

## The Education Office's Strategy for Primary School Mergers

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### Abstract :

Primary education plays a critical role in building the basic skills required for students' future academic success and social development. This research focuses on strategies for combining primary schools to optimise education services for the community, which previous research has not discussed in terms of local authority. The research method used a qualitative approach of the case study type. Data were collected using interviews, observations and documentation, analysed by reduction, display and conclusion and confirmed through triangulation and dependability. The results of this study illustrate the importance of efficient decision-making strategies for regional education leaders who continue to listen to input from their members, including through swot analysis, optimising services, and meeting future challenges. Contribution of this study is how optimization of execution of the leader with swot in eraly is giving positive. This research provides a view that local leadership must be able to use its role in updating the state of education so as to create a more qualified and appropriate national education institution.

**Keywords:** *Merger Strategy, Educational Leadership Role, School Merger*

### Abstrak :

Pendidikan dasar memainkan peran penting dalam membangun keterampilan dasar yang diperlukan untuk kesuksesan akademik dan perkembangan sosial siswa di masa depan. Penelitian ini berfokus pada strategi penggabungan sekolah dasar untuk mengoptimalkan layanan pendidikan bagi masyarakat, yang belum pernah dibahas dalam penelitian sebelumnya dalam konteks kewenangan daerah. Metode penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan dengan menggunakan wawancara, observasi dan dokumentasi, dianalisis dengan reduksi, display dan kesimpulan serta dikonfirmasi melalui triangulasi dan dependabilitas. Hasil penelitian ini menggambarkan pentingnya strategi pengambilan keputusan yang efisien bagi pemimpin pendidikan daerah yang terus mendengarkan masukan dari anggotanya, termasuk melalui analisis swot, mengoptimalkan layanan, dan menjawab tantangan di masa depan. Kontribusi dari penelitian ini adalah bagaimana optimalisasi eksekusi pemimpin dengan analisis swot memberikan hasil yang positif. Penelitian ini memberikan pandangan bahwa kepemimpinan lokal harus dapat menggunakan perannya dalam memperbaiki keadaan pendidikan sehingga dapat menciptakan lembaga pendidikan nasional yang lebih berkualitas dan tepat guna.

**Kata Kunci:** *Strategi Merger, Peran Kepemimpinan Pendidikan, Sekolah Merger*

## INTRODUCTION

The urgency of education is underscored by the need for formal education programmes that enhance literacy and integrate relevant principles into curricula at different levels of education. This approach aims to develop regionally specific resources aligned with the national narrative, ensuring that educational strategies have adequate resources and support.<sup>1 2 3</sup> Furthermore, the concept of professional vision in teacher education highlights the need for educators to develop skills in noticing and reasoning about classroom situations, which are crucial for effective teaching and learning.<sup>4</sup> The focus on vision urgently needs an educational framework that prepares individuals to effectively address contemporary challenges, thus emphasising the urgency of improving educational practices and resources in today's rapidly changing environment.<sup>5 6</sup>

Primary education plays a critical role in building the foundational skills necessary for students' future academic success and social development. Many students struggle to meet basic curricular expectations by the end of primary education, which disproportionately affects low-achieving students who are often not served by teachers using whole-class instructional approaches.<sup>7</sup> In Pakistan, primary education is recognised as a vital sub-sector that generates significant social and private returns, highlighting its importance in the education pyramid.<sup>8</sup> Primary education is critical to improving overall educational outcomes, as weak governance and management have been identified as important factors undermining its effectiveness.<sup>9</sup> Thus, improving basic education is critical to fostering responsible citizenship and achieving national education goals.

The problem of too few learners can be attributed to issues of inadequate pedagogical approaches and lack of motivation among students, absence of effective teaching methods and replication of real-life scenarios that hinder student engagement and skill acquisition.<sup>10</sup> In the context of language education, the

<sup>1</sup> Francesca Cava et al., "Science Content and Standards for Ocean Literacy : A Report on Ocean Literacy," *National Geographic*, no. November (2005): 1-49, <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.12126.84804>.

<sup>2</sup> Devin J. Hoover, Darryl Z. Seligman, and Matthew J. Payne, "The Population of Interstellar Objects Detectable with the LSST and Accessible for in Situ Rendezvous with Various Mission Designs," *Planetary Science Journal* 3, no. 3 (2022): 71, <https://doi.org/10.3847/PSJ/ac58fe>.

<sup>3</sup> Melita Mokos et al., "Navigating Ocean Literacy in Europe: 10 Years of History and Future Perspectives," *Mediterranean Marine Science* 23, no. 2 (2022): 277-88, <https://doi.org/10.12681/mms.26989>.

