schools. In terms of (SASA no.84,1996 section 16A subsection (2A)): The principal must in undertaking the professional management of a public school as contemplated in section16(03) carry out duties which include but not limited to amongst others the implementation of all the educational programmes and curriculum activities, the management of all teachers and support staff, etc.

It is mainly based on the above that principals were the focus for interview in this research. In this research, the three groups within the nine schools had the following to say regarding the importance of merger of schools: Of all the principals in the nine schools, seven of them said that merger of schools is important because it reduces teacher workload and when the enrolment rises, more teachers will be allocated, and quality education will be ensured. Three principals noted that in small schools' teachers are bound to combine classes of different grades (multi grade teaching) which hinder concentration and as such proper learning and teaching is no longer effective and efficient. Some principals argue that merger of schools addresses allocation of norms and standards for school funding because when schools are merged, the enrolment grows, and more teachers will be employed. Small schools suffer a great deal when it comes to National Schools Nutrition Programme, in this programme, allocation is done as per school enrolment and schools with low enrolment get little allocation.

It was also noted that merger of schools minimizes unnecessary wasteful expenditure on infrastructure that is constructed today and tomorrow becomes a white elephant. The last point made on the importance of merger is that in a bigger school, a lot of people benefit because some educators get promoted into deputy principal ship posts, others become HOD's, School Management Team becomes bigger and make work easier. The interviewed principals were able to emphases what the department identified as things that merger of schools can address. Apart from all what principals mentioned as the importance of merger, interviewed Deputy Managers for governance concurred with them and the Chief Education Specialist dealing with governance confirmed during his responses to the interview questions.

Both principals and departmental officials (DMG and CES) agree that mergers of small schools are important since they reduce workload on both teachers and principals. Teachers are able to teach their specialised subjects whereas principals are able to have less periods of teaching and have more time for administrative work. In addition, all

participants agree on the economic value of merger of schools and provision of quality education in terms of enough allocation of NNSSF, NSNP, teachers and infrastructure.

Hentschke, Jacobs, Ladd and Parthenon (2017**:**23) are in line with participants views as they assert that all mergers harbour the potential for a range of gains and costs that should be weighed against each other. Gains include opportunities for realizing financial savings, leveraging greater size and scale in multiple areas, and re-deploying stakeholders.

The Department of Basic Education, (2014) support the views above. It provides the following factors as important for merger of schools: infrastructure, staff allocation, multi-grade teaching, National Schools Nutrition Programme (NSNP), National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSF), Learner and Teacher Support Materials (LTSM) and Learner Transport. However, Infrastructure provisioning comes after a thorough research, planning and strategic intelligence (Department of Basic Education, 2014:4).

There is a view that participants had a negative perspective towards multi-grade teaching. For example, multi-grade teaching was associated with poor performance. Therefore, they saw merger as a way of doing away with it. This is also noted in departmental manuals for merger of schools. The department has noted that a small number of teachers in small schools is unable to carry the school curriculum and they resort to a technique called Multi-Grade Teaching (MGT). The merger will therefore ensure maximum use of school time and human resources (Limpopo Merger of Schools' Manual, n.d).

5.3.2 Challenges of Merger of Schools

Every initiative has its own setback and challenges, merger of schools programme in Vhembe District had its challenges, almost all schools that failed to merge raised a challenge of traditional leaders who will always challenge the issue of the name of the

new school. When it comes to the school to be closed, it again becomes a problem when it is in a traditional leader's name; they want the names of their forefathers to remain. Another challenge that communities raise is that a school is part of development and closing one school means that the community is taken back in terms of development.

Community leaders and parents whom their schools are to be merged with a school from another village reject merger, traditional leaders feel their own development is given to another leader who never initiated because most community schools were initiated by communities. School principals argue that school culture has a serious impact when it comes to merger of schools because a school in which policies are not followed, a school where educators do as they wish and learners come to school as and when they feel like, such a school has a bad culture and parents do not want that.

Some principals pointed out that there is subtle resistance especially from teachers who earmark some promotional positions. These teachers (some of whom are SGB members) unduly influence SGB members and community members to reject merger. This is also practised by some principals who are intimidated by change, principals who feel that power and their positions are taken away from them, so they also influence parents and traditional leaders negatively. The above challenge goes hand in glove with that failure to differentiate merger from assimilation.

One school cited a story that led to rejection, a community made up of two different ethnic groupings initially had one school in which only Tshivenda as a language was recognised and Xitsonga undermined. The Xitsonga group later initiated their own and recognised both languages but when the two schools were supposed to be merged, the predominantly Xitsonga speaking group rejected indicating that they do not want to experience what happened previously. While on the above narrative, another principal cited another story based on historical background; that the reasons to reject merger was because their school was to merge with a school which had no history, according to the principal, theirs is a monument and named after the traditional leader's name so they

could not be merged in another school premises. Another reason was that their school (with enrolment of 150 learners) has new buildings, electricity and water and did not understand the reasons for merging. The above account was confirmed by DMG's and the Chief Education Specialist who also emphasized lack of understanding when it comes to the objectives and reasons for merger of schools programme.

Jackson (2013) maintains that merger of schools promotes desegregation of schools previously identified by races (literature review item 2.3.1). Before and during apartheid, South African public schools were "strictly" segregated according to race (Steyn, Steyn & de Waal, 1998:38). This view is still evident in the manner communities behave. The DMG raised an issue on assimilation and acculturation. He claims that communities fear for their languages to be dealt away with. An example was given of Tsonga and Tshivenda schools which are identified for merging. Traditional leaders and their communities fear that there will be assimilation of one language by the other. They are not aware that two or more cultures can co-exist without one losing its identity, which is promotion of acculturation. Participants raised several views related to challenges of merger of schools. Principals and departmental officials agree that traditional leaders are afraid of losing the legacy since most schools are named after them. In extreme cases, the very school identified to close and merge with others is the only school in the village. Hence, its closure also means end of what traditional leaders perceived as the development in the village.

Ecks (2005) – (in 2.3.1) in support of the above, revealed that white parents in Delta County (in USA), responding to proposed merger of schools chose not to send their students to traditional public schools because of perceived disciplinary problems, less challenging academics, and fewer extra – curriculum opportunities which are barriers. This scholar's view is also shared by participants of this study. Participants claim that parents do not want their children's school to be merged with schools that have a lazy culture of working.

