EXPERIENCES OF STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS ON THE MERGER AND DEMERGER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO LEADING TO THE SUBSEQUENT TRANSITION INTO THE NEW SEFAKO MAKGATHO HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY

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SIYABONGA SANELE ZIKALALA

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SUPERVISOR: Ms K. Thobejane

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DECLARATION

I declare that the mini dissertation hereby submitted at Sefako Makgatho Helath Sciences University, for the degree of Master of Science in Clinical Psychology has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other institution university; that it is my work in design and in execution, and that all material contained herein has been duly acknowledged.

SS Zikalala (Mr) 06 April 2017
Student Number: 210450468
ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE: The University of Limpopo (UL) is a product of the merger between MEDUNSA and UNIN. This merger resulted in the recommendations of the Higher Education’s National Working Group of 2002 that there should be a legal establishment of the UL. Subsequently, the two campuses of the UL became known as Medunsa and Turfloop. The merger of the UL brought about logistical and administrative difficulties. In 2013, the Minister of Higher Education and Training published his intention to establish a new university that will incorporate Medunsa in the Government Gazette, thus “unbundling” the merger of the UL and subsequently establishing a new university incorporating Medunsa and named it SMU. The aim of the proposed study was to explore the experiences of students’ organizations during the merger and demerger processes of the UL and during the transition into SMU.

METHODS: Student organizations affiliated with the SRC of SMU were divided into four focus groups according to the focus of the organization, such as political, religious, social and sporting focus groups. Each student organization selected two representatives to participate in the focus groups. Focus groups met with the interviewer on scheduled occasions. Semi-structured interviews following an interview guide were used to facilitate focus group discussions. Data was analyzed using the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis.

RESULTS: The study established that the UL merger failed to implement aspects of transformation. The major precipitating factors were the geographical distance between the two campuses of the UL, the experienced loss of skilled labor and the failure to harmonize policy and programmes offered by the two campuses. The demerger brought about independence, freedom and autonomy. The establishment of SMU presented excitement, hopefulness and a sense of belonging. Negative effects of the establishment of SMU included sidelining of student organizations in the naming of the new university and lack of sound university policy.

CONCLUSION: The study identified the UL as one of the very few higher education institutions globally to undergo a merger/demerger and establishment of a new university. As such, the study contributes to the expansion of literature on universities that have undergone a demerging process using the UL and the establishment of SMU as a practical case.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The preamble to the Higher Education Act (“the Act”) envisaged the establishment of a “single higher education system” arising from the need to “redress” past discrimination, to ensure representativity and to restructure and transform higher education institutions with the aim to promote the values which should underlie a democratic South Africa. In an effort to facilitate the above-mentioned aims, Chapter 3 of the Act makes provision to merge public institutions of higher education (Leslie & Mowatt, 2006).

According to the South African Students’ Congress (2009), the merging process amongst South African higher education institutions was necessary to (1) abolish apartheid that imposed divisions amongst historically white institutions (HWIs) and historically black institutions (HBIs); (2) use resources efficiently; (3) integrate academic programmes and reinforce research throughput; (4) heighten institutional diversity in general universities, comprehensive universities and universities of technology, and (5) encourage student suppleness.

These above-mentioned legislative provisions made a merger possible that gave birth to the University of Limpopo (UL) – a product between the merging of the former Medical University of Southern Africa (MEDUNSA) and the former University of the North (UNIN) (Limpopo Leader, 2005). This merger was the result from the 14 November 2003 notification published in the Government Gazette No. 25737 after recommendations were made by the National Working Group of 2002 that the University of Limpopo should be a legal establishment from 1 January 2005 (Makgoba & Price, 2011). Subsequently, the two campuses of the University of Limpopo became known as Medunsa (the former MEDUNSA) and Turfloop (the former UNIN).

The rationale behind the recommendation for the merger between UNIN and MEDUNSA was derived from the need for transformation in South African universities as a means to free the South African higher education system of the remnants of the apartheid regime and to provide solutions to problems that developed during and after the transition into democracy (Gibbon, 2004).

However, the University of Limpopo faced a number of challenges which eventually put this merger in the spotlight. Firstly, the merger failed in its inception to break the
boundaries separating the HWIs and the HBIs by merging two historically black and disadvantaged institutions – MEDUNSA and UNIN. As a result, the merger brought about many structural and operational difficulties which, amongst others, included: (1) logistical difficulties directly linked to the distance between the two campuses – they were more than 300 km apart; (2) the centralization of senior governance and management; and (3) attempts to relocate MEDUNSA to Polokwane, which could be linked to the declining quality of the programmes (Makgoba & Price, 2011).

The saga of events relating to the difficulties and challenges faced by the University of Limpopo during the merger led to the inevitable pronouncement of the Department of Higher Education and Training to demerge the University of Limpopo. In May 2013, the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande, made his intention clear in the Government Gazette to establish a new university which will include the former MEDUNSA by “unbundling” the merger that created the University of Limpopo. This public notice followed the Makgoba and Price (2011) task team report, which suggested that MEDUNSA is neither viable nor sustainable as a stand-alone institution (Government Gazette No. 36492, 2013).

In May 2014, Dr Blade Nzimande published the finalization of the establishment of a new university in Gauteng incorporating MEDUNSA and named it the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) (Government Gazette No. 37658, 2014).

It is within the above-mentioned cascade of events that continuous changes in university processes, operations and structuring have had a significant impact on university personnel members in general and on the lives of students in particular. These events have been observed since 2005 until this present day. This study, therefore, tried to unveil and explore the degree of impact on student organizations who are experiencing these continuous changes. In addition, the possible impact that the entire process of merging and demerging have had on the University of Limpopo and the transition into the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University were also explored.

**Problem Statement**

The experience of change within the structure and operations of the university due to the merger and demerger as well as the establishment of the SMU still has a significant impact on student organizations today. A change process was created by the merging, demerging and transition events leading to the creation of a new university. A dramatic shift in the
structure and operations of the university took place – in the former MEDUNSA, the UL and the SMU. This shift is expected to generate certain emotions experienced by the university community in general and in particular student organizations as stakeholders of the university. The interest of the study was, therefore, to explore these experiences as they pertain to student organizations during the entire change process.

**Significance of the Study**

Firstly, the importance of this study emanates from observations made with regard to changes that have already taken place in the structure of the university since the merger as well as protests that demanded a demerger. It is hypothesized that the university community, especially at the Medunsa Campus, did not react well to the merger process and might feel dissatisfied by the processes followed and the structural and operational changes that have taken place during the existence of the UL and the current transitional process taking place at the new university including its name – the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University.

Secondly, given the recent pronouncements from Minister Blade Nzimande on the demerger process and the establishment of the new university – which is currently in place – it will be interesting to obtain a deeper understanding of how student organizations experienced the demerger process and changes caused by establishing a new university.

The study, therefore, explored the experiences of different student organizations as stakeholders within the university with regard to the impact and effects of the merger on their day-to-day general operations, the structuring that took place within the university and student life in general. The study further completed an in-depth exploration of the experiences of student organizations with regard to the demerger process. Lastly, the study tried to establish the expectations of student organizations with regard to the establishment of the new SMU.

**Research Question**

What are the experiences of student organizations with regard to the merger and demerger of the UL and the subsequent transition process into the SMU?
Aims of the Study

The aims of this study were firstly, to explore the experiences of student organizations during the merger and demerger processes of the UL and secondly, to explore the transition into the SMU.

Objectives

- To gain an in-depth understanding of how student organizations at the SMU experienced the changes caused by the merger.
- To gain an in-depth understanding of how they experienced the process of a demerger.
- To explore in-depth the expectations of student organizations at the SMU, the transitional process followed, and their anticipated role in future processes.

Definition of Fundamental Concepts

Multiple concepts and phenomena are used and referred to in the study. Significant concepts are, therefore, defined below in order to provide a clear understanding:

1) Community psychology

Community psychology is a field of psychology that is concerned with the context of individuals within communities and the wider society, and the relationships of individuals within communities and societies (Lazarus & Seedat, 1995).

2) Ecological systems theory

The ecological systems theory holds that in order to understand human development, the entire ecological system within which growth takes place needs to be taken into consideration (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

3) General systems theory

The general systems theory refers to the interdisciplinary study of systems in general with the aim of determining patterns and formulating principles that can be distinguished from and applied to all types of systems at all logical levels in all fields of research (Bertalanffy, 1968).
4) *The Act*

“The Act” refers to the Higher Education Act of South Africa – a policy on higher education determined and published by the Minister of Education in terms of Section 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Higher Education Act 101 of 1997).

5) *The Statute*

Provided for by Section 33(3) of the Act, “the Statute” refers to the Standard Institutional Statute (SSIS) of South Africa – a policy applicable to every public higher education institution whose institutional statute has not been developed until such time that the council of such a public higher education institution is able to development its own institutional statute under Section 32 of the Act. The Statute gives effect to any matter not expressly prescribed by the Act (Government Gazette No.23065, 2002).

6) *Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)*

Public higher education institutions referred to in Section 20 of the Act and in Section 3 of the Statute (Higher Education Act 101 of 1997; Government Gazette No.23065, 2002).

7) *Merger*

As provided for by Chapter 3 of the Act, a merger is designed to integrate institutions at a substantive level to hopefully result in a new institution with a new culture and new character (Leslie & Mowatt, 2006).

8) *Demerger*

Demerger (in the context of this study) refers to the process of unbundling what was merged before, for example the separation of the Medunsas Campus from the UL – a process which led to the establishment of a new institution incorporating the former MEDUNSA (Government Gazette No. 36492, 2013).
9) **Transition**

Transition (in the context of this study) refers to the establishment of a new university – the SMU (Government Gazette No. 37658, 2014) – and changes made to the policies, operations, structure and processes of the UL to reflect the SMU.

10) **Students’ Representative Council (SRC)**

The Students’ Representative Council (SRC) is provided for by Section 36-43 of the Statute with the purpose of representing students of an institution in matters relating to liaison with the managerial structures of the institution and being an umbrella organization for all the student committees, clubs and societies (Government Gazette No.23065, 2002).

11) **Student organizations**

Student organizations are provided for by the constitution of the UL. Student organizations refer to student structures affiliated with the SRC (University of Limpopo SRC Constitution, 2010).

12) **Interpretive phenomenological analysis**

The interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is an analytic approach aimed at generating an in-depth understanding of the subjective view of participants and the meaning of their personal and social world. It focuses on exploring personal experiences and it is concerned with the personal perceptions of individuals with regard to events rather than a preoccupation with producing objective statements of events themselves (Smith, 2003).

**Overview of Methodology**

The research method used in this study was a strategy of enquiry which moves from the underlying hypotheses of a phenomenon to the study design and data collection (Myers, 2009). A deeper discussion of the methodology is provided in chapter 3. This section attempts to provide a brief overview of the methods used in the study. A qualitative approach was used and the study made use of purposive sampling. Two members of each student organization were selected and these participants were categorized into four focus
groups according to the different types of student organizations present and recognized at the SMU within the university’s relevant policy.

Data collection was done by making use of focus group interviews conducted by the researcher and two other neutral people experienced in qualitative research. The interviews were semi-structured and followed an interview schedule. The study also utilized the interpretive phenomenological approach as a tool to address the aims of the study and to analyse data. This approach allowed for an in-depth reflection of the subjective experiences of the participants and thematically connected these subjective experiences and translated them into a narrative account of student organizations.

The researcher ensured that the research was trustworthy at all times by addressing its credibility by making use of triangulation, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The research minimized researcher bias by involving two other neutral people experienced in qualitative research during the collection process and analysis of data. Lastly, the research took cognizance of the relevant ethical considerations and addressed them accordingly.

Chapter Outline

This study consists of five chapters – all aimed at achieving an in-depth understanding of the experiences of student organizations with regard to the merger and demerger processes followed at the UL and the subsequent establishment of the SMU and the change it entailed.

- Chapter 1: Introduction to the study
- Chapter 2: Literature review
  - Theoretical perspectives
  - The concept of change
  - The concept of a merger
  - Merger trends locally and internationally
  - The role of student organizations
- Chapter 3: Methodological approach
- Chapter 4: Data analysis of results
- Chapter 5: Discussion of the results and conclusion of the study
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

*It is rare to find an institution which is at once so uniform and so diverse; it is recognizable in all the guises which it takes, but in no one place is it identical with what it is in any other. This unity and diversity constitute the final proof of the extent to which the university was the spontaneous product of mediaeval life; for it is only living things which can in this way, while fully retaining their identity, bend and adapt themselves to a whole variety of circumstances and environments.*

– Emile Durkheim: The Evolution of Educational Thought (Clarke, 1983)

**Introduction**

This chapter focuses on unpacking and discussing the theoretical framework on which this study was based. It highlights the relevance of existing theory – specifically the ecological systems theory – and other relevant theoretical frameworks from which the study was conceptualized. It discusses change as a concept and the theories of change that relate to the study including the general systems theory and the work of contributors. Reference is made to existing literature pertaining to mergers of higher education institutions and their outlook – both globally and within a South African context. Higher education institutions are furthermore positioned in the ecological systems theory and the impact that mergers have had on higher education institutions as part of a larger ecosystem is highlighted. Lastly, this chapter explores and discusses the history and role of student organizations as well as their experiences and the impact existing higher education mergers has on them.

**Theoretical Perspective**

The conceptualization of this study was primarily based on a community psychology perspective. Community psychology studies the contexts of individuals within communities and the wider society as well as the relationships of individuals with communities and societies. The theoretical perspective shifts away from the individualistic position of being victims and accepting blame towards a realization of a collective social environment and its psychological and social experiences and, therefore, macro-level and multi-level analyses and interventions were needed (Lazarus & Seedat, 1995).
Community psychology accentuates that behaviour occurs in a given context. Behaviour, therefore, requires both intra-individual and a broader macro conceptualization. Both behaviour and experiences are normal as well as pathological and both are affected by the suitability between the needs of individuals and capabilities and available contextual resources and opportunities (Naidoo, 2000). Therefore, a strong relationship occurs between individuals and the system within which they exist. The choice of theory in this study – the ecological systems theory – helps us to conceptualize and understand this relationship, particularly within a higher education system and its sub-systems.

**The Ecological Systems Theory**

One of the major contributors of community psychology is Urie Bronfenbrenner who developed the ecological systems theory (Rappaport & Seidman, 2000). The study was theoretically conceptualized from Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory.

In this theory, Bronfenbrenner (1994) holds that in order to understand human development, the entire ecological system within which growth takes place needs to be taken into consideration. An ecological system may be viewed as a context within which interactions between individuals and their environment occur. Bronfenbrenner (1994) further defines ecological systems by classifying them into five systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem.

![Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory](Paquette & Ryan, 2001)
These systems can be explained in the following manner:

1) **Microsystem** – A pattern of activities, social roles and interpersonal relations experienced by individuals in particular settings. For example, in families and peer groups, at school and in workplaces. These are settings where interactions may occur.

2) **Mesosystem** – Patterns of interactions linking two or more settings where individuals are involved. For example, the relation between home and school, school and workplace. These relations have an effect on individuals.

3) **Exosystem** – Patterns of interactions linking two or more settings; at least one of which does not involve individuals directly but influences individuals indirectly on a microsystem level. For example, the relations between the home of children and the workplace of parents.

4) **Macrosystem** – Patterns of interactions encompassing the relations amongst the microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem and the given culture with reference to the belief system, law, resources and lifestyle.

5) **Chronosystem** – This level encompasses change or consistency over time within each of the levels defined above and in the characteristics of individuals. For example, changes during the life course of family structures, socioeconomic status, employment and places of residence.

In summary, Bronfenbrenner (1994) describes a social context as a set of Russian dolls – each implanted within the other – or a set of nested systems, respectively demonstrating a different level of analysis from individuals or families through to the greater public. The innermost circle represents the microsystem of families which is entrenched within the mesosystem: the web of extended family members, friends and neighbourhood interactions. The official service system and labour market are found within the exosystem, which in turn is incorporated into the macrosystem or the cultural design of societies and all of these are connected to the chronosystem (Giraldo-Gracia, 2014).
**Brief Review of the Ecological Systems Theory**

Despite its complexity, the ecological systems theory offers a holistic approach to analyse multilevel and interactive impacts on individuals, such as socioeconomic inequalities and change, which can be major factors affecting communities (Krishnan, 2010). This theory integrates and amalgamates the comprehension of the nature, causes and effects of spatial diversity that ecological studies have achieved over a long period of time (Pickett & Cadenasso, 2004).

However, there are limitations when studying ecological units that are free of human influence. Studies of human-free systems often produce inaccurate outcomes due to failures in separating human influences from the structure and function of systems (Pickett & Cadenasso, 2004).

The ecological systems theory has a tendency to focus on determining factors due to their proximity to persons while there is inadequate crucial information to comprehensively comprehend connections at all levels of social ecology. Information is often derived from a lower level source in a hierarchy, therefore, capping the accessibility of variables pertaining to individual responses is necessary which in turn presents a notable limitation (Krishnan, 2010).

Another limitation argued by Siporin (2014) is that systems analysts assume that all systems are similar while there are actually important differences between persons and work environments. The ecological systems theory is, therefore, unable to deal with subjective experiences. Control issues about native, shared control and partaking as neglected sub-system integrations are overestimated, which results in “conservative, status-quo, political positions” and the demotivation of positive criticism and variations take place.

The ecological systems theory illustrates factors that are applicable to the structuring of the population of the UL in particular. Generally, institutions of higher learning as ecosystems within ecological levels can be observed. Events occurring at a macrosystem level, such as higher education acts and guidelines aimed at merging institutions of higher learning, may have a significant impact on student organizations and on individual students in their microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem (Krishnan, 2010) such as campus life, day-to-day operations, the structure, governance and academic rules of a university.
Therefore, the process of a merger and demerger (UL) led to the subsequent transition into the SMU – as ecological systems – was hypothesized as a major influence on significant experiences in existing student organizations from a micro-level to a macro-level. The discussion below position higher education institutions as ecological systems and, therefore, the relevance of the ecological systems theory with regard to the study was analysed.

**A Higher Education Institution as an Ecological System: Relevance of the Ecological Systems Theory with regard to the Study**

Like other organizations, institutions of higher learning have a prescribed structure of governance provided by legislative governing institutions of higher learning. Particularly in a South African context – the Act and the Statute (Leslie & Mowatt, 2006).

Section 4(26) of the Act and Section 4(1) of the Statute prescribe that every public higher education institution shall structure its governance into (1) a chancellor; (2) a council; (3) a senate; (4) a principal; (5) a vice-principal; (6) a students’ representative council; (7) an institutional forum; and (8) other structures and offices as determined by the institutional statute (Higher Education Act 101 of 1997; Government Gazette No.23065, 2002). These legislative prescriptions outline and describe the sub-systems of higher education institutions and the interactions that occur within these sub-systems in order to achieve one single ecological system.

Anderies, Janssen and Ostrom (2004) define an ecological system as an association with and influenced by one or more social systems and can easily be defined as an interdependent system of biological entities. The above-mentioned authors argue that ecological systems are robust, difficult to control, unpredictable and do not conform to the definition of one simple, easily quantifiable performance index. This is argued contrary to engineered systems, such as airplanes and computers, which are easily controllable, programmable and better understood. This argument differs with the critique by Siporin (2014) that the ecological systems theory neglects control issues and overestimate subsystem integration as cited in the preceding paragraphs.

Although higher education institutions have prescribed structures of governance, the above-mentioned argument distinguishes institutions generally as ecological systems and not as engineered systems due to their robustness and interdependence. Ecological systems require the following three issues in differentiating them from engineered systems: (1)
being co-operative and the ability of joint actions should be upheld in ecological systems; (2) ecological systems are subject to change, as the rules of the game that agents play amongst themselves change continually; and (3) ecological systems can inhabit several unchanging forms and can travel speedily amongst them (Anderies et al., 2004).

Walker, Holling, Carpenter, and Kinzig (2004) argue that ecological systems are characterized by three factors: (1) resilience – the ability of systems to minimize commotion and restructure so as to still maintain fundamentally the same function, structure, identity and feedback; (2) adaptability – the ability of agents in systems to drive resilience; and (3) transformability – the ability to produce an essentially new system when ecological, economic or social structures deem the existing system unsustainable.

Higher education institutions like other ecological systems are bound to undergo change and have to display the above-mentioned characteristics when dealing with change. Organizational changes or changes in ecological systems are viewed by Freese, Schalk and Croon (2011) as affecting the fulfilment of perceived organizational obligations and roles defined within every system negatively.

These organizational changes are caused, amongst other factors mentioned by Freese et al. (2011), by increasing global competition and standards; culture changes due to mergers and acquisitions; increased complexity of work; and increased cultural diversity. Different demands and expectations are, therefore, part of communities, policies, structuring, operations as well as the workforce. Higher education institutions as organizations (or ecological systems) are from time to time exposed to factors which trigger change within their sub-systems.

Scott (1981) affirms the classification of organizations or higher education institutions as ecological systems by mentioning that “organizations are first and foremost systems of elements, each of which affects and is affected by the others. Goals are not the key to understanding the nature and functioning of an organization, no more than are the participants, the technology, or social structure, and no organization can be understood in isolation from the larger environment. We will miss the essence of organization if we insist on focusing on any single feature to the exclusion of all others”. Therefore, the larger environment within which organizations exist becomes part of the ecological system from an ecological perspective (Kelly, Ryan, Altman, & Stelzner, 2000).
Krucken (2011) views higher education institutions as entities that undergo transformation or change at multiple levels, for example at the macro-level of society; at governance-level; or at an institutional level. These levels can be fitted well within Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory:

- **Macro-level**
  The ecological systems theory places this level within its macrosystem. The macro-level, according to Krucken (2011), is concerned with global trends in higher education systems and societal influences on “inclusion” relating to the number of students enrolled, study programmes offered as well as the missions of higher education institutions. This level goes as far as influencing policies and frameworks that higher education institutions have to deal with.

- **Governance-level**
  This is the second level where change can be observed. Change is placed within both the macrosystem-level and exosystem-level of the ecological systems theory. These two levels are concerned with the relationship amongst higher education institutions and the strong governmental regulations that affect the capacity for self-governance of higher education institutions. Krucken (2011) is of the view that with the establishment of new governance regimes, the relationships amongst Government and higher education institutions are undergoing profound changes. These changes are observed from Government taking a more supervisory and “steering at a distance” approach to higher education institutions; the involvement of accreditation and evaluating bodies in teaching and research; and where external competitors (on the supply side) play a decisive role while internal competitors (on the demand side for academic goods) play a more indirect role.

- **Institutional level**
  This level fits on multiple levels of the ecological systems theory – from the microsystem, mesosystem to the exosystem level. Krucken (2011) describes this level as where higher education institutions transform into organizational actors characterized with independent decision-making. Stakeholders within higher education institutions are integrated, goal-orientated, bounded and are capable of making decisions with regard to their own identity and culture. Management and entire communities play an increasing important role.
In summary, higher education institutions are systems that undergo change and change in one sub-system affects the entire system and pressure thereby increases. Systems need to be resilient, adaptive with regard to new conditions, and transform (change) according to demands in order to survive. Mergers expose higher education institutions to change. In the following passage, the concept of change is discussed that can be located within the ecological systems theory. Other theories of change are reviewed and placed in context with regard to the study.

The concept of Change

Aristotle defined change from a metaphysics perspective as the actualization of potentiality – meaning that change is a process of circularity in realizing potential occurrences (Kotsman, 1987). From a philosophical point of view, change can be conceptualized as a difference or a non-identity in the features of things (Zalta et al., 2015).

Adu and Mantashe (2014) state that change is a lifestyle followed by organizations, leaders and the workforce in general. Change requires the utmost attention because it influences operations and structures of businesses.

Ajay (2002) is of the opinion that change is an illogical and emotional process in the lives of human beings; it is disruptive and it erodes the accountability and reliability of organizations possibly leading to frustration and confusion in organizations. Dahl (2010) affirms the above-mentioned opinion by stating that change destabilizes processes and forces systems to reshape and restructure.

Change from a General Systems Theory

The general systems theory is a multidisciplinary study of systems in general with the aim of establishing patterns and formulating ideologies that can be differentiated from and applied to all kinds of systems at all logical levels in all fields of research. This theory is a valuable instrument in producing modalities that are useful in and transferable to various areas and this theory also protects these modalities from senseless analogies which often tarnish progress in most modalities (Bertalanffy, 1968). A number of contributors to the general systems theory have analysed the concept of change from the perspective of theory and explain change at various levels. These levels are discussed below.
**First order changes**

Watzlawick, Weakland and Fisch (1974) divide change into two different logical levels: first order and second order changes. They define first-order changes as changes that occur within given systems, which remain unchanged. In essence, first-order changes are corrective changes – functionally ideal changes in specific behaviour within a certain context. These changes unfold at the same logical level as “problematic” behaviour (Perez, 2008). Bateson, as cited in Sterling (2011), further contributes to the concept of first order changes by alluding that first order changes refer to doing “more of the same” – changes within specific boundaries and without exploring or changing the norms, values or rules of systems.

**Second order changes**

To understand the concept of second order changes, most authors approach this concept from the perspective or theory of logical types. Second order changes represent changes from a different or higher logical type than first order changes (Johanson, 1984). Second order changes are productive changes and can be described as more functionally ideal changes that take place in the whole spectrum of behaviour within a certain context. These changes occur at a logical level higher than “problematic” behaviour (Perez, 2008). Second order changes alter original systems. These changes usually occur when norms are explored and problems are reframed. It is a change in kind rather than only in degree (Watzlawick et al., 1974). In essence, second order changes are meta changes – significant changes in thinking or when changes occur as a result of examining assumptions and values. These changes are about understanding the inner or subjective world of human beings (Sterling, 2011).

**Third order changes**

Bateson, as cited in Sterling (2011), introduced a third level of change – third order changes or epistemic changes. These changes require moving away from the operational way of knowledge and thought generation that shapes the insight, experience and interaction of individuals with the world and involve thinking about and assessing the foundations of thoughts – a dramatic shift of consciousness – the experience of harbouring a worldview rather that upholding subjective perspectives of the world. These changes facilitate a more open view characterized by other views and possibilities. Sterling (2011) argues that these changes can be described as an expansion of consciousness and a more
ecological way of seeing transformation. These changes are validated by the views of others and thus holistic in nature.

**Change from the perspective of the Ecological Systems Theory**

The practical application of implementing change in ecological systems is discussed by Kelly *et al.* (2000) in Rappaport and Seidman (2000). These authors wrote about the concept of structures and processes within an environment. “Structures” are defined by Kelly *et al.* (2000) as elements within social systems that provide a context within which members of systems interact with other participants in systems while “processes” are actions in systems that allow structures to be created, changed or acted upon – the relationship between participants and structures.

The ecological framework of structures and processes is provided for by eight concepts that differentiate between the two main concepts. “Structures” are defined by the following four concepts outlined by Kelly *et al.* (2000):

1) **Personal resource potential** – Refers to opportunities available to individuals within social systems to provide certain characteristics, potential or information that improve the social competence of other members of social systems.

2) **Social system resources** – Refer to clusters, measures or occasions that drive the growth of a social system.

3) **Social settings** – Refer to places or sites that promote change for the formation of both personal and social system resources in order to improve a sense of identity and integration.

4) **System boundaries** – Refer to the relationships within social systems (e.g., between two institutions or between two communities).

The four concepts outlined by Kelly *et al.* (2000) that define “processes” are as follows:
1) **Reciprocity** – Refers to the various ways in which agents in social systems describe and create give-and-take exchanges.

2) **Networking** – Refers to different activities that agents undertake to generate interaction with other agents within their own social system and with members of other systems.

3) **Boundary spanning** – Refers to agents in one social system establishing relationships and interactions with agents in other systems to recognize and share resources amongst systems.

4) **Adaptation** – Refers to the processes that agents in social systems produce to adapt to the impositions of their own system as enforced by external systems.

In essence, structures define the “what” of social systems while processes define “how” specific actions (Kelly *et al.*, 2000) are completed or implemented. Both concepts prepare systems to undergo successful changes – allowing changes in structures and processes while maintaining an identity.

The discussion of Kelly’s ecological perspective leads to an introduction of a more practical implementation of change within ecological systems. Later on, he discusses an ecological metaphor where he outlines four principles that are crucial in understanding changes within ecological systems and the impact of these changes on people and communities.

The ecological metaphor is defined by Nelson and Prilleltensky (2010) as the interaction amongst individuals and the multiple social systems in which they exist. The concept of an ecological metaphor is also discussed by Kagan, Burton, Duckett, Lawthom and Siddiquee (2011) wherein four principles of an ecological perspective are introduced:

1) **Interdependence** – Asserts that different parts of ecosystems are interconnected and change in one component of a system causes a ripple effect with regard to other components (Levine & Perkins, 1987). For example, the ecological systems theory
provides a multi-level analysis of the microsystem, mesosystem, macrosystem, exosystem and chronosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

A typical example used by various authors in explaining interdependence is the deinstitutionalization of patients from psychiatric hospitals in the 1950s. Patients were discharged from hospitals into poor living conditions (substandard housing, homelessness and inadequate support services) in their community. The ripple effect of this deinstitutionalization included unprepared communities, prejudice and rejections of these discharged patients by community members. The understanding of the principle of interdependence is, therefore, important in avoiding unintended consequences of change (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010).

