

The Prevailing Views of the Buffalo City College Merging on Managers and Educators

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Abstract: Post-1994 Public Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Colleges, formerly known as Technical Colleges, were faced with the consequences of the merger process. One of the merger challenges was the resources provided to the merged institutions as there was an insufficient amount of money to run successful programmes. The study aims to explore the views prevailing from the operational plans and working conditions of managers and educators in Buffalo City College (BCC). To achieve the aim, a qualitative case study approach was employed, where interviews were used for data collection in the BCC campuses. It was discovered that the merger policies were not properly addressed as according to the FET Act no. 16 of 2006. This led to some educators not choosing to work for the College Council. Furthermore, some had grievances of accountability issues that were escalated from the College Council to the Department of Education at provincial level. Senior managers were retained under the Department of Education while other employees were appointed by the College Council. Salaries influenced decision on other educators to leave the College for industrial sector. It is recommended that the college should apply the FET Act to formulate credible and transparent policies for effective and efficient operations.

Keywords: TVET College, Merger, Transparency, Efficient operations

1. Introduction and Background

In the Republic of South Africa, there are nine (09) provinces, and the Eastern Cape is regarded as one of the poorest provinces (Moyo, Mishi & Ncwadi, 2022). In the post-apartheid government, the Bantustan regions were among the regions which were ruled by their leaders according to their tribes. The democratic government came up with a plan to redress the imbalances of the past. In this case, the then Technical Colleges were merged to form the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) to meet the demands of the South African Context (Daniels, 2018; Mathonsi & Sithole, 2020). TVET colleges were reporting to the Eastern Cape Provisional Department of Education (ECPDoE) and supported TVET in terms of finance according to the number of students they had (Daniels, 2018). In support of TVET, it is necessary to have sound financial muscles to drive vocational education. The college to fulfil its mandate, the following factors must be taken into consideration: it is noted that the following factors were not taken into consideration; working conditions were not stated clearly; to take informed decision-making it is therefore important that an effective management information system be considered (Mathonsi & Sithole, 2020).

The aim of the study was to seek whether the circumstances of managers and educators related to the working conditions had improved and to check that policies or Acts aligned with the functions operations of the college were interpreted in a proper way at BCC. Nundkumar & Subban (2020) mentioned that all the colleges of South Africa must be able to govern their colleges through the implementation of the Further Education and Training (FET) Act, No. 16 of 2006, for the improvement of the management of the college to build up the strong human relationship between the staff members from different colleges.

In South Africa, TVET colleges were struggling to attract learners as the institution of the first choice referring my argument to the implementation of effective and efficient performance. The government of the day has tasked the TVET colleges to fulfil the challenges facing South Africa as a country through its National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 to register at least 2.5 million students in TVET colleges based on plan NDP by 2030. In line with the government initiative, the purpose is to address inequality, poverty, and unemployment (Mathonsi & Sithole, 2020).

The legislation and policies for TVET colleges were formulated by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) to achieve the development goals and objectives of the South African government (Sithole, 2019).

The government's aim is to support the vision of the TVET sector by providing a national plan in South Africa, the researcher concurred with other scholars (Motala & Pampallis, 2020). The TVET colleges in nature were to produce a high calibre of skilled students who in turn will meet the needs of the community by doing quality work and realistic programmes which in turn talked to the community demands (Msibi, 2021).

The researcher sought to establish what other researchers said about the literature as far as the TVET colleges concerned in the South African context. The most important part is to add value to the existing knowledge by filling the gap. The researcher would like to found the impact of mergers on managers and educators in BCC on the following issues:

- New laws and policies bring new ideas to the change the government is expected to TVET colleges through the new officials will be employed by the government.
- The implications in the functions of the organization the way it operates previously and its impact on the new system of governance.
- All stakeholders involved in the running of the organisation are expected to be in the planning phase and all the necessary steps to be taken must be articulated.
- Change brings a lot of speculation to the employees about their future related to the transition taking place.
- Transition is not always nice; employees associated it with retrenchment, even if there is a bright light in the tunnel.

In concur with other researchers, African children in the government of apartheid were trained to be labourers only under the governance of the Minister of Native Affairs in the 1950s (Khumalo, 2022). As a result, most African children did not have an interest in their hearts to do technical subjects to equip themselves with skills.