In some cases, according to the DMGs and CES of this study, principals and teachers are against merger because of fear of uncertainty. They are afraid of losing their positions and prospects for promotion. These are people who will influence the SGBs and traditional leaders to resist merger.

Common challenges raised by participants are: safety of learners not guaranteed in a merged center school, bad roads to center schools, inconsistent transport as cited by merged schools and fear of well-resourced schools' communities to share their resources with poorly managed schools. Hence, these communities make unreasonable demands upon the department as prerequisite for merger. However, literature (Chapter Two of this study) shows that parents need to be consulted to satisfaction. Global studies on merger reveal that there are legal challenges attached to merger of schools. Parents have to be consulted before a decision is arrived at (Black, 2016). To sum up, Black (2016) argue that parents normally do not want the culture of their schools to be diluted by poor performing, ill-discipline and the school that fails to manage itself.

5.3.3 Availability of Resources for Merger

Principals share views with regard to availability and non-availability of resources to assist the process and promote effective teaching and learning. They refer to physical structures, referring to insufficient and dilapidating school buildings and no water (PA1, PA2 and PC2). In addition, principals cite lack of electricity, lack of sanitation, lack of computers and photocopiers. There is also lack of human resources. This related to insufficient teachers and no security personnel. PC3 gave a good picture of the school's resources. The school has new six classes, staff room and office. The prerequisite of merger is safe buildings, teaching and learning resources and enough teachers in order to promote quality teaching and learning. None of the principals cited capacity development training of the human resources to assist teachers and principals in the process of transition. This solidifies their reason why they cite challenges of merger. Lim (2017) emphasises the importance of a planned transition with reference to Singapore

school mergers. He maintains that school mergers as a transition for teachers can be challenging. He claims that there is a need for a "bridging" programme in place to assist in the process of merger (2.3.3).

Principals of Group B are proud of their resources (PB1, PB2 and PB3). This is attested by their DMG 2 when he gave this response:

> "*I am satisfied because all identified schools have successfully merged… There are no more challenges with regard to school buildings, teachers and machineries because even the amount of money we get through norms and standards for school funding is enough… teachers' workload has been reduced and effective teaching and learning takes place, results in all schools have improved…*"

In Group B all schools managed to successfully merge and after merging, these schools were better resourced with structures consisting of both classes and offices. Teachers were enough and demonstrated teamwork.

Literature is in line with the views above but adds legal resources that support merger. These Guidelines for the Rationalization of Small or Non- Viable Schools (2009:07) in terms of South African Schools Act (SASA) (Act No. 84 of 1996). Section 12A of the same Act provides for the merger of schools and Section 33 of the same Act provides for the closure of public schools. In addition, Gazette 530 of (2000) entails how the SGBs of merging schools should constitute an interim governing body. It is the responsibility of the Head of Department (HOD) at Provincial Office to appoint the School Electoral Officers (SEO's) in terms of regulations relating to interim school governing bodies.

Documents analysis (Appendix B of this study) reveal that school principals show gaps in terms of understanding their role with regard to merger of schools. None of them cited these resources during the interview as known to them. This means that consultations were done but principals did not understand and inquire about the merger programme.

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Literature (2.5.5) of this study states that according to the Limpopo Department of Education Merger of Schools Manual (n.d) the Provincial Coordinating Teams were established to guide the merger and closure of school's process. Each team consists of key stakeholders within the Provincial Department of Education dealing with for example; rural education coordinator, human resource, finance, legal services, physical planning, curriculum, scholar transport, school nutrition, etc. The team reports directly to the HOD regarding progress on merger and closure process in the province. The Provincial Coordinating Team serves to establish provincial database of all public schools in farms and rural areas that includes inter alia infrastructural, as well as legal ownership of the property. The team consists of provincial stakeholders such as rural education coordinator, human resource, finance, etc. The team establishes a list of schools that qualifies for merger (schools with 50 learners and less). The team also establishes another list of schools built in farms and the lists are directly submitted to MEC (Limpopo Department of Education Merger of Schools Manual, n.d).

Literature review of this study (2.5.7.3) sums up by stating the resources for merger in terms of planning, consultation and implementation of the merger programme. That is, the following teams should be in place to manage closure, mergers and launches of new schools: District Steering Committee, District Project Team, Community Launch Team and School-Based Community Team.

5.3.4 Suggested Strategies to Facilitate the Process of Merger of Schools

All the nine schools within the three groups and the departmental officials at circuit and district levels suggested ways to facilitate the process of merger of schools. The first principal in group A acknowledged that consultation was done as per the departmental programme but suggests that teachers should have been taken on board first for the department to take them into its confidence to guarantee their jobs and positions. He further suggested that each school community should be consulted separately because community needs are not the same.

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Principals in group A, suggest that the department should not come with a holistic approach in solving the problem of small and non- viable schools because there are small schools that are far away from other schools; those that are more than five kilometres away but with serious problems when it comes to the natural conditions of the roads, for example a single road that connects two or more villages which goes through mountains, rocky, bushy, misty in the morning and during rainy seasons. According to the principals, such roads should get a total solution (tarring of the road) before the process of merger can continue. He further suggested that remote communities with one school only should be accorded special treatment by leaving the school as it is but consider adding more teachers instead of closing it. Some principals suggested that during consultation, the department should allow democratic process to take its course by giving people chance to express themselves and their views should also be considered not only to be listened to.

On consultation, there are mixed feelings, some principals feel that consultation should involve the Schools Governing Bodies, biological parents of learners and legal guardians of learners only because these are the people with direct interest of learners at heart. Others hold the view that SGB's, Parents and all the community structures including political organisations should take part during consultation because we need political will from political parties and without that it could be difficult to achieve what we want. DMG's also agree that consultation process should be democratic, free from distortion and intimidation.

Almost all principals agreed that during the process of consultation, the department should first seek to educate community leaders, SGB's and School Management Teams about the importance of merger of schools and ensure that all affected principals in the respective circuits form part of the facilitating team. The inclusion of principals in the facilitating is aimed at ensuring that principals assist in convincing parents until they understand that the process should be allowed to get through. On scholar transport, principals suggested that the department should provide regular monitoring with regard

to time consciousness and vehicle road worthiness. They further suggested that, bus companies should always have contingency plan in case their transport encounter problems.

There are several possible intervention strategies drawn from participants' perspectives and literature review. These include: good planning of which 'school twinning' could be employed as an initial stage for merger, consultation, adequate advocacy stakeholder-participation, political will, mentoring programme, bussing system and school boarding system.

