

Lessons from the implementation process of the merger between the University of Namibia's Faculty of Education and former Colleges of Education in Namibia

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Abstract

This article is based on the implementation process of the merger between the University of Namibia and former colleges of education in Namibia. The aim of this article is to share some staff and student experiences of what transpired during the merger. The methodology used in this article reflects characteristics of both the quantitative and qualitative methodology. Questionnaires were used as research instruments for data collection. The article concludes that the general implementation process of the merger was slow, communication was very poor, stakeholder participation was very limited, pre-merger planning was not enough, time was not on the side of the university and unavailability of financial resources were a major obstacle to actual implementation.

Introduction

After independence on the 21st of March 1990 the education sector was one of the sectors that needed some urgent transformation because education was the privilege of a few, hence to become the right of every Namibian. Education for All became a goal which necessitated the ministry to develop alternative thought about the education system and training of teachers. The Ministry of Education and Culture (1993) assigned the highest priority and activities to realize the four major goals such as Access, Equity, Quality and Democracy.

The University of Namibia (UNAM) and former Colleges of Education

UNAM has the primary responsibility for preparing senior secondary school teachers. According to Ministry of Education and Culture (1993) one of its principal responsibilities is to participate in improving the education system as a whole. We had four Colleges of Education (CoE) in Namibia namely; Windhoek College of Education (WCE), Ongwediva College of Education (OCE), Rundu College of Education (RCE) and Caprivi College of

Education (CCE), which were state-owned and managed by the Ministry of Education. They were renamed as: Windhoek College of Education as Khomasdal Campus, Ongwediva College of Education as HifikepunyePohamba Campus, Rundu College of Education as Rundu Campus and Caprivi College of Education as Katima Mulilo Campus. The directorate of Higher Education within the Ministry of Education openly controlled the affairs of the colleges that taught the Basic Education Teachers Diploma (BETD) leading to specializations in lower primary, upper primary and junior secondary levels. The Coe Manual (2000) makes reference to each college having its own establishment for academic, administrative and hostel personnel with funding directly from the Ministry.

Statement of problem

The primary objective of this article is to identify challenges as lessons learnt during implementation of the merger process starting from the 01 April 2010. The other interest was to measure the perceptions and attitudes of students and teacher educators on how well the implementation was handled, what were the obstacles and suggest what could have been done well in order to have an effective implementation process.

TERP in an undated Consultancy Report to Develop Guidelines on Teacher Education Reform recommended three inter-related areas to improve the quality of teacher education to be exact; improved management of the colleges; improved effectiveness and productivity of teacher educators, and improved curricula. According to the Ministry of Education the purpose of the merger of the former CoEs into the faculty of education at UNAM was to ensure quality in teacher education in Namibia.

Literature Survey

Since this concept is still new in the Namibian education sector rather than in the industry sector, there might be some myths and misconceptions. Crebbin (2008) defined a merger as the academic and administration integration (amalgamation) of CoE with another tertiary institution. Henry (2008) elucidates that a merger occurs when two organizations join together to share their combined resources. Therefore, a merger implies that both organizations accept the logic of combining into a single organization and willingly agree to do so.

The Rationale of a Merger

When institutions of unequal size merge there are some key factors that contribute to that decision. According to Fielden and Markham (1997) the benefits which the larger institution had hoped from the merger process are strategic or academic rather than direct financial benefits. But a smaller partner is a good fit, there is academic compatibility and

complementary, which provides them with an enhanced academic profile/portfolio, helps with their long term strategic plan for changes in the higher education sector; the merger will give a way to enter new markets, aims to be the main higher education provider in the country, the merger will enhance efficiency and productivity, the merger will promote knowledge innovation and promote new technology. They further identified problems in a merger as a clash of institutional cultures, different educational philosophies and priorities, disruption of relocation for staff and students, poor quality of the junior partner's academic programmes and staff, to eliminate competition and strengthen the dominant partner and job losses as a result of cost-cutting measures.

Lang (2003) contradicts Fielden and Markham by indicating that the principal interest in a merger in higher education has been financial. Thus a merger is seen as a means of promoting efficiency in production and ensuring an optimal allocation of scarce resources. In other words, a merger is expected to allow the reduction of inputs without reducing the level of output. In South Africa the mergers in higher education are said to be transitional of transformational to indicate their role in social, political, and economical integration after the eradication of apartheid, meaning it was strongly driven by the idea of redressing deep systematic inequalities inherited from the apartheid social system. Jansen (2002) and Lang (2003) concludes that a merger is not only a form of diversity but it is also a means of creating broader diversity through institutional form, the composition of student populations, the composition of faculty complements, availability, and accessibility to programmes.