The then government of apartheid believed that the African child had to receive as little education as possible. For this reason, the African child was discouraged to do Mathematics and Science subjects. The apartheid government passed the Bantu Education Act, Act No. 47 of 1953 for them to fulfil their mission (Thumbran & Sacks, 2022).

Technical Colleges were divided into two categories, namely, Urban State Colleges and Rural State Colleges. Urban State Colleges were supported by sponsors and donors and the government allocated huge amounts of money for these colleges even though the Rural State Colleges were receiving the money from the government only (Aina & Ogegbu, 2022). Urban State College, in this case, was East London Technical College where it belonged, and the Rural State College was John Knox Bokwe Technical College situated in the Mdantsane Township. TVET Colleges merged into one Buffalo City College in 2005. The three Technical Colleges in East London, namely, John Knox Bokwe, St Marks, and East London Technical College merged to form Buffalo City College (BCC). The merger was focused to redress the imbalances of the past, where racial and equity issues of the education system were addressed. Therefore, the study addressed several issues such as improvement of the working conditions and implementation of the FET Act on managers and educators. Additionally, it was imperative to establish if there was assistance given to managers and educators for excessive decision making in the merger process. Also, the interesting point is to determine if colleagues were working together across campuses.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Literature

The study adopted an organization theory, which focuses on an explanation of what an organization is, and how it functions, from a range of different perspectives, such as management, human resource management, organization, structure, and change management (Waddington, 2018; Baloyi, 2019). This is applicable to the transformation process of TVET colleges and links to this study to establish whether the benefits related to the working conditions of managers and educators at the BCC had improved. As the colleges guided by the FET Act, No. 16 of 2006 to govern the college has the college implemented in a satisfactory way to improve its operational functions.

In addition to the organization theory, some legal issues are discussed. The political atmosphere had a positive impact in South Africa which shifted the country from apartheid to a democratic state.

In education, system change was driven by the political sphere in the country (Jansen, 2002). Molele (2007) argued that the ushering in of drastic changes in the formation of one department of education forced the appointment of a second post-apartheid Minister of Education. A legislative process is needed for the transformation process to take place. It means therefore, the following Acts will be considered: FET Act No. 98 of 1998 for merging the College with a single council, principal and combining all assets (DoE, 1998); FET Act no. 16 of 2006 that declared appointed of managers by the Department of Education (DoE) and all other employees by Council (DoE, 2006). Most academics decided not to transfer their services to the College Council and remained under their current employer (DoE). They believed that there was uncertainty about the security of their jobs.

2.2 Empirical Literature

The FET Act, No 16 of 2006, gives specific powers and functions to the Executing Authorities responsible for TVET college education within the two levels of power (FET Round Table, 2010). "A meeting of the Council of Education Ministers in July 2009 considered the position of TVET colleges as a concurrent legislative competence between the Minister of Higher Education and Training (Minister) and the nine Members of Executive Council (MECs) responsible for education in a province and recommended that the TVET colleges should be made a special national competence but acknowledged that this can be achieved only through an amendment to Schedule 4 of the Constitution. This amendment was needed as Section 40 of the Constitution specifies that the different levels of government are distinctive, interdependent, and interrelated. The different levels of government must respect the competence to feature in the functional area and cannot deny the principle of coexisting legislative authority by absorbing all powers and functions to a specific level of government and leaving the other level of government with no powers to perform (FET Round Table, 2010)".

The Governance and management capacity in the TVET sector is uneven. "The inadequacies were

highlighted by the recent transfer of college staff (with the exception of the principals) from the employ of the provinces to the colleges. This change caused an exodus of college lecturers who did not have confidence in the Councils as an employer and preferred to stay in the employment of the State. FET Round Table (2010:47-48) mentioned that "The Unions have suggested that the exodus may have been as high as 36% of staff employed at Colleges which represents a massive loss of experienced staff at a time of curriculum and governance transition". As the Round Table Working Document highlighted there are tensions in the current dual accountability of college principals, who have a performance agreement with the state (or should have, this is largely unimplemented) but need to respect the strategic priorities set by the College Council".