Participants are aware that **good planning** is paramount to successful merger. Arnolds, Stofile and Lillah (2013:03) citing Thompson, Strickland and Gamble (2005) talk about strategic management, job performance, organizational commitment and merger goals. The strategic management function of an institution consists of five phases, namely: Developing a strategic vision, setting objectives, creating a strategy to achieve the objectives and the vision, implementing and executing the strategy and monitoring developments and evaluating the performance and making corrective adjustments. The goals cited here could be a corner stone for successful merger in the Vhembe District and elsewhere.

Based on their responses, participants are partially aware of the legality of merging schools entailed in section 12A of SASA, 1996. However, they didn't cite any view with regard to section 33 of the same act on closure of a school. Merger is likened to twinning of schools which is common in South Africa. Mtshali and Ndaba (2015) promote that "school twinning" is the way to non-racialism. The two authors made comment on the Gauteng MEC's intention to twin some schools to achieve a truly non-racial schooling representation and the improvement of academic performance. Hence, since the purpose of merger is to collectively improve quality of education, to expedite resourcing of schools, to promote access to schools and to ensure retention of learners and educators in Rural and Farm Schools (Guidelines for the Rationalization of Small and

Farm Schools, 2009:01), **twinning of schools** is another strategy. At first, schools proposed to be twinned share governing bodies and infrastructure such as libraries and sports fields while the actual twinning starts later-on. Twinning on the basis of this definition, could be employed as the initial stage for merger.

All participants cite **consultation** as a strategy that can enhance a successful programme of schools in Vhembe District. Participants have a view that consultation will also address tribal and multi-cultural dynamics. Schools that are identified for merger run across multi-cultural backgrounds, hence their communities need to be exposed to the benefits of merger. Naidoo, Pillay and Conly (2018:02) support that merging schools by race need effective structures such as School Management Teams (SMT's), School Governing Bodies (SGBs) and Students Representative Councils (SRC's) should be put in place. The SGBs should develop policies that address segregation and structures such as SMT's and SRC's to implement without compromising.

Knowledge is power. PA1 and PB3 when responding to Research Question 04 support that teachers need to know about merger. In fact, the researcher argues that communities need to know the purpose of merger of schools. Amongst others the purpose is restructuring the schooling system and equitable share of educational opportunities (Rodgers, Glesner & Meyers, 2014:1-2). In South Africa, the purpose of merger of schools is to collectively improve quality of education, to expedite resourcing of schools, to promote access to schools and to ensure retention of learners and educators in Rural and Farm Schools (Guidelines for the Rationalisation of Small and Farm Schools, 2009:01). Consultation is informed by processes some of which are sharing information with the schools' stakeholders (SGBs, politicians, biological parents and legitimate guardians) and adequate advocacy.

The departmental officials (DMGs and CES) further propose that consultation should be **stakeholder-participation**. DMG1 is skeptical about the involvement of political parties during consultation processes. He supports the role of SGBs, biological parents and

legitimate guardians in merger through exposure to knowledge about merger of schools. On the contrary, the CES official in particular argues that communities lack a political will to promote merger of schools, hence he supports the **inclusion of political parties during consultation**. DMG2 highlights that merger of schools could be enhanced by **adequate advocacy**. He argues that consultation (adequate advocacy) should be done in good faith, in his words he said: *"consultation process should be free from distortion and intimidation…"*

Mentoring programme as an intervention strategy for successful merger wasn't explicitly stated by participants. Literature of this study clearly emphasises the role of mentoring (2.4.3). Davie (2017) asserts that teachers affected by school merger need to be provided bridging courses and lighter teaching workload where possible, in addition Davie further claims that the bridging courses will help equip the affected teachers with the competencies and content knowledge to make the switch, while the lighter loads will give them time and space to adjust.

In addition to mentoring programme, literature review of this study (2.4.3) revealed that affected staff should be taken through pre-processes of merger, that is, **orientation** of affected teachers. Besides bridging courses, affected teachers will also be attached to their new schools before their formal postings begin. After posting, they need support through regular engagements sessions (Davie, 2017). Redeployed teachers will also be paired with mentor teachers while schools, where possible, have been asked to **adjust their workload.**

PB2 and PC1 lament on the inconsistency of the **bussing system**. The roads are bumpy, mountainous and when the transport in not available, learners travel long distances. Literature reviewed for this study proposes the **school boarding system** as an alternative to inconsistent transport. Hongyong (2018) points out that there are some students who spend more time commuting to and from schools in remote mountainous areas. This presents parents and learners with serious safety challenges. Hongyong

(2018) suggested that the only viable short-term solution in this issue is to improve the country's boarding school system while considering ways to revive rural schools on a smaller scale.

5.4   RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

Based on the responses and the pertinent issues revealed by research findings from individual interviews and documentary analysis, the following recommendations are made believing that they will assist in terms of ensuring that departmental programmes and projects are successfully completed in time:

5.4.1   Correct Interpretation and Implementation of Legislation

Merger of schools programme gets its full mandate from (section 12 (a) of the South African Schools Act, SASA No. 84 of 1996). The Act provides for merger of schools and section 33 of the same Act provides for closure of schools. Based on the findings, section 12(a) was correctly interpreted and implemented, however, section 33 was not fully considered. This suggests that if section 33 was considered, correctly interpreted and implemented some of the schools that failed to merge could have successfully merged. The recommendation is that governance officials from the district to circuit levels should consider correct interpretation and implementation of all the relevant legislation in order to avoid unnecessary resistance.

5.4.2   A Complete Programme should have Time Frames

The purpose of the Guidelines for Merger of Small and or Non- Viable Schools Document was to provide a framework which was meant to assist Provincial Governments Departments of Education to expedite the process of merging and closing of farm and rural schools by the year 2012. This framework was adopted in 2009 and implemented as from 2010 indicated the completion due date to be 2012; however, the provincial

manual for Merger of Schools had no time frame and this turned the programme into an open-ended one hence the delay in the completion. The recommendations are; firstly, departmental programmes should be assessed before they are made public for implementation and secondly, during the programme unfolding, the programme itself must be monitored for it to yield the expected outcome.