2) Transference of energy/resources – derive their energy from the sun; and plants fertilize the soil for other plants. Suggests that in ecosystems, the transference of energy reveals individual components that can compromise these systems and their relationship with each other. For example, large animals feed on smaller ones; smaller animals feed on plants; plants Energy is thus transferred throughout cycles (Levine & Perkins, 1987).

Human communities have similar qualities. For example, on cultural level stories are transmitted and rephrased to provide meaning and direction with regard to collective activities (Kagan et al., 2011). This principle is, therefore, focused on the identification, development and allocation of resources within systems. In the case of deinstitutionalized patients from psychiatric hospitals, resources were not reallocated from hospitals to communities. This resulted in inadequate support services and housing for these discharged patients (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010), which led to unintended consequences and unsuccessful change processes.

3) Adaptation – Refers to the capacity of systems to adapt with regard to contextual threats or policy changes and to increase their range of options in order to survive (Adger, 2006). Adaptation describes the process by which individuals change their habits or characteristics in order to cope with available or changing resources in order to survive (Levine & Perkins, 1987).

Looking back at the example provided of deinstitutionalized patients of psychiatric hospitals, communities had to adapt to the integration of people with
ongoing mental health problems; community support workers had to cope with inadequate funding; and families had to become primary care providers (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010).

4) Succession – It is implied that change, both artificial and natural, can contribute to our understanding of systems in the first place (Levine & Perkins, 1987). Succession involves a long-term perspective and draws attention to the historical context of problems and the need of planning for a preferred future (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Succession is concerned with how ecological systems change over time (Kagan et al., 2011).

Some authors have made changes to Kelly’s work and added more critical principles in addressing ecological changes. Kagan et al. (2011) have added five more principles on top of those established by Kelly:

5) Unintended consequences – These consequences have been established by Kagan et al. (2011) as a result of human interventions trying to address certain aspects of ecosystems that are difficult to anticipate. For example, poor communities were supported in developing skills to take over management of social housing complexes. This support led to an increased sense of community identity and confidence, and skills in negotiating with authorities were developed. However, it also led to taking hostile decisions with regard to other groups. The poor communities became more inward-looking and strong in their own identity while neglecting other less equipped groups (Kagan et al., 2011).

6) Non-linearity – This added principle posits that the effects of change in ecosystems are typically but spread over other non-anticipated areas of benefit for these ecosystems. For example, it may seem that little progress is being made on social issues, but then a number of mutually reinforcing developments take place in short succession producing a real change (Kagan et al., 2011).

7) Fields and edges – Fields and systems are described as concepts of ecosystems. Fields are considered environments with boundaries within which interaction occurs. Ecosystems are considered as interactions within fields that contain structure and complexity and cannot be simply reduced to the sum of those interactions. Fields that are called ecosystems do not generally have hard
boundaries and allow transactions to occur between adjacent ecosystems. This leads to the formation of edges which are the areas where two ecosystems meet and energy is transferred. Consequently, the use of resources amongst communities are maximized and can lead to sustainable changes (Kagan et al., 2011).

8) **Nesting** – Refers to the way habitats and ecosystems can be defined on various scales. Identification and belonging as well as family and friendship group communities are nested within social network communities, which in turn are nested within communities of interest such as religious, political, ethnic and occupational communities. The understanding of these communities and forms of nesting are important in order to avoid oversimplifying (Kagan et al., 2011).

9) **Ecological designs** – Designs in a sense of creating social contexts include: (1) creating and sharing resources locally and not depending on inward investments; (2) the exploitation of edge effects such as interacting with other ecosystems or communities and transferring necessary resources; (3) strengthening community resilience (resilience is discussed later in this chapter); (4) creating elements that produce multiple revenues; and (5) attention is given to the carrying capacity of communities – living within the limits of ecosystems and within available resources (Kagan et al., 2011).

**Theoretical perspectives relating to ecological changes**

There are various other theories that have been developed to address the process of change in systems. Some of the following theories can be applied to this study in an attempt to understand the process of change within the different levels of higher education institutions as ecological systems.

**Lewin’s Three-Step Change Model**

Lewin’s theory was applied by Dannar (2011a) to demonstrate organizational change processes. Lewin focuses on what influences people to change and introduced three steps that make change successful: unfreeze; change; and refreeze (Dannar, 2011a). These steps are illustrated and discussed below:
Before changes affect, systems are in equilibrium. Lewin believes that an equilibrium needs to be destabilized before old behaviour could be discarded in order to initiate new behaviour. This psychologically demanding task is called *Unfreezing* – the status quo and constitutes the first step of Lewin’s change model (Dannar, 2011a). Some activities, highlighted by Kritsonis (2005), which may be helpful in achieving the unfreezing step, include encouraging individuals by readying them for coming changes; building trust and creating recognition for the need to make changes; and actively partaking in identifying difficulties and devising resolutions within groups.

The unfreezing process leads to the *Transition or Change* stage where the cultivation of a long-term relationship between leaders and followers begins. When leaders and followers work together towards the same goals and no resisting or restraining forces are pulling them in opposite directions, change can occur (Dannar, 2011a). This step can also be viewed as movement taking place and the activities that assist people in achieving goals, including the persuasion of individuals to admit that the status quo is not helpful to them and motivating them to see problems from a new viewpoint; working together in pursuit of fresh and relevant information; and bringing the opinions of groups under the attention of influential authority figures who are also open to change (Kritsonis, 2005).

The third step of Lewin’s change model is the *Refreezing* stage. Refreezing seeks to re-stabilize groups to find a new perceived state of equilibrium in order to avoid relapses into old behaviour – a process that still requires group activities and a strong relationship.
between leaders and followers (Dannar, 2011a). In essence, refreezing is the actual integration of new values into community values and traditions with the purpose of stabilizing a new equilibrium by balancing both driving and restraining forces (Kritsonis, 2005).

In summary, Lewin’s three-step change model illustrates the importance of the involvement of stakeholders when implementing changes such as mergers of higher education institutions. The theory emphasizes that the key element to the success or failure of mergers lies in the degree to which leaders at the macrosystem and exosystem level and at various sectors of higher education systems involve followers as subordinating structures of higher education systems.

**Lippitt’s Phases of Change Theory**

Lippitt’s phases of change theory are a seven-step theory created by Lippitt, Watson and Westley as an extension to Lewin’s Three-Step Change Theory. Contrary to Lewin’s three-step change model, Lippitt’s phases of change theory emphasizes the role and responsibility of “change agents” and not necessarily the progression of change (Kritsonis, 2005). The seven steps are:
1) Identify the problem.

2) Evaluate the drive for and capability of change.

3) Evaluate the resources and drive of change agents, including their willingness to facilitate change and control as well as their output of energy.

4) Select progressive change entities. Plans of action are established and approaches are developed.

5) The role of change agents ought to be carefully chosen and well-comprehended by all entities so that the goals are clearly defined. Examples of roles are: supporters, architects and professionals.

6) Uphold changes. Engagement, feedback and group facilitation are crucial in this step of the change process.

7) Progressively minimize external help. Change agents ought to progressively pull away from their role in changes taking place – this will happen when changes become part of the organizational culture.

According to Henderson (2002), the ultimate success with regard to Lippitt’s phases of change theory hinges on change agents transferring the duty of establishing changes to the client organization. Commitment to change is promoted by participation in the change process and by timeous accounting which enforces structural support.

Henderson (2002) further argues that organizational change studies show an ongoing high degree of failure with regard to transformational change efforts in organizations. Acquisitions, global competition and new technology are pivotal elements that necessitate speedy transformational changes in order to ensure the survival of organizations in environments where sporadic changes take place. Leaders, scholars and experts should, therefore, continuously search for more effective methods for organizational transformation.

In essence, Lippitt’s phases of change theory emphasizes the need to view stakeholders in higher education institutions as change agents who should instigate the change process in order to realize a successful change process. Mergers of higher education institutions
cannot, therefore be viewed a success unless all stakeholders are committed to intended changes.

**Resilience**

The concept of resilience can be used to conceptualize the study of higher education mergers as a change process. Resilience can be defined as the capability of systems to avoid disruptions and to regroup while undergoing changes in order to maintain basically the same purpose, form, identity and feedback (Folke, 2006). Resilience in literature has been introduced and defined in various forms. Adger (2006) defines socio-ecological resilience as the ability of systems to adapt to new circumstances. Furthermore, Adger (2000) defines social resilience as the capacity of systems to resist external disturbances to their social infrastructure such as environmental variability or social, economic and political turmoil.

As mentioned earlier, higher education institutions are viewed as entities that undergo transformation or changes on multiple levels. Higher education institutions can be viewed as ecological systems and from time to time these systems demonstrate the capacity to withstand disturbances, to reorganize themselves, and to adapt to new circumstances as a result of change.

Chetty (2010) is of the opinion that mergers have a serious impact on the transformation of higher education systems. Mergers, therefore, be viewed as agents of change that subject higher education institutions to resilience. Since resilience requires adaptation as a characteristic (Adger, 2006), and adaptive processes that relate to the capacity to withstand and deal with changes emerging from self-organization systems (Folke, 2006), it is important that a discussion concerning resilience be coupled with that of adaptation (Gallopin, 2006) in analysing the impact of change within higher education institutions.

Adaptability – adaptive capacity – refers to the capacity of systems to be able to absorb environmental hazards or policy changes and to increase their range of variability in order to cope (Adger, 2006). Gallopin (2006) defines adaptability as the ability to become adapted to a range of environmental incidents.

In social-ecological systems such as higher education institutions, adaptability involves two different components (Gallopin 2006):
• The ability of systems to survive environmental changes – the ability to maintain and advance their state amidst changes to their environment.
• The ability of systems to advance their state with regard to their environment even if the latter does not change or to enhance the range to which these systems need to adapt.

Mergers – as agents of change within social-ecological systems such as higher education institutions – elicit challenges for systems to adapt in order to be resilient and to survive institutional changes and transformation at a microsystem level, and societal and governmental impositions at a macrosystem level.

Vulnerability

The vulnerability of systems reflects the sensitivity of systems to threatening conditions and the capacity for resilience of systems to cope, adapt or recover from the impacts of these unfavourable conditions (Smit & Wandel, 2006). Gallopin (2006) conceptualizes vulnerability as components that include exposure to external stress, sensitivity to stress, and the capacity to adapt. In support of Gallopin (2006), and Smit and Wandel (2006), Adger (2006) explains the two concepts of exposure and sensitivity as the former being the nature and degree to which systems experience environmental or socio-political stress while the latter is the degree to which systems are modified or affected by stress.

Gallopin (2006) further argues that vulnerability – like resilience – is generally viewed as being specifically vulnerable to stressors that have an impact on systems. However, systems can be vulnerable to certain disturbances and not to others.

Adger (2006) posits that vulnerability to environmental changes cannot be separated from an influence on a macrosystem level such as resource use by the broader political economy. As such, vulnerability is strongly influenced by purposeful human actions that reinforce self-interest and power sharing over and above interacting with other ecological systems.

In essence, higher education institutions as ecological systems are affected by a vulnerability when they are exposed to external stress on a macrosystem level when government policies determine the type of changes impacting them. They become sensitive to these stressors up to a point when transformation takes place – demonstrating resilience and adaptability. Macrosystem level stressors can be attributed to mergers.
The concept of a merger

A merger emanates from an economic perspective. It is often used hand in hand with the term acquisition with little variance between the two terms (Hodgkinson & Ford, 2005). From an economic viewpoint, a merger or an acquisition can be defined as a combination of two or more corporations into one new corporation (Roberts, Wallace, & Moles, 2012). In essence, a merger is an amalgamation of multiple entities into one.

According to Robert et al. (2012), the difference between a merger and an acquisition lies in the manner in which the combination takes place. In the case of a merger, entities engage in a negotiation process for mutual benefits before a merger takes place. In the case of an acquisition, there is usually no negotiation process – one entity buys the other one and becomes wholly owned by the buying entity and, therefore, cease to exist as a separate entity. The dominant entity is then known as the “acquirer” and the lesser one the “acquired”.

Botha (2001) further presents various types of mergers as follows:

- **Vertical merger** – A merger between entities with a buyer-seller relationship. The one entity moves away from serving the market to linking with the parent entity.
- **Horizontal merger** – A merger between entities with identical products operating in the same or in different markets. One entity would acquire a supplier or a customer.
- **Concentric merger** – A merger between entities with identical production or distribution technology.
- **Conglomerate merger** – A merger between entities with no buyer-seller relationship, no technical and distributional relationship, nor identical products and completely unrelated in production and in scope.
- **Congeneric merger** – A merger in which one entity attains another in the same general industry but neither are in a similar scope of business nor a supplier or customer.

Botha (2001) went on to classify mergers according their friendliness and hostility. He describes a friendly merger as one which emanates from an agreement between the management of both entities to be amalgamated into one. Such a merger has a consensus that the two entities are worth more together than separately and both benefit equally from the merger. In the hostile merger there usually is disagreement to the amalgamation and
often power struggles prevail. One organization usually tries to gain control of the other by wanting to buy or swallow it.

The concept of merging entities has been widely adopted across various sectors of societies such as in governmental departments and in higher education institutions. In higher education institutions, a merger can be defined as a combination of two or more institutions to create one new organization or when the identity of the original organization is retained (Goreham, 2011). The definition of a merger by Botha (2001) is not so different from Goreham (2011). Botha (2001) adds that the resulting entity after the merger usually maintains the identity of the larger entity. Chipunza and Gwarinda (2010) further elaborated that the newly formed institution after a merger must consist of a single governing body whereby all resources, reliabilities and responsibilities of the old institutions are transferred into the new one.

The concept of a merger from a higher education perspective is often used invariably with the term “incorporation” as opposed to the use of “acquisition” from an economic viewpoint (Sehoole, 2005). However, contrary to the variance between a merger and an acquisition as found in the economic sector, Botha (2001) views an incorporation and a merger as the same.

Rationales and drivers of mergers in higher education

Roberts et al. (2012) suggest that the fundamental drive to merge is driven by a chain of rationales – a higher level of logic that presents terms under which a decision to merge could be made; and drivers – mid-level specific factors that contribute towards the rationale for a merger to take place.

Mergers are believed to have the potential to enhance system integration; improve quality of both teaching and research; address issues of equity and efficiency of higher education systems; and produce long-term benefits for both the individuals and the system as a whole such as (1) the establishment of larger and more comprehensive institutions; (2) an increased variety and quality of academic programmes; (3) an improved student service; (4) an enhanced student choice; (5) institutional flexibility; and (6) an efficient way to save costs (Pinheiro, Geschwind, & Aarrevaara, 2015).

Harman and Meek (2002) identified some of the drivers for mergers in higher education when pressure is experienced: (1) to increase efficiency and effectiveness; (2) to address problems of non-sustainable institutions and institutional fragmentation; (3) to widen
student access and to implement broad scale equity strategies; (4) to adapt programmes offered in order to accommodate larger student diversity and to enhance the quality of graduates; and (5) to increase governmental control with regard to the general direction higher education systems are heading. Arnolds, Stofile, and Lillah (2013) added that some of the drivers were the need to reinforce the relation between teaching and research, to usher in a new funding model that inspires higher education institutions to expand their funding sources, and to avoid the duplication that existed among universities in order to reduce cost from the government side.

Within the South African context, the concept of mergers was introduced in 2001 when the former Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, published the National Plan for Higher Education aimed at restructuring the higher education sector (Seepe, 2010). According to the National Plan for Higher Education, restructuring would mean a reduction in the number of South African universities from 36 to 23 through mergers and incorporations – a process which resulted in the formation of 11 traditional universities, 11 universities of technology, and six comprehensive universities (Arnolds et al, 2013). The National Plan for Higher Education identified goals and objectives for mergers as (Ministry of Education, 2003):

1) to increase access to higher education,
2) to promote equity,
3) to ensure institutional diversity through mission and programme differentiation, and
4) to build high level research capacity.

A deeper rationale for mergers in South Africa was stated by SASCO (2009) as emanating from the needs to:

1) overcome apartheid induced divisions between historically white institutions (HWIs) and historically black institutions (HBIs),
2) achieve cost effectiveness in the use of resources,
3) enhance institutional differentiation, and
4) to promote student mobility.

Chipunza and Gwarinda (2010) and Arnolds et al. (2013) supported this by adding that there was a need to redress inequalities of the previous dispensation, to achieve a new social order, to respond to the new societal demands within the higher education sector. Other reasons included increasing student access, improving technology, research, and training to respond
to the national and international challenges, to create a democratic and non-racial higher education system, and to free higher education from the geopolitical mindset of apartheid (Arnolds et al, 2013; Seepe, 2010).

Jansen (2002) reviewed the rationale for mergers in South Africa and mentioned that a merger can be deemed successful if it:

1) enhances the access and equity goals for both staff and students,
2) enables economies of scale through the creation of larger multi-purpose institutions with more efficient uses of buildings, facilities, and human resource,
3) overcomes the threat to institutional viability in terms of student numbers, income and expenditure patterns, and management capacities, and
4) creates new institutions with new identities and cultures that transcend their past racial and ethnic institutional histories and contribute to their decentralization.

**Implementation of mergers**

Oakleigh Consulting Limited (2010) conducted a review of higher education collaborations, alliances and mergers. The study suggested that the critical success factors and good practice of mergers require the following:

1) a strong educational basis, shared vision, and a strategic fit between institutions,
2) an effective merger planning and implementation process,
3) addressing staff, students, and cultural issues including open communication,
4) realistic estimations of cost and potential savings,
5) complementary missions and cultures, and
6) active management of benefits, and devising and tracking of measures of success.

In an examination of mergers in higher education institutions in Australia, the United Kingdom, South Africa, the United States of America and Japan, Lang (2003) presented the following five characteristics that should be thoroughly examined in order to achieve a successful merger:

- The motivation for a planned merger should receive serious attention. The focus should be on the rationale for institutions to merge and the objectives for survival and reform should be predicted.
- The political economy of a merger plays an important role. The focus should be on the actual events that occur during a merger.
• The participants in a merger – including the merging institutions, other organizations involved, such as funding organizations, Government and sub-units of institutions – are the key role-players. Their interests count.

• How the merger takes place is of the utmost importance. The focus should be on establishing whether a new institution is indeed formed or if smaller institutions are “swallowed” by larger ones. The level of diversity and competitiveness with other similar institutions also need serious attention.

• Possible alternatives to a merger should be considered. It should be monitored if some of the entities rely solely on the merger to meet their objectives while others regard the merger as a possibility for inter-institutional co-operation.

Authors identified three phases of a merger process that are necessary for planning and implementation. These three phases are outlined by the Ministry of Education (2003) as follows:

• **Pre-merger phase** – When institutions are expected to submit to the legal requirements for the creation of a merger and to commence with preparative work.

• **Interim phase** – When the new institution becomes operational on the date published in the Government Gazette and the interim council has been put into place to serve until the nomination of the substantive governance and management structures.

• **Post-merger stage** – When the substantive governance has taken office and the full merging of all units has been implemented.

Hall, Symes and Leucher (2004) mention that mergers that have been successfully implemented were found to have shown to have negotiated these mergers to benefit all of the relevant role-players; the principle of equal partnership during the pre-merger phase has been addressed; specific due-diligence assessments were completed beforehand; a memorandum of understanding has been established and a clear merger plan outlining the transitional and integration phases of the merger was outlined; an interim council in accordance with the specific circumstances of parties involved was put in place; a new institutional culture and identity were developed; a well-defined mission and vision to address academic integration were developed; and models for multi-campus governance in terms of their impact on effective operation and academic integration were evaluated.

In addition, Chipunza and Gwarinda (2010) emphasized the need for transformational leaders in any successful merger. Transitional leadership is one characterized by charisma,
inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individual considerations. Transformational leadership differs from transactional leadership in the sense that the latter involves promising rewards for followers’ efforts and responding to subordinates’ immediate interests. Chipunza and Gwarinda (2010) further argue that by using charisma, the leader communicates a vision and mission of the institution, imparts pride in subordinate’s, and resultantly gains respect and trust. The transformational leader gives attention to individual followers, provides guidance, and promotes openness of ideas, intelligence, reasonableness, and cautious problem solving.

**International and local Merger trends**

**Global merger trends in higher education institutions**

Some researchers have provided an international overview of merger processes with particular reference to mergers in Australia, The Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. Skodvin (1999) found the following experiences as lessons learned from mergers in higher education institutions of the above-mentioned countries: (1) mergers fail to resemble a marriage between equal partners; (2) the geographical location is of crucial importance – the most successful mergers took place between institutions which were geographically proximal to each other; (3) Massive resources are needed for planning, co-ordination and infrastructure – mergers are usually costly in the short-term; (4) in some universities the harmonization of academic programmes seemed to be difficult in the short-term after a merge took place.

From the above-mentioned lessons, the interplay took mostly place on a macrosystem level. A decision to merge two or more institutions should supposedly have considered factors such as geographical proximity, financial viability and control (United Nations Public Administration Network, 2008). However, it is inevitable that this interplay overlaps onto the microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem levels where it has a direct impact on individuals in communities.

The institutional restructuring which informed higher education mergers in Australia, reducing the number of institutions from 10 to three, and funding model adopted resulted in severe adverse impacts on the higher education system. The adverse effects included neglect of basic infrastructure, student fee hikes, and reduced income from research output and third party (Arnolds et al, 2013). They also included alienation of human resource due to the cooperative style of management, threat to quality assurance in teaching and
learning due to reduced funding, and increase in administration, teaching and research supervision workloads (Arnolds et al., 2013).

Another case in point with lessons learned in the merging of higher education institutions was the merger of technical colleges in the Kentucky and Minnesota states of the United States of America. Ellis (2011) conducted a study with 30 faculty professionals as the participants – 15 from the Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) and 15 from the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU). The aim of the study was to develop an understanding of: (1) the factors leading to the merger of technical colleges in two states; (2) the dynamics that took place during the merger process; (3) the impact of the merger after a decade; and (4) the lessons learned from this merger.

The study found that the KCTCS experienced inadequate resources and funding, inadequate workforce development, student barriers and a political drive, power and will before the merger took place. The institutions experienced cultural resistance, challenges in administrative process integration and problems with regard to the integration of people and during multilevel broad-based involvement during the merger process. However, there was an overall positive impression about the impact of the merger a decade after the merger took place. This merger produced three core concepts as experienced by the faculty professionals: (1) cultural resistance; (2) a communication need; and (3) stakeholder importance (Ellis, 2011).

Similarly, the Canadian experience of post-secondary education mergers was characterized notable adverse effects. Arnolds et al. (2013) reported that Canadian mergers were challenged by insufficient communication and beaurocracy in decision-making processes, inadequate funding, and neglect of basic infrastructure. Institutional autonomy was often disregarded, lack of cohesion prevailed due to lack of trust and commitment, unhealthy competition among members developed, roles and expectations were not clearly articulated, visibility and availability of member institutions declined, and low morale and participation from various groups prevailed (Arnolds et al. 2013). Part of the positive outcomes of Canadian mergers included increased cohesion, access, consolidation of academic programmes, and improved quality assurance (Arnolds et al. 2013).

Fielden and Markham (1997) identified four possible problems caused by merging institutions of higher education in London. These were: (1) a clash of institutional
cultures; (2) different educational philosophies and priorities; (3) a disruption due to relocation was caused for staff members and students; and (4) the poor quality of academic programmes. The study further found that the expected benefits of merger processes concentrated more on the strategic and academic aspects rather than on direct financial benefits (Fielden & Markham, 1997).

South African merger trends in higher education institutions

In South Africa, the goal of merging higher education institutions – as initially proposed by the government – emanated from the following merger policy objectives as discussed by Adu and Mantashe (2014):

1) To create a unified national system of education.
2) To increase access to education. People who were previously disadvantaged would be given an equal opportunity to access higher education.
3) To respond to changing societies in terms of technological, global and national demands and economic needs.

One of the first higher education mergers to be implemented in South Africa was the merger between the historically white University of Natal and the Indian dominated University of Durban-Westville. The merger resulted in what is known today as the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) (Seepe, 2010). The merger of UKZN appears to be one of the successful mergers in South Africa, having demonstrated the ability to effectively harmonize academic programmes through a development of a single, unitary academic architecture which was accelerated from the onset (Seepe, 2010).

However, most mergers appear to have not been as successful as envisaged. Chetty (2010) conducted a micro-level study of the merger between Technikon Natal and ML Sultan which resulted in the Durban University of Technology (DUT). The study found that nearly 50 per cent of the participants felt that the merger did not result in high quality management. 42 per cent of the participants were of the opinion that the merger did not help establish a high-quality council. Many of the participants thought that their governance structure and system were weakened by the merger.

The study indicated that financial difficulties – especially cash flow problems that were experienced for at least the first two years during the post-merger phase – certainly caused the new university significant harm (Chetty, 2010).
Furthermore, significant short falls were experienced by the university community in areas such as throughput, skilled staff, executive leadership, governors and governance (Chetty, 2010).

Mabokela and Wei (2007) further emphasize essential conditions for mergers such as the geographic location, past co-operation, complementary instructional programmes, improvement in the quality of academic programmes, common political interest, decisive legislation, robust directing by Government, and skilled and dedicated management. Besides these conditions, Kotecha and Harman (2001), as cited in Mabokela and Wei (2007), emphasize culture as an important variable in merger processes as “a particular cultural challenge for higher education leaders to manage the merging of divergent campus cultures into coherent educational communities that display high levels of cultural integration and loyalty to the new institution”.

Researchers argue that mergers may impoverish diversity within organizations and, when examining the importance of mergers in the transformation process within the South African higher education system, mergers may not be able to deliver a successful transformation of institutions without changing the origins of organizational behaviour or disrupting the institutional culture (Mabokela & Wei, 2007).

The merger between the University of South Africa (UNISA), the Technicon South Africa (TSA), and the Vista University Distance Education Campus (VUDEC) is also an important example. Kilfoil and Groenewald (2005) acknowledge that for any change to occur successfully, emotional and behavioural aspects should be addressed as thoroughly as operational issues. Meaning the impact of change on individuals on a microsystem level cannot be ignored. It is, therefore, important to determine whether the intended change will be viewed as a success or failure. Kilfoil and Groenewald (2005) further highlighted the following critical principles in the implementation of change on a microsystem level which were successfully applied in the merger of UNISA, TSA and VUDEC:

1) **Putting principles, people and culture first, and structures last**

This principle entails creating a collective perspective and being all-inclusive. To achieve this principle, it is important to assume participative decision-making and to practise relationship-based strategies. This principle also entails addressing emotional matters by (1) treating employees as appreciated and knowledgeable
resources and pillars of strength; (2) vigorously including people in the merger process; (3) establishing harmony; (4) shying away from generating “losers” during the process of change and instead working towards a win-win situation; and (5) presenting choices wherever possible to alleviate fear and worry.

This principle also entails generating capabilities which can be achieved by (1) arranging time for working over the process to achieve consensus instead of only attaining compliance; (2) offering the necessary support – be it emotional support or in terms of resources; and (3) offering the material and skills development necessary for achieving change.

Another element highlighted by the above-mentioned principle is dealing with diversity and resistance. This can be addressed by (1) responding to the question of “what’s in it for me?”; (2) offering acknowledgment, enticements and benefits; (3) forestalling and managing disputes in the open – amenably and timeously; and (4) concentrating less on content and more on process.

2) Communicate, communicate, and communicate!

The principle of communication is achievable by (1) distributing information and facts known to managers so that all people can gain a common viewpoint; (2) assisting people to see the bigger picture, lessening confusion by providing people with notices about new necessities; and (3) clarifying prospects, standards and requirements.

3) Planning well

The principle of planning well can be accomplished by (1) concentrating on main priorities; (2) categorizing big changes into practicable phases; and (3) reducing the amount of time spent in the transition phase.

The above-mentioned principles are crucial in ensuring that stakeholders and sub-systems within higher education institutions are well-integrated and goal-orientated and that the change process is owned by all of the individuals within a particular system.

Makgoba and Price (2011) point out that the merger that resulted in the UL brought about many structural and operational difficulties which, amongst others, included: (1) logistical difficulties directly linked to the distance between the two campuses – more than 300 km
apart; (2) the centralization of senior governance and management; and (3) attempts to relocate the former MEDUNSA to Polokwane – which could be linked to the declining quality of programmes.

Goldman and Van Tonder (2006) argue that there is substantial evidence that mergers are not always as successful as they were intended to be. These authors drew attention in their study to the merger that resulted in the University of Johannesburg (UJ) and the experiences of academics during the pre-merger phase. This merger took place amongst the Rand Afrikaans University, the Technicon Witwatersrand, and two campuses of Vista University – the East Rand and Soweto Campus.

