

## **Education Reform and School Size: Stakeholder Perspectives on The Shift from Small Independent to Large Profit-Driven School**

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### **Abstract**

During apartheid in South Africa, the quality of education varied significantly across cultural and racial groups, resulting in systemic inequality. Following the democratic transition in 1994, the South African government-initiated education reform by allowing the establishment of independent schools, which had previously been restricted. Since then, the independent school sector has diversified, giving rise to various models, including both not-for-profit and profit-driven institutions. This study investigates stakeholders' experiences of the transition from small, not-for-profit independent schools to larger, profit-driven models—an emerging trend within the broader context of educational reform. A qualitative multiple case study design was employed, with data collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data gathered from two independent schools in Gauteng that underwent this transition. Initially, the shift appeared to be beneficial for stakeholders—principals, teachers, parents, learners, and school governors, such as owners, CEOs, and church managers. However, over time, optimism diminished, and concerns emerged. This study provides insights into the evolving nature of independent schooling in South Africa and contributes to the discourse on education reform by highlighting stakeholder concerns and offering guidance for managing such transitions more effectively.

**Keywords:** class size, decision-making process, education reform, independent schools, south african school system