

Strategy Implementation: A Determinant of Competitive Academic Performance among Secondary Schools in Kenya

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Abstract

Education plays a critical role in ensuring survival of any nation in the global economic setup leading to emphasis on quality outcomes of education. Strategic management practice is a very critical factor for any organization's survival in the modern competitive operating environment. The purpose of the study was to establish whether schools adopt strategic management practices and their influence on competitive academic performance. Strategic management practices were decomposed into specific objectives of environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation and strategy control. The study concentrated on the role of strategy implementation on competitive academic performance of secondary schools. It was conducted in eastern counties of Kenya namely, Meru, Embu, Tharaka Nithi, Kitui and Machakos informed by stakeholder and human resource based theories of strategic management. The study adopted cross sectional survey design with a target population of principals of secondary schools in eastern counties with a frame of 919. The counties were divided into strata with a sample of 273 drawn based on survey monkey formula. The counties were further stratified and random samples drawn from each stratum. Data collection was through questionnaires, analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings indicated that schools had intricate programmes for strategy implementation and processes which when followed enabled the schools to remain competitive. Overall strategy implementation practice was found to have a significant influence on competitive academic performance. It is recommended that strategic management training be extended to all school principals with emphasis on strategy implementation because the input of employees who are strategy implementers determine performance. Participation in strategy implementation should be through shared responsibility enabling the heads of departments to shoulder responsibility for the outcomes. Finally, the study recommends that principals should be allowed to complete at least two cycles of strategic management in one school for their strategy implementation capabilities to be reflected in academic performance and hence used for making and implementation of proper decisions.

Keywords: *Academic performance, competitive, strategy implementation*

Introduction

Technological and economic paradigm is emerging with the role of education and training taking a crucial part in ensuring survival of organizations in the global economic platform (Ayiro & Sang, 2010). Education being a tool of progression

in society and operates in global contexts and therefore must respond to these shifts (Pashiardis, Kafa & Marmara, 2012). This is achievable if educational institutions used management models in their governance structure which embrace strategic management. Small and medium size enterprises to a large extent are managed by owners who make strategic decisions based on contingencies and intuitions rather than research based models. Schools falling in this category must endear strategic management practices so that decisions are not intuition guided but rather scientific.

Strategic Management Practices

Dauda, Akingbade, and Akinlabi, (2010) define Strategic Management Practices (SMP) as the process that examines present and future environment, developing the organizations objectives, implementing and controlling decisions meant to drive the organization in achieving the objectives. Strategic Management Practices is a set of management decisions and activities that determine the long-term performance of the organization. It includes the concepts of environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and strategy control (Wheelen & Hunger 2012). Strategic Management (SM) has grown into a powerful tool that top management use to make the corporation triumphs over competition that emanates from their operating industry.

Mwashinga, Karim, Ndinya, and Mngoda (2014) posit that school principals play a critical role in promoting improvement of schools with effectiveness; charged with duties that improve the school performance including interpretation and implementation of policies and other decisions leading to high level training and learning standards. The authors further opine that actual responsibilities by top management can only be enforced with effectiveness if there is preparation of those in charge of school management with proper mechanisms. Managers would vividly drive their organizations performance if they articulated SMP in their management models

Strategy Implementation and Performance

Speculand (2014) contends that strategy implementation (SI) is the actions of employees which are right and leaders ensuring that activities are happening in ways that are consonant with objectives of the strategy. SI only work if a clear and shared understanding among the strategy implementers of who does what, when and at what cost exist. Strategy managers should work together with colleagues to put the strategy into action through shaping goals into actions and measurable standards. Strategy managers compete for processes and scarce resources (employees, finances and machines) used for implementation of the strategies hence affecting organizational performance.

Kohtamäki, Kraus and Rönkkö (2012) argue that employees who are committed to SI moderate the relationship between participation in strategic planning and company performance. When all members of the organization participate in SI it becomes part of them because they know exactly what to do with resources consequently enhancing organization performance. Participation in strategic planning increases employee knowledge of the company's mission and strategic targets, clarifies why strategies are implemented developing a feeling of shared purpose for employees.

The Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MOEST) (2014) is a state body vested with oversight of education sector in Kenya. It has strategic plans at the corporate level where policies are made sufficiently to drive the needed change and consequently the desired academic performance at the national level.