Goldman and Van Tonder (2006) found that the reaction of academics to this merger was initially characterized by fear and concerns about the impact the merger would have. However, a shift in attitude was noted over time. Their study posits that the initial fear was due to an overall lack of information about the merger after its announcement, and the personal readiness of individuals.

Much of the general failures of mergers in South Africa are attributed to the lack of experience of institutional leaders who championed the process of mergers (Chipunza and Gwarinda, 2010). Another factor which contributed largely to the failure of mergers in South Africa is identified by Arnolds et al. (2013) as the inability of leaders to consider the impacts of a merger on employees. These authors stated that 55-70 per cent of mergers is said to have failed because of neglect of human resource issues.

The issues around demoralization of human resource can be attributed to the impact of ineffective management styles on the psychological contracts. Van Straaten Theron (2011) states that the psychological contract that occurs between the employee and the institutions is fragile due to psychological recession - an emotional state in which an employee feels extremely vulnerable to economic hardship. Therefore change or inconsistencies between the employee and the institutions lead to a decline in employee commitment, motivation, and performance (Van Straaten Theron, 2011; Arnolds et al. 2013). It is on this basis that Arnolds et al. (2013) posit that most mergers in South Africa failed because mergers adversely affected job security, management-employee relations, and performance standards.

Consolidation of academic programmes was one of the hardest challenges of most mergers institutions in South Africa leading to merger failure. Consolidation of programmes was
essential in avoiding duplication and overlap in programme and service provision and in promoting joint development and delivery of programmes (Woodward, nd).

From these above-mentioned cases – in a South African context and globally – the following are common themes elicited by researchers as challenges experienced by merged institutions of higher education:

1) Geographic proximity  
2) Financial viability  
3) Decentralization of governance and control  
4) Harmonization and quality of programmes  
5) Demoralization of staff members and students

The merger that resulted in the UL

A merger was not a new concept to the institutions involved. The former MEDUNSA component of this merger had been exposed to a merger in one of its faculties – the Veterinary Sciences Faculty with the University of Pretoria (UP) (Jansen, 2002). In December 1998, the Minister of Education, Professor Sbusiso Bengu, announced the merger of the Faculty of Veterinary Sciences at the historically black MEDUNSA with the Faculty of Veterinary Sciences at the historically white UP (Lethoko, 2011).

In the course of its continued existence, MEDUNSA was yet again faced with another merger – the entire university this time. In October 2003, the Minister of Education, Kader Asmal, announced the merger between MEDUNSA and the UNIN to establish the UL (Limpopo Leader, 2005).

The merger was a failure bound to happen by merging two historically black and disadvantaged institutions (MEDUNSA and UNIN). As a result, the merger brought about many structural and operational difficulties which, amongst others, included: (1) logistical difficulties directly linked to the distance between the two campuses – they were more than 300 km apart; (2) centralization of senior governance and management; and (3) attempts to relocate the former MEDUNSA to Polokwane – which could be linked to the declining quality of academic programmes (Makgoba & Price, 2011).
In May 2013, the Minister of Higher Education and Training – Dr Blade Nzimande – gazetted his intention to establish a new university which will incorporate the former MEDUNSA. The merger that resulted in the UL was, therefore, “unbundled”. This public notice followed the Makgoba and Price (2011) task team report which suggested that the former MEDUNSA was neither viable nor sustainable as a stand-alone institution (Government Gazette No. 36492, 2013).

Subsequently, in May 2014, Dr Blade Nzimande gazetted the finalization of the establishment of the new university in Gauteng incorporating the former MEDUNSA and named it the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University (SMU) (Government Gazette No. 37658, 2014).

The Role of student organizations

Student organizations are generally referred to as organizations that are voluntary – students voluntarily join these organizations to become members. Often higher education institutions have their own definition, terms and policies regulating the affiliation and funding of student organizations within institutions. For example, the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), defines a registered student organization as a group of five or more students actively enrolled with the UNLV (UNLV, 2015).

The Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) added into their definition that student organizations do not discriminate on the basis of any protected category; be it ethnicity, gender, age, colour, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, veteran status or disabilities (Penn State, 2015). In the UL and ultimately in the SMU, student organizations are provided for by the constitution of the SRC and this council refers to student structures or groups affiliated with an institution through the office of the SRC (University of Limpopo SRC Constitution, 2010).

Dale (1984) posits that organizations cannot be perceived as merely an official agreement by authorities and subordinates or as social systems in which individuals have an impact on each other. On the contrary, organizations should function as a total system in which the environment, the official agreement and technical systems are continuously intermingling. This notion positions student organizations as sub-systems within larger higher education systems constantly interacting with other structures within higher education institutions. A sub-system is a system that exists within a larger system. It is a set of components interrelating for a purpose that relates to that of the larger system.
Furthermore, higher education systems are sub-systems of a nation's global social, political, cultural, religious and economic system (Oyebade, 2015).

Generally, the role of student organizations in the United States of America can be traced back to the time after World War I. Before the establishment of student gatherings, student activities were less prevalent on college campuses – it was difficult for students to connect with their institution. Initially, the role of student organizations was to enhance social and cultural life on a campus. This changed in the 1990s and student organizations became instrumental in creating opportunities for student learning and engagement within institutions which led to research and the intentional practise of student activities (Culver, Ziadie, & Cowherd, 2013).

In realizing the role of student organizations within the European higher education institutions, Mirica and Abdulamit (2014) conducted a study on the contribution of student organizations with regard to quality assurance and enhancement amongst Romanian higher education institutions. The study discussed and positioned student organizations as participants in official decision-making bodies of institutions, more specifically in providing feedback about student learning experiences which included their experiences with regard to the curriculum, learning resources, assessment and feedback, student progression and achievement, guidance and support systems, and quality enhancement of learning experiences.

Similarly, Makinen and Nyman (2008) from Finland published an article on the role of student organizations in bringing quality to the education process. The article holds that while most higher education institutions have established several means to evaluate quality teaching, these means rarely offer a possibility to give feedback on the structures or processes at institutions. As a result, institutions lack quality supervision of their processes and students remain stuck with problems with limited means to bring matters under the attentions of these institutions. In order to eliminate misconduct during the application of processes, there should be an establishment/agent close to students with the power to take up such matters with institutions. Such an establishment or agent, according to Makinen and Nyman (2008), is student organizations which naturally represent students and provide them with feedback from institutions and vice versa as well as contributing to quality enhancement.
In Norway, Bergan (2003) wrote an article reporting on a survey conducted in 2002 on student participation in higher education governance. This article views students as members of the academic community rather than clients within higher education institutions. The article holds that students have an important role to play via participation in their education and they have a responsibility to try and improve their education, should they find their education unsatisfactory. This can be done by being registered members of a student organization.

Studies in the United States also revealed that student organizations registered a number of impacts and experiences during the merger processes of higher education institutions (Kroontz, 2009). An organizational culture has been found to be affected by mergers in the sense that it is very difficult to modify cultures during mergers. It would, therefore, be really troublesome to develop an exhaustive list of cultural characteristics that would be of interest in the context of mergers. Even when merging institutions seem compatible, there are often underlying cultural differences between different organizations and these can become difficult to integrate and harmonize (Kroontz, 2009).

In the merger of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU), student organizations and institutional communities at large experienced significant confusion, conflict, immobilization and financial distress arising from the naming of the new institution, during policy harmonization, funding and distribution of funds, and programme harmonization (Wallace, 1998). However, the experiences of student organizations were different during the merger of the Kansas Community and Technical Colleges. Student organizations reported positive impacts of the merger. The merger increased study opportunities for students, resources, housing, online facilities, and changes within the curriculum (from programme-based to course-based) allowed students to take one course at a time (Ohman, 2011).

In New Zealand, the New Zealand Tertiary Education Union (TEU) did a study on the impact of mergers on staff members and students in the tertiary education sector. Grey (2015) reports that members at merged institutions discussed five major issues (both negative and positive) with regard to their experience of a merger: (1) stress − being overworked and negative impacts on their physical and emotional well-being as a result of the merger; (2) negative impacts on teaching and learning due to understaffing, inadequate teaching time and lack of professional development; (3) the loss of autonomy and respect
caused by the merger; (4) some members highlighted gains from the merger; and (5) improvements in the institutional processes were noticed.

In South Africa, the role of student organizations is provided for by the Act and the Statute. Section 35 of the Act and Section 36 of the Statute recognizes the role of the SRC as necessary for the representation of students on matters that may affect them within higher education institutions. Both the Act and the Statute recognize SRCs as statutory that act as liaisons with councils, senates, management, the general public, and other institutions. SRCs also act as umbrella organizations for all student organizations, committees, clubs, councils and societies (Higher Education Act 101 of 1997; Government Gazette No.23065, 2002). In short, SRCs are a federation of student organizations within higher education institutions.

The role of student organizations in the transformation of higher education in South Africa can be traced back to the Apartheid era. According to Reddy (2004), there were three trends that contributed to the development of student organizations: (1) black student numbers increased at higher education institutions creating a basis for political mobilization and effective mass protests; (2) the all-inclusive segregation of students into ethnic universities and the suppressive atmosphere dominating black institutions contrary to established white institutions which were believed to be “normal universities” isolated, infuriated and irritated black students; and (3) the new institutional vision of the higher education system − structured to enhance social relations hampered by apartheid − resulted in new protest-based identities emanating from a fast-growing black consciousness.

However, student organizations were found within both black and white student communities. The National Union of Students (NUSAS) was formed in 1924 as a predominantly white student organization including English and Afrikaans students. Afrikaans students later left the organization due to ideological differences within NUSAS and English students embraced liberalism (Reddy, 2004).

NUSAS later attracted the support and interest of black students who joined this union because of its liberal ideology and empathy towards them. However, in 1967 Steve Biko felt that black students did not play as prominent a role as white students in NUSAS. In 1969, black students left NUSAS to form a student organization for only black students – the South African Students’ Organization (SASO). SASO was formed at the UNIN and
Steve Biko was elected as President (South African History Online, 2011). The main role of SASO was to: (1) mobilize black students by expanding contact across the country; (2) earmark critical matters that faced black students; (3) represent the concerns of black students; (4) develop a strong identity to enhance the self-worth of black students; and (5) commence solid programmes to address crucial issues to attract more black students in becoming members of SASO. However, SASO was banned in 1977 following the June 16 student uprising against the use of Afrikaans as the main medium of instruction. This left a vacuum in student organizations which led to the reform of the state of apartheid in South Africa (Reddy, 2004).

In order to fill the vacuum created by the banning of SASO, the Azanian Students’ Organization (AZASO) was formed in 1981. At the time, AZASO was the only student organization not affected by the national crackdown – the banning of all black student organizations – and was still intact. AZASO later formed an alliance with NUSAS – linked with the United Democratic Front (UDF) – and embarked on door-to-door awareness campaigns to teach communities about the risks within the proposed constitution of the republic. They also started a campaign favouring the Education Charter which was aimed at making certain that education becomes accessible to all fellow South African citizens (SASCO, 2010).

AZASO later changed its name to a more representative one – the South African National Students’ Congress (SANSCO) – to echo its undivided devotion to the Freedom Charter and the African National Congress (ANC), which was still banned. SANSCO worked closely with NUSAS against De Klerk’s Education Bill aimed at reducing subsidies to politically active higher education institutions (SASCO, 2010).

In 1991, SANSCO and NUSAS started engaging in talks about forming one non-racial student organization. In September later that year, a new non-racial, democratic student organization – the South African Students Congress (SASCO) – was born. SASCO has since then play a pertinent role in the transformation of higher education through its Strategic Perspective on Transformation (SPOT) which seeks to redefine the concept of “radical strategic student activism”. SASCO has identified their relationship with the ANC as complementary and contradictory (SASCO, 2010). SASCO is also widely known for its role in influencing Government and relevant institutions to recognize distance education students as full participants in higher education, and to provide financial support to
academically deserving students through the establishment of the National Students’ Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) (Ngengebule, 2003).

SASCO performed a critical review of higher education mergers in South Africa from the perspective of student organizations. SASCO (2009) characterized the positive impact of mergers as follows: (1) formation of a comprehensive agenda and policy framework seeking to overcome the apartheid past and to create a more socially equitable and democratic higher education system; (2) laying a foundation for a new higher education framework characterized by a single, harmonized and distinguished system covering universities, universities of technology, comprehensive institutions, contact and long-distance institutions, and different kinds of colleges; (3) de-racialization of student bodies in institutions; (4) increased student enrolments; (5) internationalization of student bodies; (6) increasing skilled professionals by establishing quality assurance frameworks and a sound infrastructure; and (7) establishing an efficient and effective student funding scheme (NSFAS).

SASCO (2009) further outlined the negative impacts due to failed mergers and challenges experienced: (1) masking inequalities pertaining to African students and female students in various demographical distributions; (2) continuous low graduation rates and student throughput; (3) increasing student drop-out rates; (4) inadequate funding as a means of student support; (5) failing institutional restructuring programmes; (6) continued short-changing of HBI’s in terms of funding; and (7) the escalation of university fees.

**Summary**

This chapter discussed the ecological systems theory as a theory relevant to the conceptualization of this study. It characterized the ecological systems of higher education institutions in which interactions occur between the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem levels of the theory. It also discussed changes that occur within higher education institutions, specifically higher education mergers as change agents, and the ability of higher education institutions to adapt to change. It also discussed theories and characteristics of change and applied them to higher education mergers.

The chapter further identified characteristics that are needed by higher education institutions to achieve successful mergers (emanating from existing global and local merger trends), guidelines to be followed during mergers, goals to be achieved during higher education mergers and experiences outlined from previous mergers. Lastly, it
discussed the history and role of student organizations in higher education and their participation, experiences and impacts with regard to higher education mergers. It positioned student organizations as actors, role-players and important partners in higher education institutions and in the larger higher education system.

The following chapter discusses the methodological approach of the study explaining the research design chosen and its purpose, the sampling procedure used, the data collection and analysis plan, and the ethical considerations applicable to the study.
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter provides an outline of the research plan followed by the researcher in conducting the study. It focuses on providing an in-depth description of the research process – paying specifically attention to the research methods used within the framework of a qualitative study.

Definition of Research Methodology

The term research is defined by Rajasekar, Philominathan and Chinnathambi (2013) as a logical and systematic search for new and pertinent information on a particular subject. It is concerned with exploring the “how” and “what” of phenomena and becomes, therefore, a probe into finding solutions to scientific and social problems. Gill (2014) posits that research is composed of two words: “re” – meaning again and “search” – meaning to verify facts. “Research” can, therefore, also refer to verifying old facts again.

Research methodology is a way or a process to systematically find solutions and information, and to ultimately answer the research question (Khothari, 2004). In short, research methodology is a process of studying how research is done scientifically and its logical sequence. It is an approach to enquire from the basic hypothesis of phenomena to the choice of research design and data collection (Myers, 2009). Research methodology differs from research methods in the sense that research methods are the modus operandi used for conducting research – approaches are applied in carrying out research processes. Research methodology is a means to sequentially answer the research question considering not only the approaches used but also the reasoning underlying the use of certain approaches within the framework of a specific research enquiry (Khothari, 2004).

Research question

The following research question was investigated in this study: What experiences and impacts did the merger and demerger of the UL and the subsequent transition process into the SMU leave student organizations with?
Aim

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of student organizations with regard to the merger and demerger processes followed at the UL and the transition into the SMU.

Objectives

- To gain an in-depth understanding of how student organizations at the SMU experienced the change that the merger brought.
- To obtain an in-depth understanding of how these student organizations experienced the demerger process.
- To explore the expectations and anticipations of the student organizations with regard to the SMU, the transitional process followed and their anticipated role in this process.

Research approach

This study was grounded in a qualitative research approach. A qualitative research design, according to Noor (2008), is a study design wherein researchers are interested in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than the testing of hypotheses. Creswell (2003) adds that a qualitative approach is a study approach suitable for the examination and comprehension of particular phenomena. In order to gain knowledge about phenomena, researchers ask questions, gather comprehensive perceptions of participants by making use of interviews and lastly, data are analysed to obtain themes.

This study required an in-depth understanding of the experiences and impacts of participants with regard to the merger and demerger processes followed. A qualitative approach allowed for an explorative engagement between the participants and researcher through the use of semi-structured interviews in order to gain their in-depth experiences. This qualitative approach was chosen due to the variety of strengths it provided to the study. These strengths are outlined by Anderson (2010) as follows: (1) it provides an in-depth and thorough exploration of phenomena; (2) interviews are not limited to a definite line of questioning and can be facilitated by researchers in real time; (3) the research context and course can be rapidly reviewed as new facts arise. According to Griffin (2004), researchers are, therefore, allowed a degree of flexibility in the conduct of studies; (4) the data obtained on human experiences are influential and more convincing than quantitative data; (5) covert and overt elements about research participants, which are usually overlooked in quantitative studies, are revealed; and (6) data are often gathered
from a smaller sample to avoid generalization of results to the greater populace but can be transferable to a different context.

Other authors such as Griffin (2004) and Atieno (2009) add to the above-mentioned strengths of qualitative research by stating that researchers are able to simplify and manage data without destroying the complexity and context, and new ways of seeing existing data for the purpose of developing theories can be generated. Lyons, Bike, Johnson and Bethea (2012) also posit that qualitative research recognize the interpretive nature of research and researchers are viewed as tools in the research process. For this reason, the biases of researchers with regard to topics are known, explained and looked into during the analysis of data.

These above-mentioned strengths have largely benefited the study to achieve its aim – to explore and gain an in-depth understanding of the subjective experiences of different student organizations in an attempt to understand the impact of the change process on these organizations that has occurred at the SMU. However, it should be noted that the qualitative approach may have presented limitations to the study. These limitations are outlined by Griffin (2004), Atieno (2009), and Anderson (2010) as follows: (1) sporadic phenomena are given equal consideration as other phenomena – no effort is applied in assigning rates of recurrence which are identified in data; (2) results cannot be generalized to larger populations with an equal extent of rigour as it may be the case in quantitative analyses; (3) the quality of research depends highly on the competence of researchers and may be affected by researcher bias; (4) accuracy is hard to obtain, maintain, evaluate and prove; (5) the amount of data cause analysis and interpretation to be time-consuming; and (6) anonymity and confidentiality can be problematic to uphold when discussing results.

In addressing the above-mentioned limitations and in order to achieve trustworthiness in the study, the researcher ensured that (1) all phenomena were treated equally as they were the direct experiences of the participants; (2) the interpretive phenomenological approach methods were followed in the analysis of data in order to identify common emerging themes and to translate them into a narrative account of student organizations; (3) the researcher acknowledged that results may not be generalized and clarified the boundaries of the study results by providing information about the study at the beginning of the research process; (4) the researcher minimized bias by involving two additional neutral persons who are experienced in qualitative research in the collecting and analysis of data.
thereby addressing the time factor; and (5) the participants were reassured of confidentiality in the use of the results.

**Sampling**

A purposive sampling method was used in this study. A purposive sampling method is based on the judgement of researchers regarding the characteristics of the sample. According to this sampling approach, a sample is chosen on the basis of what researchers consider to be typical of units (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000). In accordance with the aim and objectives of this study, purposive sampling strategies were designed to enhance the understanding of the experiences of selected individuals or groups in developing theories and concepts (Devers & Frankel, 2000).

The motivation for the choice of purposive sampling in this study was based on the following key features of qualitative samples mentioned by Curtis, Gesler, Smith and Washburn (2000):
1) The method of drawing samples in qualitative research is based on purposive sampling criteria and not on the statistical probability of selection as is the case with most quantitative methods.

2) Samples are small and studied extensively. Samples usually produce huge amounts of data.

3) Samples are not typically entirely pre-identified. Selection takes place systematically through an ongoing process interleaved with analysis.

4) Sample selection is theoretically determined, either by the theoretic perspective which underlies the research question from the onset, or by developing theories emanating from the information emerging as the study progresses.

5) Qualitative research ought to be spontaneous and unambiguous about the rationale for participant selection because there are ethical and theoretic implications rising from the choices which are made to include and exclude particular participants.

6) Qualitative samples can offer a chance to select and evaluate observations of broad processes which are vital to the conceptualization of new or existing theories about the phenomena under study.

In incorporating the above-mentioned key features in the sampling choice, the researcher chose participants with the specific goal of focusing on particular characteristics of a population who were of interest – who would best enable the answering of the research question. A strategy primarily used when there is a limited number of people who have expertise in the area being researched (Mugera, 2013). The strategy was to select units that were judged to be the most common in the population under investigation (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000). Student organizations were, therefore, judged as the most common units of universities. Members of such organizations were, therefore, purposively sampled to participate in the study with the aim of obtaining members who had a vast knowledge about the process that led to the establishment of the SMU.

Student organizations were categorized into the following groups: political, religious, sports, and social student organizations in accordance with the constitution of the SRC (University of Limpopo SRC Constitution, 2010). From each student organization, two members were delegated to represent their student organization in its relevant category.
There was a total of 39 student organizations affiliated with the SMU SRC. These organizations were subdivided into 8 political organizations, 11 religious organizations, 4 social clubs, and 15 sporting codes. As a result, the categories formed four focus groups.

**Inclusion Criteria**

For the purpose of sampling a well-defined and adequate population based on ethical principles, the following criteria were adopted by the researcher to be met by all of the participants:

1) All of the participating student organizations were required to volunteer to participate in the study.

2) All of the participants were required to be well-informed (should have organizational and institutional memories leading up to the establishment of the SMU) members of their respective student organizations.

3) All of the participants were required to provide signed consent in order to participate.

4) All of the participants were required to communicate in English.

5) All of the participants were required to be aged 18 years or older.

Purposive sampling may display a variety of strengths in qualitative research, but Mugera (2013) argues that purposive sampling may also be prone to researcher bias. However, this argument is only a major limitation when the judgements and choices of researchers are ill-conceived and poorly considered or if researchers could not clarify the use of purposive sampling in their research and deliberated on interfering with study results – poor descriptions may lead to criticism of qualitative research (Devers & Frankel, 2000). Another limitation of purposive sampling is where samples are “nested”, which is proportional to the number that can be included in a study. A single sample may comprise of several levels that are logically interrelated to the main research case for instance, researching various kinds of health professionals who are subscribed to adult primary care teams in various facilities, in a large medical group, or in a hospital. As a result, the work required to study the main research subject increases exponentially (Devers & Frankel, 2000).
Data Collection

Four focus groups of members of student organizations were used to collect data in the study. Focus groups are a small number of people taking part in informal group discussions focused on a particular topic or set of issues (Smith, 2003). In-depth group interviews take place in focus groups by employing relatively homogenous groups to provide information concerning topics specified by researchers. These group discussions are carefully planned and designed to obtain perceptions with regard to defined environment, and to promote an interactive process amongst researchers and the participants (Smithson, 2000).

The advantages of using focus groups are discussed by Krueger and Casey (2015) and include the following: a window into the internal thinking of participants is provided allowing researchers to obtain in-depth information; how participants react to each other can be examined; and probing could take place and questions could also be adapted as the exploration of ideas and concepts continues. As mentioned above, Smithson (2000) argues that focus groups promote interaction between the participants and researchers and amongst the participants themselves. This interaction allows for the generation of a particular type of data where focus groups become units of analysis rather than treating data as identical to individuals – data are viewed collectively. Focus groups provide structure and direction to interviews – interviews can take place in any setting. Interviews also allow participants to query each other and explain themselves to each other. Interaction amongst participants offers researchers valuable data in terms of consensus and diversity in different groups by allowing researchers to identify constructs when agreements and differences between different groups are present (Morgan, 2011).

However, focus groups also present limitations and these are mentioned by Goerres and Prinzen (2012): difficulties in finding moderators with good facilitative and rapport building skills; participants may display defensive mechanisms if they feel watched or cross-questioned; one or two of the participants could become dominant during a focus group while subduing the rest of the participants; it may be difficult to generalize data – especially if data were collected from small samples; unnecessary information may be included; data analysis can be time-consuming due to the open-ended nature of questions; and focus groups can be expensive. The researcher was aware of these limitations in the study and addressed some of these concerns by involving two additional facilitators to ensure that the quality of interviews was ensured.
The four focus groups consisted of members of different student organizations who met with the interviewer during scheduled meetings to participate in discussions. The focus group schedule was based upon a number of questions and the researcher acted as the facilitator of each group while two additional neutral people experienced in qualitative research acted as interviewers, posing questions, keeping the discussion flowing, and encouraging maximum participation (Smith, 2003). The focus group discussions took place in a semi-structured format using a focus group guide. The participants were allowed time to share their own experiences but the facilitator provided structure and direction to the discussions while probing for more information. Discussions in the focus groups followed a well-constructed interview guide. The following aspects were taken into consideration as outlined by Smith (2003):

1) The researcher was concerned with:
   - the description of the phenomenon in question;
   - the effect of the phenomenon on the participants during questioning; and
   - the coping strategies of the participants.

2) Topics were logically put together starting with the least sensitive ones to allow the participants to relax and get comfortable at the beginning of a focus group. Rapport was developed.

3) Appropriate questions related to each of these areas were developed.

4) Possible probes and prompts which may follow from answers provided were also developed.

The use of an interview guide is arguably able to summarize the content that researchers cover during interviews by either providing minimal directions leading to less structured interviews aimed at exploring the perspectives of participants with regard to the topic or by containing elaborate specifications to ensure that the topics of interest are thoroughly covered. An interview guide is able to suggest probes and follow-up questions that enable the participants to elaborate on the basic set of questions (Given, 2008).
The use of interviews is the most common data collection method in qualitative research. Interviews provide an opportunity for participants to confide in “safe strangers” which may facilitate participants to share more than they had anticipated for – providing researchers with more data (Lyons et al., 2012). Wolgemuth et al. (2015) listed the benefits of interviews in qualitative research as a chance to engage with individuals; providing time for self-reflections; for participants to be emotionally debriefed; for researchers to become knowledgeable about a certain issue; to unite with the greater society based on common experiences; and for participants to represent a community or a cause and to help others in future. Semi-structured interviews provide benefits such as (1) an attempt to establish rapport with participants; (2) the freedom to probe; (3) the ability to follow the interests or concerns of participants (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

However, there are also a set of risks identified by Wolgemuth et al. (2015) when interviews are used during qualitative research and include: the concern of participants of being identified; how their voice are represented; the fear of damaging their professional image by providing private details of themselves, their organization or institution which may cause problems for themselves and/or others; the risk of experiencing emotional pain. Huseyin (2009) argues that if interviewers use note-taking as a method during interviews, it can disrupt the effectiveness of communication amongst interviewers and participants. However, if note-taking is delayed until the end of the interviews, interviewers may forget important details – particularly those in contrast with the expectations of interviewers. Researchers can also unintentionally provide clues to their own attitudes and values during interviews and the kind of responses they expect from participants (Huseyin, 2009). The researcher of this study addressed these risks by reassuring the participants that data were handled confidentially and strict ethical guidelines were maintained during the course of the research.

The focus group interviews lasted for an average of one hour and twenty minutes. The focus group interviews were audiotaped with the consent of the participants to capture discussions verbatim. Two audio recorders were used in order to avoid loss of data due to technical errors. The focus group interviews were conducted over a period of two days – two focus groups each day – one in the morning and another in the afternoon. The interviews were transcribed in order to commence with the interpretive process (Given, 2008) described in the following section.
Data Analysis

An interpretive phenomenological analysis was used to analyse the data. Pioneered by the philosopher, Edmund Husserl (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), the interpretive phenomenological analysis is intended as an in-depth exploration on how participants give meaning to their personal and social world. This exploration includes an in-depth assessment of the life world of participants in an attempt to study personal experiences in detail and focuses on the personal views of participants in order to obtain an objective view of research phenomena being studied (Smith, 2003). This analysis utilizes participants themselves as experts in the chosen field being analysed (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). From a phenomenological research perspective, a phenomenological study is concerned with a description of what all the participants have in common and an explanation of their shared experience of phenomena in order to reduce individual experiences to a universal essence (Creswell, 2003). Some of the characteristics of an interpretive phenomenological approach are mentioned by Griffiths (2009): idiocentric; inductive and interrogative. These characteristics allow a degree of flexibility during an interpretive phenomenological approach, which separates it from other analytical approaches (Brocki & Wearden, 2014).

Data analysis from a phenomenological approach is conducted by following steps, which include building on the data from the first research question asked and highlighting significant statements that provides an understanding of the experiences of the participants with regard to phenomena – a process called horizontalization – followed by the development of clusters of meaning from these significant statements into themes – a thematic analysis. The themes are then used to describe the experiences of the participants by means of a textural description (Creswell, 2003).

The interpretive phenomenological approach is more concerned with the subjective accounts of individuals than the creation of objective reports so as to reflect the analytical accounts produced by both the participants and researchers (Brocki & Wearden, 2014). An interpretive phenomenological approach is remarkable for its strength of being able to provide a rich and complete description of human experiences and meanings wherein findings are allowed to emerge, rather than being forced by researchers. This approach allows for steps in keeping carefully track of descriptions – as faithfully as possible – of raw experiential data without deleting, adding, changing or distorting anything concerning
the transcripts of participants (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). These steps referred to, which were used in the analysis of the data in my study, are outlined by Smith (2003) as follows:

1) Firstly, look for themes.