The Namibian Perspective

In Namibia the merger was a government initiative and one of the reform options or an ETSIP activity spearheaded by the MoE. According to Lang (2003) most recent studies have confirmed that finances drive many mergers in higher education. Even if financial concerns do not motivate a merger, they may still be an important ingredient in the success or failure of a merger. Lang (2003) further states that larger institutions in a merger share some objectives with their smaller partners because they wish to benefit from government incentives that some merger schemes offer more to larger institutions. They may have small, highly specialized programmes that, on their own, are uneconomic as those in smaller institutions. They may gain additional revenue from the new programmes. They may offer the programmes of the smaller institutions at lower costs. They may gain access to highly specialized facilities that might be underutilized. It is quite possible that government used the merger in order to increase the institutional size of UNAM as the national university. If UNAM products will not perform as expected then the education system will be exposed to further poor performance.

Steps in the merger

The compasspartnership.co.uk/knowledge/strategic-alliances [10 July 2010] lists the four steps that can contribute to a successful merger as; defining 'the prize', establishing a process and timescale for negotiations, addressing the biggest obstacles early on in the process and recognizing that cultural integration is the greatest challenge.

Implementation of the Merger Process

A joint delegation from MoE and UNAM travelled from college to college first-handly informing the respective institutions about the merger. The formation of committees was done after the CoEs as well as UNAM had received the letters that declared the merger. In order to have a successful implementation of the merger process, committees were established to oversee certain aspects of the implementation. Each committee had the task of gathering information, consulting and paying attention to details related to their committee. The names of the established committees were; the Main Merger Committee and the Implementation Committee. The main Merger Committee was chaired by the Permanent Secretary in the MoE in order to ensure smooth implementation of the merger process. The implementation committee had sub-committees such as the Human Resources Sub-committee, Academic Sub-committee, Finance Sub-committee, Infrastructure Sub-committee, Student Welfare Sub-committee, and Library Sub-committee. The chairpersons of each sub-committee were advised to schedule their meetings in such a manner that they were able to provide written submissions before the Main Merger Committee meetings in order to facilitate quality deliberations.

Methodology

The research methodology used in this research article reflects characteristics of both the quantitative and qualitative methodology. The purpose is to get benefits provided by the two methodologies at the same time getting a clear focus of the implementation of the merger process.

Sampling

The target group for this study comprised of staff members and student teachers in CoE. Due to cost and time limitations this research study was not expected to cover the entire population. The researcher collected information from a smaller group of the target population with the aim that the data collected is representative of the total population under study, by taking a sample size of thirty which is being held by many to be the minimum number (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p. 89-90). That sample size of thirty was done at each college. The sampling that was employed was a simple random sampling where each member of the population under study had an equal chance of being selected. It is

also important to mention that students who had classes on the day that the questionnaire was administered were the ones who served as respondents. Staff members at former CoE included the vice rectors, heads of departments and lecturers. The student teachers from each college were those in first and second year of the BETD. Thereby questionnaires from each college gave a total of 120 questionnaires.

Research instruments

Questionnaires were used during this research study in order to investigate respondents' opinions on the implementation of the merger.

Questionnaires

The researcher organized a written questionnaire that was based on addressing the general implementation of the merger process. Before the questionnaire was administered it was piloted on five student teachers and five teacher educators in order to detect any shortcomings in the layout of the questionnaire. It took about fifteen to twenty minutes to complete the questionnaire. The piloting was done during September 2010 at the former CCEs. Those that completed the pilot questionnaire were free to give suggestions and identify any weaknesses.

Each area had a number of about five to ten questions that were considered to be relevant specifically to that area. Most question statements were based on Likert's five-point scale. The researcher was advised to add another category to the Likert scale known as the "don't know". That category was meant to cater for lack of knowledge and understanding by respondents concerning the implementation of the merger. The respondents had to choose one of the given, alternative answers: 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'uncertain', 'disagree', 'strongly disagree', or 'don't know'. The last area in the questionnaire on general implementation process had some open-ended questions. Throughout the research study, these response categories are represented as 'SA' (Strongly Agree), 'A' (Agree), 'U' (Uncertain), 'D' (Disagree), 'SD' (Strongly Disagree) and 'DK' (Don't Know).