<sup>4</sup> Ilana Finefter-Rosenbluh and Kerry Power, "Exploring Preservice Teachers' Professional Vision: Modes of Isolation, Ethical Noticing, and Anticipation in Research Communities of Practice," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 132 (2023): 104245, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104245>.

<sup>5</sup> R. J. Shellock et al., "The Nature and Use of Ocean Literacy in Achieving Sustainable Ocean Futures: A Systematic Map," *Ocean and Coastal Management* 257, no. August (2024): 107325, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2024.107325>; Finefter-Rosenbluh and Power, "Exploring Preservice Teachers' Professional Vision: Modes of Isolation, Ethical Noticing, and Anticipation in Research Communities of Practice."

<sup>6</sup> Finefter-Rosenbluh and Power, "Exploring Preservice Teachers' Professional Vision: Modes of Isolation, Ethical Noticing, and Anticipation in Research Communities of Practice."

<sup>7</sup> Sharnic Djaker, Alejandro J. Ganimian, and Shwetlena Sabarwal, "Out of Sight, out of Mind? The Gap between Students' Test Performance and Teachers' Estimations in India and Bangladesh," *Economics of Education Review* 102, no. April 2023 (2024): 102575, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2024.102575>.

<sup>8</sup> Samra Maqbool et al., "Stance of Numerous Leadership Styles and Their Effect on Teaching to Sustain Academic Performance at the High School Level," *Heliyon* 10, no. 16 (2024): e36438, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e36438>.

<sup>9</sup> Maqbool et al.

<sup>10</sup> Masoomeh Habibi Baghi et al., "Unveiling CPR Training Challenges in Nursing Education: Pedagogical Strategies for Success," *Nurse Education in Practice* 78, no. June (2024): 104040, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nepr.2024.104040>.

challenges faced by students learning in a non-native language can exacerbate the problem, as they struggle with the curriculum and language of instruction.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the lack of clear curriculum guidelines for integrating AI in education may also contribute to the limited number of learners engaging with important subjects, as teachers face barriers in applying these technologies effectively.<sup>12</sup> Taken together, these factors collectively contribute to the problem of insufficient basic-level learners in various educational contexts.

Therefore, the government has an important role in solving national problems, including basic education.<sup>13</sup> emphasises the importance of adaptive management strategies to meet local needs and create inclusive learning environments. However, despite the progress that has been made in curriculum development and improving the quality of teaching, there are still major challenges faced by the education system in Indonesia, including issues of disparities in access to education and the quality of services that vary between regions.

In this context, this study focuses on the strategy of merging primary schools to optimise education services for the community, which has not been discussed in previous studies in terms of local authority. Merging primary schools is considered a strategic step to increase the efficiency of resource management, improve access to education and enhance the quality of education services received by students. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the Cirebon district education office's strategy in merging primary schools and analyse its impact on optimising education services. The main issues to be addressed in this research are how merging primary schools can improve accessibility and quality of education for the community, as well as the challenges faced in its implementation.

This paper is theoretically strengthened by strategy theory of Hunger<sup>14</sup> with strategic stages of environmental analysis, strategy formulation, implementation, and systematic evaluation. Education policy theory based on public policy (Dye, 1997),<sup>15</sup> total quality management (Chen et al., 2020; Edward Sallis 2006).<sup>16</sup> Strengthening research (Cai et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2010; Mo et al., 2012)<sup>17</sup> related to school mergers, especially primary schools.

Thus, the results of this study are expected to provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of primary school amalgamation as a strategy in improving the quality of education services in Cirebon District, as well as provide recommendations for the development of better education policies in the future.

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<sup>11</sup> Margaret Leighton, "Mother Tongue Reading Materials as a Bridge to Literacy," *Economics of Education Review* 91, no. August (2022): 102312, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2022.102312>.

<sup>12</sup> Eric Chi Keung Cheng and Tianchong Wang, "Leading Digital Transformation and Eliminating Barriers for Teachers to Incorporate Artificial Intelligence in Basic Education in Hong Kong," *Computers and Education: Artificial Intelligence* 5, no. October (2023): 100171, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.caeai.2023.100171>.

<sup>13</sup> (Aliyah et al., 2020; Mulyasa 2021)

<sup>14</sup> Thomas L. Wheelen and J. David Hunger, "Strategic Management and Business Policy (3rd Edition)," in *Encyclopedia of Statistical Sciences*, vol. 41, 2005, 91-92, <https://doi.org/10.1002/0471667196.ess7033.pub2>.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas R. Dye, "Determinants Public Policy," 1997.