2) Secondly, connect emerging themes.

3) Thirdly, continue the same analysis with other cases and write up the common themes.

4) Fourthly, translate themes into a narrative account.

Smith et al. (2009) further outlined a six step model for following an interpretive phenomenological analysis. This model together with the above-mentioned steps were followed by the researcher in the interpretation of the data. The model can be discussed as follows:

Step 1 – Engagement of the researcher with the data. Listening to, and reading transcripts so as to gain an in-depth understanding of each of the subjective meanings and experiences of the participants regarding the phenomena being studied.

Step 2 – Reading the relevant text sections and making descriptive conceptual commenting.

Step 3 – Data analysis enables the development of themes. Themes emerge from the involvement of the researcher with the data.

Step 4 – Emergent themes are studied to find connections which enable the creation of an inclusive structure when themes are linked into clusters.

Step 5 – The individual analysis of each of the transcripts, according to the first four steps.

Step 6 – The searching for patterns across each of the transcripts. Patterns indicate a shared meaning and an understanding regarding the experiences that exist.

The researcher and two additional neutral people (experienced in the application of an interpretive phenomenological analysis) analysed the data in order to ensure that the above-mentioned steps were consistently followed.

Another advantage of a thematic analysis – being the essence of an interpretive phenomenological analysis – as argued by Boyatzis (1998), is that it is flexible and usable
with many types of qualitative data and goals in mind. Brocki and Wearden (2014) argue that the flexibility of an interpretive phenomenological approach to be usable in various qualitative approaches and has to a large extent made it relevant to psychological research models due to its ability to synthesize a biopsychosocial analysis of data where the perceptions and interpretation of patients with regard to their bodily, emotional and environmental experiences and meanings can be understood. This analysis uses comprehensible language and straight forward guidelines (steps) rather than making use of language to obscure meaning in the way that many qualitative approaches have been criticized for (Brocki & Wearden, 2014).

An interpretive approach further allows for an interactive mutual relationship between the situation and researchers, which makes interpretation a reciprocal act whereby the parties guides each other in creating new ideas, insights and an understandings of phenomena. It also allows for feedback or the occurrence of recursive loops and continuous critiquing of the work of researchers. Researchers ask others to explore their own exploration of a situation, therefore, researchers can recursively explore the interpretations of those critiquing their own interpretations (Given, 2008).

One of the challenges of an interpretive phenomenological analysis stated by Creswell (2003) is the difficulty encountered by researchers to stay separate from the text when bracketing the experiences of participants. It is also argued by Smith (2007) that people struggle to express what they are thinking and feeling – leaving it to the subjectivity of researchers to interpret the mental and emotional state of participants from what they say. Furthermore, an interpretive phenomenological analysis depends of the ability of participants to present information by making use of a language and terminology. This approach can be complicated when important information about events leading up to certain experiences are overlooked due to the misinterpretation of the language and terminology used (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). These above-mentioned factors present limitations to the objectivity and transferability of the research outcome.

**Trustworthiness of the Research**

Qualitative research – emanating from various paradigms – encircles multiple standards of quality that underpin the research rigour such as the trustworthiness of research (Morrow, 2005). In qualitative research, trustworthiness of the research corresponds directly to validity and reliability. Qualitative researchers use different terminology which includes
credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity or generalizability),
dependability (reliability), and confirmability (objectivity) (Fong, 2008). Shenton (2004)
outlines criteria to be followed in ensuring trustworthiness:

Credibility

Credibility ensures that the study measures what is actually intended to measure (Shenton, 2004). It deals with the question of how congruent the findings are with reality (Fong, 2008). As such, it is the idea of internal consistency of a research study where the core issue is how rigour can be ensured and communicated to others (Morrow, 2005). To ensure that phenomena have been accurately recorded, the following provisions were made by the researcher:

1) The adoption of research methods was well-established

This was done to ensure that the specific procedures used are derived from those that have been successfully used in previous comparable studies (Shenton, 2004). This usually includes the type of questions used to collect data and the methods of data analysis. In this study, the participants were invited to reflect on their experiences of the merger and demerger processes and the changes these processes wrought (Shenton, 2004).

2) The development of an early familiarity with the culture of participating organizations

This was done before the first data collection interviews took place in order to gain an adequate understanding of student organizations and to establish a relationship of trust amongst the researcher and participating student organizations (Shenton, 2004). This was done via the studying of appropriate documents and preliminary visits to these organizations themselves (Shenton, 2004).

3) Triangulation

Triangulation can be defined as the use of multiple methods in studying the same phenomena for the purpose of increasing the credibility of a study (Hussein, 2009) to enhance confidence in the research findings and to allow for greater
accuracy (Jick, 1979). Triangulation takes place during a process of verification that increases the credibility of a study by incorporating several viewpoints and methods: combining two or more theories, sources of data, research methods and researchers in one study of phenomena in order to join a single construct (Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012). In this study, triangulation was achieved by using a combination of two or more data sources, investigators (interviewers) and analysers to study the same phenomena (Hussein, 2009).

Hussein (2009) points out five types of triangulation: methodological, investigator, theoretical, analysis and data triangulation. In this study, the focus was mainly on data triangulation, investigator triangulation and analyses triangulation by appointing two neutral people experienced in conducting qualitative research to work with the researcher during the interviews and in the analyses of data to ensure consistency in following the steps of analysis, to verify data, and to avoid researcher bias.

By combining multiple investigators, researchers hope to overcome weaknesses or intrinsic biases and problems that may arise from single investigator studies to facilitate the confirmation of data (Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012). As a result, researchers can gain confidence while obtaining the results of the study stimulating the creation of inventive methods, new ways of capturing problems with conventional data collections methods, and providing richer and more comprehensive information (Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012).

Triangulation may lead to three unintended outcomes in qualitative research: convergence, inconsistency and contradiction. When data are obtained from different sources or collected by different researchers – as was the case in this study – confirmability becomes difficult and can lead to researchers forming immeasurable conclusions (Yeasmin & Rahman, 2012). It is further argued by Casey and Murphy (2009) that the credibility of studies can only be enhanced if the findings from different sources were confirmed. If the methods used were incompatible and cannot reduce bias, triangulation would fail in ensuring credibility and confirmability in research studies.

Triangulation was not used in this study, because a clear, well-focused and appropriate research question was asked (Casey & Murphy, 2009). There was no
clear indication and rationale for the use of triangulation given that the study utilized a research paradigm – the qualitative approach – and methods to minimize researcher bias and to objectify data collection. Since triangulation can involve peer review as well, external researchers may examine research processes followed and the interpretation of data. This study was subjected to an external examination performed by researchers in order to verify that the data were collected and analysed in an appropriate and systematic manner and that reasonable conclusions were made (Pitney, 2004) as part of the peer reviewed process discussed below.

4) Methods to help ensure that participants are honest

Each of the participants who were part of the focus groups was given an opportunity to refuse participation in the study. This was done in order to ensure that the data collection sessions involve only participants who were genuinely willing to participate and were prepared to offer information freely (Shenton, 2004). It was also made clear to the participants that they have the right to withdraw participation from the study at any given point in time and without having to disclose an explanation to the researcher (Shenton, 2004).

5) Peer scrutiny of the research project

This study was open to scrutiny and feedback from colleagues, peers and academics. Feedback of this nature is always welcome because a fresh perspective is brought to the fore that allowed peers to challenge the assumptions made by the researcher whose closeness to the study may have inhibited his ability to view the study with the necessary detachment (Shenton, 2004).

Morrow (2005) further posits that credibility can be achieved by a prolonged engagement with participants; persistent observations made in the field; the use of peer researchers; negative case analysis; researcher reflexivity; and checks, validation or co-analysis by participants. These strategies were utilized by the researcher of this study during data collection and analysis and, therefore, credibility was ensured. Given (2008) also posits that the credibility of studies may be enhanced by having larger focus groups; introducing private interviews with participants; and then providing opportunities for follow-up interviews if necessary. Researchers can make use of time to establish enough contact with
participants to discover new angles to look at data from different perspectives. To increase the credibility of research, the following strategies are available:

- Researchers can make use of support networks knowledgeable in the research area to review and critique the research.
- Researchers can make use of triangulation by seeking out multiple sources of data.
- And lastly, researchers can make use of member checks by asking the participants to make sure that the data were analysed accurately.

The researcher of this study utilized multiple large focus groups over a prolonged period of time to conduct interviews, and two additional neutral persons who are knowledgeable in qualitative research were also used during the research process.

**Transferability**

Transferability is concerned with demonstrating that the research results of the study could be applied to a wider population (Shenton, 2004). Transferability is associated with establishing whether findings are relevant in other similar contexts and it attempts to provide descriptive information about a context so that participants themselves may determine whether the results are in line with their situation or experiences (Pitney, 2004). In essence, transferability refers to the extent to which readers are able to generalize findings of a study in their own context. Transferability addresses the core issue whether research can be applied (Morrow, 2005). The golden question relating to transferability is whether the results of a study can be transferred to other contexts and situations beyond the scope of the study context (Given, 2008). Since the findings of a qualitative study specifically relate to only a small number of participants in a particular environment, it was impossible to conclude that the findings and conclusions of this study were applicable to other situations and populations (Shenton, 2004).

Shenton (2004) also holds that when researchers only know the sending context, transferability inferences cannot be made. The findings of this study could, therefore, not be transferable or generalized to other contexts and populations other than the population in question. However, to increase the transferability of this study required an answer on how closely the participants were linked to the context that was studied, and the contextual boundaries of the findings (Given, 2008). It was, therefore, important to the researcher to convey the boundaries of the study. As a result – before any attempts at transference were
made – information on the following issues was provided at the beginning of the study (Shenton, 2004):

- The number of student organizations who participated in the research and their location.
- Limitations with regard to the participants who provided data.
- The number of participants participating in the research study.
- The data collection procedures that were applied.
- The number and duration of the data collection meetings.
- The total duration within which the data were collected.

Thick description – which refers to proving readers with a full and purposeful design of the study so that readers can make their own conclusions about the results of the study – is one strategy to increase transferability. Another strategy is through purposive sampling where participants are chosen because they ideally match the design, limitations and delimitations of the study. Such participants are able to improve the possibility of readers applying the degree of transferability to their given context (Given, 2008). The researcher provided, therefore, a thick and clear description of the methodology used and in addition, provided a clear account of the purposive sampling that took place as well as a description of the inclusion criteria with regard to the selection of the participants.

Dependability

Dependability is concerned with showing that, if the work were repeated, in the same context, with the same methods and with the same participants, similar results would be obtained (Shenton, 2004). It is based on whether the results are reasonably based on the data collected (Pitney, 2004). Dependability deals with the core issue of ensuring that the manner in which a study was conducted stays consistent across time, researchers, and analysis techniques (Morrow, 2005). Moreover, dependability addresses the challenge of the variability of an environment. Researchers may have an adequate comprehension of underlying theories to design an appropriate methodology to research a subject. However, once the researchers have begun the study process, they may found that the research procedures could have an effect on their work. Dependability acknowledges that the environment in which studies are taking place is changing continuously and it is difficult to comprehend results as one-time events. Dependability explains results through relevant methodologies (Given, 2008).
In addressing dependability, it is noted that credibility also plays an important role. Credibility was, therefore, achieved through the use of focus groups (Shenton, 2004). The research process in this study was reported in detail – enabling future researchers to repeat the work and possibly obtain the same results. In order for the readers of this study to gain a complete understanding of the research approach and its efficacy, the study included areas committed to (Shenton, 2004):

- The research design and its application – implemented on a strategic level.
- The process of data collection – providing details of what was done during the research process.
- A reflective appraisal of the study – assessing the efficacy of the research process embarked on.

Pitney (2004) emphasizes the importance of clarifying the perspective of researchers, how triangulation was used and the manner in which data collection took place and analysis decisions were made. Researchers are tools for data collection and analysis, it is, therefore, important for them to share their viewpoints and biases related to the topic being analysed. A detailed chronology of research activities is explained in this chapter to provide a tracking process or an audit trail to the research design chosen and to subsequently, achieve dependability (Morrow, 2005).

In order to increase dependability, researchers should be aware of the fact that study environments is flexible and should be aware of changes to monitor them. The following changes can have an impact on emerging data: when the design, approach and techniques are changed; an increase in the amount of interviews needed; how non-verbal clues and the verbal script are monitored; an additional text analysis; an increased inter-coder dependability by utilizing more coders; and using an additional impartial person to evaluate the process notes of researchers to make sure that changes in the research design have methodological and theoretical foundations (Given, 2008). The researcher of this study utilized an external reviewer and two neutral persons who are knowledgeable in qualitative research during the data collection and analysis, and in reviewing the study results with regard to the methodology.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability is used by qualitative researchers to address objectivity in order to minimize the intrusion of researchers’ bias (Shenton, 2004). It is underpinned by the
recognition that research cannot be done objectively and highlights the fundamental notion that results should represent – to a greater extent – the phenomena being studied as opposed to the views and predispositions of researchers (Morrow, 2005). Confirmability measures the rigour of facts or interpretations conveyed in the research – are the facts and interpretations dependable? Can these facts and interpretations be tested and proven as more than just one-time occurrences specific to a particular study? Confirmability is, therefore, the process that authenticates the factuality or interpretation of the research done (Given, 2008). Steps were taken by the researcher to make certain that the findings of the study are the result of the experiences and notions of the participants and not based on the beliefs and biases of the researcher. Triangulation was used to minimize the effect of the researcher’s bias (Shenton, 2004).

In order to achieve confirmability: (1) researchers have to admit their own predispositions; (2) preliminary results produced by data should be discussed; (3) detailed methodological descriptions aimed at enabling readers to determine whether the data constructs could be accepted should be included; and (4) an audit trail should be presented which will allow observers to trace the course of the research step-by-step via the decisions made and the procedures described (Shenton, 2004). Even though confirmability acknowledges that researchers are able to derive exclusive viewpoints, it is deemed necessary that researchers declare and explain any biases upfront and openly, and to utilize the relevant qualitative methodological practice to address biases. Confirmability can also be demonstrated by making use of an audit trail where a neutral external agent can verify the research process and meanings derived from the data collected (Given, 2008).

Furthermore, since dependability is founded on the perspective that the rigour of results rests upon the data and that researchers ought to connect the data with the analysis done and results obtained so that readers can confirm the sufficiency of the results (Morrow, 2005), the study at hand utilized some of the strategies used in ensuring dependability to achieve confirmability. The researcher ensured that the audit trail was clearly described and that all of the strategies utilized in collecting and analysing the data were explained earlier in this chapter.

**Bias**

Bias refers to a predisposition or partiality concerning a particular phenomenon. In qualitative research, bias involves influences that compromise accurate sampling, data
collection, data analysis, and the reporting of findings (Given, 2008). There are different kinds of bias that may be present at any given time in a research process and could include researcher bias, design bias, measurement bias, selection bias, procedural bias and problem bias (Easterbrook, Berlin, Gopalan, & Mathews, 1991).

Researcher bias was a concern in this study. Given (2008) alludes that in order to minimize bias in qualitative research, researchers should be self-aware of their values and assumptions, they should look for contradictory data, and be open to alternative interpretations of their data.

The researcher was aware of the involvement of his own interests, emotions and experiences. The researcher was at some point in time a member of some of the student organizations at the SMU. In order to avoid bias in the research process, the researcher, therefore, appointed two neutral persons with experience in qualitative research to facilitate the interviews in the focus groups in the presence of the researcher. Similarly, to avoid bias in the analysis of data, two neutral persons who are experienced in an interpretive phenomenological analysis were appointed to analyse data. During the focus group interviews the participation of the researcher was limited to that of an observer and only provided guidance when necessary.

In summary, Pitney (2004) holds that to sufficiently determine the general trustworthiness of a qualitative research study, researchers should at least make use of two of the above-mentioned strategies. In particular, the returning of data to participants for them to verify the findings through member checks and triangulation. The study made use of focus groups as a means to verify experiences shared by different student organizations, and appointed two additional neutral persons who are experienced in an interpretive phenomenological analysis to analyse data and ensure that bias is minimized.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethics are a part of human philosophy concerned with appropriate conduct and moral living (Given, 2008). This part of the chapter considers ethics, related constructs and ethical issues relevant and adhered to in this study.

The existence of ethical dilemmas in qualitative studies is minimal in comparison to dilemmas present in quantitative research. Often ethical quagmires appear when researchers attempt to obtain right of entry into community groups and the impact they may have on participants is severe (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001). However,
qualitative research is often facilitated in situations that include the involvement of people in their day-to-day environment. Research that involves human beings, therefore, necessitates mindfulness of ethical issues that may arise from transactions (Orb et al., 2001).

Adherence to ethical norms in research is important for the following reasons as cited by Resnik (2013):

- To promote the aims of research such as knowledge, truth and an avoidance of errors.
- To promote standards that are fundamental to research such as trust, accountability, mutual respect and fairness.
- To make certain that researchers are held accountable to the public.
- To develop public support for research by ensuring the quality and integrity of the research.
- To promote moral and social values such as social responsibility, human rights, animal welfare, compliance with the law, health and safety.

Ethical clearance was obtained from the School (of Medicine) Research and Ethics Committee (SREC) and the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University Research and Ethics Committee (SMUREC). Permission to conduct the study and to collect data within the university jurisdiction and using members of the university (student organizations) as participants were obtained from the office of the Director of Student Affairs.

Important and relevant ethical considerations that were adhered during the course of the study are as follows:

**Informed Consent**

Informed consent emanates from the good ethical understanding that participants have to comprehend that they are allowing researchers to include them in a study and what that implies. Researchers ought to provide prospective participants with transparent information about the rationale, approaches, needs, threats, anticipated problems, discomforts and possible results of the proposed research, and for what the results will be used and how (Given, 2008). Informed consent means that all of the participants participating in interviews should freely and voluntary consent to participate in a study.
Participants should be informed about their right to withdraw themselves at any time from the study without penalties or repercussions (Dixon, 2015).

Informed consent was provided by all of the participants. Information was provided to all of the participants about the aim of the study and its core elements and the potential harms and benefits of participation. Consent was granted in writing (Medical Research Council, 2013). The researcher prepared a consent form (Appendix 2) and all of the participants signed a form. The researcher explained to all of the participants the nature of the study, its purpose, the use of their data and results, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time (Dixon, 2015). The participants were also informed about the use of audio recordings to collect data and how the recordings were going to be used (Banister, 2007).

Confidentiality

Confidentiality means that private data that can be linked to participants should not be disclosed. Participants should be provided with information on how researchers will protect their identities and information provided. Participants should also be made aware of the fact who will have access to their data and how the data will be used (Dixon, 2015). Confidentiality in this study meant that the information shared by the participants with the researcher would not be disclosed in a way that could publicly identify participants or sources of information (Given, 2008).

In ensuring confidentiality, the researcher reassured the participants that he will not report private data that could identify participants (Medical Research Council, 2013). However, confidentiality and anonymity can be breached by legal requirements such as when the data of researchers are subpoenaed for legal purposes (Orb et al., 2001). For the sake of anonymity, the names of participants or organizations were not revealed in the transcriptions, in the analysis of data or in the discussion of results. Categories of sensitive information requiring anonymity include, but are not limited to the following: sexual attitudes, preferences or practices, the use of addictive substances, illegal conduct or any information about the psychological well-being or mental health of individuals (Medical Research Council, 2013). The researcher guaranteed the participants that the results will not be made available to others unless participants express their permission to do so (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2009).
Minimizing Harm

Minimizing harm is embedded in the ethical principle of beneficence and is concerned with doing well to others and preventing harm. Researchers are, therefore, required to oversee the potential consequences of breaching ethical guidelines such as confidentiality (Orb et al., 2001). The golden principle that should be followed when minimizing harm is considered is that the totality of benefits and the significance of the information obtained from the participants should surpass the possible threats of harm to the participants (Dixon, 2015).

Qualitative interviews on delicate subject matters may incite potent emotive reactions from participants. In this study, a relevant referral source for professional help was, therefore, made available to all of the participants and was ready to use should referral was necessary (MRC, 2013). The researcher prepared various student support structures such as the university social and academic support services and student psychologists.

Voluntary participation

Babbie (2011) posits that research may at times represents an intrusion into the lives of people. Research may require participants to reveal personal information that may be unknown to friends and family members. Voluntary participation was, therefore, considered very seriously in the study. As mentioned in the section on inclusion criteria, participation was limited to participants who were completely willing to take part in the study and were capable of giving informed consent. The participants were also informed about their right to withdraw their participation at any time during the research process − even after the data have been collected − without any penalties attached (Banister, 2007).

Use of deception

It was important to the researcher to be open and honest to the participants about the aim and nature of the study. The participants needed to have a clear understanding of the research before it was conducted (Babbie, 2011). The aim and the purpose of the study were verbally explained to the participants. The participants were also allowed to ask any questions regarding the research process. Deception was, therefore, not used in this study.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the research methodology and approach used by the researcher. It explained the qualitative research design and its relevance to this study. The
sampling process, inclusion criteria and the process of data collecting followed in the study were discussed. The researcher utilized purposive sampling as the sampling method to be able to meet the inclusion criteria. The interpretive phenomenological analysis was selected as the best approach for this study and was discussed with regard to the analysis of the data. The concept of trustworthiness and the use of credibility – with an emphasis on triangulation (dependability, transferability and confirmability) were elaborated on. Researcher bias and measures to avoid it were also explained. Lastly, the chapter incorporated a discussion of relevant ethical considerations that were adhered to in the study.

The following chapter will discuss the analysis of data – the process of data collection, the interpretation of the data, the transcriptions from the interviews and the results of this study are also highlighted.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS

Introduction

The aim of this study was to obtain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of student organizations on the merger and demerger of the UL and on the subsequent transition into the new SMU. This chapter focuses on the presentation of the study results.

The objectives of the study were to gain an in-depth understanding of how student organizations at the SMU experienced the changes that occurred due to the merger, how they experienced the demerger, and their expectations and anticipations with regard to the new university, the transitional process followed and lastly, their anticipated role in future processes.

In order to achieve the aim and objectives of this study and to answer the research question, an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used as the preferred method of data analysis. IPA allowed for the representation of the experiences of individuals relevant to the study. Furthermore, the study could identify with the aid of IPA significant themes which characterize and categorize the experiences of student organizations with regard to the merger and demerger of the UL and the subsequent transition into the new SMU. These themes are elaborated on in this chapter.

Events, themes and subthemes

The researcher identified three events that characterize the change process that took place leading to the establishment of the SMU. These events provided a framework within which the focus groups discussions were conducted – the experiences of student organizations were elicited. Within each event, the researcher identified a number of primary themes which emerged from the data collected. These primary themes are reported on and narrated in this chapter. Secondary content themes derived from primary themes also emerged due to the complexity of the data. The events characterizing the process of change leading to the establishment of the SMU as identified by the researcher are as follows:
1) Merger

2) Demerger

3) Transition into the SMU

The primary themes illustrated the complexity of experiences and were supported by secondary content themes which elicited an in-depth understanding of the experiences of student organizations. Secondary content themes emerged from certain primary themes and could be directly linked to primary themes listed under each event. When the secondary content themes were applicable, an additional second level breakdown of the primary themes as they emerged from the original transcripts was provided. Primary themes and secondary content themes are summarized in Table 1 below:

**Table 1: A summary of the primary themes and secondary content themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Primary themes</th>
<th>Secondary content themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Merger</td>
<td>2. An understanding of the merger</td>
<td>4. Transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. A failed merger</td>
<td>5. Geographic location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6. Loss of personnel</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7. Harmonization of policies and programmes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10. Unequal sharing of resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11. Lack of transparency and accountability</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. The role of students</td>
<td>13. Student representation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14. Student consultation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>15. Student support systems</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16. A decline in student social life</td>
<td>18. Quality assurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17. Teaching and learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

71
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Primary themes</th>
<th>Secondary content themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19. Marketability of the university and its programmes</td>
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The researcher made use of the *verbatim* extracts of the participants from the raw data to illustrate the above-mentioned themes. The responses of the participants in this section were labelled according to the different types of focus groups and the identification number allocated to each of the participants and were used as follows (Appendix 7):

- Political focus group – PP1-PP7
- Religious focus group – RP1-RP6
- Social club focus group – SOP1-SOP8
- Sporting code focus group – SPP1-SPP14

**Thematic Exploration**

**Event: Merger**

1) *Primary theme: An understanding of the merger*

All of the participants demonstrated an awareness and understanding of the merger that led to the establishment of the UL. The discussion about an understanding of the merger was initiated with question 2(a) listed in the interview schedule (Appendix 3). A merger – according to the participants – generally refers to the combination of two entities into one. The following response was given during a focus group discussion:
...when you merge things it’s when you bring two things from two different spheres of life together, and those things form a union – they are one. That’s my understanding of merger. In some cultures, they actually call marriage a merger. It’s two different things from two different spheres of life and then they become one that’s why it’s called a merger. (RP1)

Within the context of this study, a merger refers to the union between the UNIN and the former MEDUNSA as indicated by the following response:

... it was the union between the University of North and the Medical University of South Africa. (SPP1)

The participants expressed their own conceptualization of how the merger of the UL came to be. They attributed the merger that led to the establishment of the UL to an effort by Government to effectively manage the funding of higher education institutions, and to provide the Limpopo province with a medical school which was, at the time, a first. Three of the participants provided the following explanations:

From my understanding and the history was that when they came together, they University of the North were wanted a medical school that side, and MEDUNSA could not sustain itself financially. So the government came up with ways, strategies to help them both universities then, to be able to reach their goals, could I say vision, and then that’s when thought okay, if they can get MEDUNSA, which has the medical school, it will assist the University of the North and then in return, MEDUNSA will be able to be sustained financially. (RP1)

... I think the purpose was to increase number of health professions and boost UL in terms of finance. (SOP1)

... maybe the government saw that there’s a need of having a medical school around that side of Limpopo. Then they said okay, there’s also a university this side, it’s a medical school, so why can’t you merge them and join the two, you know, the number of people just going from that side to come this side or something like that. (RP2)

All of the participants, therefore, have shown a common understanding of and could conceptualize the merger that led to the establishment of the UL.
2) **Primary theme: A failed merger**

The primary theme concerning a failed merger emerged through a discussion based on question 2(b) listed in the interview schedule (Appendix 3). The responses of the participants pointed to four secondary content themes that emerged from the primary theme. These secondary content themes are discussed below to provide evidence of the failed merger between the UNIN and the former MEDUNSA.

- **Secondary content theme: Transformation**

Transformation – in the context of the South African higher education system – refers to a comprehensive, in-depth and continual social process aimed at achieving a fundamental reconstitution and redevelopment of universities to reflect and promote the vision of a democratic society: to abolish all forms of discrimination; to enhance the talents of all South Africans particularly those of the disadvantaged and the poor; and to actively remove all agents of economic, cultural and political inequality (Second National Higher Education Transformation Summit, 2015).

Experiences were shared by 12 of the participants – a clear indication of a failed merger. The transformation of higher education with regard to the UL merger was, therefore, not achieved. The UL merger failed to bridge the gap between HWIs and HBIs and the transformation process involving HBIs in general and at the UL between two HBIs (MEDUNSA and UNIN) in particular was not realized:

> ... *I think the reason to merge was to ensure that the fast transformation of the historically black institutions ...that they want to be bringing this university which was disadvantaged back then eh, together so that they can be able to fund them, when they are one, unlike when they are funding one in terms of trying to transform them, develop them. Of which, according to my understanding, it would have failed. Hence we end up having a de-merger now, because it was not working according to the way they anticipated. Ja ...* (PP3)

As a result, most of the participants felt that the merger was a complete failure especially when the transformation of the Medunsa Campus was considered. The participants felt that the Medunsa Campus was marginalized and treated unequally to its counterpart, Turfloop Campus, throughout the merger:
... everyone was longing for a demerger ... Now the MEDUNSA suffered that way, so unity was not there ... (RP1)

... when we look at it from afar or inside, we don’t see any improvements. Actually there’s degradation from when it was then, to when it is now ... (RP2)

... if MEDUNSA was suffering then it defeats the whole purpose ... so I think it affected us and it benefited them. (SOP4)

... MEDUNSA did not have a voice in the merger. They ruled us more, so, ja. That’s what I saw. (SPP2)

The study found that the merger failed to achieve transformation as defined above, evidenced by continual deprivement and the Medunsa Campus that was marginalized.

- Secondary content theme: Geographic location

The geographic location refers to the physical distance between the two campuses of the UL: the Turfloop Campus – located in Mankweng, Polokwane, Limpopo province; and the Medunsa Campus – located in Garankuwa, Tshwane, Gauteng province. According to the survey conducted by Makgoba and Price (2011), the distance between these two campuses of the UL was more than 300 km.

