

INFLUENCE OF STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION ON GROWTH OF STUDENTS' POPULATION IN SELECTED PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA

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Abstract – Strategy implementation plays a significant role towards achievement of the objectives of private university education. The study sought to investigate the influence of strategic implementation on the growth of students' population in selected private universities in Kenya. The study was guided by Carnegie school of thought and distributed leadership theory. Descriptive research design was used in the study. The study used random sampling technique to select research participants. The study targeted private universities in North Rift, South Rift and Nyanza region of Kenya. The unit of observations was staff and students in various departments and faculties existing in the institutions. The study used purposive sampling to select research respondents. Questionnaire was the main instrument for data collection. Collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the and presented using frequency distribution. The findings of the study indicated that a unit increase in strategy implementation will leads to an increase in growth of student population by a margin of 0.714. It was concluded that implementation of strategies set by private universities was little. The study recommended that private universities should consider bringing to the board all stakeholders in order to facilitate implementation from all corners.

Keywords: Strategy implementation, growth of students' population, private universities, decision making.

INTRODUCTION

Strategic planning process involves analyzing the organization's internal and external environment followed by careful and logical planning of the execution process and making useful choices. To achieve their performance targets, institutions such as universities ought to build synergy between strategy planning and execution for effective integration of their plans towards advancing the missions of their institutions. One of the most important strategies is strategic intent, which refers to the relentless pursuit to realize an aspiring strategic objective and anticipated business situation through cautiously intertwining and harmonizing of the organization's vision, mission and strategic objectives (Bowlby, 2011).

According to Onsongo (2007) private universities play an important role in university education by bridging the gap that exists in public universities. Most private universities have invested heavily on resources such as infrastructure development and human resource development. Missionaries established schools and colleges for their converts. The first private institutions of higher learning were the St Paul's United Theological College (1955). On the 18th of March 1993, the National Council of Churches of Kenya, (NCKK) in its corporate identity was admitted by the Governing Council as the fifth Participating Partner in the ownership of the College. On September 14, 2007, the University was awarded a Charter to become St. Paul's University (Onsongo, 2007).

The enrolment rate in university education in Sub-Saharan Africa is very slow (UNESCO, 2004). The demand and supply of the same education is of great significance in provision of the required highly skilled manpower. The Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) for university education for example, South Africa is 15%, Egypt is 30% and Mauritius 15.3% is highest of the top countries (Otieno, 2005). In Poland, as in many other Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, the rapid reforms and the global transformations in higher education have intensified the discussion about private higher education. The rapid rise of new private institutions soon invited questions about quality and legitimacy. And despite the fact that, unlike the existing public institutions, these new private colleges and universities are untainted by the communist past and are part of the broader transformation process

from a planned state economy to a market oriented one, they still continue to grapple with social acceptability (Levy, 2005).

Statement of the problem

The demand for higher education, has led to development of various universities offering variety of courses in Kenya. The move has tremendously led to advancement of education in the country. The growth of universities in the country has led to rapid growth in the number of student enrolment. Most of the private universities are well-equipped with resources that facilitate learning but due to low enrollment rate, the facilities are underutilized. Little is known why the population is low despite of many resources at their disposal. With the growing need to increase higher education provision in Kenya, it has become increasingly impossible for the public universities in Kenya to cater for all those who qualify for university admission. This has presented a gap that private universities have not fully utilized their potentials. Few studies have been carried out to investigate the role of strategic decision making on the growth of student's population with majority of these studies being undertaken in Western Countries. Most of the studies have concentrated on other aspects not related to strategic decision making. This presented a research gap that the study sought to fill by investigating the influence of strategic decision making on growth of student population in selected private universities in Kenya.

Objectives of the study

The research aimed at investigating the influence of strategic implementation on growth of student population in selected private universities in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The section covers the literature related to the objectives of the study which includes theoretical review, goal setting, strategic communication, stakeholder participation, strategic implementation, and conceptual framework, summary of the literature and research gap.