The shift with the employer from the State to the College Councils was meant to provide a governance structure flexible enough to accommodate the flexibility required for maximum responsiveness of individual colleges. It has had major unintended consequences which have more than any other factor destabilized the system massively. The following factors include:

- The key staff chose to remain in the employment of the State.
- The College Council employees have not benefited from the multiple conditions of service benefits negotiated in the ELRC for teachers.
- Conditions of service of staff employed by College Councils must be led in a collective bargaining process by FETCEO which is a voluntary organization of people who agreed to serve on College Councils as a civic duty. The Department of Education provided support and a special chamber was created in the ELRC. The substantive technical information in the provinces was further complicated (FET Round Table, 2010).

The model for allocation of workload to staff members was controlled by the number of students admitted based on the facilities the colleges had. The researcher argues that there was a need because of the courses they registered. The purpose of TVET was to produce a quality of workmanship, which is why there was an undesirably low student: staff ratio.

Many colleges claimed that they do not have specialized facilities where practical learning can be simulated successfully as the NC(V) programme demands simulated work.

The researcher concurred that one of the challenges is the lack of data in support of the FET Round Table (2010). The DHET's initiative is to provide colleges with a reliable centrally hosted management information system to contribute immensely to the effective planning and budgeting.

Transformation of institutions like technical colleges and universities should take place to decolonize the thinking that African children cannot think for themselves, they will depend on the education infused by the Europeans the Africans (Dandala, 1996). Transparency is one of the features of transformation and is treated as a separate concept in this study. Be sufficient to say that the concept deserves an explanation. In Public institutions, higher learning means handling matters in such a manner that things are done openly either in the presence of all affected stakeholders, sometimes allowing the stakeholders to demand explanations or documentation or both where necessary (Dlova, 1993).

Studies in different countries show that higher education institutions were not motionless units; the institutions were very sensitive to changes in their environment and they adjust to these quickly. The Research Council of Norway (1998) states that, in general, mergers led to an improvement in management, organisation and administration. In support of the Research Council of Norway (1998), mergers led to an improvement in management, organisation, and administration specifically to the administration which usually became more professional and efficient.

In international countries, Norwegian state colleges thought that the reform had resulted in an increase specifically in efficiency and professionalism in the administration of the affairs of the organisation. The researchers highlighted that bureaucracy was a negative effect on the merger. The main purpose of mergers is to save money and resources might be shared among the affected stakeholders (Andersson & Getz, 2008). In the planning process, coordination, and physical infrastructure, a lot of resources are required. The researcher concurred with other scholars that indeed, it is often expensive in the

short term but in the long run, there may be changes in terms of economies of scale (Bryson, 2018).

Song (2017) argued that the higher institution in other countries had problems in maintaining their heritage and identity in the newly merged institution. The researcher supported American merger studies with regard to their experiences in terms of maintaining their dignity and avoiding bankruptcy and total closures and they achieved less than they had originally expected (Bakalian, 2017). Evans (2017) stated that the institutions were in a subordinate position during the merger transitions due to the financial problems that might be the possible reason for these difficulties.

One of the intentions of mergers was to create better academic institutions. This pertains to both teaching and research. In this respect, experiences were mixed. The original goals for this had not been achieved in Great Britain or in Germany regarding the polytechnics and the Gesamthochschulen (Williams, 2017). These institutions were intended to be alternatives but, regarding the 'level', they should be equal to existing universities. There were many reasons for this failure, but status and prestige were two important factors (e.g. Cerych, 1981; Goedegebuure, 1992). There were, however, clear indications that mergers improve the future academic position (in the long run) of new institutions, especially in regard to the breadth of different educations. Mergers in Australia, the USA, and the Netherlands had created broader and more multidisciplinary course programmes that still function well today. It is true that there had been tensions connected to the expansion of new academic profiles and new course programmes, but at many of these institutions, the tensions had been characterised as creative.

Mergers were often connected to problems, stress, and fear, and in part, inadequate planning at all levels has created tensions that usually have a long-term effect on the academic development of the new institution (up to ten years). Such tensions were related to issues about teaching versus research, different competency profiles, identity and autonomy, and especially for the Australian and Norwegian reforms, professional education versus academia. But the degree of tensions and conflicts with regard to academic development was to some extent dependent on the kind of strategy that has been chosen. Especially in mergers where the main strategy was to increase academic integration

and collaboration, problems were often created between different academic cultures, which again hindered positive academic development. At some institutions the integration goals have been attained to a certain degree, but – on the whole – the strategy has not been successful. There were many complex reasons behind this lack of academic integration and collaboration. First of all, it is difficult to establish coordination between different cultures and traditions. Second, for network institutions especially, it is also difficult to establish coordination over distance. Third, more academic integration also requires more investments. During the reorganization process in – for instance – Norway, the Netherlands, and Australia, educational authorities tightened the budget (Johnes & Tsionas, 2019).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Methodological Design

The paper addresses the aim by using a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research uses words to narrate facts and tries to understand each situation uniquely as an element of a given context. Qualitative research seeks to understand the nature of a specific setting and the meaning derived by participants in that setting. The researcher decided to use the case study (Cohen & Manion, 1994).