The participants were of the view that the distance between these two campuses contributed largely to the failure of the merger, and presented administrative challenges to the management of the UL and, ultimately, to the progress of the merger:

The factor that I think contributed much is that the distance, first, the management, second, and having one person one person leading the merger, of which he spends of his time on the other than the other side ... (SOP4)

... and the physical location, looking at the distance from here and there and the management, most of the management, eh, eh, most of the senior management being at that side. So the merger, it was, it came with a lot of challenges. (PP4)

I wouldn’t think or assume from myself that anyone was expecting anything much, given the geographical location … (PP1)
Secondary content theme: Loss of personnel

The participants reported that skilled and experienced professors and staff from the Medunsa Campus left the university during the merger period. According to the participants, this had a negative impact on the quality of education offered by the university and on the throughput of black health professionals:

... number one, we start with the issues of the university personnel. When we have staff, experienced and we have staff leaving the university it impacts badly on the number and the quality of the graduates that the university produces … (PP1)

We had resignation of very important staff/personnel ... We had eh, our senior lecturers resigning, of which the credibility of the institution, now, it doesn’t hold much when you lose your most trusted and powerful professors. (SOP1)

The participants attributed the loss of personnel as one of the major causes for the failure of the merger. The loss of personnel had a harmful effect on the historical reputation and credibility of the former MEDUNSA.

Secondary content theme: Harmonization of policies and programmes

In the context of the study, harmonization referred to the synchronization and integration of policies and programmes on both campuses of the UL. Policies refer to the rules and guiding documents for operations within the university varying from academic rules, tuition fees, and funding models to the SRC constitution and the constitutions of various student organizations. Programmes refer to the academic programs offered by the UL.

The participants reported that the merger failed to harmonize the policies used on both the two campuses of the university. There was also a difference between the programmes offered at the two campuses. Student organizations were also treated differently on the two campuses. The UL should have offered similar programmes at both campuses because it was one university. The merger, therefore, failed to create a united university. Some of the participants shared their experiences:

... there were a lot of clashes. For example, um, where it concerns students, the issue of, eh, fees, you’d get people within the same university but the fees they pay were quite huge you understand? It is not consistent. We also
get issues of uh, academic rules, for example. We get an academic rule that says uh, for example, to do a three-year course, you have a maximum of five years... but to come and say also, if you’re doing a four-year course, you are also given an extension of two years, it is not consistent... So the, there’s that and a lot of constitutional clashes and the rule clashes that we had at the institution. Hence now, even within one university, there was a need a need to treat two universities differently ... (PP3)

I kind of expected that even policies that guide at SASO should be mutual, not different to what guides at SASO MEDUNSA and what guides at SASO Turfloop. (SOP6)

For me, I think there were no good systems in place in term of policies that should govern both campuses, as you know, ‘cause they were one institution ... the codes in BSc, they’re different regardless subjects and modules, their different that side. So they were operating differently. (RP3)

3) **Primary theme: Funding and infrastructure**

Funding and infrastructure emerged as a primary theme through a discussion based on question 2(c) listed in the interview schedule (Appendix 3). The responses of the participants highlighted four secondary content themes. These secondary content themes are explored and discussed below with regard to the experiences the participants shared during the focus group discussions.

- **Secondary content theme: Financial difficulties**

The participants were of the opinion that during the UL merger period, their student organizations experienced a number of financial challenges at the Medunsa Campus especially on an organizational level. The participants pointed out that before the merger, the former MEDUNSA was financially stable compared to the UNIN. The merger caused a significant financial crisis for the Medunsa Campus:

... from my understanding, MEDUNSA was well stable financially, and then uh, the University of the North, I don’t know much because from what I was presented with the statements it was unstable ... (PP1)
... Government saw that the new Turf was under financial crisis, and the government identified that it was under financial crisis, right? So then they had to bring up merger ... (SOP2)

The participants pointed out that the merger was characterized by an unfair distribution of funds made available from Government and other external funders. The participants felt that the bulk of the funding was allocated to the Turfloop Campus:

_What happened is that all of the financial support that MEDUNSA was supposed to get, the resources that MEDUNSA was supposed to get to get us out of this recession, to say, uh, that we were in, all of those resources went to the University of Limpopo. They went to Turfloop. (SOP1)_

_The distribution in terms of NSFAS was just unfair when you look at it from the perspective as MEDUNSA students, where you see that a large amount of money was pushed to Turfloop Campus, leaving us with just a little bit ... (SOP4)_

The participants felt that the merger created a situation in which it became impossible for students to assist one another with excess funds from bursaries or sponsors. Previously, they could assist fellow-students financially. In the former MEDUNSA, students who had excess funds available in their financial account transferred amounts to needy students of their choice:

_And it was even beneficial to those who are needy in the MEDUNSA community because, I mean, right now it has made, eh, eh, I think it has disadvantaged a lot of people because back then, my brother who’s suffering, on the side, I was able to make sure that okay, I’ve balanced one of, eh, I can afford to take some portion of my funds and transfer to the other person ... (SOP1)_

On an organizational level, the participants felt that inadequate financial support was provided to student organizations during the merger period. The participants mentioned student inter-varsity conferences, concerts, sports tournaments and general organizational activities in this regard. The level of financial support provided to the Medunsa Campus in terms of equipment, uniforms, allowances and transport was poor as compared to the Turfloop Campus:
I felt that Turfloop benefited more from the merger, uh, financially, academically, uh, for example in, when we went to USSAs um, they had better tracksuits, better bags, everything ... so in other words, it did help in the other side, not in financial side in terms of MEDUNSA. (SPP2)

We didn’t really have financial support. In 2012 we didn’t get support. 2013, I remember we got a bus – that’s what we got for the whole year, a bus to go to an orphanage. Last year, nothing. This year we were told that we came too late or something, but we don’t really get any support financially. (RP4)

- **Secondary content theme: Unequal sharing of resources**

Most of the participants mentioned the unequal treatment of the two campuses of UL. The Medunsa Campus always received the short end of the stick pertaining to the sharing of resources. The general feeling of the participants was that the Turfloop Campus was the more favoured and best-supported campus:

> I can say differences in the treatment of uh, both campuses. That’s one thing that I noticed form 2011 ... you find that the University of Limpopo will be going to a tournament, for an example, a sporting tournament, both campuses are there, but if you look at one campus, it does not have certain things. The other has certain things, you know, you out there. It shows that it seemed as if only part of the University of Limpopo that existed was in Turfloop Campus. (PP2)

> Resources also, like the budget given to structures: they get a different budget, we get a different budget, but our POAs are the same ‘cause we function under the same organization. (RP6)

The unequal treatment and differences between the two campuses were reported to have been experienced in the infrastructure, sporting equipment and organizational resources. To a large extent this unequal treatment created an impression by student organizations that the UL belongs more to the Turfloop Campus than the Medunsa Campus. It also left an impression that the unfair treatment towards the Medunsa Campus was a deliberate gesture by the Turfloop Campus in reaction to an unwanted demerger. The inequalities further created disunity between the two campuses:
So now that is why you’ll find that even Turfloop even had better facilities than us this side, because they were protecting their territory ...

(RP1)

Turf, you could see, they were flourishing. Everything their side was improving, they got everything done on time. But yet again you come back to this university – things were not done ... So it was very bitter for us here – everything was just slowed down. And I don’t know if they did that deliberately ‘cause they didn’t want the demerger. (RP3)

They lived even in better residences in comparing to us and I wondered, what is happening, why is this uh, like why is the sport money not, uh, equal in both campuses ... (SPP2)

I feel like there was still a lot of competition, uh, between the two campuses and we were not working together on all aspects. It would be even financially, you’d see that there’d always be a campus, that has more, I don’t know, equipment, and the other ones were not treated the same way always. (SPP3)

The inequalities were also reported to have been contrary to the expectations of student organizations of what a merger should have meant:

... personally I would expect that resources would be shared mutually and equally, but from what we’ve seen and the feedback that comes from students and the management, is that resources weren’t really shared equally, because um, in terms of development and infrastructure when we compare the two institutions, not much positive impact is seen in this institution than the other institution ... (RP5)

Secondary content theme: Lack of transparency and accountability

The participants reported dissatisfaction with the transparency and accountability of line managers in different departments of the UL. Most of the participants referred to a lack of accountability which was experienced during the merger. Lack of accountability became obvious in various facets of operations of the UL, particularly where sports were concerned. Lack of transparency and accountability was perceived to have been the reason
for the slow development on the Medunsa Campus. The participants felt that line managers were never held accountable for their work or lack thereof:

... there’s no transparency because now there were rumours late last year, I don’t know when or early this year, that there was something like a million allocated to renovation of sports com [complex] and nothing has been done. The best that has happened was the changing of the machines at the gym ... (SPP6)

Like for now, eh, I’ve never seen or heard someone say that no, we’re requesting for a student report of a certain tournament that we had, improvements. There is no report being submitted...Yes, basically, it’s the same fights, as you know as usual, the USSAs come, and there’s no money, you need to walk up and down at and then suddenly there’s money. (SPP1)

The problem is that they’re in power, and there’s nobody monitoring what they are doing. And there’s no way of going around them, like, wherever you’re going, you meet them there, and honestly if they don’t like you, you’re not going to get anything … (SPP3)

4) Primary theme: The role of students

The primary theme of the role of students emerged through a discussion based on question 2(e) listed in the interview schedule (Appendix 3). The participants pointed out three secondary content themes that emerged from the primary content theme. These secondary content themes are explored and discussed below with regard to the experiences of the participants during the focus group discussions.

- Secondary content theme: Student representation

The UL merger was reported to have compromised student representation in more than one way. The participants felt that student representation on the Medunsa Campus was weakened and could not be used effectively to influence university matters. Student organizations at the Medunsa Campus felt overpowered by the Turfloop Campus in events such as electing a balanced and unbiased SRC that should have provided an equal representation of students on both of the campuses:

... when you’re thinking contestations in the SRC. So that, in itself, brings a complex issue of how do you then vote, um, elect the proper representation
that will represent both campuses without biasness ... even the structuring of those things, at that time it was 4200 students around that time. You can’t compete with twenty-something students to vote for ... you see, and then they say both campus are well-represented. Then there was no way both campuses will be well-represented ... (PP1)

The participants also reported that students at the UL were not recognized by management. The voices of students were silenced and not considered in operations of the university. Even when the SRC occupied seats in structures of the university such as the Council, the Senate and management forums, their influence was minimal and their inputs were often disregarded. Their experiences of student representation were different than their expectations of a merger:

No, our needs were the last thing ... as I said. Like, there were a lot of things. For them it was always us, us, us, then students. But as we’re supposed to be the primary stakeholders, we felt that we’re the tertiary stakeholders. We’re the last people on their minds. Themselves were the first ones, and then the workers, and then, then the institution itself, and the infrastructure, then comes students, which didn’t make sense. (RP1)

I think also what we are expecting, also, the recognition. We were expecting that we were going to be recognized better ... (RP2)

The non-recognition of student organizations by the management of the UL was also reported during sports whereby sporting codes felt that their student organizations were not recognized and they were treated as insignificant:

I would say that we also expected more recognition of the sporting codes because sport is like at the bottom of whatever pyramid there is ... (SPP2)

Secondary content theme: Student consultation

The participants felt that there was no student consultation during decision-making and operations of the UL by the university management at various structures of the university. The participants reported that the consultation of students as stakeholders of the university was not taken seriously by management. Changes in policies, in day-to-day operations – even during the merger process – were imposed on students without their input being recognized as primary stakeholders and end-users:
... we were supposed to be consulted in everything. In each and every process, we were supposed to be taken through it. In the policies, we were supposed to be involved. In everything, as much as the SRC was supposed to be involved, also us, as much as uh, other political organizations would be involved, we were supposed to be involved. We were supposed to be taken through all those steps, of which, that role, we didn’t play because we were never involved ... (RP6)

Issues of consultations, it’s really not important for them actually per se ... So there is no communication, there’s no consultations, there’s nothing, no process, just sport as I said ... (SPP1)

... whenever they take decision, um, they don’t include people that are being affected ... (PP3)

○ Secondary content theme: Student support systems

The participants highlighted issues with regard to a lack of student support systems experienced during the merger of the UL. Lack of support was reported in various areas of student life such as in sports, social and religious activities. The participants felt that they did not receive enough support when they participated in university related activities and when hosting their own organizational activities. They also experienced inconsistency and favouritism in the manner in which student support was provided to the different student organizations:

... ‘cause there is no sport which is soft, and if as the students we gonna participate, we gonna get injuries and you have to pay for yourself in hospital but for that sake of this year, very, they said it was concussion and that person was supposed to be taken to a private hospital … (SPP3)

... when it comes to the religious structures that are her on campus, the institution doesn’t take them seriously ... they will never even bother to hire us resources for these small structures when we ask them ... (RP2)

... unfortunately, they always have sports awards or something, and stuff, you know, they will never have your religious awards or something ... (RP5)
… we say we want activities that will foster cohesion. We cannot expect to take our sisters and go and socialize outside. We need, eh, places on this campus that will guarantee safety and also make sure that we mingle.

(SOP1)

The participants were further of the opinion that lack of support concerning student organizations and favouritism experienced during the merger of the UL became a cause for not participating in university and organizational activities. They reported low morale and feelings of demotivation when students were asked to become members of student organizations or to participate in student organizational activities:

... there was a total lack of morale in people joining certain sporting codes
... I feel that certain sporting codes were affected differently ... (SPP4)

... When we say we need a physiotherapist, they won’t even understand that no, people fall on the floor in dance, people, people um, get hurt, you know
... Because if they always tell us that there’s no money, it’s totally discouraging … (SPP5)

Because first of all, I’m representing a student, I’m representing a varsity. I’m going to debate all weekend. The varsity is aware of that ‘cause they gave us funds to go there. But especially again, to come back Monday to write an exam to pass. So does it give me an encouragement to say okay, let me go and debate ... What is the university doing about the activities that we are doing ‘cause we go to UP, if you are playing soccer they will give you a bursary, so they won’t do anything ‘cause they know what you are doing for the varsity at the same time. So what is happening about this university because we’ve always had a problem that’s why students don’t participate, and then at the end of the day you say students why they’re not playing anything. They can’t, it’s difficult ... (SOP4)

5) **Primary theme: A decline in student social life**

A decline in student social life emerged as a primary theme through a discussion based on question 2(e) listed in the interview schedule (Appendix 3). The theme is explored and discussed below with regard to the experiences of the participants during focus group discussions.
The participants reported that the merger of the UL had a severe impact on their campus life as a significant decline in their social lives on the Medunsa Campus took place. The participants experienced that the campus culture in terms of recreational programmes was negatively affected by the merger as evidenced by the deterioration of social cohesion events hosted during the merger in comparison to the period of time before the merger when they studied at the former MEDUNSA. The role and relevance of some of the student organizations was reported to have been questioned during the merger – illustrating the serious harm that the merger was causing students. The safety of students was also seriously compromised, because some of the students had to leave the campus in search of recreational activities in an unsafe environment:

... a downfall in social life ... We used to have a pre-bash for every single bash we had. We don’t have that no more ... not to say go we want more parties but there was a decrease since the initiation of this merger. (SOP2)

... we used to have fun in this campus ... Honestly, how many café parties have you had since the University of Limpopo opened, compared to when it was before? That’s just one instance. (SOP3)

Us as DJ society, back when we were in MEDUNSA, we used to have a club. We used to DJ there, have fun, and we were more protected within our institution than now when the University of Limpopo came with a merger. Now we have to go out, chase our fun other than when we had fun in our own campus. (SOP1)

The participants also felt that a decline in their social lives impacted negatively on the gender balance with regard to student participation in their organizations due to a lack of social cohesion programmes at the Medunsa Campus:

... we have also noted that from MEDUNSA via the University of Limpopo, the level of female participation in programs around campus, be it in leadership, or other spheres, I think it might be also attributed to issues of not having enough programs to foster social cohesion, you know? But we have noticed a decline in participation ... (SOP1)
6) Primary theme: Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning emerged as a primary theme through a discussion based on question 2(e) listed in the interview schedule (Appendix 3). Two secondary content themes emerged from the above-mentioned primary theme. These secondary content themes are explored and discussed below with regard to the experiences of the participants during the focus group discussions.

- Secondary content theme: Quality assurance

The participants reported that the merger of the UL impacted negatively on quality assurance issues at the Medunsa Campus. The quality of programmes offered and the professionals produced at the university declined significantly after the merger. The decline in quality assurance was reported to have been attributed to the exodus of skilled and experienced personnel from the university due to merger discomfort. As a result, the standard and quality of education at the Medunsa Campus was significantly poor after the merger:

... when we have staff, experienced and we have staff leaving the university it impacts bad on the number and the quality of the graduates that the university produces. (PP1)

... the quality of lecturing worked to produce black doctors in particular ... but however, within a year after the merger, there was a drop in the number of graduates that the university was producing ... but one of the biggest cornerstones to say look, we have lost a number brilliant professors ... so we were going nowhere slowly. (PP3)

... you’d expect that the quality of education would improve for the black student as well. So in that saying, uh, most people were expecting that the doors to education would be open to more and more black people and yet still not compromising the standard of education. (RP4)

- Secondary content theme: Marketability of the university and its programmes

The participants reported that the image, credibility and marketability of the university – particularly at the Medunsa Campus – were compromised by the merger. The reported exodus of skilled personnel was blamed – the marketability of the university was severely affected. They also pointed out that some of the programmes offered at the UL, such as the
BSc degree, can be used as an example of an unmarketable degree which produced unemployable graduates. The participants were of the opinion that these problems imposed a financial and a socio-emotional strain on the graduates of the university:

We had eh, our senior lecturers resigning, of which the credibility of the institution, now, it doesn’t hold much when you lose your most trusted and powerful professors. (SOP1)

I read a friend of mine’s research and we found out that the people that graduate here from BSc they end up going to pursue other courses in other different institutions. We have a problem with an institution that allows people to invest three years of their time and hundreds of thousands in a programme that they know, for years, it has not been producing employed people. So that investment does not make business sense. (PP1)

The participants stated that since the merger, there have not been an adequate effort to market the university effectively, particularly at the Medunsa Campus. They pointed out that sports could be used very effectively to market a university and to improve the university’s image, yet sports was not utilized satisfactorily during the merger:

... for the university to be known, you need to promote it on all aspects and sports helps a lot, and of course if we do well, our name is going to be out there. Our name is going to be out there, they’ll know us and all that. So I believed they were going to invest a lot in sport and try to match all the universities in terms of sports for example ... (SPP4)

7) **Primary theme: Centralization of senior management**

The centralization of senior management emerged as a primary theme through a discussion based on question 2(c) listed in the interview schedule (Appendix 3). The themes is explored and discussed below as experienced by the participants during the focus group discussions.

The participants reported that the senior management of the UL was centralized during the merger to the Turfloop Campus – leaving the Medunsa Campus with minimal influence on the decisions made by the university. The participants believed that this was one of the factors that contributed largely to the failure of the merger. They reported dissatisfaction with the availability of senior managers to address issues affecting the Medunsa Campus.
As a result, the participants were of the view that the merger favoured the Turfloop Campus which led to divisions between the two campuses of the UL:

... this merger favored one side. The factor that I think contributed much is that the distance, first, the management, second, and having one person one person leading the merger, of which he spends most of his time on the one side than the other side. So the place where he spends more time is the same place that is going to benefit more... So again, what I'm getting at is you take an institution MEDUNSA and Limpopo, the Turfloop, you hire a person from Turfloop to head the two institutions together. Obviously there's always going to be a conflict of interest or biased. (SOP4)

As you'll understand, having management’s office in Polokwane while we are in Rankuwa, it was problematic ... there was completely no unity between the two sides of management. You find that there was management under the MEDUNSA campus, there was management under Turfloop campus. There was an executive manager under the University of Limpopo, of which it was based in Turfloop. (PP1)

The participants also reported that the centralization of management caused frustrations to student organizations in their day-to-day operations. It made it difficult to organize student events timeously and efficiently as the student organizations were subjected to an unreasonable bureaucracy:

... Let's say with regard to marketing of stuff, which was a hassle. 'Cause, you find that to get things like, even a poster, a mere poster approval, because it's gonna go to Marketing here, and then go to Turfloop, and it takes days for it to come back ... (RP3)
Event: Demerger

1) Primary theme: Independence

Independence emerged as a primary theme through a discussion based on question 3(c) listed in the interview schedule (Appendix 3). The theme is explored and discussed below as experienced by the participants during the focus group discussions.

The participants reported that the demerger was experienced positively with regard to the Medunsa Campus. The Medunsa Campus gained their independence from the UL. The participants felt that their long awaited autonomy and freedom were finally realized by the demerger. The responses of the participants highlighted that the period during the merger was not enjoyed by the student organizations and the demerger was welcomed with open arms. Independence was illustrated in financial and administrative aspects of the Medunsa Campus. The participants were of the opinion that the demerger provided a clear organogram and line of communication on campus and accountability was improved:

What we students wanted was that we wanted a stand-alone, independent university, and we got that ... the important thing about de-merger is the independence from UL ... So whatever happens after, you can have twenty campuses under SMU, but it doesn’t change the fact that we are independent from UL. The most important thing that you wanted from the de-merger is to divorce UL. That’s what you wanted. So it doesn’t change the fact that we have independence ... (PP2)

Um, firstly, the independence, that’s what we’ve been fighting for ... (RP2)

Okay. I thought, it, it, it happens with everyone, once you have your own freedom, once you have autonomy you can do whatever you want, ‘cause whatever decision, you don’t need to consult anyone ... (SPP1)

... but the one thing I’ve benefit from the demerger is, we had someone who’s gonna held accountable for everything that has to happen, that has to do with sports, as like as they were mentioning, most of the time if we have to lay a complaint we have to send letters to Turfloop and something else ... (SPP3)
2) **Primary theme: Rapid development**

Rapid development emerged as a primary theme through a discussion based on question 3(c) listed in the interview schedule (Appendix 3). The theme is explored and discussed below as experienced by the participants during the focus group discussions.

The participants highlighted another gain of the demerger process of the UL – rapid development. They reported that fast-tracked development in terms of infrastructure was experienced – student housing, academic infrastructure, academic programmes, job creation, social cohesion and student support:

*Hundred percent. Because if you go to the SMU website, we have the independent pharmacy field, introducing new courses. There's new courses tse tlang mo tsa pharmacy in this new building, which means there's new staff, there’s new job opportunities ...* (SOP3)

*So what I’m seeing is that there are new residences, of which it gives advantage to saying we’re gonna take the first-years, put them on campus, and that brings more what? They study, the library is here, and every facility is on campus.* (SOP3)

*One of the positive changes that I noticed is the cleaning of the pool ...* (SPP3)

*Another parts of change is the hiring of coaches, ‘cause it’s, there’s been, we’ve been without a coach for a number of years, so, this year we finally have a coach.* (SPP5)

3) **Primary theme: Ambiguous use of terminology**

Ambiguous use of terminology emerged as a primary theme through a discussion based on question 3(b) and (c) listed in the interview schedule (Appendix 3). The theme is explored and discussed below as experienced by the participants during the focus group discussions.

In contrast to the advantages gained by the demerger, the participants reported their dissatisfaction and confusion about the kind of language used in implementing the demerger process. The participants were of the opinion that the use of the term “unbundling” as opposed to “demerger” was confusing, unclear and caused ambiguity. They felt that unbundling presented a different context to what was their actual
expectation of the demerger of the UL. The participants reported that the ambiguous use of terminology allowed for the unfair distribution of assets of the UL between the two separating entities. Student organizations were confused about and dissatisfied with the demerger process:

*Um, I think the whole term of de-merger or the unbundling as they were using the term, I think, I don’t know if it was used out of context or what, because you can’t say that if we are married and then now we are getting divorced, and now all of a sudden I don’t know what happens to you. I keep everything else that we had, and now you become another thing like what happened here …* (PP2)

**Event: Transition into the SMU**

1) **Primary theme: Name change**

Name change emerged as a primary theme through a discussion based on question 4(b) listed in the interview schedule (Appendix 3). The theme is explored and discussed below as experienced by the participants during the focus group discussions.

The participants reported discontent over the process which was followed in naming the university and the choice of the name itself. They indicated that they felt excluded from the processes leading up to the naming of the new university. They were not consulted on the name change – the name “SMU” was imposed on them. The experience of not being consulted and involved in the decision-making process of the UL was repeated during the name changing process:

*… The process, seriously, we didn’t have a choice. We were told ukuthi, no, you guys have a choice, you guys have a say in what you want the new name of the university to be, but already they had known what they wanted to call it …* (SOP3)

*It’s like the name, ne, same thing happened with the merger, they just tell you to do what, and then … it’s like the name. No one wanted the name but we had no choice to accept it. Even the merger, the same thing. Then we have to accept it, they were likely to accept the merger.* (SOP2)
... then they imposed the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences on MEDUNSA because we had de-merged with the University of Limpopo and we couldn’t keep our old name, and then they gave us that name ... ” (SPP5)

The participants wished to keep the old acronym “MEDUNSA” as the new name since the name create fond memories of how things used to be before the merger. The participants reported that they view the name “MEDUNSA” as iconic and it commands respect in various spheres of society and has the potential of building confidence – more so than the name “SMU” which was imposed on the students even when they declared what their preferred name was:

... the name ‘MEDUNSA’ on its own was an iconic thing and it worked and I think diluting that meant a lot of lost sponsorship ... So the change of the name was kind of discouraging to us. Now when you have such an experience in which you’re not happy, it speaks bad to us ... Even arriving at the name, you understand, students demonstrated I think last year to protest the issue of the name because our understanding is that if people are responding to out call, the call that we made as students, then they must do that without having their own interests. And it now comes across as if we’ve got certain problems with our black former leaders which is not the case. But what we are saying as students is we wanted MEDUNSA back. (PP1)

... preferably, some of us would have preferred to retain the old name because it held so much weight and it resonates with even the community around us. They still identify this campus as MEDUNSA. You go out there, there’s a taxi station there. It’s not SMU. I’m sure people would get lost if you say ngiyehla e SMU, uyangithola ... MEDUNSA used to have so much integrity to a level whereby the sponsors, you know, when you said MEDUNSA, I mean, people understood exactly what you were talking about. So I think maybe, ge we might have re-branded and given it another name, but we expected it go back ... (SOP1)
2) **Primary theme: Attitudes towards the SMU**

Attitudes towards the SMU emerged as a primary theme through a discussion based on question 4(b), (d) and (e) listed in the interview schedule (Appendix 3). Three secondary content themes were identified with regard to the attitudes experienced by the participants during the focus group discussions and can be linked with their expectations concerning the SMU.

○ **Secondary content theme: Excitement**

Excitement was experienced by the participants as well as optimism with regard to the process of developing the SMU and about the new university itself. They felt happiness and was encouraged by the establishment of the SMU. The participants viewed the SMU as a university that has the potential to achieve the milestones that could have been achieved by the former MEDUNSA:

> Ja, again, I remember saying we cannot fear the unknown or the future. Currently, nna, I take the SMU as the old MEDUNSA, but a bit broader, and I’m happy with everything that is happening currently … (SOP3)

> ... What I’m experiencing um, is happiness. I mean we’ve inherited what the comrades worked for us, the Ntsie’s of this world. But I’m so happy that we ended up being at the final stage of what we were fighting for. So as SASCO I’m happy to have been a generation that came up with results ...