<sup>16</sup> (Chen et al., 2020; Edward Sallis 2006)

<sup>17</sup> Weixian Cai, Gong Chen, and Feng Zhu, "Has the Compulsory School Merger Program Reduced the Welfare of Rural Residents in China?," *China Economic Review* 46 (2017): 123-41, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chieco.2017.07.010>; Di Mo et al., "Transfer Paths and Academic Performance: The Primary School Merger Program in China," *International Journal of Educational Development* 32, no. 3 (2012): 423-31, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2011.11.001>; Chengfang Liu et al., "The Effect of Primary School Mergers on Academic Performance of Students in Rural China," *International Journal of Educational Development* 30, no. 6 (2010): 570-85, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2010.05.003>.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach<sup>18</sup> to explore the understanding of the phenomenon of strategic management of the merger of public primary schools in the Cirebon District Education Office. The research design chosen was a case study, as this design is most suitable for analysing in depth the merger programme and process, as well as the context and dynamics surrounding it. The research subjects were selected through purposive sampling technique, which is the selection of participants based on certain criteria relevant to the research objectives. The main resource persons consisted of the head of the Cirebon District Education Office, the head of the SD Division of the Education Office, as well as the principals of the schools involved in the merger, teachers and student guardians. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and participatory observation. This technique was chosen to obtain detailed information and direct perspectives from the participants on the implementation of strategic management in school mergers. The data analysis process follows the steps of thematic analysis. The data collected from interviews and observations will be arranged and organised based on emerging themes, so that it can help in understanding the phenomenon under study.<sup>19</sup> To increase the validity of the data, this study applied triangulation and member checking. Triangulation<sup>20</sup> is done by collecting data from various sources to ensure consistency of information, while member checking is used to validate the findings with participants, so that the credibility and trustworthiness of the research results can be ensured. The role of the researcher in this study is as the main instrument in data collection and analysis. The researcher is actively involved in interactions with participants, which allows for more in-depth and contextualised data collection. To make it easier, the researcher displays table 1.0 of the research subjects as follows.

**Table: 1 Subject, Instrumen and Primer Seconder Data**

Subject	Informan Name	Initial	Role	Question
Schoole Merger Strategies	H. Ronianto, S.Pd. MM. (Primer Data)	HR	Head Local Education Cirebon	How are internal and external factors analysed to optimise education services post-merger?
	Hj. Een Nurhaeni, S.Pd.	EN	Principal of SDN 1 Kedungjaya	How were the vision, mission and goals formulated in your school in relation to the school merger?
	Maesyaroh, S.Pd.I	MY	Teacher of SDN 1 Kedungjaya	How was the formulation of the vision, mission and objectives in your school related to the school merger?
	Head of Field PSD Disdik Kab. Cirebon	KB	Head of Primary School of Cirebon	Does the education office use SWOT analysis in the strategic management of school

<sup>18</sup> John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Mixed Methods Procedures, Research Defign: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed M Ethods Approaches*, 2018.

<sup>19</sup> A. Michael Huberman Matthew B Miles, "An Analytic Approach for Discovery," *CEUR Workshop Proceedings*, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Muhammad Ghafar, "Kyai's Leadership Strategy and Its Implications For Improving The Quality of Education," *Nazhruna* 5, no. 3 (2023): 1388-99, <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v5i3.2172>.

				mergers?
	Parent of Student SDN Kedungjaya	OT	Parent of Student SDN Kedungjaya	What is your response to school mergers and their impact on the quality of education?

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The merger of primary schools in Cirebon district is a strategic step taken by the education office to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the education system. In facing the growing challenges of education, the merger aims to optimise existing resources and improve the quality of education services for students. By making maximum use of existing buildings and facilities, the merger is expected to create a better learning environment and wider access to education. In addition, community involvement in the decision-making process is key to building support and reducing resistance to change. Through these efforts, it is hoped that school mergers will not only have a positive impact on the quality of education but also build trust between the education office and the community.

### School Merger Strategy

School mergers, particularly in the context of Primary School merger programmes involve the closure of other schools and the consolidation of students into a larger, centralised institution.<sup>21</sup>

However, the programme has faced criticism for potentially exacerbating inequity, as the increased distance to the centralised school and the requirement for boarding can negatively impact students' academic performance.<sup>22</sup> The overall effect of amalgamation remains debated, with concerns about the loss of local educational settings and the adequacy of support for students during the amalgamation transition.<sup>23</sup>

*"School mergers have a positive impact, especially in utilising greater resources. We used SWOT analysis to look at the strengths and weaknesses in management, as well as the opportunities and threats."*

*"SDN 1 Kedungjaya's vision is to create a conducive learning atmosphere that supports the development of students' potential. We also set a mission that focuses on developing IMTAQ and Science and Technology, as well as fostering a culture of noble character in the school environment."* (HR, Informan 1, September 2023)

This is also as stated by the principal of SDN Kedungjaya as follows.