5.4.3 Sufficient Consultation is Imperative in all Departmental Programmes

Most Public Schools in the Republic of South Africa were initiated by communities and that such schools were owned by the selfsame communities. Since the ownership of the schools was with the communities, as and when the Department of Education wants to do anything in these schools, consultation is very key. The recommendation in this regard is that for every plan or an intention, the Department of Education should consult community leaders, starting from Traditional Authorities, SANCO structures, the schools concerned and the Parent School Community at large. Consultation must not be just a mere information dissemination, but robust official meetings where minutes and roll calls are recorded for future references. Where possible, structures should be consulted separately to avoid power struggles among the structures.

5.4.4 Community Leaders as Part of the Coordinating Structures

As pointed out above that community leaders have influence and power over their constituencies, their part in the coordinating structures is of great importance. Recognising and taking them on board make them understand things better and turn to speak the language of the department. Under normal circumstances, people listen to their leaders and the buying in by the leaders, is the buying in by the community. Based on the findings, the Limpopo Manual for Merger of Schools Programme did not have the provision to include community structures in the Coordinating Teams and therefore the recommendation is that the Coordinating Teams should consists of the affected schools'

principals, Traditional Leaders and any recognised community structure. The meetings must be led by the Department of Education in an unbiased manner.

5.4.5   A Departmental Programme should have Alternatives

The implementation of Merger of Schools Programme expected to see one outcome only – all schools merging successfully. The programme did not cater for exceptional cases where some conditions could have a serious bearing on the outcome. The research revealed that conditions of other villages are not conducive for the programme. In this situation, it was discovered that two schools which were supposed to merge, are separated by a mountain which rocky, the only road that connects the two villages is currently difficult to grade because of rocks, the road is bushy and that it is mostly misty especially in the morning and during rainy seasons. In this case, parents feel that their children are not safe because it is even difficult for people to drive through this dangerous road. This reveals that one size does not fit all. The recommendation is that the Department of Education should put such merger in abeyance to ensure that an absolute solution is secured to resolve the main problem (in this case, the road).

5.4.6   Educating People about the Importance of a Programme

When it was started, Merger of Schools Programme was the first of its kind in Vhembe District Department of Education. Given the statement above, it was not going to be automatic or easy for people to understand Merger of Schools. One of the reasons why parents rejected merger was because they did not know the benefits of Merger of Schools; how do learners benefit, how does the community benefits and so forth. In this regard, my recommendation is that during the process of consultation, there should be a special presentation about the benefits of Merger of Schools to educate the leadership and the Parents School Communities before the commencement of a programme such as this one.

5.5   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

During the process of this research work, there was only one limitation that the researcher encountered, and it was in Group A participants. The limitation was inaccessibility of schools because of very bad roads, for example, in one school I had to park my car about 300 metres away from the school and walk to the school.

5.6   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

During the process of the research, especially during data collection, the researcher further identified the following areas that necessitate further research:
The role of citizens and government in developing viable communities.
The impact of ethnicity in building strong communities.

5.7   CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

In chapter one, the research dealt with introduction together with the background of the study; it further spelled out the problem statement. Objectives and research questions were then presented followed by research tools and the related items to lay a firm foundation for the study. In chapter two. The study outlines importance of merger of schools as it transcends across the globe, it further unpacked the challenges that countries encounter with an aim of finding solutions. The literature study also flagged out intervention strategies employed by countries internationally in search of the most relevant solutions. The study further went through the processes and procedure when schools are to merge in which it was revealed that most countries did not have clear processes that were followed. However, the Department of Education in Limpopo Province had a Manual for Merger of Schools which also had some challenges e.g. the Time Frame was not clear.

Chapter Three, flowing from chapter two, dealt with Research Design and Methodologies. The study outlined the whole process of Data Collection and the significance of the study which culminated in the presentation of research findings in chapter four. The research findings (Chapter 4) as expressed by the participants from the individual interviews revealed that consultation during the process of merger of schools programme was done but insufficiently; some participants pointed out that parents were not accorded opportunity to object but only to take directives. Some participants wanted consultation to be done village by village in merger that involved schools from different villages, parents wanted consultation to be done separately because according to them, village needs differ. Certain level of leadership (village executive council in one village) wanted to be consulted first before parents could be consulted for them to give direction to parents. Still on consultation, some participants indicated that consultation programme could not give parents and traditional leaders a chance to consult each other.

From the documentary analysis, it was revealed that section 12(a) and section 33 of SASA No. 84 of 1996 were correctly implemented although section 33 was not given much attention. The department of education followed correct procedures starting from the report entitled "a new vision for rural schooling" written by the (MCRE) in 2005, to the commencement of drafting of the National Guidelines for the Rationalisation of Small and/or Non-Viable schools by Rural Education Directorate (RED) in 2007. The document was adopted in 2009 and its implementation in 2010. From the adoption, Limpopo Provincial Department of Education developed Merger of Schools Manual which directed how the process will be implemented.

Document analysis further revealed that Merger of Schools Manual did not indicate time frames in the programme meanwhile the National Guidelines for the Rasionalisation of small and non-viable Schools had indicated the deadlines. The above discrepancy might have negatively contributed to the delay in terms of programme completion. The analysis also made it clear that implementing structures put in place were the Provincial and the District Task Teams' responsibility only; there were no other structure at circuits which

could be made up of principals of the affected schools, representatives from traditional leaders and SGB members. The Circuit Task Teams could be the most influential teams and its absence might have been among the factors that delayed merger in some schools.

In the last chapter, the researcher made an overview of all lessons drawn from the whole process of research. He further gave a summary of findings outlined in chapter four and later made recommendations of the study. The researcher also flagged out limitations of the study as indicated in the analysis of findings and documents analysis in chapter four. The researcher pointed out recommendations that can assist the Department of Education in and around the globe to implement programmes such as this successfully.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interviews were conducted at three different levels; District, Circuit and Schools. The following officials were interviewed; Chief Education Specialist – Governance at the District, Deputy Manager- Governance at circuits and principals at schools.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

What is the importance of merger of schools?

What are the challenges in the merger of the schools programme in the Department of Education in Vhembe District between 2010 and 2016?

Which are the available resources to assist the process to unfold in order to promote effective teaching and learning?

What are the possible intervention strategies that could be used to enhance a successful merger of schools in Vhembe District?