(PP1)

The participants highlighted that their current experiences in the transition process of the SMU has redefined their role and posed a challenge to them in shaping the new university to display an image appreciated by all of them. They experienced a sense of ownership and belonging to the SMU – more than they have ever felt during the merger that led to the establishment of the UL:

> Now whether we want to make SMU a brand, that’s what excites us because we have a new a challenge and an opportunity as students of this time to lay a ground and leave a legacy, because it is up to us now to shape what SMU is. So we got what we wanted – we didn’t lose anything, really. We have a challenge now, just to shape the new university. (PP2)
I feel as leaders of the university what we supposed to do is to make sure that we market our institution; we make sure our institution has got uh, a brand that students and learners can identify with... so I believe that’s some of the things that we can do … (PP1)

Secondary content theme: Hope

A sense of hope was experienced by the participants with regard to the SMU. The participants believed that the SMU has the potential to achieve much more than what has been already achieved during the transition process. The participants were positive about the SMU’s future and their sense of belonging and ownership of the new university were highlighted during the focus group discussions. They based their hopefulness on the tangible developments that are currently in place at the SMU such as infrastructural development, improvements of learning facilities and study aids:

I think also MEDUNSA started somewhere for it to carry weight. Even when you say I’m studying at MENDUNSA, everyone would say, ‘ah, you gonna be a doctor ... So even that thing, you know, I think SMU can do the same thing. When you say you’re studying at Sefako, they’ll be like, ‘ah, you’re a scientist, or you’re a doctor?’ something like that. So I think we have it, we didn’t lose anything. It’s just upon us students or upon the university to improve and do things different from MEDUNSA, like forget about MEDUNSA and work on SMU. (PP3)

So I think when we look at the establishment of SMU, it’s looking positive. (PP3)

... we feel that more can be achieved or more can be done. We can have a higher throughput in this institution only if we behave in a way that Africans behave ... I think we are getting there because from my side, where I’m standing, there were a lot of things where if you were to do, um, the course that I’m doing, you wouldn’t be able to do um, during that time when we didn’t have enough equipments and stuff. But it’s promising – I see a lot of renovations, I see a lot of changes in those facilities, so I will say that we are getting there, even though it’s in the first eleventh month to date, so I think ja, I think we are getting there. (PP1)
Secondary content theme: Uncertainty

A significant portion of the participants – amidst all of the positive experiences – reported feelings of uncertainty and scepticism about the future of the SMU. They based their doubts on their previous experiences during the merger and it has become very difficult for them now to trust change processes based on a few visible positive changes. The participants admitted distrust and pessimism based on their traumatic experiences during the UL merger. They continuously compare the two periods – the UL era and the SMU era:

*We can be excited to day, you know, because things are still new and nice. But you don’t know about the future. The future might hold worse kind of things that we experienced when we were together with Turfloop.* (SOP1)

*I’m not going to look at two buildings on this campus and say the future is bright. We’ll see as we go on. That’s my point.* (SOP2)

*... Oh ja, and nna I doubt. But if they start it, though, like the way they started, there’s high chances that they, you know, repeat the same thing ... because then you’re used to something ...* (RP5)

3) Primary theme: A need for sound policy development

A need for sound policy development emerged as a primary theme through a discussion based on question 4(c) listed in the interview schedule (Appendix 3). The theme is explored and discussed below as experienced by the participants during the focus group discussions.

The participants reported that there is still a strong need for sound policy development at the SMU as they have experienced difficulties in executing certain processes in their student organizations due to a lack of guiding documents. They felt that it was very important for the SMU to urgently undertake policy summits during which the student organizations should be consulted:

*I don’t think that so far there are enough policies to guide that support that you are talking about. Um, to the point that if, for an example, if one of the structures sitting here, it’s not represented in the SRC, they may not be privy to certain information and certain discussions which are held. I don’t*
think there’s that platform which allows all the student organizations to say, let’s sit down, let’s discuss this and that ... (PP1)

Once we have policies that are working, we’ll have good systems in place, then we’ll stick to them and they will work. (RP1)

... you know that the SRC doesn’t have a constitution? So for them to implement a new SRC they need the inputs of the students. So all they need to do is take our inputs, and then ja, we take it from there ... We need a summit as soon as possible ... to come up with a document because we can’t run without that document ... (SOP2)

Conclusion

A total of 13 primary themes were presented in this chapter. Secondary content themes emerged under some of the primary themes and were also presented. All of these themes emerged through focus group discussions based on the questions developed in an interview schedule (Appendix 3) and from the transcribed responses of the participants. The presentation of the results is, therefore, a summary of the responses of the participants.

The following chapter discusses and integrates the results with the theoretical perspectives discussed in chapter 2. It will further integrate the results with already existing literature on mergers of higher education institutions – globally and locally.
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

This chapter provides a discussion on the results presented in Chapter 4. The chapter looks into the themes that emerged during the analysis of the results and translates these themes into a narrative account. Thereafter, the findings are positioned within the existing literature about the merger trends globally and locally and the theories presented in Chapter 2. These themes emerged from the three events that were identified as sources from which the experiences of student organizations were deduced (see Table 1, Chapter 4). Themes are grouped and discussed as core aspects of the experiences of student organizations in relation to the existing literature and theories. Lastly, the strengths and limitations of the study are explored, followed by the highlights of the researcher’s recommendations.

Understanding of the merger

The results of this study indicate that student organizations have an adequate understanding of what a merger is in general and how the merger of the UL, in particular, occurred (see 4.3.1.1, Chapter 4). Authors who have contributed to the discussion on higher education mergers globally and locally define a merger as a combination of two or more entities into one new institution with a new culture and identity (Goreham, 2011; Roberts et al. 2012). The understanding of a merger as defined by student organizations in the UL is in line with the aforementioned definition. Student organizations in the present study added that part of the rationale for the mergers was as an attempt by government to manage funding of higher education institutions effectively. The existing literature on merger trends indicates that the rationale for mergers in higher education include, inter alia, an attempt to address issues of equity and efficiency of higher education systems and to produce long-term benefits for both the individuals and the system as a whole, such as efficiency and cost saving (Pinheiro et al. 2015).

Cost efficiency in this case relates to effective funding of higher education institutions by the government. As in the case of Australian and Canadian mergers, their respective federal governments demanded that institutions become more efficient and accountable with regard to how they spend public funds. By merging higher education institutions, the
federal governments achieved greater efficiencies such as educating more students at a lower cost by means of the reduction of administrative cost previously imposed by the separated universities and colleges (Arnolds et al. 2013).

The intended influence of the government on the funding of higher education institutions can be understood better through the ecological systems theory, which classifies the government and higher education institutions as ecological levels within the broader higher education system. The ecological systems theory illustrates factors that are applicable in the structuring of the population of higher education institutions as ecosystems (Scott, 1981; Kelly et al. 2000) within which the ecological levels may be observed. An institution of higher education represents a microsystem level, which creates a context within which interactions between the student organizations and other higher hierarchy levels such as management and institutional policy occur. The government or the Department of Education represents the macrosystem level where laws governing higher education institutions are passed (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). These levels are nested within each other, each representing a different level of analysis from individuals’ immediate environment through to the greater society (Giraldo-Gracia, 2014). Therefore, the government’s influence and control of the funding of higher education institutions represent an interaction between the ecological levels of higher education.

The study also revealed that student organizations view the UL merger as a means to provide the Limpopo province with a medical school. Some of the global drivers for mergers, locally and globally, include broadening student access and implementation of broad scale equity strategies (Harman & Meek, 2002; The Ministry of Education, 2003). The view of student organizations about the UL merger specifically, refers to the South African government’s goal to increase access to higher education. This shows that the merger of MEDUNSA and UNIN emanated from the government at the macrosystem level and flowed down to affect student organizations, personnel and the entire environment at the microsystem level. However, the decision to merge MEDUNSA and UNIN was made with inadequate considerations of management issues such as local, decentralized control and participation. It further overestimated subsystem integration, which led to “conservative, status-quo, political positions”, and discouragement of constructive conflict and variety Siporin (2014). The neglect of subsystem integration and control issues is one of the limitations of the ecological systems theory pointed out by Siporin (2014) and, in the case of the UL, led to merger failure.
Merger failure

The current study found that the merger of the UL failed to achieve the global and local rationale, aims and objectives for higher education mergers. Student organizations experienced the UL merger as a failure particularly on aspects of transformation, for which the major precipitating factors were the geographical distance between the two campuses of the UL, the experienced loss of skilled labor and the failure to harmonize policy and programmes offered by the two campuses (see 4.3.1.2, Chapter 4).

At a transformational level, the results show that the UL merger failed to uphold the rationale of overcoming apartheid induced divisions between HBIs and HWIs by merging two historically black and disadvantaged institutions (SASCO, 2009). This implies that the UL merger failed to meet the government’s need to redress inequalities of the previous dispensation (Chipunza & Gwarinda, 2010). The failure of mergers in higher education hinges on the inability to facilitate transformational change (Henderson, 2002). According to Lippitt’s phases of change theory, failure to facilitate transformational change results from an inability of the change agent - the government and mergers - to transfer the duty for establishing change to the client organization - the merging institutions. Successful transformational change requires enhancing commitment to the change process (the merger) by timeous and continuous accounting, which enforces structural support (Henderson, 2002). This implies that the failure of mergers in facilitating transformation hinges on what the Lippitt’s phases of change theory refers to as the role and responsibility of the change agent in acknowledging the role and responsibility of the client organization (Kritsonis, 2005).

A review of the lessons learned from higher education mergers by Skodvin (1999) and Unpan (2008) put geographical proximity as one of the fundamental necessities for successful mergers. The present study revealed that the UL merger was characterized by a geographical distance that presented administrative challenges to the university management and to the progress of the merger. Makgoba and Price (2011) alludes to the fact that the geographical distance between the two campuses of UL is more than 300km. The distance led to logistical difficulties such as centralization of senior management, insecurities about attempts to relocate the Medunsa campus to Polokwane, and a decline in the quality of the academic programmes.
The study found that centralization of management roles to Turfloop in Limpopo led to unavailability of senior managers in timeously addressing pressing day-to-day issues of the Medunsa campus. In line with Lang (2003), the centralization of senior management in Turfloop suggested a form of a merger characterized by the swallowing of a smaller institution by a bigger one. Lang (2003) suggests that the level of diversity and competitiveness of the two institutions were not monitored thoroughly during the pre-merger phase. As in the case of Australian mergers, Arnolds et al. (2013) state that the adverse effects of mergers include alienation of human resources due to the ineffective style of management. The Ministry of Education (2003) emphasizes the need for effective management and the importance of availability of management at merged institutions. Therefore, centralization of senior management left the staff of the Medunsa campus feeling alienated and the student organizations feelings neglected.

Furthermore, negative effects arising from the centralization of management suggest that the merger failed to achieve the principle of ‘nesting’ for the Medunsa campus. Nesting entails that identification and belonging nest within social network communities, which in turn nest within the greater social system (Kagan et al, 2011). Student organizations lacked a sense of belonging to the UL. This was perpetuated by the perceived division and competition between the two campuses due to centralization of senior management to the Turfloop campus. Student organizations in Medunsa campus felt the Turfloop campus was favoured by management.

Logistical and administrative difficulties further spread to areas such as the distribution of funding and infrastructure between the two campuses. The manner in which the distribution of funding and infrastructural development was carried out led to unintended consequences and unsuccessful change process (Kagan et al, 2011). In essence, the UL merger failed to uphold the principle of the ecological metaphor - the interaction between the entities of a system and the multiple social systems in which they exist (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). The ecological metaphor, according to Kelly et al. (2000), outlines four principles that are crucial in understanding change within ecological systems and its impact on people and communities, these are interdependence, cycling of resources, adaptation and succession. The result of failure to uphold the ecological metaphor saw student organizations experiencing unequal treatment of the two campuses of UL by management.
Concurrently, the attempts to relocate the Medunsa campus to Polokwane created job insecurity among staff members (Makgoba & Price, 2011). The centralization and unavailability of senior management, attempts to relocate and the resultant feelings of alienation together led to low morale and an exodus of skilled personnel from the university due to the discomfort created by the merger. In support of these findings, experiences of employees in the merger of technical colleges in Kentucky and Minnesota in the USA pointed out cultural resistance, inadequate communication, and declined stakeholder importance (Ellis, 2011). Arnolds et al. (2013) posit that most South African mergers failed due to their adverse effects on job security, management–employee relations, and performance standards. Similarly, Fielden and Markham (1997) report disruption of relocation of staff and students as part of the problems caused by mergers in England. Literature shows that 55–70 per cent of mergers across the world fail because of the neglect of human resources and the breach of psychological contracts leading to a decline in employee commitment, motivation and performance (Van Straaten Theron, 2011; Arnolds et al. 2013).

The ecological systems theory explains the exodus of staff as being the result of vulnerability and lack of resilience and adaptability. Adger (2006) posits that vulnerability to environmental change cannot be separated from the macrosystem level influences such as the broader political economy of resource use. As such, vulnerability is strongly influenced by purposeful human actions that reinforce self-interest and power sharing. Higher education institutions as ecological systems are affected by vulnerability when they are exposed to external stressors descending from the macrosystem level. In such a case, the type of change to impact on them is determined by government policies. They therefore become sensitive to such stressors to a point that their resilience and adaptability is affected. The study established that the impact of uncertainty about UL imposed vulnerability at the microsystem level of the merger of UL, thus compromising resilience and adaptability of staff members and leading to the experienced exodus.

The results suggest that the quality of teaching together with quality assurance also declined due to the loss of skilled and experienced personnel. This compromised the standard and quality of education, image, credibility and marketability of the university. Arnolds et al. (2013) note the threat to quality assurance in teaching and learning, linked to a loss of personnel, as being part of the adverse effects of Australian mergers. Likewise, studies done on the DUT merger revealed that nearly 50% of participants felt that mergers
did not result in high quality management, while 42% thought that mergers did not help establish high quality councils (Chetty, 2010).

The findings of the present study indicate that the merger of the UL failed to harmonize policy and academic programmes between the two campuses of the university. Similar programmes were offered at both campuses while governed by different academic rules. Lessons learned from South African mergers indicate that harmonization of policy and teaching programmes are a common challenge among mergers in various institutions (Goldman & Van Tonder, 2006). This is attributed to the lack of complementary instructional programmes between merging institutions (Mabokela & Wei, 2007). Arnolds et al. (2013) hold that harmonization of programmes in merged South African institutions was not effectively addressed. The continued duplication of programmes against the goal of avoiding duplication and overlap in programmes and service provision, is due to failure to effectively consolidate programmes and policy (Woodward, n.d.).

The merger of UKZN was reported as one of a few successful mergers in South Africa. The UKZ merger was able to harmonize academic programmes effectively through the development of a single unitary academic architecture in its early stages (Seepe, 2010). Achieving successful harmonization of policy and programmes hinges on the success in developing a well-defined mission and vision to address academic integration during the pre-merger phase. It also hinges on successfully evaluating models for multi-campus governance in terms of their impact on effective operation and academic integration during the pre-merger phase (Hall et al., 2004).

Failure to create a single integrated university results in a failure to progress into the refreezing stage of Lewin’s change model, which is concerned with the re-stabilization of the institution in a new perceived state of equilibrium to avoid relapse into old behaviours – a process still requiring cooperation at all ecological levels and a strong relationship between the leader and the followers (Dannar, 2011a). This, according to the Lewin’s change model, further implies that the merger process overlooked important activities such as encouraging individuals by readying them for change, building trust and recognition for the need to change and actively partaking in identifying difficulties and devising resolutions with all stakeholders of the institution during the unfreezing stage (Kritsonis, 2005).
The present study identified challenges associated with the unfair distribution of university funds and slow development of infrastructure during the UL merger. Jansen (2002) mentions that a successful merger must be able to permit economies of scale through the establishment of larger multi-purpose institutions with more proficient uses of infrastructure, amenities and labour. Canadian and Australian mergers faced similar challenges as those reported in the present study in that mergers resulted in inadequate funding and neglect of basic infrastructure (Arnolds et al., 2013). Lessons learned from the Dutch, Norwegian and Swedish mergers also pointed out that mergers require considerable resources for planning, coordination and physical infrastructure, and they are therefore often expensive in the short run (Skodvin, 1999). One can argue that ineffective management of funding and infrastructural development contributed to the failure of the UL merger. Often newly adopted funding models in merged institutions seem to lead to adverse effects and failure as in the case of Australian mergers (Arnolds et al. 2013).

The experiences of student organizations on the UL merger suggests failure to uphold the principle of cycling of resources. The manner in which the distribution of funding and infrastructure between the two campuses was carried out led to unintended consequences and unsuccessful change process (Kagan et al, 2011). The result of failure to uphold the ecological metaphor saw student organizations experiencing unequal treatment of the two campuses by management.

The results also revealed that the role of students, student organizations and the SRC during the merger of the UL was often neglected. Student organizations were left feeling sidelined, unsupported, having low morale and demotivated from participating in university activities. A review of higher education mergers conducted by Oakleigh Consulting Limited (2010) suggests that the critical success factors and good practice of mergers requires addressing staff, students, and cultural issues, including open communication as a means to uphold stakeholder importance. Similar trends were noted in the merger of technical colleges in Kentucky and Minnesota states in the USA. Stakeholder importance was often neglected by institutional management and this is listed as one of the adverse effects of mergers (Ellis, 2011).

The outcomes of Canadian mergers also point out that low morale and participation from various groups prevailed as part of the adverse effects of mergers (Arnolds et al. 2013). The low morale and demotivation and the resultant decline in student life seem to have been as a result of the lack of establishment and clear definition of the ‘structures’ and
‘processes’ as explained by Kelly et al. (2000). The lack of a student support systems and clear definition of the role of student organizations provides evidence for poor structures and processes in the UL merger. This, according to Kelly et al. (2000), impaired the development of the concepts that define processes such as reciprocity, networking and adaptation.

Studies in the United States revealed that among the effects of the merger processes in merged higher education institutions, students mention organizational culture as one that is affected by mergers. This is due to the difficulty in integrating and harmonizing different organizational cultures (Kroontz, 2009). Mabokela and Wei (2007) argue that mergers would not produce successful transformation of institutions without interventions at the root of organizational behaviour or affecting institutional culture. Kotecha and Harman (cited in Mabokela & Wei, 2007) emphasize that a particular cultural challenge for higher education leaders is to manage the merging of divergent campus cultures into coherent educational communities that display high levels of cultural integration and loyalty to the new institution. In their list of principles important for implementation of mergers, Kilfoil and Groenewald (2005) suggest putting principles, people and their culture first, which includes being as inclusive as possible. Student organizations as organizational actors and stakeholders in the UL were not integrated and were not capable of making decisions within their own rights towards their own identity and culture (Krucken, 2011).

Lastly, from a general systems perspective, the merger failure can be understood as involving two patterns; (1) challenges experienced by student organizations, and (2) failed attempts to redress such challenges. These two patterns constitute change attempts that occurred in the same logical sequence as the problematic behaviour of the merger at various ecological levels within the UL. This phenomenon is referred to as ‘more of the same’ and constitutes first order change (Johanson, 1984; Perez, 2008; Sterling, 2011). The impact of change at this level produces more frustrations among student organizations and a negative view of the merger.

**Gains from the demerger process**

The results indicate that after the announcement of the demerger or the ‘unbundling’, the attitude of student organizations changed completely from what it was during the merger. Student organizations enjoyed the independence, freedom, and autonomy that came with the demerger. These were new experiences that were reported to have been absent during
the UL merger (see 4.3.2, Chapter 4). The disregard of autonomy and independence seems to be confirmed by the experiences of Canadian mergers, where Arnolds et al. (2013) report that institutional autonomy was often disregarded. Similarly, studies on the New Zealand higher education mergers confirmed that mergers caused loss of autonomy and respect of institutions (Grey, 2015), thus destabilizing the institutions.

“...The destabilized process enforces reshaping and restructuring of the system” Dahl (2010).

The UL system was destabilized and this necessitated reshaping and restructuring (Dahl, 2010). The reshaping and restructuring process took place through the demerger and tramped on what Adger (2006) describes as adaptation and succession of ecological systems. Adaptation requires structural, process and policy change to expand the range of variability with which an institution can cope with change (Levine & Perkins, 1987). Succession, according to Nelson and Prilleltensky (2010), involves a long-term perspective and draws attention to the historical context of the problem and the need for planning for a preferred future. Adaptation and succession represents change that occurs at a different level than that of the status quo of an institution. The demerger process therefore represents a second order change, which is change that is effected at a higher logical level than the problematic behaviour. This level of change presents a meta-change to a problematic merger, hence facilitating a restructuring and reframing process that removed the Medunsa campus from the UL (Watzlawick et al, 1974; Perez, 2008; Sterling, 2011). The demerger therefore led to new experiences of independence and autonomy enjoyed by student organizations.

**Attitude of student organizations towards the new institution (SMU)**

Gaining independence and autonomy from the merger seemed to have remolded the attitude of student organization to that of excitement and hopefulness as indicated by the results (see 4.3.3.2, Chapter 4). Student organizations felt (1) happy and encouraged by the establishment of SMU – excitement; (2) they viewed SMU as having the potential to achieve great milestones – hopefulness; and (3) an increased sense of ownership and belonging to SMU developed.

Lewin’s three-step change model shows how the establishment of SMU was a process that emanated from the unfreezing step where the leader and the follower worked together in the same direction and there is no resisting and restraining forces pulling in the opposite
direction (Dannar, 2011a). It was also based on a change process where there was complementary interaction from all members of the system. It demonstrated appropriate persuasion of individuals at a microsystem level to admit that the status quo of UL was not helpful to them. It further motivated them to see the problem from a new viewpoint, to work together in pursuit of fresh and relevant information, and to connect group opinions to those of influential authority figures who are also amenable to the desired change at a microcosm level (Kritsonis, 2005).

Contrary to the above, the results point out that there were also negative attitudes that developed from the establishment of SMU. Feelings of uncertainty and skepticism about the future of SMU and distrust of university managers were noted. These were based on the previous sidelining in processes of the UL and during the process of naming the new university. These experiences seem to follow closely on those of the technical colleges in Kentucky and Minnesota state colleges and universities (MnSCU) where the attitudes of faculty professionals were negatively affected by a neglect of stakeholder importance and effective communication (Ellis, 2011). The results further identify gaps and insufficiencies in the policy of SMU (see 4.3.3.3, Chapter 4). Both the negative attitudes about the naming of the new university and the lack of sound policy development seem to have been the case with the MnSCU. Wallace (1998) reveals that the general community of MnSCU experienced confusion, conflict, paralysis and financial distress arising from the naming of the new institution. Such experiences were found to have been similar to those of student organizations in SMU.

The negative experiences of student organization can be understood from the ecological perspective as the unintended consequences of government’s intervention in a problematic merger. Kagan et al. (2011) posit that unintended consequences are a result of human interventions aimed at addressing certain aspects of the ecosystem and are difficult to anticipate. While on one hand the government’s intervention produced excitement, hope and a sense of belonging, the process involved yielded hostility and continued neglect of stakeholders in the system (Kagan et al. 2011). The principle of succession involves a long-term perspective of change and draws attention to the historical context of the problem and the need for planning for a preferred future (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). This implies that sidelining student organizations from the naming of the new institution was a neglect of the historical context of the problem and recapitulated the trends of the UL merger. Lack of sound policy hinges on the principle of adaptation according to which
policy change is one of the necessary means to expand the variability with which the new institution and its participants can cope with change (Adger, 2006).

**Strengths of the study**

The researcher identified the following as highlights of the study:

1) The study presented an opportunity for a part of the university community to reflect on the transition process that occurred in the guise of three events of change experienced by the university. This allowed student organizations to debrief their frustrations with the merger process.

2) The study utilized student organizations as focus groups, thus allowing for an exploration of organizational experiences that comprised of organizationally conserved information as opposed to individual information, which could have been lost with the annual transit of individual students.

3) The use of student organizations as focus groups further allow for holistic and detailed discussions, involving as many student organizations as possible, thus yielding a great deal of information and richer results.

4) The study highlighted important academic and curricula issues that may not have been revealed otherwise.

5) The study clarified the role of students as stakeholders within an institution of higher learning and the consequences of neglecting such a role in institutional change processes.

6) The study highlighted significant shortfalls in the university policy, which is important for the smooth operation of the new university.

7) The researcher’s previous participation in some of the student organizations helped him to derive a more accurate analysis of data because he understood the contextual dynamics, the language, and the culture of student organizations better than any
other researcher would have. However, the researcher did not participate in the data gathering as a member of a student organization to minimize bias.

8) The study contributed to the expansion of literature for universities that have undergone a demerging process, using the UL and the establishment of SMU as a practical case.

Limitations of the study

The researcher identified the following limitations in conducting the study over the course of the research:

1) As indicated above, the UL is one of the very few higher education institutions globally to undergo a **merger/demergent and establishment of the new university**. As a result, there was not enough literature to conceptualize the demerger process as far as global and local trends are concerned. Also, the South African higher education system currently does not have any guiding policy on demerging or unbundling of institutions and it was therefore difficult to position the process that unfolded during the demerger of the UL on existing literature.

2) The study involved three different events of change within the same environment, i.e. merger and demerger of the UL and the transition to SMU. All these events necessitated experience or at least knowledge of the three universities within which they occurred, i.e. MEDUNSA, UL, and SMU. Most of the participants who were sampled during the study only enrolled during the UL era and were not directly exposed to the MEDUNSA and the merger experience. Therefore, their accounts of the merger event were based on organizationally conserved information rather than their own experiences.

3) The number of student organizations affiliated at SMU and expected to participate in the study was very large due to the sampling procedure of choice. Some focus groups had more than the required number of participants necessary to accommodate all student organizations willing to participate in the study.

4) The present study was conducted on student organizations and not on individual students. Therefore, the results are a representation of experiences of student organization and not those of the individual students. The experiences of students
who are not affiliated to any student organization were not represented. Therefore, the study may not be a holistic representation of students’ experiences.

**Recommendations**

As noted in the limitations, the study represents the views of student organizations and not those of individual students. In order to enhance the quality and wholeness of the study, the following is recommended:

1) Future research on similar or related studies focusing on a larger sample of individual students.

2) Future research that extends to university employees and their organizations to explore their experiences on the three events. This, together with the present study, will yield a holistic understanding of the impacts of the change on all community members of the university.

The nature of the study hinges on processes of the higher education. It is recommended that the Department of Higher Education and Training take interest in the study and consider it as a further contribution to the lesson learned from mergers in South African institutions of higher education.

SMU is a new university that is currently preoccupied with generating its own structures and processes, culture, identity, policy and a student life. Therefore, in the current exercise, it is recommended that the following be taken into consideration:

1) In order to avert a repeat of student experiences during the merger of the UL era and to facilitate a collective effort in moving the new university forward, student consultation and representation in crucial decision making of the university and its implementation will be of high importance.

2) Building a strong campus culture and student life requires facilitating motivation and high morale to students and student organizations in order for them to fully support the vision and the direction of the new university. Therefore, improvement
and re-establishment of student support systems, both academically and socially, is highly recommended.

3) As a means to enhance teaching and learning, quality assurance and the production of quality and marketable degrees, the BSc curriculum should be revised and redesigned to meet societal demands. Seeking assistance from the corporate world, which is by far the biggest employer of BSc graduates, may assist in pointing out areas that the BSc curriculum should address to remain a relevant qualification to the societal needs.

4) Furthermore, an increase of staffing in various departments that suffered loss of skilled staff during the merger of UL is strongly recommended. This can be achieved through the recruitment of qualified heads of department, lecturers and technical staff.

5) Infrastructural development, study aids, educational and sporting equipment stood out as a point of concern for student organizations. Therefore additional or special funding from the Department of Higher Education and Training for such purposes, given that SMU is still a new and fragile institution, is highly recommended.

6) Policy development is still lacking; especially university statutes, academic rules, student policy such as SRC constitution and student disciplinary procedures, etc. Therefore, it is recommended that the university engages in urgent policy summits and rule workshops, with due consultation and representation of student organizations.

7) Lastly, the study acknowledges that SMU is still in a transition period. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct further studies aimed at exploring the experiences of student organizations and other major stakeholders of the SMU during this critical period.

Conclusion

The findings of the present study seem to fit well within the global and local experiences of merged higher education institutions. Studies point out that multiple institutions that have undergone mergers have experienced negative effects. The most common trends of mergers involve inadequate funding, neglect of infrastructure, lack of communication,
neglect of stakeholder importance, alienation of human resource, unsuccessful harmonization of academic programmes and cultural resistance. The experiences of student organization in the UL can be related to these, although changes in attitude were noted during the demerger and transition into SMU.

The present study was based on the community psychology perspective. The goal of community psychology is to explore the individuals' challenges within communities and the wider society and the relationships of the individual to communities and society. The current study explored challenges faced by student organizations during the UL merger and interpreted these challenges against those of the broader community of higher education globally and locally. The interplay of principles of community psychology was observed during the change processes that took place in the UL. As such, the present study identified the UL as a unique institution to experience a threefold change process, which made it interesting to understand the impact of such a change on stakeholders. The conceptualization of the study was primarily based on the ecological systems theory. Other theories, like the general systems theory and theories of change that were found to be relevant to the present study, were also discussed.

Although there is much that still has to be explored about the experiences and impacts of the merger, demerger and establishment of SMU on university stakeholders, the present study confirms the hypothesis that student organizations in the Medunsa campus were not taken into considerations during the merger of the UL and it structures and processes. Student organizations registered more impacts during the transition into SMU. The study was therefore able to answer the research question by revealing the experiences and effects with which the merger and demerger of the University of Limpopo and the subsequent transition process into SMU left student organizations.
REFERENCES


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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Consent Form

SEFAKO MAKGATHO HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY CONSENT FORM

Statement concerning participation in a Research Project

Name of Study:
Experiences of Students’ Organizations on the Merger and Demerger of the University of Limpopo leading to the subsequent transition into the new Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University.

I have read the information on the proposed study and was provided the opportunity to ask questions and given adequate time to rethink the issue. The purpose of the study is sufficiently clear to me.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time for any reason whatsoever.

I am aware that audio recordings will be used in all interviews. I am aware that information I supply may be used in scientific publications. I consent to participate provided that my name is not revealed.

I have been made aware that this Study has been approved by the Medunsa Research Ethics Committee (MREC), Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University.
I hereby give consent to participate in this Study.

...................................................................................................................................
Name of participant  Signature of participant

Place. ................................................ Date. .............................................