The advantage of questionnaires is that respondents have time to think about the answers to the questions in the questionnaire (Brynard and Hanekom 2008, p.46). In addition to that, a large number of respondents can be reached. The disadvantage of questionnaires is that it is quite costly to photocopy since the questionnaire consisted of six pages. According to Nyambe (2005, p. 40) longer questionnaires can cause fatigue and withdrawal of respondents. The researcher used a teacher educator stationed at each of the former CoEs to administer the questionnaire during the month of October 2010. Thirty questionnaires were administered at each former college and collected on the same day. A 100% return of questionnaires was possible from students present in the classroom and teacher educators

in their offices.

Ethical Considerations

The respondents were not harmed as a result of participating in this research study. A promise of confidentiality was given. No personal names were used in the study. It was done with informed consent.

Findings

The results came from the questionnaires that were completed by teacher educators and student teachers in all former CoEs. Out of the 120 questionnaires that were completed by teacher educators and student teachers, 49.16% (59) were males and 50.8% (61) were females. The age categories were as follows:

- 69 (57.5%) were between the ages 18-25,
- 13(10.8%) were between the ages of 26-33,
- 12 (10%) were between the ages of 34-41,
- 16 (13.33%) were between the ages of 42-50, and
- 10 (8.33%) were between the ages of 51-60.

In terms of positions (capacity): 80 (66.66%) were student teachers, 23 (19.16%) were teacher educators, 15 (12.5%) were heads of departments and 2 (1.66%) were vice rectors.

Findings on General Implementation Process

	SA	A	U	D	SD	DK	n
I do feel that UNAM and CoE have merged.	12 (10%)	24 (20%)	28 (23.33%)	24 (20%)	31 (25.83%)	1 (0.83%)	120
I do not feel that UNAM and CoE have merged.	67 (55.83%)	20 (16.66%)	11 (9.16%)	10 (8.33%)	12 (10%)	0	120
I do feel that NANTU has played its role during the implementation of the merger.	10 (8.33%)	23 (19.16%)	28 (23.33%)	12 (10%)	23 (19.16%)	24 (20%)	120
I do feel that NANSO has played its role during the implementation of the merger.	20 (16.66%)	24 (20%)	25 (20.83%)	7 (5.83%)	20 (16.66%)	24 (20%)	120

I do feel that the SRC has played its role during the implementation of the merger.	20 (16.66%)	45 (37.5%)	14 (11.66%)	13 (10.83%)	23 (19.16%)	5 (4.16%)	120
I do feel that there was proper communication during the implementation of the merger.	6 (5%)	13 (10.83%)	7 (5.83%)	31 (25.83%)	58 (48.33%)	5 (4.16%)	120
I do feel that there is a system in place to monitor teacher education reform in Namibia.	8 (6.66%)	19 (15.83%)	33 (27.5%)	16 (13.33%)	27 (22.5%)	17 (14.16%)	120
I do feel that the merger was necessary as part of teacher education reform in Namibia.	16 (13.33%)	48 (40%)	13 (10.83%)	14 (11.66%)	20 (16.66%)	9 (7.5%)	120
I do feel that I was disadvantaged by the merger.	45 (37.5%)	14 (11.66%)	14 (11.66%)	19 (15.83%)	23 (19.16%)	5 (4.16%)	120
I do feel that the merger is being well implemented.	2 (1.66%)	14 (11.66%)	5 (4.16%)	28 (23.33%)	61 (50.83%)	10 (8.33%)	120
My feelings about the merger when announced still correlate with the actual happenings during the implementation.	8 (6.66%)	28 (23.33%)	23 (19.16%)	22 (18.33%)	23 (19.16%)	16 (13.33%)	120

Findings on Constraints

What are the factors that were inhibiting or hindering the successful implementation of the merger between UNAM and CoE? The following factors were registered as inhibiting or hindering the successful implementation of the merger between UNAM and CoEs:

1. Pre-planning for the merger was necessary so that activities could be coordinated in a systematic manner. Too many poorly organized merger activities were happening at the same time. The merger committees were not well organized and constituted. Government and UNAM did not have an implementation plan. Effective planning was not done. Implementation must always start at the beginning of the year. UNAM and CoE calendars are different from one another in terms of semesters.
2. Lack of financial resources from the Government hindered the implementation process; one example is that the ministry had to pay employees until December 31, 2010 since UNAM did not have the money to do that.
3. Lack of proper communication between Government, UNAM, CoEs and other stakeholders. This meant that the flow of information from one party to the other was not smooth enough to make impacts. There was a lack of written information from the side of GRN, UNAM and CoEs which resulted in too many rumours and much confusion. No reliable information was given at the right time. Some stakeholders lacked information and understanding about the concept of the