APPENDIX B: DOCUMENTS ANALYSES SCHEDULE

Groups of Schools	SASA no.84 of 1996	Guidelines for rationalisation of small or non-viable schools	Merger of schools Manual	Minutes for consultative meetings	SGB members attendance registers
School A1					
School A2					
School A3					
School B1					
School B2					
School B3					
School C1					
School C2					
School C3					

APPENDIX C: CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE FROM UHDC

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR:
Mr XNC Hon'wana

Student No:
16023533

PROJECT TITLE: **An investigative research into merger of schools programmes in the department of Education in Vhembe District for the academic years 2010 to 2016.**
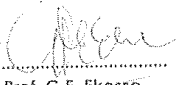
PROJECT NO: SEDU/17/CSEM/19/2710

SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS

NAME	INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT	ROLE
Dr NF Litshani	University of Venda	Supervisor
Mrs RM Makwathana	University of Venda	Co-Supervisor
Mr MA Sinthumule	University of Venda	Co-Supervisor
Mr XNC Hon'wana	University of Venda	Investigator – Student

ISSUED BY:
UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Date Considered: October 2017
Decision by Ethical Clearance Committee Granted
Signature of Chairperson of the Committee: ....
Name of the Chairperson of the Committee: Senior Prof. G.E. Ekosse

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA
DIRECTOR
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
2017 -10- 3 1
Private Bag X5050
Thohoyandou 0950

University of Venda
PRIVATE BAG X5050, THOHOYANDOU, 0950, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA
TELEPHONE (015) 962 8504/8313 FAX (015) 962 9060
"A quality driven financially sustainable, rural-based Comprehensive University"

122

APPENDIX D: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Enq. Dr NF Litshani
CELL: 079 341 9936

P.O. BOX 17
ELIM HOSPITAL
0960
19 OCTOBER 2017

The District Director
Department of Education
Vhembe Department of Education
P/BAG X2250
SIBASA
0970

Dear Sir

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH
My name is HONWANA XINYATA NHLAZINI CARTSON and I am a Masters student of Educational Management in the School of Education at University of Venda (Univen). The title of the research is: **AN INVESTIGATIVE STUDY INTO MERGER OF SCHOOLS PROGRAMME IN THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION IN VHEMBE DISTRICT FOR THE ACADEMIC YEARS 2010 TO 2015**. This project is conducted under the supervision of Dr NF Litshani, Dr D.A Sinthumule and Mrs RM Makhwathana. The circuits under your District have been identified for the purpose of a study, namely: Tshilamba, Sibasa and Hlanganai North.

The main purpose of the study is to investigate merger of schools. Accordingly, it was planned to have been completed by the end of 2012. Hence, the study will be conducted to enhance merger of the identified schools in order to mobilise resources and promote quality teaching and learning.
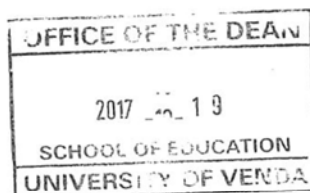
I therefore sick permission to conduct the research.

Yours sincerely,

HONWANA XINYATA NHLAZINI CARTSON (student)
University of Venda
082 953 3736

Dr NF Litshani (main supervisor)

OFFICE OF THE DEAN

2017 -10- 1 9

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

University of Venda

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123

University of Venda

APPENDIX E: GRANTED PERMISSION LETTER TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

CONFIDENTIALITY

[Stamp: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION VHEMBE DISTRICT 2017-10-20 PRIVATE BAG X 2250 SIBASA 0970 TEL: 015 962 1313/4 FAX: 015 962 6039 LIMPOPO PROVINCE]

REF: 14/7/R
ENG: MATIBE M.S
TEL: 015 962 1029

HONWANA NC
P.O BOX 17
ELIM HOSPITAL
0960

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

1. The above matter refers.

2. You are hereby informed that your request for permission to conduct research titled,
**AN INVESTIGATIVE STUDY INTO MERGER OF SCHOOLS PROGRAMME IN
THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION IN VHEMBE DISTRICT FOR THE
ACADEMIC YEARS 2010 TO 2015** has been granted.

3. We appreciate your commitment to ensure confidentiality, anonymity and voluntary
participation by research subjects.

4. Kindly inform Circuit Managers and Principals of selected School prior to
commencing your data collection.

5. Wishing you the best in your study.

[Signature]
DISTRICT DIRECTOR

2017-10-20
DATE

Thohoyandou Government Building, Old Parliament, Block D, Private Bag X2250, SIBASA, 0970
Tel: (015) 962 1313 or (015) 962 1331, Fax: (015) 962 6039 or (015) 962 2288

The heartland of southern Africa – development is about people!

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH: HONWANA NC

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APPENDIX F: VERBATIM REPORT FROM PARTICIPANTS

1.   RESEARCH QUESTION NO.01: WHY DO YOU THINK MERGER OF SCHOOLS IS IMPORTANT?

Group A

1.1   First Principal

Researcher: Good morning Sir, how are you?	1
First Principal: I am fine, thanks and how are you?	2
Researcher: I am also fine; I think you remember somebody who called	3
you yesterday making an appointment to meet you today regarding research?	4
First principal: I do remember, are you the one?	5
Researcher: Yes, I am Hon'wana X.N.C and I am here to do research on the	6
Topic: An investigative research into merger of schools programmes	7
Vhembe District Department of Education in the academic years 2010 to 2016.	8
First principal: Thanks and you are welcome	9
Researcher: Okay, brought with me a permission letter to conduct a research	10
and a consent letter for you to sign if you agree to participate in this research	11
Please take note that your participation is on voluntary basis	12
First principal: I am willing to participate, may I sign the letter	13
The researcher: Why do you think merger of schools is important?	14
First principal: No one can deny that merger of schools is important, to me,	15
merger of schools is important because the enrolment of small schools will	16
be bigger after and the number of educators will also grow and make teaching	17
and learning easier… In small schools, educators are forced to combine classes	18
of different grades in one class and this type of teaching intrudes on	19
concentration and proper learning so in this case; teaching is no longer	20
effective and efficient…	21