Statement by the Researcher

I provided verbal and written information regarding this Study

I agree to answer any future questions concerning the Study as best as I am able.

I will adhere to the approved protocol.

...................................................................................................................................
Name of researcher  Signature

Place. ................................................ Date. .............................................
EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS’ ORGANIZATIONS ON THE MERGER AND DEMERGER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LIMPOPO LEADING TO THE SUBSEQUENT TRANSITION INTO THE NEW SEFAKO MAKGATHO HEALTH SCIENCES UNIVERSITY.

This interview schedule is used as a guide to explore important areas of interest during the interview process. The questions will not be followed rigidly, but will serve as markers to guide the researcher and participants as to the type of information that is sought and to prevent the interview from going off track.

1) Biographical Details
   • Age:
   • Gender:
   • Student Organization:

2) The Merger Process
   • What do you understand about the merger of the University of Limpopo?
   • What were your student organization’s expectations of the merger?
   • How did your student organization experience the merger process?
   • What changes did your student organization notice in the University of Limpopo?
   • What impacts did your student organization experienced due to those changes?

3) The Demerger Process
   • What do you understand about the demerger of the University of Limpopo?
   • What were your student organization’s expectations of the demerger process?
   • How did your student organization experience the demerger process?
4) The transition into SMU

- What do you understand about the establishment of SMU and the current transition?
- How is your student organization experiencing the transition process?
- What changes does your student organization anticipate in SMU?
- What role does your student organization expect to play in the transition process?
- How does your student organization feel about its role in the current transition process?
- What would be your student organization’s ideal transition process?
Appendix 3

Permission letter – Student Affairs

Mr. T. Khumalo  
Director Affairs Department  
Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University  
Setlogelo Drive, Road  
Ga-rankuwa, Gauteng  
2000  
09 February 2015

Dear Sir

Re: Request for permission to conduct a research study at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University

My name is Siyabonga Sanele Zikalala and I am conducting a research study towards the completion of my Master’s degree in Clinical Psychology. This research study is undertaken to explore the experiences of students’ organizations on the merger and demerger of the University of Limpopo leading to the subsequent transition into the new Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University.

I hereby request your approval to conduct this research on campus. The research will be conducted on students’ organizations affiliated with the SRC. Students’ organizations will be categorized into four focus groups such being political, religious, social and sports organizations. From each student organization, two members delegated by the organization, will represent the student organization in its relevant category based on the inclusion criteria as described in the proposal.

Research data will be collected through interviews conducted in focus groups and will follow the attached interview schedule. The interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder. Participants will be expected to give signed consent in ensuring ethical practice. The research participants’ identity will be kept anonymously and data collected will be treated as strictly confidential. This research is voluntary and the researcher will...
emphasize that the participants are free to withdraw their participation at any time for any reason whatsoever.

Participants will be made aware that the results of the study will be used in the writing a dissertation for academic purposes and may be used for scientific publications.

The research will only commence when approval have been obtained by the Medunsa Research and Ethics Committee (MREC) at the University of Limpopo.

Attached hereto please find a copy of my research protocol.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully

........................................

Siyabonga Sanele Zikalala

09 February 2015
Student Number: 210450468
Cell No: 0826409992
Email: siyaziks@gmail.com

Further queries may also be directed to my supervisor at SMU, Ms. K. Thobejane on (012) 521 4632 or kgaditjiane@gmail.com
Appendix 4

Permission Letter - Student Organizations

The General Secretary
(Name of Student Organization)
Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University
Setlogelo Drive, Road
Ga-rankuwa, Gauteng
2000
09 February 2015

Dear Sir/Mam

Re: Request for permission to conduct a research study at Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University

My name is Siyabonga Sanele Zikalala and I am conducting a research study towards the completion of my Master’s degree in Clinical Psychology. This research study is undertaken to explore the experiences of students’ organizations on the merger and demerger of the University of Limpopo leading to the subsequent transition into the new Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University.

I hereby request your permission and the participation of your organization in this study as an organization affiliated with the SRC. The study will also include participation of other students’ organizations affiliated with the SRC. Students’ organizations will be categorized into four focus groups such being political, religious, social and sports organizations. From each student organization, two members delegated as participants by the organization, will represent the student organization in its relevant category based on the inclusion criteria as described in the proposal.

Research data will be collected through interviews conducted in focus groups and will follow the attached interview schedule. The interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder. Participants will be expected to give signed consent in ensuring ethical practice. The research participants’ identity will be kept anonymously and data collected will be treated as strictly confidential. This research is voluntary and the researcher will emphasize that the participants are free to withdraw their participation at any time for any reason whatsoever.

133
Participants will be made aware that the results of the study will be used in the writing a dissertation for academic purposes and may be used for scientific publications.

The research will only commence when approval have been obtained by the Medunsa Research and Ethics Committee (MREC) at the University of Limpopo.

Attached hereto please find a copy of my research protocol.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully

................................................................

Siyabonga Sanele Zikalala

09 February 2015
Student Number: 210450468
Cell No: 0826409992
Email: siyaziks@gmail.com

Further queries may also be directed to my supervisor at SMU, Ms. K. Thobejane on (012) 521 4632 or k Haditjiane@gmail.com
Appendix 5

SMUREC Clearance

Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University
Research & Postgraduate Studies Directorate
Sefako Makgatho University Research Ethics Committee
(SMUREC)

Mabola Street, Ga-Rankuwa 0208
Tel: (012) 521 5617/5698, fax: (012) 521 3749
Email: howto.ohrm@smu.ac.za
P.O. Box 163 Modunu 0264

APPROVAL NOTICE - NEW APPLICATION

04 August 2015

Ms SS Zikali
Department of Clinical Psychology
P.O.Box 159
Dutroos, 0264

Meeting: 06/08/2015

SMUREC Ethics Reference Number: SMUREC/B/17/4219: PG

The New Application received on 02 July 2015, was reviewed by members of Sefako Makgatho University Research Ethics Committee on 06 August 2015 and was approved on 06 August 2015.

Title: Experiences of students’ organizations on the merger and formation of the University of Limpopo leading to the subsequent transition into the new Sefako Makgatho University.

Researcher: Ms SS Zikali
Supervisor: M K Thistlethwaite
Department: Clinical Psychology
School: Medicine
Degree: MSc Clinical Psychology

Please note the following information about your approved research protocol:

Protocol Approval Period: 06 August 2015 - 06 August 2015

Please remember to use your protocol number (SMUREC/B/17/4219: PG) on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your research protocol.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modification, or remark the content of your research and the consent process.

After Ethical Review, please note the template of the progress report is retrievable in the Research Office and should be submitted to the Committee before the year has expired. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary). Activity number may be assessed annually for an external audit. Submission of the consent document in the language applicable to the study participants should be submitted.

Institutional Review Board (H300015), Institutional Review Board (IRB000086120), Federal Wide Assurance (FWA00003419) Approval Date: 11 October 2011 and NHREC No REC 210405-013

Sincerely,

Prof. G. M. O. B. MOYIWA
Chairperson SMUREC

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## Appendix 6

### Participants' Sociodemographic Info

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<td>SPP6</td>
<td>Netball</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPP7</td>
<td>Dance</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPP8</td>
<td>Volleyball</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPP9</td>
<td>Soccer</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPP10</td>
<td>Table Tennis</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPP11</td>
<td>Karate</td>
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<tr>
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<td>SPP13</td>
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<tr>
<td>SPP14</td>
<td>Chess</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>MBChB</td>
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<td>Sporting Codes</td>
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Appendix 7

Comprehensive Table of Themes

A thematic exploration of each of the themes is illustrated in the table below. The exploration provides the reader with a more profound understanding of each of these themes along with the relevance and evidence from participant's responses:

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<tr>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Primary themes</th>
<th>Secondary content themes</th>
<th>Participants’ responses</th>
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</table>
| 1. Merger | i) Understanding of the merger of UL | | PP2: “Okay, as he just said, just the bundling of two Universities and making them into one university...The merger of the two institutions becoming one.”  
RP1: “...when you merge things it’s when you bring two things from two different spheres of life together, and those things form a union – they are one. That’s my understanding of merger. In some cultures, they actually call marriage a merger. It’s two different things from two different spheres of life and then they become one that’s why it’s called a merger.”  
RP2: “...because we understand it that with a merger, we take two things that are different, put them together, and make them perform, a similar thing or go with one vision. Like, maybe, you find that we have two visions but we would make them have one vision, so, we merge them. Or we unite them.”  
SOP2: “…So I think eh, mergers are aimed at improving the quality of whatever was offered by those entities, um, bringing them together so that they can be, you know, synergic... synergetic, or whatever the word is, yes...
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<td>enhance each other for a better service quality of service.”</td>
<td>SPP1: “The combination of two aspects. When two parties come together... it was the union between the University of North and the Medical University of South Africa.”</td>
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<td>PP4: “…apparently, allegedly, there was one which was financially seeking, so merging them into one institution would make it easier for the government to commit funds for one institution.”</td>
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<td>RP2: “…maybe the government saw that there’s a need of having a medical school around that side of Limpopo. Then they said okay, there’s also a university this side, it’s a medical school, so why can’t you merge them and join the two, you know, the number of people just going from that side to come this side or something like that.”</td>
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<td>RP1: “From my understanding and the history was that when they came together, they University of the North were wanted a medical school that side, and MEDUNSA could not sustain itself financially. So the government came up with ways, strategies to help them both universities then, to be able to reach their goals, could I say vision, and then that’s when thought okay, if they can get MEDUNSA, which has the medical school, it will assist the University of the North and then in return,”</td>
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|        | ii) Merger failure | a) Transformation | MEDUNSA will be able to be sustained financially.”

SOP1: “…I think the purpose was to increase number of health professions and boost UL in terms of finance.”

SOP4: “Remember it was not only, it didn’t happen only between Turfloop and MEDUNSA. It happened also in other institutions – Gauteng...RAU, remember RAU? And then it’s now the University of Johannesburg; actually the University of Technology was Pretoria Tech, it was also independent, the one in Soshanguve. So it was a national thing.”

PP3: “…I think the reason to merge was to ensure that the fast transformation of the historically black institutions...that they want to be bringing this university which was disadvantaged back then eh, together so that they can be able to fund them, when they are one, unlike when they are funding one in terms of trying to transform them, develop them. Of which, according to my understanding, it would have failed. Hence we end up having a de-merger now, because it was not working according to the way they anticipated. Ja.”

PP2: “Ja, definitely I think the other understanding, I mean for us, there’s nothing complex about this. There was a merger for whatever reasons, and the merger failed. The de-merger started...as student organizations,
we never expected this thing, to anticipate that it will work out. Hence we were rallying behind that it must not happen... your merger, it’s not working and can you please reverse it...”

PP3: “…with the experience of the merger, the student organizations picked up that we are heading for a fall. We had, I mean, we had bright expectations that the university was going to go forward, but unfortunately it never happened. Because one thing that must be clear is that student leaders were not challenging the merger because they have a sitting attitude. But they would rather challenge the merger because it was doing more faults that the previous independent institution... So we were going nowhere slowly”

PP5: “…it gave us a lot of challenges that we had to deal with, like our campus, I can say that our campus didn’t have peace, because the students they would say that no guys, we are suffering financially, guys we are suffering in this…”

PP1: “…those who were there when the merger was formed and stuff, they would actually tell you that, from the word go, they were not for this merger, but since it was imposed, they just had to, you know, suck it up a bit, but they started with the campaign that we found in the crowd when they said “Mayibuye MEDUNSA”.”
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<td>RP5: “…personally I would expect that resources would be shared mutually and equally, but from what we’ve seen and the feedback that comes from students and the management, is that resources weren’t really shared equally, because um, in terms of development and infrastructure when we compare the two institutions, not much positive impact is seen in this institution than the other institution, so we feel that, as much as they wanted to merger, they had a good vision for both institutions, one of them benefited and the other didn’t.”</td>
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<td>RP1: “…everyone was longing for a de-merger…. Now the MEDUNSA suffered that way, so unity was not there. There was not calmness, so always they were pointing fingers. We find that even if there is a strike, this management is like it’s on your side, and that side they’re against this side...”</td>
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<td>RP2: “…when we look at it from afar or inside, we don’t see any improvements. Actually there’s degradation from when it was then, to when it is now...”</td>
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<td>SOP1: “P1: I would just say it was a terrible idea...It was more just them taking, taking, taking, from us, than bringing in anything. So there was no positives.”</td>
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<td>SOP4: “Uh, I’d like to say, uh, I agree what he’s saying, but, um, the merger could have done what it was supposed to do but then if one of...”</td>
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<td>the campuses wasn’t doing as well as the other one, then it defeats the whole purpose of one purpose working out and the other doesn’t work out...if MEDUNSA was suffering then it defeats the whole purpose...So I think it affected us and it benefited them.”</td>
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<td>SOP1: “... in South Africa we have a problem of eh, monitoring things. If we look at UJ, UJ, they started the merge of UJ very well. Before they initiated, there was research done about it. You go to UKZN, again it was researched about their merger, that’s why even today the merger today is still working very well. But then we go to this one of MEDUNSA and Turfloop, they just assumed that okay, ‘cause... not even considering the distance between the MEDUNSA and Turfloop...I’m saying the merger was a complete failure, you know. Yes, there might have been some positives, you know, sparking from that thing, but it was a failure as evidenced by the government also seeing the need to de-merge the structures.”</td>
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<td>SPP2: “...MEDUNSA did not have a voice in the merger. They ruled us more, so, ja. That’s what I saw.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>b) Geographic location</td>
<td>SOP1: “...but then we go to this one of MEDUNSA and Turfloop, they just assumed that okay, ‘cause... not even considering the distance between the MEDUNSA and Turfloop, ‘cause if you look at the UKZN one, there is a</td>
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<td><em>campus in Maritzburg. The distance is almost ninety k’s. It’s not that big but you can drive everyday and go back. It’s not that bad. But the one from here to Turfloop is something else ‘cause you can’t skype every time. And there’s no one to make sure the VC is always here, I think I’ve seen him twice... since I’ve been here for I don’t know how many years...”</em></td>
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<td><em>PP1: “I wouldn’t think or assume from myself that anyone was expecting anything much, given the geographical location...”</em></td>
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<td><em>PP4: “...and the physical location, looking at the distance from here and there and the management, most of the management, eh, eh, most of the senior management being at that side. So the merger, it was, it came with a lot of challenges.”</em></td>
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<td><em>SOP4: “...The factor that I think contributed much is that the distance, first, the management, second, and having one person one person leading the merger, of which he spends of his time on the other than the other side...”</em></td>
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<td>c) Loss of labour</td>
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<td><em>PP3: “...if you look at the number of graduates that MEDUNSA used to produce as a stand-alone university, um, the kind of staff they had, you know, experienced professors who were passionate about their work, the quality of lecturing worked to produce black doctors in particular...we have lost a number brilliant</em></td>
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|        |                | d) Harmonization of policy and programmes | professors with many things that were involved – they were underpaid and everything…”  
PP1: “…number one, we start with the issues of the university personnel. When we have staff, experienced and we have staff leaving the university it impacts bad on the number and he quality of the graduates that the university produces…”  
SOP1: “We had resignation of very important staff/personnel…We had eh, our senior lecturers resigning, of which the credibility of the institution, now, it doesn’t hold much when you lose your most trusted and powerful professors”  
PP3: “…there were a lot of clashes. For example, um, where it concerns students, the issue of, eh, fees, you’d get people within the same university but the fees they pay were quite huge you understand? It is not consistent. We also get issues of uh, academic rules, for example. We get an academic rule that says uh, for example, to do a three-year course, you have a maximum of five years… but to come and say also, if you’re doing a four-year course, you are also given an extension of two years, it is not consistent… So the, there’s that and a lot of constitutional clashes and the rule clashes that we had at the institution. Hence now, even within one university, there was a need a need to treat two universities differently…” |
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<td><strong>PP1:</strong> “…Um, and again as I said, new rules that were not fully student-friendly this side, you know? I think for me, those are two things that stand out: the issue of funding and the university rules that were imposed unto us.”</td>
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<td><strong>SOP6:</strong> “I kind of expected that even policies that guide at SASO should be mutual, not different to what guides at SASO MEDUNSA and what guides at SASO Turfloop.”</td>
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<td><strong>SOP3:</strong> “For me, I think there were no good systems in place in term of policies that should govern both campuses, as you know... The codes in BSc, they’re different regardless subjects and modules, their different that side. So they were operating differently.”</td>
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<td><strong>SOP1</strong> “…once we have policies that are working, we’ll have good systems in place, then we’ll stick to them and they will work.”</td>
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<td><strong>RP3:</strong> “…For me, I think there were no good systems in place in term of policies that should govern both campuses, as you know, ‘cause they were one institution... the codes in BSc, they’re different regardless subjects and modules, their different that side. So they were operating differently.”</td>
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| iii) Funding and Infrastructure | a) Financial difficulties |                          | **PP1:** “…from my understanding, MEDUNSA was well stable financially, and then uh, the University of the North, I don’t know much...
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<td><em>because from what I was presented with the statements it was unstable…”</em></td>
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<td>SOP2:</td>
<td>“…government saw…that the new Turf was under financial crisis, and the government identified that it was under financial crisis, right? So then they had to bring up merger…even previously MEDUNSA was financially disadvantaged, so the reason they merged was to benefit both.”</td>
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<td>SOP1:</td>
<td>“…What happened is that all of the financial support that MEDUNSA was supposed to get, the resources that MEDUNSA was supposed to get to get us out of this recession, to say, uh, that we were in, all of those resources went to the University of Limpopo. They went to Turfloop…”</td>
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<td>SOP4:</td>
<td>“…The distribution in terms of NSFAS was just unfair when you look at it from the perspective as MEDUNSA students, where you see that a large amount of money was pushed to Turfloop campus, leaving us with just a little bit…”</td>
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<td>SOP5:</td>
<td>“…again, with allocation of funds among students, we have now, NSFAS, they want to put funds, and now you have to be Turfloop and MEDUNSA… it was not shared equally…even with our leader here, they were also frustrated by this funds being centralized, you’ll get eh, SRC wanting to do an event for students, and seeking authorization in Limpopo – struggling</td>
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<td>to get the management in Limpopo so that they can authorize it. It was frustrating.”</td>
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<td>SOP1:</td>
<td>“…You were able to decide, okay, I’m going to take this much amount, and balance it to books and what-not and what-not. And it was even beneficial to those who are needy in the MEDUNSA community because, I mean, right now it has made, eh, eh, eh, I think it has disadvantaged a lot of people because back then, my brother who’s suffering, on the side, I was able to make sure that okay, I’ve balanced one of, eh, I can afford to take some portion of my funds and transfer to the other person. That’s how the system used to work. Now I think it has created inequalities because you have somebody with a “due to you” of forty thousand, and me on the other side, with a “due to us” of a Mercedes Benz. You understand, whereas before then, as students, I mean, we understand each other. We share eh, the same habitats, so we understand each others’ struggles. So, and, I think the system that is in place now is not sympathetic to the students, because they don’t really care whether the other one is suffering or not, whereas as students, we used to sympathize with each other and distribute funds very well among ourselves. And also, you could give a better account of what happened to your money because you were the ones who were in control of controlling your funds.”</td>
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<td><strong>SPP2</strong>: “… I felt that Turfloop benefited more from the merger, uh, financially, academically, uh, for example in, when we went to USSAs um, they had better tracksuits, better bags, everything…”</td>
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<td><strong>SPP6</strong>: “…I think I would be right to say our role, we have played our role, but the sport bureau itself, um, did not do well with assisting the sporting codes with finding…”</td>
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<td><strong>SPP2</strong>: “…we always have problems or issues, when coming to finances…”</td>
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<td><strong>RP4</strong>: “We didn’t really have financial support. In 2012 we didn’t get support. 2013, I remember we got a bus – that’s what we got for the whole year, a bus to go to an orphanage. Last year, nothing. This year we were told that we came too late or something, but we don’t really get any support financially.”</td>
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<td><strong>SOP2</strong>: “…So in other words, it did help in the other side, not in financial side in terms of MEDUNSA.”</td>
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<td><strong>SOP5</strong>: “Because you know what happens when, um, after the merger of MEDUNSA and Turfloop, funds had to be centralized…”</td>
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<td><strong>RP3</strong>: “…whatever that they were trying to alleviate the financial constraints in this campus, I feel like they just continued there, but even if they were merged with another institution, and like they said, a merge is a...”</td>
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<td>Events</td>
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<td>b) Unequal sharing of resources</td>
<td>union; it was supposed to benefit both of them, regardless finances…”</td>
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PP2: “…I can say differences in the treatment of uh, both campuses. That’s one thing that I noticed form 2011... you find that the University of Limpopo will be going to a tournament, for an example, a sporting tournament, both campuses are there, but if you look at one campus, it does not have certain things. The other has certain things, you know, you out there. It shows that it seemed as if only part of the University of Limpopo that existed was in Turfloop campus because you find that the go with branded car and everything, you know, they are wearing the full inform and all that…”

RP1: “…So now that is why you’ll find that even Turfloop even had a better facilities than us this side, because they were protecting their territory…”

RP3: “Turf, you could see, they were flourishing. Everything their side were improving, they got everything done on time. But yet again you come back to this university – things were not done... So it was very bitter for us here – everything was just slowed down. And I don’t know if they did that deliberately ‘cause they didn’t want the de-merger.”

SOP1: “… instead of benefited both campuses, what it did is that make sure that the University
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<td>of Limpopo, Turfloop campus have everything they needed, and the University of, MEDUNSA, we didn’t have everything that we needed...”</td>
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<td>SPP3:</td>
<td>“...I feel like there was still a lot of competition, uh, between the two campuses and we were not working together on all aspects. It would be even financially, you’d see that there’d always be more campus, that has more, I don’t know, equipments, and the other ones were not treated the same way always.”</td>
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<td>SPP1:</td>
<td>“Ja, another thing as well um, for the badminton sporting code, only in MEDUNSA we have, um, badminton, but in Turfloop I’ve never heard of a sporting code called badminton there. Um, you see, if we were working together, badminton would have been there at Turfloop campus as well...”</td>
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<td>SPP2:</td>
<td>“...They lived even in better residences in comparing to us and I wondered, what is happening, why is this uh, like why is the sport money not, uh, equal in both campuses...”</td>
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<td>SPP3:</td>
<td>“... Plus they have a coach that side for pool, we never had one...”</td>
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<td>PP1:</td>
<td>“...if we’re talking about the issues of eh, financial exclusions/financial differences whereas we’re in the same institution, you, know, you relate because obviously we are all Africans and you know, the difference between the two campuses.”</td>
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RP2: “...Then it became the University of Limpopo, but the objectives were different, the goals and aims were different, the vision and mission ya bona was different. They wanted a better something for all. So the mission was different and they didn’t even carry it out.”

RP5: “...personally I would expect that resources would be shared mutually and equally, but from what we’ve seen and the feedback that comes from students and the management, is that resources weren’t really shared equally, because um, in terms of development and infrastructure when we compare the two institutions, not much positive impact is seen in this institution than the other institution...”

RP6: “Resources also, like the budget given to structures: they get a different budget, we get a different budget, but our POAs are the same ‘cause we function under the same organization...”

R: “So the distribution of everything was not the same for all?”