Theoretical review

Carnegie school of thought

The Carnegie school proposes critical theoretical foundations for contemporary organizational research (Gavetti & Ocasio, 2007). This school of thought offers a useful structure for the exploration of strategic intent execution. The theory is anchored on three premises. First, the theory postulates that all organizations constitute the ultimate object for study. Second, it holds the view that organizational impacts on individuals are prevailing and are exercised through organizational authority, strategic decision making, and motivational inducements. Finally, the Carnegie school believes that organizations are communal institutions which are shaped by, but not reducible to, human behavior, societal relations, and market and non-market environments.

The Carnegie school offers important lessons for enhancing students' populations in institutions of higher learning as Gavetti (2007) argued that in order for institutions to perform they must study the market factors, internal operations of the firm, structures of the organization and predictable practice on expansion, formation of expectations, and execution of choices. The Carnegie school incorporates important insights for understanding problems associated with shared action, predominantly in the face of contending benefits. At the individual level, the theory identifies psychological constraints, but the key concerns at the organizational level are the connection between specific and structural goals. The Carnegie theory is important in this study as it emphasizes the importance of standard alignment of practices, processes, and procedures that serve to stabilize expectations and perceptions of organizational performance. The theory is applicable to universities, which have structures of harmonized actions among personalities and groups whose inclinations, information needs, benefits, and knowledge levels vary, and hence the theory is linked to strategy implementation in growing students' population.

Growth of universities in Kenya

A leading factor specific to the Kenyan context that is responsible for the expansion in university education is the growing segments of the population that demand university education. In particular, the widespread belief that a degree is required to get a good job, or to advance in a job demand has elevated the importance attached to university education, making it a necessity for success. This in turn has increased the need among many Kenyans, especially those in the middle class, to access university education. The expanding demand for university education has been associated with the increase in the number of secondary school leavers meeting the minimum qualifications (average grade of C+) for university admission that was triggered in part by the massive expansion of primary education, accompanied by increased transition rates from primary to secondary school (Onsongo M., 2017).

A second factor explaining the growth of university education within the specific context of Kenya is the flexibility accorded by university institutions. According to Gudo (2011), individuals who attain lower qualifications are finding universities more flexible than before. Previously, the only way of entering a university was a convincing pass in the Kenya Advanced Certificate of Education (KACE) or, since 1987, the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). Today though, individuals who scored lower passes are joining universities, sometimes through the longer route of studying for a certificate, followed by a diploma before one can enroll for a degree Program. Such flexibility has been responsible for Module II group of students which thrives in virtually all public universities in the country (Gudo *et al.* 2011). Private universities in particular, several factors have favored their emergence and expansion in the country. First, as elsewhere in Africa, private university expansion sprang forth largely due to the public system's failure to meet the demand for higher education. With an ever-growing need to increase higher education provision in the country, it became increasingly impossible for the public sector in Kenya to cater for all those who qualify for university admission (Mwebi & Simatwo, 2013).

Despite the phenomenal growth in the number of public universities, these could only absorb a small proportion of secondary school graduates who met the minimum requirements for university entry. The situation was compounded by the financial inability of the government to continue subsidizing an ever-expanding public university system. This was especially so after the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) in 1985 as part of the reform initiatives driven by the World Bank and bilateral donors. The Program called for reforms in the education sector, including the reduction of subsidies to university education. The inability of the public sector to meet the demand for a university education created the need to complement government-managed higher institutions of learning (Mwebi and Simatwa 2013) as well as a gap that called for the entry of other non-governmental players to fill such gap. According to the Ministry of Education (2012), the government recognized that, without a working partnership between the public and the private sectors in provision of education, it was going to be hard to address the problems of access, equity and quality. As such, it strongly encouraged private sector partnership as articulated in Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 and in the Kenya Education

Sector Support Program resulted in the privatization and liberalization of higher education (or the opening up of the sector to private players) and to the provision of incentives to encourage the growth of private sector education. This explains the mushrooming of private universities as a viable alternative for acquiring university education in the country (Ministry of Education 2012).