3.2 Sampling

The sample of this study is made up of 10 managers and 30 educators from the different campuses of the College. Of the 10 managers 6 were chosen from

East London, 2 from St Marks, and 2 from John Knox Bokwe Campuses. East London had a large number of managers as it is the BCC headquarters and has executive management to facilitate the operational plans of the merger. Figure 1 represents the structure of the BCC for ease of reading.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques

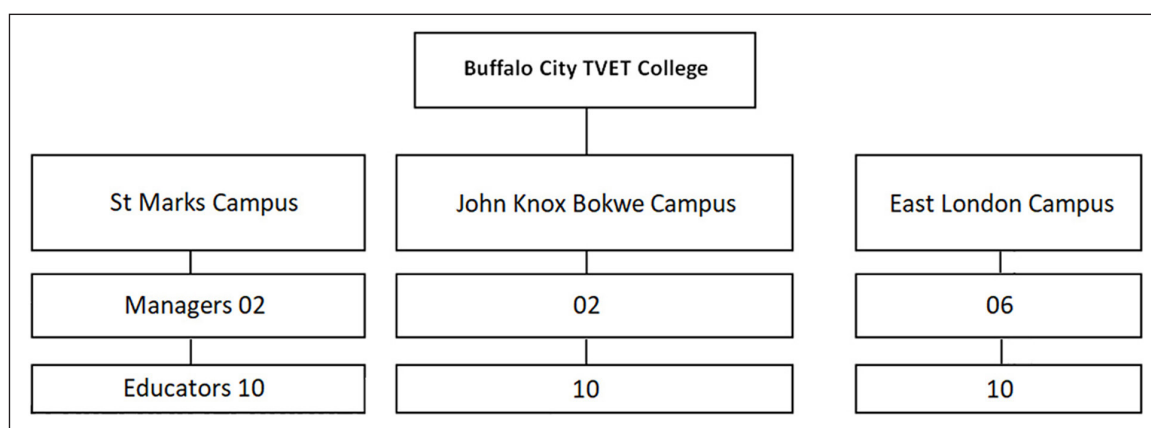
The structured interviews were used to collect data, audiotape and handwritten notes were used to support the recordings. Permission was granted by all the participants to use the audiotape during interviews (Sapsford & Jupp, 2006).

3.4 Administering Instruments

The interview schedule was used to gather information from the participants as well as observations. Audio tapes were used for recordings when listening to the respondents, and permission was granted to participants to do so. There were in-depth interviews inside and outside, the researcher accommodates those who were comfortable being interviewed outside and inside the college.

The researcher was collecting data within the duration of 5 days, participants were given approximately 15 minutes to participate in the interview. The Buffalo City TVET College campuses were used to conduct the interviews. Based on the interviews which were conducted differences between the three campuses of the College were interpreted and inferences were drawn to determine the implications of mergers on managers and educators at BCC.

Figure 1: Buffalo City TVET College Structure



Source: Author

4. Findings and Discussions

The aim of the research study was to investigate whether the merger had an impact on managers and educators in BCC and its effect on the development of the college.

4.1 Management Response Concerning the Impact of the Merger

The FET Act no 16 of 2006 focused on the operations of the merger in the colleges. The views of the participants indicated that the merger did not address the aims of the Act. Hence, some educators left the college for the Department of Education to remain with the colleges. The research revealed that most participants were dissatisfied with the merger.

Manager 1: "we're not happy with the division of powers, where top management was employed by the Provincial Department of Education, and middle management and educators down to the administration staff were employed by the College Council".