1.2 Second Principal

Researcher: Mr… why do you think that merger of schools is important? 22

Second principal: Merger of schools is important because it addresses the 23

problem of shortage of educators … so low allocation of funds can be 24

addressed by merger of schools 25

Researcher: thank you for responding 26

1.3 Third Principal

Researcher: Thank you, my first question is; why do you think merger of 27

schools is important? 28

Third principal: merger of schools reduces workload for educators because when 29

you have bigger enrolment, the number of allocated educators will 30

be commensurate with the number of learners 31

Group B

1.4 First Principal

Researcher: Okay my first question; why do you think merger of schools 32

is important? 33

First principal: merger of schools is important because it minimises unnecessary 34

departmental expenditure on infrastructure e.g. building a new school which 35

will soon no longer be used because of low enrolment and the building 36

becomes a white elephant… 37

The researcher: Thank you 38

1.5 Second Principal

Researcher: My first question reads; why do you think merger of 39

schools is important? 40

Second principal: Merger of school addresses the double or wasteful expenditure 41

on similar infrastructural needs e.g. buildings such as kitchens… In a merged 42

school, the management structure also grows and the bigger the   43

management structure, the more the management of the school becomes   44

easier   45

Researcher: Thank you   46

1.6   Third Principal

Researcher: Okay, my first question; why do you think merger of   47

schools is important?   48

Third principal: merger of schools is important because it reduces teacher   49

Workload; it further addresses the problem of multi grade teaching   50

Group C

1.7   First Principal

Researcher: Here is my first question; why do you think merger of   51

schools is important?   52

First principal: Merger of schools improves the quality of education   53

because it provides enough educational services…   54

Researcher: Thank you Sir   55

.

1.8   Second Principal

Researcher: Here is my first question; why do you think merger of schools is 56

important?   57

Second principal: It is difficult for smaller schools to purchase resources such as 58

 computers, photocopiers etc. because of the small amount allocated to them…   59

In smaller schools, it is difficult it is difficult to hire a Security Company to provide 60

 for safety and security for the school and if such a school is merged, such a   61

problem   62

can be addressed because the financial allocation in terms of NNSSF will also raise 63

and the school will be able to pay for the security company for its safety. If a small 64

school is merged the principal is relieved of the number of teaching periods, 65

administrative duties, governance and other educational responsibilities. 66

1.9   Third Principal

Researcher: My first question reads; why do you think merger of 67

schools is important? 68

Third principal: Merger of schools is important because it addresses inadequate 69

allocation of educators… 70

Group D

1.10   First Deputy Manager (DMG) 71

Researcher: Good morning Sir and how are you? 72

First DMG: Fine thanks, please take a seat, how can I help you? 73

Researcher: Thanks for asking, I am Hon'wana X.N.C the one who 74

Telephonically spoke to you yesterday about research interview, do you 75

remember the conversation? 76

First DMG: By the way you said you are Hon'wana; yes, I remember 77

The name and you are welcome. 78

Researcher: I brought with me permission letter to conduct interview and 79

A consent letter for you to sign if you agree to participate in the 80

interview, remember your participation is on voluntary basis 81

First DMG: Thank you I don't have a problem let's continue 82

Researcher: Here is my first question; why do you think merger of 83

schools are important? 84

First DMG: Merger of schools is important because it improves quality 85

of education…, allocation of educators become simple in bigger schools. 86

1.11   Second DMG

Researcher: Thank you, my first question is; why do you think merger of   87
schools are important?   88
Second DMG: Most schools that are merged are separated by a mere fence   89
meaning that they are as good as situated in one yard and in such cases,   90
providing resources in both school's amount to wasteful expenditure…   91
Merger of schools addresses rationalisation and redeployment (R&R) and brings 92
stability in schools that are merged…. It is simple for some parents to attach bad 93
attitudes towards educators in small schools, it is not in case of bigger schools… 94

1.12   Third DMG

Researcher: My first question; why do you think merger of schools is important   95
Third DMG: merger is important because gifted learners are able to excel in a   96
bigger school than in a smaller school because educators are adequate, they   97
able to focus, are able to unleash their potential, they have enough time   98
to prepare and have time for individual attention…   99

1.13   Chief Education Specialist (CES)

The researcher: Good morning Sir and how are you?   100
CES: Fine thanks, please take a seat, how can I help you?   101
The researcher: Thanks for asking, I am Hon'wana X.N.C the one who   102
Telephonically spoke to you yesterday about research interview, do you   103
remember the conversation?   104
CES: By the way you said you are Hon'wana; yes, I remember   105
The name and you are welcome.   106
The researcher: I brought with me permission letter to conduct interview and   107
 A consent letter for you to sign if you agree to participate in the   108
interview, remember your participation is on voluntary basis   109
CES: Thank you I don't have a problem let's continue   110
The researcher: Here is my first question; why do you think merger of   111

2. RESEARCH QUESTION NO.02: WHAT ARE THE MAJOR CHALLENGES THAT OBSTRUCTED THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO COMPLETE ITS MERGER OF SCHOOLS PROJECT BETWEEN 2010 AND 2012?

Responses in this question are based on themes.

2.1 Theme 01: Merger of schools destroys the traditional legacy and is expensive	116
Researcher: Since you answered my first question, here follows the second	117
question; what are the major challenges that the department of education in	118
Vhembe District to complete its merger of school's project between	119
2010 and 2012?	120
First principal: One of the challenges is that most schools are named after the	121
names of traditional leaders' fore fathers and that merging a school named as	122
such is tantamount to wiping out of such a traditional leader… On the other	123
hand, communities see a school as part of development and when a school is to	124
be closed, to them is like taking development away and so they reject merging…	125
In schools where the department provides scholar transport, parents blame	126
the department for failing to guarantee consistency in terms of the availability	127
of transport… They further blame the department for allocating money for	128
scholar transport instead of using the money to hire more educators because	129
according to two principals, the monthly R40000.00 that is paid to a bus which	130
transport learners to the merging centre amounts to R480000.00 a year while	131
this money could be used to pay two more educators an amount of R20000.	132
monthly each for the whole year…	133

Second Principal:

Community leaders feel their schools cannot be merged with a school from	134
another village that is outside the periphery of their traditional leadership	135
boundaries…	136
The road to the merging centre is very bad; it is via a mountain which is rocky and	137
Cannot be graded, the road is bushy and misty especially during rainy seasons and	138

Therefore, accidents are unavoidable… When transport fails to come there is no   139

Alternative remember primary school learners cannot attempt walk the plus or   140

minus 7 kilometres to the school through the only hazardous road because   141

"vha do ngalangala" (meaning that they will disappear…)   142

 Third principal: But the road is very bad; it is mountainous, bushy and slippery   143

especially during rainy season…   144

Theme no. 02: Disintegration of established school culture   145

First principal: Merging two or more schools from different headmen or   146

Chieftainship has a lot of resistance… Schools develop their own cultures as   147

and when they grow, some educators are used to come to school late, they dodge   148