Private Universities in Kenya are institutions established in accordance with the Universities Act 1985(CAP 210B) and the Universities Rules, 1989 (Establishment of Universities, Standardization, accreditation and Supervision). Private universities in Kenya operate under a Full Charter or Letter of Interim Authority as they await Full Charter. The private universities offer both undergraduate and postgraduate programs. The Commission for University Education (CUE) is mandated with responsibility of ensuring that private universities adhere to the standards of a university. In Kenya currently we have 34 registered private Universities. Kenya is currently leading the East Africa countries of Tanzania and Uganda in the number of private Universities. This is because Kenya was the region's first country to recognize the importance of private universities (Oketch, 2003).

Experienced challenges in growing student population are due to a variety of issues that requires strategic address. Private universities face numerous challenges including: maintaining a steady supply of students who can afford to pay for private university education, stiff competition from their public universities counterpart who have

introduced parallel degree courses for full paying students , aggressive competition from foreign universities who have launched an aggressive campaign for recruiting local students, lacking a research focus comparable to public universities and offering specific and narrow programs (Oketch, 2003). Most of the problems experienced in the private universities require strategic implementation approach in order to provide long lasting solution.

Strategy implementation and growth of students' population

The implementation process involves the actual performance that commits resources to accomplish its mission. Implementation involves regularly making difficult decisions about doing things in a way that supports rather than undermine the organizations chosen strategic approach. Implementation of strategy will depend on the nature of the knowledge, technology, and competence resources available to the enterprise. The implementation of strategies will be constrained by the need to make the best use of the available resources to meet financial obligation, and to ensure survival in the face of increasingly harsh demands of competitive international trading environments or performance oriented public sector decision-makers (Ndcgwa, 2008).

According to Speculand (2009), leaders know they must pay greater attention to the implementation and that it is not the strategy that delivers revenue it is its implementation. Most strategies, most of the time, accomplish less than half of what their sponsors hoped and planned for. Its true nine out of ten strategies fail to be implemented successfully. Implementing a strategy is harder than crafting strategy. It doesn't matter if you have the perfect strategy for your circumstances if you don't succeed in implementing it. Speculand (2009) emphasizes that one of the difficult challenges of strategy implementation is that everyone agrees to the plan but no one is responsible or accountable for results. Further, there are number of reasons for failed strategy, including the fact that the project goals were unrealistic or poorly defined, the implementation took more time than was originally planned in competing activities and crises took time away from the implementation (Speculand, 2009).

Stoner and Freeman (1999), contend that there are certain barriers to effective strategy implementation and some result from changes in a complex environment while others stem from internal obstacles. Internal constraints could be; resistance to change, financial constraints, inflexibility, executive obsolescence, values, traditions, styles and power. The environmental constraints include scarcity of natural resources, changes in political stability and technology. In 2009 Speculand summaries the following as the typical issues that have been experienced by many organizations with regard to strategy implementation: implementation took more time than originally allocated; major problems surfaced during implementation; coordination of implementation activities was not effective; competing activities and crises distracted attention from implementing the decision; training and instruction given to lower level employment were not adequate; uncontrolled factors in the external environment had an adverse impact on implementation.

It occurs that the strategy which follows the government had led to the top down approach in the University strategy formulation. The top down approach is evident in the strategy formulation that had only involved the University top management team. It is also discovered that the Vice Chancellor plays an important role in ensuring that the strategy which followed the government was implemented. In doing so, he had exercised his power to control decisions which relate to University strategy. In a way, the top down approach in the University strategy formulation can be considered as embedded in the University culture. This is evident in the culture that emphasizes hierarchical positions whereby lower level staffs are expected to adhere to the requirements of the higher positioned staff (Speculand, 2009).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Descriptive survey design guided the study. The design is important as it allowed the researcher to provide deep insight into a specific subject and focuses on explaining the aspects of the study in a detailed manner. The location of the study was North Rift, South Rift and Nyanza region. The target university in North Rift was University of Eastern Africa (Baraton), South Rift region was Kabarak University and while in Nyanza was the Great Lakes University. The three universities were selected because they are well-equipped and had capacity to accommodate more students than current status. The unit of observations was staff and student leaders in the institutions of higher learning. A sample size of 10% of the target population is viewed as adequate (Kerlinger, 1986). Three private universities were selected out of 34 representing 105 of the total registered private universities in Kenya.