Manager 2: "There is a contradiction in terms of accountability, where the employees had grievances. The Provincial Department of Education refers the matter to the College Council. Nobody would like to deal with the challenges of college. The merger affected both the managers and educators because the ideal situation where the institution meets the required standard is not taking place because of the many challenges facing the institution. Most of the challenges are based on teacher dissatisfaction and basically salary benefit and other issues. The participants were promised in a meeting that all conditions of employment will change once they transfer their services to the college, but to date, nothing had happened".

Manager 3: "The colleges are not individually run like they used to be before the merger. If one considers that one college (previously advantaged college) will have all the financial resources, while the two other disadvantaged colleges do not have any than one can deduce that the one college will be in a position to misuse its power. Considering that all FET educators, after 2008 decided to transfer their services to the college".

Participants said that they were robbed when it comes to payment, as the salaries were not standardised across campuses. There was no stability as

some were threatened to lose their jobs if in conflict with their supervisors. There were so many uncertainties especially when others were supposed to be paid. There were no policies followed or given to employees to be transparent about salaries and about 37.5% of the participants claimed that the College Council did not show employees how compensation of employees will be done at the time of the merger. Hence some remained with the Department of Education and left the college. This was referred to as a form of discrimination leading to inequality.

Participants highlighted the undesirable way the new curriculum (National Certificate Vocational) was introduced. They had trouble with the implementation thereof. Most of the time is spent on the paperwork that needs to be done.

The college has a subject-level co-ordinating structure for the smooth running of the department in terms of planning, monitoring, and assessment of the delivery of the curriculum.

The participants mentioned that the college is struggling to attract the best candidates from industries to join the TVET sector. As a result, the college is too far to achieve the objectives of the DHET as it is expected.

Working conditions must be considered by the DHET, for the TVET sector to be able to attract highly competent staff. The nation will be affected indirectly if the employer cannot consider the salary scales for college employees. The teacher-pupil ratio was raised as a concern. The educator will be difficult for him/her to take special attention to the individual if the class has many learners in the classroom. The participants raised the issue of inadequate resources to be considered and one can understand the frustration of the participants.

Regarding financial and human resource management, some participants reported that the merger was lacking. This was seen by fears that were expressed by participants when they handled the government subsidy. This was shown by the mismanagement of funds for college activities. Also, the employees that are employed by the College Council were not treated well resulting in threats that lead to dismissal. The success was in the consolidation of the 152 Technical Colleges into 50 TVET Colleges in South Africa.

4.2 Educator Response on the Impact of the Merger

Educators responded as follows:

Educator 1: "Almost all educators agreed in one voice that managers of BCC had focused on developing the educators and meeting their needs in a way that enabled them to effectively deliver on the curricula".

Educator 2: "Since the colleges had been consolidated from 03 Technical Colleges to 01 Buffalo City TVET College, which is Buffalo City College, no improvement in terms of conditions of service, like salary improvement and benefits had taken place".

Educator 3: "Facilities were not up to scratch in regard to teaching facilities and infrastructure".

Most of the respondents, about 50% alluded that the merger was not transparent, while about 35% suggested that the merger served what it aimed for. Some of the respondents said that "there was cooperation after the merger of these colleges". However, some claimed that a lot of empty promises emerged. Then, the college management introduced some workshops to empower them.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper aimed to improve the operational plans and the conditions of benefits for managers and educators at (BCC). To achieve these aims, a qualitative case study was employed, where structured interviews were used for the data collection on the BCC campuses. It was discovered that the merger policies were not properly addressed according to the FET Act no. 16 of 2006. The conditions of benefits for managers and educators at BCC had not been properly interpreted according to the FET Act, Act No. 16 of 2006 to improve the operational functions of the BCC.

Therefore, it was established from this paper that the Provincial Department of Education did not want to be accountable for TVET colleges instead they referred the matter to the College Council or vice versa when the employees had grievances. Nobody would like to deal with the problems of college. Conditions of benefits were not clear, and because of that qualified personnel were not interested to join the TVET sector instead most of them decided to remain in the DoE. Some of them joined

the industrial sector. There was nobody who wants to be accountable for the implications of the merger. The results indicated that there was dissatisfaction about different appointments between managers and other employees. The study recommended that for efficiency and effectiveness of the operation in the college, there should be credible policies that are transparent and according to the FET Act no 16 of 2006. The College should have fundraising strategies to maintain the finances of the merger and be given the liberty to govern its affairs.

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