*"SDN 1 Kedungjaya's vision is to create a conducive learning atmosphere that supports the development of students' potential. We also set a mission that focuses on developing IMTAQ and Science and Technology, as well as fostering a culture of noble character in the school environment"* (EN, Informan 2, September 2023).

<sup>21</sup> Mo et al., "Transfer Paths and Academic Performance: The Primary School Merger Program in China."

<sup>22</sup> Cai, Chen, and Zhu, "Has the Compulsory School Merger Program Reduced the Welfare of Rural Residents in China?"

<sup>23</sup> Liu et al., "The Effect of Primary School Mergers on Academic Performance of Students in Rural China"; Mo et al., "Transfer Paths and Academic Performance: The Primary School Merger Program in China."

As stated by HR and EN that after the implementation of merger school activities, the positive impact can be seen from the more conducive and focused students during learning in accordance with the school's vision and mission. This is in accordance with research <sup>24</sup> that primary school mergers in rural China do not have a negative impact on academic performance for either merger guest or merger host students, as evidenced by stable Z scores in subjects such as Chinese and mathematics. <sup>25</sup> In addition, merger programmes aim to improve educational resources, which can lead to improved academic outcomes due to better facilities and teacher quality <sup>26</sup>. However, while the resource effects are significant, the negative impact of increased class sizes during mergers may counteract the potential benefits. <sup>27</sup> Overall, the findings suggest that while mergers may provide better resources, their success depends on managing class sizes and ensuring quality teaching. <sup>28</sup> <sup>29</sup> Positive impacts are seen from more conducive and focused learners while learning, no negative impact on academic performance for either merging guest or merger host students, increased educational resources, but their success depends on managing class size.

### **Optimisation of education services**

Optimising education services involves improving the quality and accessibility of education resources to effectively meet the needs of society. Educational institutions should upgrade their service tools and maximise the capabilities of existing staff to deliver quality services, which includes optimising human resources and improving facilities and infrastructure. <sup>30</sup> In addition, the integration of optimisation algorithms, such as Harris Hawk's Optimizer and Earthworm Optimisation Algorithm, with adaptive neuro-fuzzy inference systems can significantly improve the accuracy of student performance assessment, thereby improving educational outcomes. <sup>31</sup> Furthermore, spatial optimisation of basic education services is crucial, especially in areas with significant supply-demand imbalance, as shown in the case study of Zhangjiakou City, where strategic planning can reduce the gap in education services. <sup>32</sup>

*"The main strengths of this merger are the more strategic location of the school and facilities and infrastructure that are more in line with national education standards. In addition, the human resources also fulfil the qualifications of the national standard of education."* (HR, Informan 1, September 2023)  
*School mergers are considered favourable due to better facilities and more optimal*

<sup>24</sup> Liu et al., "The Effect of Primary School Mergers on Academic Performance of Students in Rural China."

<sup>25</sup> Liu et al.

<sup>26</sup> Mo et al., "Transfer Paths and Academic Performance: The Primary School Merger Program in China."

<sup>27</sup> Yunxiang Zheng et al., "Effects of Digital Game-Based Learning on Students' Digital Etiquette Literacy, Learning Motivations, and Engagement," *Heliyon* 10, no. 1 (2024): e23490, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e23490>.

<sup>28</sup> Cai, Chen, and Zhu, "Has the Compulsory School Merger Program Reduced the Welfare of Rural Residents in China?"

<sup>29</sup> Mo et al., "Transfer Paths and Academic Performance: The Primary School Merger Program in China."

<sup>30</sup> Rusmin Husain et al., "Analysis of Student Satisfaction with the Quality of Education Services," *Cypriot Journal of Educational Sciences* 17, no. 2 (2022): 343–56, <https://doi.org/10.18844/CJES.V17I2.6802>.

<sup>31</sup> Junting Nie and Hossein Ahmadi Dehrashid, "Evaluation of Student Failure in Higher Education by an Innovative Strategy of Fuzzy System Combined Optimization Algorithms and AI," *Heliyon* 10, no. 7 (2024): e29182, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e29182>.

<sup>32</sup> An Huang et al., "A Spatial Equilibrium Evaluation of Primary Education Services Based on Living Circle Models: A Case Study within the City of Zhangjiakou, Hebei Province, China," *Land* 11, no. 11 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.3390/land11111994>.