Classes, poor performance and they do as they wish without any consequences and   149

so forth while the other school may have a school culture characterised by discipline,   150

Hardworking, excellent performance, cleanliness etc. so if you are to merge the two   151

Schools, the school management from school B will resist because of the bad school   152

Culture from school A…   153

Second principal: Some community leaders want to use traditional leadership   154

Recommended names for the new school while others object and from this point   155

division starts. From this point you find both sides not ready to compromise and   156

bring the process to a stop. Another area is the SGB's, there are diligent and   157

policy based SGB's and those who do as they wish, those who work hard and   158

follow policy will resist because they do not want to mix with lazy members…   159

Third principal: I noted that during the merging process a lot of resources   160

such as machineries and important records from the school to merge with   161

disappeared, and my SGB felt that merging with such a school becomes   162

a problem because at the end you will work with the same management and   163

SGB which is not honest and trustworthy… Parents are not comfortable with   164

other schools culture e.g. the dress as you like fundraising strategy because   165

most of the learners depend on grants…   166

they have built their school (for Xitsonga speaking kids) no longer want to   191

merge with the school that undermined their language…   192

Chief Education Specialist: The negative attitudes by some principals,   193

educators, and community leaders towards merger of schools contributed   194

in the rejection of merger… Some communities wanted the department   195

to sort out transport issue before merging; they also wanted the department   196

to provide mobile classes in the merging centres before the real merging starts…   197

3. RESEARCH QUESTION NO.03: WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATUS OF SCHOOLS WHICH WERE SUPPOSED TO HAVE MERGED IN 2012

Group A

First principal: The current school enrolment is 59 with three teachers only	198
including the principal, the school consists of eight grades (R to 07) with four	199
classrooms only; one educator teaches grades R to 03 in one class while the	200
principal and one educator share grades 4 to 7 each of the two taught grades	201
in one class… Results in all grades are poor because educators do not have time	202
to prepare lessons. These educators are always tired because they do not have	203
even a single free period…	204
Second principal: The current school enrolment is 83 with only three educators	205
including the principal, the school consists of 08 grades (R to 07) with three	206
classes only, one teacher teaches grade R to 03 while the principal and another	207
teacher share grade 4 to 7. Results are poor, when one educator is sick, learners	208
are released, teachers do not have time to prepare because they are always tired	209
The principal is always stressed	210
Third principal: Things are very difficult; the current enrolment is 56 learners	211
with only two teachers and one volunteer. The school consists of eight grades	212
with three classes only. The volunteer teaches all grades from R to 03 in one class	213
while the principal and the other educator share grades 04 to 07. Each one of	214
them teaches the two classes in one class. The school results leave much to be	215
desired… The school does not participate in extra mural activities.	216

Group B

First principal: The current enrolment is 800 learners with 21 educators	217
including the principal, the school has sufficient classrooms including	218
a staffroom for educators plus one principal's office… Teaching and learning	219

135

takes place without serious challenges, however, there are remnants of 220

Resistance among some educators… 221

Second principal: The school enrolment has gone up to 595 with sixteen 222

Educators including the principal; management and educators are highly 223

Motivated, committed and this evident because of the teamwork that they 224

Demonstrate… Academic performance is high, and the previous year learners 225

participated in speech competition until national level held in Kimberly and 226

Durban. The school also won awards and prices on NSNP, 227

cleanliness and beautification… 228

Third principal: The school merged successfully and the enrolment is at 630 229

with sixteen educators including the principal and the transition with regard 224

to school properties, projects, NSNP, and finances went very well… 225

The school is satisfied with the norms and standards that the department 226

allocates, infrastructure such as furniture is also commensurate with to 227

the number of learners. … 228

Group C

First principal: This school is among those that could not merge and its 229

enrolment is 108 with only four female educators… The money cannot cater 230

for educational services such as photocopiers, computers, electricity etc. 231

The school does not have water and sanitation; we buy water from 232

the neighbouring homesteads. 233

The school has serious problems when it comes to safety and security 234

because all educators are females and the school cannot appoint a security 235

personnel or company because of the little amount of money that we get 236

from norms and standards… The school cannot conduct any extra mural 237

activities and when one of them is sick, learners are released. School 238

performance is always poor. 239

Second principal: The school does not have enough resources the school 240

enrolment is 207 with only five educators and two more educators are needed, 241

the school consists of three classrooms and two more are still needed, 242

there are no machineries such as computers and photocopiers but although 243

the situation is bad in terms of resources, academic performance improved 244

from 29% in 2016 to 85% in June 2017. 245

Third principal: The enrolment is 147 with six educators in this school, 246

teacher/learner ratio is balancing and educators are coping with the workload… 247

The school academic performance has shown steadily improvement. 248

The school has two new buildings with 06 classes with one staffroom and 249

a principal's office… 250

Group D: Deputy Managers Governance (DMG's)

First DMG: Mobilisation of resources is very difficult; staff allocation is difficult 251

because of very few educators and because of this deficiency, there is no 252

effective teaching and learning in the small schools. Resources like buildings 253

are very poor and dilapidated because the department focuses on big schools 254

in terms of infrastructure development. The future of learners is severely 255

compromised … 256

Second DMG: I am satisfied because all identified schools have successfully merged 257

There are no more challenges with regard to school buildings, educators, 258

machineries because even the amount of money we get through norms and 259

standards for school funding is enough… Educators' workload has been reduced 260

and effective teaching and learning takes place, results in all schools have 261

improved… 262

Third DMG: What worries me most is that the enrolments of small schools 263

Decrease every time because progressive parents withdraw their children to 264

Better and well- resourced schools… In these schools Norms and Standards 265

for School Funding is little and cannot pay for educational services such as 266

Electricity, photocopying and teaching aids… 267

Group E: Chief Education Specialist (CES)

4. RESEARCH QUESTION NO.04: WHICH ARE THE AVAILABLE STRUCTURES AND RESOURCES THAT COULD DRIVE THE MERGER PROCESS TO COMPLETION?