However, owing to the small number of student leaders, the researcher used 100% to determine sample size. In this regard, the overall sample size for the study was 110 respondents, 68 university staff and 42 student leaders. The sample was distributed in the table below.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Influence of strategic implementation on the growth of students’ population in selected private universities in Kenya

Strategic implementation was considered key in growth of students’ population and responses to the various indicators was based on 5-likert scale.

Table 1: All the decision made by the institution have been implemented

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	10	10.2	10.2
Strongly agree	7	7.1	7.1
Moderately agree	4	4.1	4.1
Disagree	37	37.8	37.8
Strongly disagree	40	40.8	40.8
Total	98	100.0	100.0

Table 1 indicated that 40.8 percent of the respondents strongly disagree that all the decision made by the institution have been implemented, 37.8 disagree, 10.2 percent very strongly agree, 7.1 percent strongly agree and 4.1 percent moderately agree. This means that the universities make good decisions but not all of them get implemented. This may be attributed to the fact that some decisions are costly to implement and are done in phases. The results are in line with the findings of Rowley (2010) who found out that the contribution and value of stakeholders’ engagement at the colleges and universities is not new and a number of institutions of higher education are currently facing a crisis of confidence and trust by parents, prospective students, alumni, congressional committee, and the media, thereby necessitating stakeholders’ involvement in the strategic planning and implementation process of the institutions.

Table 2: Capitation by government has influenced the growth of student population in private universities

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	43	43.9	43.9
Strongly agree	34	34.7	34.7
Moderately agree	6	6.1	6.1
Disagree	10	10.2	10.2
Strongly disagree	5	5.1	5.1
Total	98	100.0	100.0

Source: Field data (2019)

It was revealed by the findings that 43.9 percent of the respondents strongly agree that capitation by government has influenced the growth of student population in private universities, 34.7 percent strongly agree, 6.1 percent moderately agree, 10.2 percent disagree and 5.1 percent strongly disagree. In the last two decades, Kenya has witnessed an exponential growth of students’ enrolment in its public universities and an oscillatory government funding. The findings are supported by Ndonga (2008) who reported that private higher education is the fastest growing sector worldwide, around 30% of higher education enrolments are now estimated to be in the private institutions

Table 3: Implementation of the set objectives of the institution is the responsibility of everyone

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	42	42.9	42.9
Strongly agree	33	33.7	33.7
Moderately agree	6	6.1	6.1
Disagree	10	10.2	10.2
Strongly disagree	7	7.1	7.1
Total	98	100.0	100.0

Source: Field data (2019)

The findings in table 3 shows that 42.9 percent of the respondents strongly agree that implementation of the set objectives of the institution is the responsibility of everyone, 33.7 percent strongly agree, 6.1 percent moderately agree, 10.2 percent disagree and 7.1 percent strongly disagree. From these findings, it was concluded that implementation of the set objectives in private universities is the responsibility of every stakeholder and this underscores the need to involve all the stakeholders in decision making. These findings concur with that of Ncayiyana (2003) who found out that successful strategic planning, in higher education, is inclusive, allowing every major stakeholder; students, academic staff, administrative staff and service staff an opportunity to participate and, more importantly, to support the strategic plan. Successful strategic planning involves “top-down” and “bottom-up” input from interested and affected people in an organization.

Table 4: Contribution made by the university stakeholders have been implemented

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	8	8.2	8.2
Strongly agree	4	4.1	4.1
Moderately agree	9	9.2	9.2
Disagree	53	54.1	54.1
Strongly disagree	24	24.5	24.5
Total	98	100.0	100.0

Source: Field data (2019)

The findings in table 4 shows that 54.1 percent disagree that contribution made by the university stakeholders have been implemented, 24.5 percent strongly disagree, 9.2 moderately agree, 8.2 very strongly agree and 4.1 percent strongly agree. The findings imply that not all the contributions of the stakeholders have been implemented in private universities.