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- merger and the merger processes. Information on the merger was not for public consumption. There was a lack of transparency and openness from government and UNAM.
4. Lack of proper consultation with the stakeholders after a cabinet directive about the merger. Students and parents were not involved through consultations in the decision making process. They were forced into the merger. The vision and mission of the merger was not at all communicated to them as stakeholders. The merger was not publicized. Government and UNAM were unable to engage stakeholders such as regional councils, regional education offices, and community in general.
 5. The timeframe from when the merger was announced to the time of implementation was insufficient for the process to be successful and meaningful. The government and UNAM underestimated the extent of the merger process. It was too rushed and no meaningful preparations were in place. The curriculums for the new BEd programmes were done in a hurry as result many mistakes crept in. The modules for the new BEd programmes are not yet developed. Faculty of Education at UNAM lacks knowledge about BETD pre-service teacher education in lower, upper primary.
 6. There was no clear resolution on the loans of the students as to whether they will be increased or not, as some may not have been able to afford UNAM fees because they come from poor families. There was no clear resolution on the accommodation of students in case of relocations. Students resisted because they were afraid of dropping studies due to lack of money. At UNAM if you fail you lose your loan.
 7. Some of the CoE academic staff was not well qualified to meet the UNAM lecturing requirements. Qualifications of staff members obtained elsewhere were not properly evaluated by UNAM. There will be a lack of lecturers in certain specialized subjects. Those employees were full of fear for change because of too many uncertainties about their future. Because of uncertainties the productivity of staff was very low. College lecturing years of experience were not considered by UNAM.
 8. Students did not want to cooperate because the issue of articulation was not properly communicated to them. Repeating the same year level in a different course is not fair to students. It will take more years to complete a programme. UNAM did not value students' rights and opinions on the merger. Students were left in the dark and treated like children. The absence of a phase-out plan for BETD is worrisome. BETD is accessible and funded by government. Many students are not willing to articulate because they are afraid of risking failing their studies. Students have not seen the requirements for BEd programmes. UNAM admission requirements are too high for example a C grade in English.
 9. The dilapidated infrastructure of CoEs hinders the implementation of the merger because major renovations are essential. The classrooms, library, offices, hostels,

ICT, language and science laboratories will need renovations. There is a lack of reading materials in the library.

10. There were no proper negotiations between the merging parties. UNAM felt too superior to the CoEs. The CoEs lacked stronger college management. There was a lack of proper balanced representation of colleges on the merger committees. Unions were not involved at local and national level. There was a lack of political will, commitment and accountability from government. Students did not have any say in the merging process. Decisions taken by politicians do not go well with what is happening in the classroom. The decision to merge was more political and symbolic than factual.

The following factors were identified as inhibiting or hindering the successful implementation of the merger:

- Lack of financial resources to fund the implementation process;
- Lack of proper communication to empower people;
- Lack of proper consultation with the stakeholders;
- There were no proper negotiations between the merging parties;
- The short timeframe for implementation;
- Lack of proper pre-planning for the merger;
- Absence of resolutions on the loan and accommodation of the students;
- Some of the CoE academic staff did not possess the required qualifications;
- Articulation was not properly communicated;
- The absence of a phase out plan for BETD was worrisome;
- The dilapidated infrastructure of CoEs.

Implementation of the merger is indeed a difficult undertaking particularly in Namibia where mergers in higher education are still uncommon. Seemingly, the merger that took place in Namibia is an influence of the mergers that have been happening in the Republic of South Africa as the former colonizer. Knowledge, skills and professional attitudes about the actual implementation of mergers still need to be mastered.

Conclusions

The study concludes that the general implementation process of the merger was slow, communication was very poor, stakeholder participation was very limited, pre-merger

planning was not sufficient, time was not on the side of UNAM and unavailability of financial resources were a major obstacle to actual implementation. The money given to UNAM was just 50% of what was requested to implement the merger according to the PVC of Administration and Finance. The study recommends that the merger implementation process was supposed to be treated as a priority area by government and UNAM. More time, money and specialized human resources were supposed to be allocated to the merger. An implementation plan was supposed to be accompanied by a communication plan during the implementation of the merger. Government and UNAM should develop an evaluation and monitoring system to keep an eye on the implementation process and hold people or committees accountable for their actions. Finally, the merger should be viewed as a means to improve the quality of teacher education in Namibia.

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