*resource allocation. However, the challenges that arise are students' adjustment to the new system and competition from private schools.” (OT, Informan 5, September 2023)*

*“Primary school mergers are conducted through a strategic management approach, with a focus on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of education services through a thorough SWOT analysis” (KB, Informan 4, September 2023)*

School mergers are expected to result in the optimisation of education services that have a positive impact on students and the community as a whole. One aspect to note is the better accessibility of education. With amalgamation, it is expected that school locations become more strategic and accessible to more students, especially in rural areas where some schools may be too far to reach. This optimisation of accessibility not only makes it easier for students to attend school but can also reduce the risk of dropping out, thus ensuring more children get a proper education.

Improved learning quality is also an expectation of the merger. Through the merger, students can gain access to better facilities, such as laboratories, libraries, and sports halls. With more resources available, the quality of learning is expected to improve. In addition, the merger provides opportunities to carry out more diverse extracurricular activities, which can help develop students' skills and interests beyond academics. Thus, the merger not only improves facilities, but also supports the holistic development of students' potential.

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation is essential for the merger strategy to be effective. The education office needs to conduct regular monitoring and evaluation, which includes collecting data on academic performance, student and parent satisfaction, and the effectiveness of resource management. With proper evaluation, the education office can make the necessary improvements and adjustments to the strategy to maximise the positive impact of school mergers. This will ensure that the objectives of the school merger are well achieved.

Support from third parties can also improve the effectiveness of school mergers. The education office can partner with non-government agencies and community organisations to collaborate on education programmes. This could be in the form of training for teachers, provision of infrastructure or student development programmes. With additional support, the quality of education services provided to the community can improve, so that school mergers can provide greater benefits for all parties involved.

### **Challenges in School Merger**

School amalgamation presents several challenges, especially for rural households. China's compulsory school amalgamation programme has significantly increased the distance between students' homes and schools, leading to high education-related costs such as dormitory fees, transportation, and living expenses, financially burdening rural families.<sup>33</sup> In addition, the transition to centralised schooling often results in disruptions to students' learning experiences, as they adapt to new environments and teaching methods.<sup>34</sup> While the programme aims to improve the quality of education through better resources, increased reliance on

<sup>33</sup> Cai, Chen, and Zhu, “Has the Compulsory School Merger Program Reduced the Welfare of Rural Residents in China?”

<sup>34</sup> Mo et al., “Transfer Paths and Academic Performance: The Primary School Merger Program in China.”

boarding facilities has been shown to negatively impact academic performance.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the lack of community involvement in the decision-making process regarding school mergers exacerbates the challenges faced by affected families, as local governments prioritise efficiency over the needs of rural residents.<sup>36</sup>

*“The main obstacle faced is the adaptation process, especially between teachers and students who come from different school backgrounds. In addition, private schools are more attractive to parents, leaving some public schools short of students.”* (HR, Informan 1, September 2023)

*“One of the weaknesses is the lack of an appropriate proportion of teachers, especially in neighbouring schools. In addition, there is unfair competition in the admission of new learners, as well as the issue of legalising alumni documents from schools before the merger.”* (KB, Informan 4, September 2023)

*“Students' adjustment to new friends and school environment is a major challenge, especially for low-grade students (grades 1-3) whose performance declined slightly at the beginning of the merger”* (EN, Informan 2, September 2023).

Despite its many positive potentials, school amalgamation also faces various challenges. One significant challenge is resistance from stakeholders, including parents, teachers and students. Some may feel apprehensive about the change, feel a loss of school identity or be unsure about the quality of education after the merger. Therefore, it is important to conduct good and transparent socialisation to explain the benefits of the merger and address their concerns constructively. This approach will help reduce resistance and increase acceptance of the merger.

Another challenge is effective change management during the merger process. The education office needs to ensure that change management is done well to ensure a smooth transition. This includes providing training to educators and administrative staff on how to adapt to the new structure and how to manage classes with students from different backgrounds. With proper change management, educators can create an environment conducive to learning and minimise conflicts that may arise due to differences in student backgrounds.

## CONCLUSION

Primary school mergers have many positive impacts that can improve the competence of learners, teachers, and school facilities through SWOT and enhancing strength of facilities. This research suggests that in order to improve the quality of primary education, local leadership must be able to use its role in reforming the state of education to create a more capable and viable national education institution.

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<sup>35</sup> Mo et al.

<sup>36</sup> Cai, Chen, and Zhu, “Has the Compulsory School Merger Program Reduced the Welfare of Rural Residents in China?”



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