Table 5: The institution has challenges in implementing some of the decisions made by the top management**Source: Field data (2019)**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	55	56.1	56.1
Strongly agree	23	23.5	23.5
Moderately agree	6	6.1	6.1
Disagree	7	7.1	7.1
Strongly disagree	7	7.1	7.1
Total	98	100.0	100.0

The findings in table 5 shows that 56.1 percent of the respondents strongly agree that the institution have challenges in implementing some of the decisions made by the top management, 23.5 percent strongly agree, 6.1 percent moderately agree, 7.1 percent disagree and strongly disagree respectively. This implies that there are challenges in implementing some of the decisions by top management. This may be attributed to the fact that some decisions require resources and technical know-how for successful implementation.

Table 6: Implementation process in the university is low

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	38	38.8	38.8
Strongly agree	37	37.8	37.8
Moderately agree	8	8.2	8.2
Disagree	8	8.2	8.2
Strongly disagree	7	7.1	7.1
Total	98	100.0	100.0

Source: Field data (2019)

The results in table 6 shows that 38.8 percent of the respondents very strongly agree that implementation process in the university is low, 37.8 percent strongly agree, 8.2 moderately agree, 8.2 percent disagree and 7.1 percent strongly disagree. These findings revealed that implementation processes in decision making was low and this was attributed to the small number of academic programmes offered, failure to set clear and achievable decisions as well as poor prioritization of strategies.

Table 7: Implementation of decisions made influence growth of students' population

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Very Strongly agree	45	45.9	45.9
Strongly agree	32	32.7	32.7
Moderately agree	4	4.1	4.1
Disagree	12	12.2	12.2
Strongly disagree	5	5.1	5.1
Total	98	100.0	100.0

Source: Field data (2019)

The findings revealed that 45.9 percent of the respondents very strongly agree that implementation of decisions made influence growth of students' population, 32.7 percent strongly agree, 4.1 percent moderately agree, 12.2 percent disagree and 5.1 percent strongly disagree. It was revealed from the findings that when decisions are implemented, there is growth in student population.

Inferential statistics

Quantitative data analysis was carried out on the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The inferential statistics used include: correlation analysis, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and regression analysis. ANOVA was used to test research hypotheses and explain the variation in grouped data. Multiple regression analysis was utilized to explain the strength of the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable. Hypotheses were used to answer the research questions with regard to each objective of the study.

Correlations Analysis

The objective was to determine the relationship between strategy implementation reforms and growth of students' population of the private universities in Kenya and the research question was "To what extent does strategy implementation of policies affect the growth of students' population in selected private universities in Kenya?"

which was hypothesized as “ there is no statistical significant relationship strategy implementation and growth of student population in private universities in Kenya”. The outcome of the study shows that there is positive correlation between strategy implementation reforms and the growth of students in private universities in Kenya, $r(98) = 0.673$, $p\text{-value} < 0.05$ and thus there was statistically significant relationship strategy implementation and growth of student population in private universities in Kenya.”

Table 8: Correlations Analysis Results

	Growth of students' population
Strategy implementation	.673**

Source: Researcher (2019)

Note ** $p < 0.0$ level (2-tailed) * $p < 0.05$ level (2-tailed); $N=98$
 Dependent variable: growth of students' population

CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions

It was concluded from the findings of the study that implementation of strategies set by private universities was little. The study found out that the private universities had good strategic goals and if implemented, it could enhance growth of students' population. The study also concluded that private universities had challenges in implementation of strategic goals. Implementation involves regularly making difficult decisions about doing things in a way that supports rather than undermine the organizations chosen strategic approach. Implementation of strategy will depend on the nature of the knowledge, technology, and competence resources available to the institution.

Recommendations of the Study

It is recommended that government should increase capitation in order to facilitate implementation of various strategic goals and minimize the challenges experienced.

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