RP2: “...in some structures it was easy because of the people who I was affiliated with since they were well-known and they were political people, so it was easy for us to get those resources. But when it comes to structures
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<td>RP3: “...At that regional congress, when Turf went, they had everything that they wanted. We had to maneuver around, we did not even get it from the SRC budget. We had to maneuver, and got someone from our structure...”</td>
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<td>SOP1: “What happened is that all of the financial support that MEDUNSA was supposed to get, the resources that MEDUNSA was supposed to get to get us out of this recession, to say, uh, that we were in, all of those resources went to the University of Limpopo. They went to Turfloop...”</td>
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<td>SOP5: “...We have now, NSFAS, they want to put funds, and now you have to be Turfloop and MEDUNSA. And if you look at those they have there, if you look at Limpopo, they have day scholars there? We also have day scholars, but there’s a lot of students in MEDUNSA. Now we... it was not shared equally.”</td>
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<td>SOP4: “...The distribution in terms of NSFAS was just unfair when you look at it from the perspective as MEDUNSA students, where you see that a large amount of money was pushed to Turfloop campus, leaving us with just a little bit...”</td>
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<td>c) Lack of transparency</td>
<td>SPP6: “...there’s no transparency because now there were rumours late last year, I don’t know...”</td>
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<td>and accountability</td>
<td>when or early this year, that there was something like a million allocated to renovation of sports complex and nothing has been done. The best that has happened was the changing of the machines at the gym...”</td>
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<td>SPP8: “The problem with that was actually consultations. They received the money which they used on their own without consulting this that have to do with sports.”</td>
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<td>SPP1: “…Like for now, eh, I’ve never seen or heard someone say that no, we’re requesting for student report of a certain tournament that we had, improvements. There is no report being submitted...Yes, basically, it’s the same fights, as you know as usual, the USSAs come, and there’s no money, you need to walk up and down at and then suddenly there’s money.”</td>
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<td>SPP3: “…The problem is that they’re in power, and there’s nobody monitoring what they are doing. And there’s no way of going around them, like, whatever you’re going, you meet them there, and honestly if they don’t like you, you’re not going to get anything. I don’t know what we can do, like you said, if you have to deal with the same people.”</td>
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|        |                |                          | SPP2: “…And it’s funny, you know, ‘cause not all sporting codes go to the USSAs but yet still, they do not have money for us. I don’t get it, ‘cause they’ll be having all the sporting codes there, and um, the money, like the budget,
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<td>they’ll be like okay, we have this much that we can spend on you guys. Like, okay, sharp. One, two, three, um, say rugby, uh, volleyball, whoever, whoever is not going. Now you ask yourself go re where did that one, where did the money for those, where did it go, because now they’re not going, and then they’re still telling us ukuthi we are short of this much, so you guys have to compensate...”</td>
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<td>SPP7: “...If we have a budget and we don’t really know what’s happening, there’s no use because, um, things get fraud and whatever takes place, then we as students get blocked off...”</td>
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<td>SPP4: “...So I’m just trying to show you that even when we fight for something, when they give it to us, it’s not good quality to show that they are not really taking this sports thing so seriously...”</td>
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<td>SPP7: “...and I also wish that with every meeting that we have with these people, they do what they say they’re gonna be doing...”</td>
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|        |                |                          | SPP4: “...P4: Okay, just uh, to put emphasis on what she said, it would be great to have an external structure to monitor what’s happening there because of codes – if you are doing things without any type of supervision, I mean hello, you can do whatever you want, nobody’s going to do anything to you. That’s one. Two – the second thing is we have a huge issue with
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<td>&quot;finances when we know that the money for sports does not go back, meaning, hence we say, for this year we have, I don’t know, R500, 000 for sport, if we don’t use R500, 000 for sport, it’s not like there’s an amount of it that’s gonna go back”</td>
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<td>SPP1: “Ja, I wish we’d have frequent meetings, ne, with the sport manager and uh, um, the higher up financial manager so that he can tell us what is going on, what is the plan this year, this MONTH, actually, not just in the year, what’s gonna go on this month...”</td>
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<td>iv) Role of Students</td>
<td>a) Student representation</td>
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<td>PPI: “…when you’re thinking contestations in the SRC. So that, in itself, brings a complex issue of how do you then vote, um, elect the proper representation that will represent both campuses without biasness...even the structuring of those things, at that time it was 4200 students around that time. You can’t compete with twenty-something students to vote for... you see, and then they say both campus are well-represented. Then there was no way both campuses will be well-represented...I don’t think there’s that platform which allows all the student organizations to say, ‘let’s sit down, let’s discuss this and that’...”</td>
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<td>RPI: “No, our needs were the last thing...as I said. Like, there were a lot of things. For them it was always us, us, us, then students. But as we’re supposed to be the primary stakeholders,</td>
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<td>we felt that we’re the tertiary stakeholders. We’re the last people on their minds. Themselves were the first ones, and then the workers, and then, then the institution itself, and the infrastructure, then comes students, which didn’t make sense.</td>
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<td><strong>RP2:</strong> “…we cannot allow that things like one person to represent the whole student body. For what? At least have people that are being elected by students and say these are people who we needed…”</td>
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<td><strong>RP7:</strong> “…People, they should, we should be given an opportunity to elect someone who would go into and represent the religious structure. And you can clearly see by those things that, um, the religious structure, we really have no role, at all. Even today, we still don’t have any role.”</td>
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<td><strong>RP2:</strong> “I think also what we are expecting, also, the recognition. We were expecting that we were going to be recognized better…”</td>
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<td><strong>SPP2:</strong> “I would say that we also expected more recognition of the sporting codes because sports is like at the bottom of whatever pyramid there is…”</td>
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<td>b) Student consultation</td>
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<td><strong>SPP1:</strong> “issues of consultations, it’s really not important for them actually per se...So there is no communication, there’s no consultations, there’s nothing, no process, just sport as I said…”</td>
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<td>PP3:</td>
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<td>“…whenever they take decision, um, they don’t include people that are being affected…”</td>
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<td>RP6:</td>
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<td>“…we were supposed to be consulted in everything. In each and every process, we were supposed to be taken through it. In the policies, we were supposed to be involved. In everything, as much as the SRC was supposed to be involved, also us, as much as uh, other political organizations would be involved, we were supposed to be involved. We were supposed to be taken through all those steps, of which, that role, we didn’t play because we were never involved…”</td>
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<td>SOP2:</td>
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<td>“It’s like the name, ne, same thing happened with the merger…it’s like the name, no one wanted the name but we had no choice but to accept it. Even the merger, the same thing. Then we have to accept it…”</td>
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<td>SOP1:</td>
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<td>“We are organizations ...So for them to implement a new SRC they need the inputs of the students. So all they need to do is take our inputs, and then ja, we take it from there...Thorough engagement with management and all the stakeholders, and going forward we need those engagements so that we can exchange ideas and be on par with the programs.”</td>
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<td>SOP2:</td>
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<td>“…we need a platform where all the uncertainties can be clarified in writing so that we don’t have to worry about future mergers so...”</td>
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<td><em>that we can be happy with the de-merger and the SMU.</em>”</td>
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<td><strong>SOP3:</strong> “And to make it even more like a strong participation between management and the students, and let them do it personally. Let them come, avail themselves, show themselves – ‘students, as we’re together here, please voice out your concerns’...The process, seriously, we didn’t have a choice. We were told khuthi, no, you guts have a choice, you guys have a say in what you want the new name of the university to be, but already they had known what they wanted to call it...”</td>
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<td><strong>SPP2:</strong> “I actually expected we would be consulted for, for whatever decision they have to make for sport, what we want...”</td>
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<td><strong>SPP8:</strong> “The problem with that was actually consultations. They received the money which they used on their own without consulting this that have to do with sports.”</td>
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<td><strong>SPP3:</strong> “…as it stands right now, our role is none. We cannot do anything ‘cause we’re completely locked out of the decision process, and then when they want you, they call you and they tell you how things are going to be...”</td>
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<td><strong>RP3:</strong> “…regardless of which type of religion you come from, you are supposed to maintain stability and peace on campus, and them not involving us in processes like the one that already are found, it means that they don’t want...”</td>
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<td>peace and stability...</td>
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<td>But how am I gonna pray</td>
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<td>for the campus if I wasn’t</td>
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<td>even part of it initially?</td>
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<td>You understand? I will</td>
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<td>pray, but I will pray</td>
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<td>with an attitude. I won’t</td>
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<td>pray full-heartedly...</td>
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<td>c) Student</td>
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<td>SPP3: “And to add into</td>
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<td>that, actually, we even</td>
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<td>medical aids, ‘cause there</td>
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<td>is no sport which is</td>
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<td>participate, we gonna get</td>
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<td>sake of this year, very,</td>
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<td>and that person was</td>
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<td>PP1: “...I don’t think</td>
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<td>discuss this and that’.</td>
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<td>So there’s not enough</td>
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<td>support. So that support</td>
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<td>SPP2: “I just wanted to</td>
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<td>say that, they don’t take</td>
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<td>us as leaders in our</td>
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<td>sporting codes, they just</td>
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<td>see us as participants,</td>
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<td>people who fill up sports</td>
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<td>SPP1: “...I also wish that</td>
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<td>um, we would have more</td>
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<td>Let’s say I’m a sportsman,</td>
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<td>actually, all of us. Some</td>
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<td>students are just studying,</td>
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<td>and going back to their</td>
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<td>rooms. I take three hours</td>
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<td>to go to the dance hall</td>
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<td>and practice so I can represent my school and win. That’s the difference between me or us, and other students who are doing anything in sports. What am I getting? No food, no. No tracksuit, no. What am I getting, nothing. But I’m just representing the school; we’re getting nothing...”</td>
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<td>RP5: “…unfortunately, they always have sports awards or something, and stuff, you know, they will never have your religious awards or something...”</td>
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<td>RP2: “…when it comes to the religious structures that are here on campus, the institution doesn’t take them seriously...they will never even bother to hire us resources for these small structures when we ask them...”</td>
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<td>SOP1: “…we say want activities that will foster cohesion. We cannot expect to take our sisters and go and socialize outside. We need, eh, places on this campus that will guarantee safety and also make sure that we mingle.”</td>
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<td>SPP4: “…there was a total lack of morale in people joining certain sporting codes... I feel that certain sporting codes were affected differently...”</td>
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<td>SPP2: “…we ourselves we had to go out there, find ourselves some sponsors, ourselves. Like, we’re busy with uh, like uh, school work and...”</td>
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<td>everything, on top of that, we’re sportsmen, and then we’re expected again to go out there.”</td>
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<td>SPP3: “they equate different sport as if we all require the same thing...”</td>
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<td>SPP5: “…When we say we need a physiotherapist, they won’t even understand that no, people fall on the floor in dance, people, people um, get hurt, you know... Because if they always tell us that there’s no money, it’s totally discouraging...”</td>
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<td>SPP6: “… ‘Cause the expectation that we had mostly, as you mentioned that mostly there was no improvement from the University of Limpopo and Turfloop...”</td>
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<td>SPP1: “…and I don’t know if I understood him well or if I received it well, but ‘Mr X’ said something like well, if you cannot afford an iPhone, why would you demand one? So, ja, it got to me that ja, maybe there’s this image in the school’s management that our children are poor, so they shouldn’t demand anything more than pap and chicken...”</td>
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<td>SPP9: “…The difference with us is that we’re not supported and financially it’s always a bridge to cross before we get somewhere...”</td>
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|        |                |                          | SOP2: “…I went to a couple of sessions this year and it doesn’t get as packed as it used to be, because instead of people hanging out on campus on weekends, they go out, they go look
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<td>for fun outside. So when Free Minds has a session, when they want people to just come through and enjoy some hip hop or what not, they don’t get a chance to do that, ‘cause no one is around.”</td>
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<td>SOP4:</td>
<td>“…Because first of all, I’m representing a student, I’m representing a varsity. I’m going to debate all weekend. The varsity is aware of that ‘cause they gave us funds to go there. But especially again, to come back Monday to write an exam to pass. So does it give me an encouragement to say okay, let me go and debate…”</td>
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<td>SOP4:</td>
<td>“…What is the university doing about the activities that we are doing ‘cause we go to UP, if you are playing soccer they will give you a bursary, so they won’t do anything ‘cause they know what you are doing for the varsity at the same time. So what is happening about this university because we’ve always had a problem that’s why students don’t participate, and then at the end of the day you say students why they’re not playing anything. They can’t, it’s difficult.”</td>
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<td>v) Decline in student life</td>
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<td>SOP2: “…a downfall in social life... We used to have a pre-bash for every single bash we had. We don’t have that no more… not to say go re we want more parties but there was a decrease since the initiation of this merger.”</td>
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<td><strong>SOP3</strong>: “...we used to have fun in this campus... Honestly, how many café parties have you had since the University of Limpopo opened, compared to when it was before? That’s just one instance.”</td>
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<td><strong>SOP1</strong>: “Us as DJ society, back when we were in MEDUNSA, we used to have a club. We used to DJ there, have fun, and we were more protected within our institution than now when the University of Limpopo came with a merger. Now we have to go out, chase our fun other than when we had fun in our own campus.”</td>
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<td><strong>SOP1</strong>: “…we have also noted that from MEDUNSA via the University of Limpopo, the level of female participation in programs around campus, be it in leadership, or other spheres, I think it might be also attributes to issues of not having enough programs to foster social cohesion, you know? But we have noticed a decline in participation and we would like to see women taking centre stage and, you know, and participating in social programs that are happening on this campus, you know”</td>
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<td><strong>SPPI</strong>: “…there was nothing good to say about what the University of Limpopo has brought into MEDUNSA, but the changes which I can say mostly to sport, is the damages which the University of Limpopo has brought.”</td>
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<td><strong>SPP4</strong>: “…but under the merger that happened, no, no change at all. Maybe we can say that was the change, we deteriorated. Yes.”</td>
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<td><strong>SPP1</strong>: “…it left us very stagnant, we, it forced us to, to not move at all, um, as I’ve mentioned, the change itself was deterioration. And, even if we had tried to, to, to fight for the right things we felt like we were not moving anywhere. We were just stagnant. Ja.”</td>
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<td><strong>SPP4</strong>: “…there was a total lack of morale in people joining certain sporting codes. I remember with dance we used to a very strong dance team, and then it sort of disappeared around merger time…”</td>
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<td><strong>PP1</strong>: “…there’s a debate going on about the curriculum of the BSc in School of Pathology, uh, we feel like the school does not necessarily produce eh, employable graduates… I read a friend of mine’s research and we found out that the people that graduate here from BSc they end up going to pursue other courses in other different institutions…”</td>
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<td><strong>RP3</strong>: “…the codes in BSc, they’re different regardless of subjects and modules, their different that side. So they were operating differently.”</td>
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|        |                |                          | **PP3**: “…the quality of lecturing worked to produce black doctors in particular… but however, within a year after the merger, there
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<td>was a drop in the number of graduates that the university was producing...but one of the biggest cornerstones to say look, we have lost a number brilliant professors... so we were going nowhere slowly. &quot;</td>
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|        |               |                          | **PP1:** "...when we have staff, experienced and we have staff leaving the university it impacts bad on the number and he quality of the graduates that the university produces."
<p>|        |               |                          | <strong>RP4:</strong> &quot;...you’d expect that the quality of education would improve for the black student as well. So in that saying, uh, most people were expecting that the doors to education would be open to more and more black people and yet still not compromising the standard of education.&quot; |
|        |               |                          | <strong>SOP1:</strong> “We had eh, our senior lecturers resigning, of which the credibility of the institution, now, it doesn’t hold much when you lose your most trusted and powerful professors.” |
|        |               | b) Marketability of the university and its programmes | <strong>PP1:</strong> “…I read a friend of mine’s research and we found out that the people that graduate here from BSc they end up going to pursue other courses in other different institutions. We have a problem with an institution that allows people to invest three years of their time and hundreds of thousands in a program that they know, for years, it has not been producing employed people. So that investment does not make business sense.” |</p>
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<td>PP1: “...Now we have SMU, meaning we must build the brand SMU and make sure that it’s marketable out there. So, yes, they kept what they have, but now we’re SMU students…”</td>
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<td>PP2: “…I would be having Biochemistry and Physiology, for example, but when it goes out there on the certificate it says BSc. It doesn’t really... it also confuses people who want to hire you – BSc on what? What do you know on BSc because science is very broad? So it’s something that we want to make sure that it’s there, specified; you have your majors reflecting…”</td>
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<td>SPP4: “…for the university to be known, you need to promote it on all aspects and sports helps a lot, and of course if we do well, our name is going to be out there. Our name is going to be out there, they’ll know us and all that. So I believed they’re going to invest a lot in sport and try to match, and try to match all the universities in terms of sports for example…”</td>
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<td>SPP2: “…what we think would work better for us and the promotion of the sporting codes that are here, because there’s so many people who don’t know which sports are actually here…”</td>
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<td>SPP3: “…the promotion aspect; I also thought they were going to use sport for it because let’s not lie, here in MEDUNSA we actually have a lot of sporting codes that are doing well, that are doing very well: karate, pool, dance,”</td>
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<td>aerobics, people who bring medals every single year and it’s not known…”</td>
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<td>SPP4: “…they give us tracksuits, but if we show you the kind of tracksuits that we got, they were really bad quality. No logo, no MEDUNSA, no University of Limpopo, sorry. So nobody could ever recognize who we are, when we’re there…, it would be nice to have…for the sports to be marketed, like, properly around here…”</td>
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<td>vii)Centralization of senior management</td>
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<td>SOP4: “So again, what I’m getting at is you take an institution MEDUNSA and Limpopo, the Turfloop, you hire a person from Turfloop to head the two institutions together. Obviously there’s always going to be a conflict of interest or biased.”</td>
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<td>PP1: “…I wouldn’t think or assume from myself that anyone was expecting anything much, given the geographical location and the… I don’t know, the management, the bureaucracy behind everything. As you’ll understand, having management’s office in Polokwane while we are in Rankuwa, it’s problematic.”</td>
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<td>PP5: “…But it was unfortunate, it’s now when they realise that no, in actual fact, University of the North is the one which is in charge. As they also come on board and say no, this merger is not working. It’s, ja.”</td>
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<td>PP1: “…there was completely no unity between the two sides of management. You find that</td>
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there was management under the MEDUNSA campus, there was management under Turfloop campus. There was an executive manager under the University of Limpopo, of which it was based in Turfloop."

RP3: “...Let’s say with regard to marketing stuff, which was a hassle. ‘Cause, you find that to get things like, even a poster, a mere poster approval, because it’s gonna go to Marketing here, and then go to Turfloop, and it takes days for it to come back...”

SOP4: “...this merger favored one side. The factor that I think contributed much is that the distance, first, the management, second, and having one person one person leading the de-merger, of which he spends of his time on the other than the other side. So the place where he spends more time is the same place that is going to benefit more...”

SOP1: “...if you look at the UKZN one, there is a campus in Maritzburg. The distance is almost ninety k’s. It’s not that big but you can drive everyday and go back. It’s not that bad. But the one from here to Turfloop is something else, ‘cause you can’t skype every time. And there’s no one to make sure the VC is always here, I think I’ve seen him twice... since I’ve been here for I don’t know how many years.”

SOP4: “So again, what I’m getting at is you take an institution MEDUNSA and Limpopo, the
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<td>Turfloop, you hire a person from Turfloop to head the two institutions together. Obviously there’s always going to be a conflict of interest or biased.”</td>
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a) Incompetent management

RP1: “…the reason people were complaining, who were shifting the responsibility, because if you were not responsible yesterday, what will make you responsible today... I don’t see it changing yet, until we see a change in the management.”

PP5: “…if we continue with the system that they’ve been using, then always we’re going to lose that accountability. No one is going to going to take responsibility. They will take Blade Nzimande. Blade Nzimande le ena is just someone, um, you know. I just believe go re, change everything! You know? Management..”

SOP1: “…So that’s a problem. So I think no one is making sure that they monitor the development of the merger that if it’s failing, they discover that it’s failing and then they solve the problem as soon as possible. Not just to let go until students decide no, I think this merger is not working for us, so let’s just strike…”

SPP5: “…because sometimes, someone actually said that uh, uh, they miss Bra Tshepo, because Bra Tshepo used to work... they are good people, don’t get me wrong, but, bona they’re not as competent as Bra Tshepo was. We’re not saying they fire them and hire new, but they should monitor... you see that there is a lot
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<td><strong>problems with the administrative part of sport</strong> comm...”</td>
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<td>SPP7: “... you get the same people, the same challenges again year, just like with all the other years we’ve been under UL...”</td>
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<td>SPP1: “Yes, basically, it’s the same fights, as you know as usual...there’s no money, you need to walk up and down... and then suddenly there’s money.”</td>
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<td>SPP2: “...I think we also need people who understand sport. Okay, I feel that the people who are actually managing the sports, they do not understand sport. So I feel that we need people who understand sport so that they can understand our views...”</td>
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<td>SPP5: “...I thought, okay, we would get, um, new management in sport, ne, who are actually in sport – people who are active, people who can come to the match and actually see what exactly is happening so that when we say a first-aid kit, they shouldn’t say, ‘no, do you really it, what do you need it for...”</td>
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<td>SPP6: “.... I think going forward they should establish a single department of sports where everything is done there, if needs be, get competent and trustworthy people...”</td>
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|        |                |                          | SPP8: “.... I really hope and pray that either retire or they get fired or they resign because I know, personally, that Mr Seitshiro is very
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<td><strong>predictable, he’s always sick. Like, as you can see now, he’s off. He’s never there, he’s not accountable for anything that he does…”</strong></td>
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<td>2. Demerger</td>
<td>i) Independence</td>
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<td><strong>PP2: “Okay, eh, but the important thing about demerger is the independence from UL... So whatever happens after, you can have twenty campuses under SMU, but it doesn’t change the fact that we are independent from UL. The most important thing that you wanted from the demerger is to divorce UL. That’s what you wanted. So it doesn’t change the fact that we have independence…”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>PP2: “…What we students wanted was that we wanted a stand-alone, independent university, and we got that…”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>RP2: “Um, firstly, the independency, that’s what we’ve been fighting for now, so to achieve that, we have to have a constitution that is going to act in our favor in this institution…”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>RP4: “…So let it be that we are very independent of the SRC. We don’t want... let them give us our funds, we will see how we use them. But then let it be that we are not a structure that’s part of the SRC; every time we have to go through the SRC when we need something done…”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>SOP3: “…Hundred percent. Because if you go to the SMU website, we have the independent pharmacy field, introducing new courses.”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>There’s new courses tse tlāng mo tsa pharmacy in this new building, which means there’s new staff, there’s new job opportunities…”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>SOP4: “…Also, the issue of us being independent as SMU, even the SRC won’t have excuses anymore. They can’t blame authorization problems, ‘Turf didn’t get this approved in time to do this for the students’. So they also need to step up, you see…”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>SPP1: “Okay. I thought, it, it, it happens with everyone, once you have your own freedom, once you have autonomy you can do whatever you want, ‘cause whatever decision, you don’t need to consult anyone…”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>SPP3: “…So de-merger help us to know the person we have to complaint to and know where to do everything right there.”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>PP2: “And I think for me, we need to understand. I’m trying to respond to the question... I think we’ve gained a lot ‘cause obviously the name will be attached to it and the community was attached to it, but it does not define anything. What we students wanted was that we wanted a stand-alone, independent university, and we got that…”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>SOP3: “…So what I’m seeing is that there are new residences, of which it gives advantage to saying we’re gonna take the first-years, put them on campus, and that brings more what?”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>ii) Rapid development</strong></td>
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<td><em>They study, the library is here, and every facility is on campus.</em>”</td>
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<td><strong>SOP1:</strong> “…So I won’t say that after the de-merger, um, thinks are bleak, things are not looking good. But yet, we are seeing so improvements. Honestly, there’s some right in front of me, there’s a new res. It’s something that was talked about ever since I came to MEDUNSA, you know, wanting to add another res, wanting people to be here instead of outsourcing, going to town to find new reses...”</td>
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<td><strong>SOP3:</strong> “…There’s new courses tse tlang mo tsa pharmacy in this new building, which means there’s new staff, there’s new job opportunities, there’s an increase in the number of new students taken in the pharmacy school, in the pharmacy department...”</td>
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<td><strong>SPP3:</strong> “One of the positive changes that I noticed is the cleaning of the pool...”</td>
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<td><strong>SPP3:</strong> “…but the one thing I’ve benefit from the merger is, we had someone who’s gonna held accountable for everything that has to happen, that has to do with sports, as like as they were mentioning, most of the time if we have to lay a complaint we have to send letters to Turfloop and something else...”</td>
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|        |                |                          | **SPP4:** “Well, at least... oh, sorry. At least this year we got better tracksuits than any other
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<td><strong>Year. That’s one thing that I felt go re OK, these people, at least nyana, they tried.”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>SPP5: “Another parts of change is the hiring of coaches, ‘cause it’s, there’s been, we’ve been without a coach for a number of years, so, this year we finally have a coach.”</strong></td>
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### iii) Ambiguous use of terminology

**PP2: “Um, I think the whole term of de-merger or the unbundling as they were using the term, I think, I don’t know if it was used out of context or what, because you can’t say that if we are married and then now we are getting divorced, and now all of a sudden I don’t know what happens to you. I keep everything else that we had, and now you become another thing like what happened here. Because they joined two universities, which is the University of the North and MEDUNSA, and then, upon joining them, they named that university the University of Limpopo. So when they are saying they are disbundling the university, how is it that then one part is no longer in existence, ‘cause if you’re disbanding, it means that you must take one part to the other side and one side to the other side...”**

**PP1: “Okay, eh, I’m a... I don’t want to be long. The de-merger, I would say that it’s a divorce. It’s when you had united something, and you, you take them out – you unbundle them. So that’s what we call unbundling. So in a de-merger, we’re expecting, if things were united...”**
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<td>financially, there’s financial independence, now. The operational-wise, the things are operating differently, eh, the change of policies, the change of constitutions, uh, the change of rules that are governing the institution. Or the two things… let me say in case of the University of Limpopo – because of all the things we were struggling with. Now the de-merger was supposed to give us all the things that we were expecting from the institution.”</td>
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<td>3. Transition into SMU</td>
<td>i) Name Change</td>
<td>SOP3: “…The process, seriously, we didn’t have a choice. We were told ukuthi, no, you guys have a choice, you guys have a say in what you want the new name of the university to be, but already they had known what they wanted to call it...”</td>
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<td>SPP5: “…then they imposed the Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences on MEDUNSA because we had de-merged with the University of Limpopo and we couldn’t keep our old name, and then they gave us that name…”</td>
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<td>PP1: “…the name ‘MEDUNSA’ on its own was an iconic thing and it worked and I think diluting that meant a lot of lost sponsorship …So the change of the name was kind of discouraging to them. Now when you have such an experience in which you’re not happy, it speaks bad to us…”</td>
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|        |                | PP2: “Yes, and we know they will respect you for saying you’re from MEDUNSA because they
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<td><em>thought, you know entering MEDUNSA it’s very difficult...”</em></td>
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<td><strong>PP1:</strong> “Even arriving at the name, you understand, students demonstrated I think last year to protest the issue of the name because our understanding is that if people are responding to our call, the call that we made as students, then they must do that without having their own interests. And it now comes across as if we’ve got certain problems with our black former leaders which is not the case. But what we are saying as students is we wanted MEDUNSA back.”</td>
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<td><strong>PP2:</strong> “...now we have SMU, meaning we must build the brand SMU and make sure that it’s marketable out there...”</td>
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<td><strong>SOP2:</strong> “It’s like the name, ne, same thing happened with the merger, they just you to do what, and then... it’s like the name. No one wanted the name but we had no choice to accept it. Even the merger, the same thing. Then we have to accept it, they were likely to accept the merger.”</td>
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<td><strong>SOP1:</strong> “...preferably, some of us would have preferred to retain the old name because it held so much weight and it resonates with even the community around us. They still identify this campus as MEDUNSA. You go out there, there’s a taxi station there. It’s not SMU. I’m sure people would get lost if you say ngiyehla e...”</td>
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<td><strong>SMU, uyangithola…some of the reasons Lethu has given. MEDUNSA used to have so much integrity to a level whereby the sponsors, you know, when you said MEDUNSA, I mean, people understood exactly what you were talking about. So I think maybe, ge we might have re-branded and given it another name, but we expected it go back...</strong>”</td>
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<td><strong>SOP3: “…just like with how we were supposed to decide on the name of the university. The process, seriously, we didn’t have a choice. We were told ukuthi, no, you guts have a choice, you guys have a say in what you want the new name of the university to be, but already they had known what they wanted to call it...”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>SPP5: “...and then they imposed the Sefako Makgato Health Sciences on MEDUNSA because because we had de-merged with the University of Limpopo and we couldn’t keep our old name, and then they gave us that name...”</strong></td>
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<td>ii) Attitudes towards SMU</td>
<td>a) Excitement</td>
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<td><strong>SOP3: “Ja, again, I remember saying we cannot fear the unknown or the future. Currently, nna, I take the SMU as the old MEDUNSA, but a bit broader, and I’m happy with everything that is happening currently...”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>PP2: “...Now whether we want to make SMU a brand, that’s what excites us because we have a new a challenge and an opportunity as students of this time to lay a ground and leave a legacy,</strong></td>
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<td><em>because it is up to us now to shape what SMU is. So we got what we wanted – we didn’t lose anything, really. We have a challenge now, just to shape the new university.</em>**</td>
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<td>PP1:</td>
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<td><em>…What I’m experiencing um, is happiness. I mean we’ve inherited what the comrades worked for us, the Ntsie’s of this world. But I’m so happy that we ended up being at the final stage of what we were fighting for. So as SASCO I’m happy to have been a generation that came up with results…</em></td>
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<td><strong>PP3: “…I think also MEDUNSA started somewhere for it to carry weight. Even when you say I’m studying at MENDUNSA, everyone would say, ‘ah, you gonna be a doctor…So even that thing, you know, I think SMU can do the same thing. When you say you’re studying at Sefako, they’ll be like, ‘ah, you’re a scientist, or you’re a doctor?’ something like that. So I think we have it, we didn’t lose anything. It’s just upon us students or upon the university to improve and do things different from MEDUNSA, like forget about MEDUNSA and work on SMU.”</strong></td>
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<td><strong>PP1: “…I feel as leaders of the university what we supposed to do is to make sure that we market our institution; we make sure our institution has got uh, a brand that students and learners can identify with… so I believe that’s some of the things that we can do…”</strong></td>
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b) Hope
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<td><strong>PP3</strong>: “...So I think when we look at the establishment of SMU, it’s looking positive.”</td>
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<td><strong>PP1</strong>: “...we feel that more can be achieved or more can be done. We can have a higher throughput in this institution only if we behave in a way that Africans behave...”</td>
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<td><strong>RP4</strong>: “... it’s really understandable and we see where they want to go, and it’s a really good thing that they want this institution to be one of the top one hundred institutions. We really want this institution to be a really good institution so that the global, um, itself, recognizes this institution so that, okay, we can, we can take your students...”</td>
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<td><strong>PP1</strong>: “...I think we are getting there because from my side, where I’m standing, there were a lot of things where if you were to do, um, the course that I’m doing, you wouldn’t be able to do um, during that time when we didn’t have enough equipments and stuff. But it’s promising – I see a lot of renovations, I see a lot of changes in those facilities, so I will say that we are getting there, even though it’s in the first eleventh month to date, so I think ja, I think we are getting there.”</td>
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<td>c) Uncertainty</td>
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<td><strong>RP5</strong>: “...Oh ja, and nna I doubt. But if they start it, though, like the way they started, the high chances that they, you know, repeat the same thing... because then you’re used to something. So, um, if ever they can say, now, from top...”</td>
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<td>management, from Moshe, to whoever was there, you know, ‘cause that’s the only person that I know in the management…”</td>
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<td>SOP5: “…I think, um, so far it has been good, given the reasons that have been provided. However, mna I’m a bit skeptical about the prospects, whether we’ll be able to sustain these nice things that are happening just now…”</td>
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<td>SOP1: “…We can be excited to day, you know, because things are still new and nice. But you don’t know about the future. The future might hold worse kind of things that we experienced when we were together with Turfloop.”</td>
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<td>SOP2: “I’m not going to look at two buildings on this campus and say the future is bright. We’ll see as we go on. That’s my point.”</td>
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<td>iii)</td>
<td>A need for sound policy development</td>
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<td>SOP2: “…you know that the SRC doesn’t have a constitution? So for them to implement a new SRC they need the inputs of the students. So all they need to do is take our inputs, and then ja, we take it from there…We need a summit as soon as possible… to come up with a document because we can’t run without that document…”</td>
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<td>PP3: “But I wanted to say was related to what he was saying. You know, they really need to change di policy how they work in this institution.”</td>
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<td><strong>PP1</strong>: “I don’t think that so far there are enough policies to guide that support that you are talking about. Um, to the point that if, for an example, if one of the structures sitting here, it’s not represented in the SRC, they may not be privy to certain information and certain discussions which are held. I don’t think there’s that platform which allows all the student organizations to say, ‘let’s sit down, let’s discuss this and that...””</td>
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<td><strong>RP4</strong>: “…But the policies, if you can through them right now, and see maybe if there is nepotism, whatever that was happening there…”</td>
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<td><strong>RP1</strong>: “…Once we have policies that are working, we’ll have good systems in place, then we’ll stick to them and they will work.”</td>
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<td><strong>SOP1</strong>: “We are organizations. For them to build this office, they need us. And like the constitution, you know that the SRC doesn’t have a constitution? So for them to implement a new SRC they need the inputs of the students. So all they need to do is take our inputs, and then ja, we take it from there.”</td>
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<td><strong>SOP2</strong>: “…We need a summit as soon as possible to come up with a document because we can’t run without that document. So ja, it needs to be sorted soon.”</td>
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<td><strong>PP8</strong>: “…there was a functioning in sports where sport would run without a policy. There was no policy which was being used to say no, this is...”</td>
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<td><em>how things, it was just a hearsay to say that if you come to me about this it this is done this way. Even today there is, there is no policy. There was money which was invested on policy-making which was used only once, and it was ineffective, it didn’t happen again...”</em></td>
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Appendix 8

Declaration of Language Editing

DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITING

I. Christina Maria Etricia Terblanche, hereby declare that I edited the following research study:

Experiences of students' organizations on the merger and demerger of the University of Limpopo leading to the subsequent transition into the new Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University

for Siyabonga Sanele Zikalala for the purpose of submission as a thesis for examination. Changes were suggested in track changes and implementation was left up to the author.

Regards,

CME Terblanche

Cum Laude Language Practitioners [CC]

SATI accreditation nr: 1001066

Registered with PEG