Group A

First principal: As you can see, there are these three classes, desks and	271
Chairs and with regard to human resource; I can only talk of three educators	272
Second principal: Structures in this school are the only block of three classrooms	273
desks and the three educators, the building is not in good condition…	274
Third principal: It is difficult to say we have structures and resources,	275
Because these three classes are also dilapidated, teachers are only three	276
including the volunteer.	277

Group B

In this group, all the identified schools merged successfully.	278

Group C

First principal: The structures that we have are the three classrooms and this	279
small office, educators are four, the school has no water and sanitation and	280
we buy water from the village, this situation is unbearable…	281
Second principal: The situation speaks for itself; you can see that there are	282
only three classrooms plus this "zozo", we have three educators and I'm the	283
fourth, things are bad in this school…	284
Third principal: I do not know why this department wants to merge this school	285
because at the time when the process started, the school enrolment was	286
158 learners, look at this new building it consists of seven classes with two staffrooms.	287
The school has electricity, water and pit toilets.	288
There were 06 educators with 147 learners.	289

5.   RESEARCH QUESTION NO. 05: WHICH ARE THE SUGGESTED WAYS TO FACILITATE THE PROCESS OF MERGER OF SCHOOLS?

Group A

First principal: Educators should have been taken on board to take them into   290

the confidence of the department and for the educators to speak the same   291

language with the department…   292

Second principal: The department should not come with a holistic approach in   293

solving the problems of small schools, instead, there should be schools that are   294

exempted on condition that merger only takes place after certain challenges will   295

have been provided with total solution e.g. roads through Rocky Mountains, bushy,   296

mountainous roads that are misty during rainy seasons because safety of learners   297

cannot be guaranteed…   298

Third principal: Small and remote schools should be given special treatment and   299

the teacher/ learner ratio should be adjusted to suit those areas…   300

The department should not just consult for the sake of consulting, but should take   301

Recommendations from community leaders and parents…   302

Group B

First principal: The department should first study the cultures of the schools   303

to merge before the actual process starts… There should be a special consultation   304

in case merging involves two schools from different villages because different   305

villages have different programmes when it comes to community development.   306

Second principal: Consultation should include all community stakeholders and not   307

parents only, in some instances only parents were consulted, community leaders   308

and educators were not consulted. These consultations should efficient and not a run   309

through, consultation should end up where consensus is reached and in this case   310

stakeholders should reach agreements…   311

Third principal: I made an observation that the department does not consultation 312
to make stakeholders understand the programme and its essence, but to fulfil 313
the process and I therefore suggest that the programme should first seek to 314
educate stakeholders and communities for them to understand the importance 315
of merger of schools and this will make the process proceed smoothly. 316

Group C

First Principal: The department should consider educating community leaders, 317
SGB's and SMT's about the importance of merger of schools. The communities 318
should also be taught about how they will benefit from the programme… 319
Some parents were worried about unreliability of transport… 320
Second principal: The department should assure the community stakeholders 321
and parents in particular about the reliability of scholar transport and safety of the 322
learners… 323
Third principal: The first step by the department should be taking the community 324
Stakeholders and parents through a full process of the programme, educate them 325
about the process of merger and not instruct them. Communication should be official 326
without undermining another school… 327

Group D

First DMG: Consultation should not include all stakeholders because some 328
members of stakeholders such as political organisations have some hidden 329
agendas e.g. a political party may want to cause chaos for ruling party to be seen 330
failing and useless in its programme… Biological parents and legal guardians 331
should be ones to be consulted. 332
Second DMG: During consultation by the department, advocacy campaign 333
should be sufficient and each stakeholder separately consulted for them 334
to express themselves freely. 335

Third DMG: I observed an element of lack of education about the importance   336
of merger of schools so I propose that stakeholders and parents should be   337
educated before actual process starts…   338

Group E

CES: The process of merger of schools has a lot of challenges and to avert   339
some of them, the department should consider including political parties   340
in the process because from the look of things, in some area you will find   341
that there is no political will for the process to continue…   342

APPENDIX G: IDENTIFIED, EXAMINED AND ANALYSED DOCUMENTS

Groups of Schools	SASA no.84 of 1996	Guidelines for rationalisation of small or non-viable schools	Merger of schools Manual	Minutes for consultative meetings	SGB members attendance registers
School A1	The document was available but only the principal knew about it.	Not available, the school did not receive it.	Not available, the school did not receive it.	Available, but not signed but secretary and chairperson of the SGB	Available
School A2	The document was available but never discussed.	Not available, the school was not provided with one.	Not available, the school denied having received it.	Not available, could not be traced because the secretary was not available	Not available, could not be traced because the secretary was not available.
School A3	The document was not available. The school	Not available, not sue whether they received or not.	Not available, the school could remember	Available, but not signed by the SGB secretary	Available, but some members were not present

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	claims nothing was provided to them.		having received it.	and chairperson,	
School B1	The document was available.	Available and was discussed during consultation.	Available, and was discussed during consultation.	Available and signed by the secretary and the chairperson.	Available, all SGB members were present
School B2	The document was available.	Available, and was discussed during consultation.	Available and was discussed during consultation.	Available, but not signed by the secretary and chairperson	Available, all SGB members were present
School B3	The document was available.	Available and was discussed during consultation.	Available and was discussed during consultation.	Available, signed by the secretary and the chairperson	Available, one SGB member was absent
School C1	The document was available.	Available, but was not discussed during consultation.	Not Available, not heard about it.	Available, not signed by the secretary	Available and all members were present.

School C2	The document was available.	Available, but not discussed during consultation.	Not available, did not comment further.	Available, not signed by the secretary	Available and all SGB members were present.
School C3	The document was said to be available.	The document was said to be available but was not discussed during consultation.	Not available, denied having seen it.	Not available, could not be traced because the SGB secretary was not around.	Not available, could not be traced because the secretary was not around.

APPENDIX H: EDITOR'S LETTER

Editorial letter

This serves to confirm that I, Mr. ET Sikitime, attached to University of Venda, English Department have proofread a proposal titled:

An investigative research into merger of schools programmes in the department of education in Vhembe district for the academic years 2010 to 2016
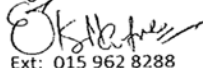
BY

XINYATA NHLAZINI CARTSON HON'WANA

Student number: 16023533

Editorial work focused mainly on technical precision and common errors relating to syntax, diction, word order and formulation of ideas. Corrections and suggestions were made for the student to effect before submission.

Signature   Date 17/05/2019

Ext: 015 962 8288

Email: Emmanuel.sikitime@univen.ac.za

BA (ed), BA (Hons) English, Univen, BA Communication Science UNISA, MA (SLS) Stellenbosch University

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