The strategic objectives of the ministry are well stipulated and are supposed to cascade through all levels of education with emphasis in secondary schools which are a bridge to tertiary education providers. Implementation of these strategies is mostly felt at the national level and rarely implemented at the school level. Many secondary schools in Kenya produce very poor results with some failing to produce a single student progressing to tertiary levels. This raises the question whether principals 'in secondary schools have acquired strategic management skills and their contribution towards achievement of national strategic objectives by implementation at the school level.

Problem Statement

Kenya universities and colleges central placement service (KUCCPS) (2014) pegged entry to public universities by students from secondary schools at B plain of 61 points for males and females at B- of 58 points, which denied C+ students an opportunity to join public universities due to stiff competition.

Ndinza (2015) opines this is a result of competition among Kenyan schools each trying to produce excellent results every year in national examinations and have as many students as possible gaining entry to universities. She argues that factors responsible for these differences in performance lie in the school principals' management practices model. These management practices include leadership, and strategic management. Ndinza does not specify the role of SMP and in particular SI in academic performance. Nyagosia, Waweru and Njuguna (2013) studied the correlates of effective schools in student outcomes using leadership, mission and vision which are partial aspects of strategic management, which was replicated by Mwashinga, Karim, Ndinya, & Mngoda (2014) who studied effects of strategic planning in schools failing to incorporate other aspects of strategic

management like environmental scanning and strategy implementation on academic performance.

Dauda, Akingbade, and Akinlabi, (2010) opine that some firms practice SMP but fail to complete the process remaining at the planning stage ignoring environmental scanning, implementation and control affecting the performance of the organizations. Very scanty extant literature was found on strategic management aspects of Strategy Implementation and its influence on competitive academic performance. This study sought to establish the specific role Strategy Implementation in competitive academic performance of schools in national examinations and specifically in eastern counties of Meru, Tharaka Nithi, Kitui and Machakos. The study was based in context of the Meru, Tharaka Nithi, Embu, Machakos and Kitui which form largely eastern Kenya, (Infotrak, 2015).

General Objective of the Study

The general objective of the study was to establish whether Strategic Management Practices have any influence on Competitive Academic Performance of secondary schools in national examinations in eastern counties. Kenya.

Specific Objective

To assess the influence of strategy implementation on competitive academic performance among secondary schools in Eastern counties, Kenya

Research Hypotheses

H01: Strategy implementation has no influence on competitive academic performance among secondary schools in eastern counties, Kenya

Literature Review

Resource-Based Theory

Resource-Based Theory was grounded by Barney (1986b) through his framework which provided a strong base upon which others constructed. The theory is underpinned in the principle that the organization's ability to compete depends on their unique internal resources, and capabilities that the organization may possess. It posits that specific types of resources that a firm processes and controls have the power and ability to produce competitive advantage and finally culminating to superior performance of the firm. This theory is supportive to the study because schools as structured organizations have unique internal resources and competencies which if used position the schools to achieve competitive academic performance. It justifies the importance of Strategy Implementation to organizations through use of the competencies which should be exploited as a

competitive advantage. When schools discover their peculiar internal resources whether tangible or intangible they become poised to make Strategy Implementation a reality.

Human Resource Based Theory

Raduan, Jegak, Haslinda, and Alimin (2009), contend that this theory was developed by Paauwe in 1998 who advanced a model on how available human resources in the organization may be used. His human resource-based theory is the mixture of resource based view theory and a stakeholder view of the firm theory. It recognizes the importance of different stakeholders and their relationships which bring them together. The stakeholders form the firm's major group of interested parties whose values and attitudes become the main factors that affect the management of the human resources and organizational performance. This supports the importance of the human capital in Strategic Management and it's critical to this study because schools are service industries with human capital as key resource, their performance is dependent on how well the human capital is aligned to the strategy at implementation stage.

Allio (2005) argued that SI deals operationalizing strategy of the organization. Strategy Implementation calls for a degree of change and the way it is handled can significantly affect successful strategy implementation. He opines that it involves converting strategic goals into specific initiatives. SI is inclusive of taking into account those responsible for implementation programs and the structure should be agreed upon so that it will support the implementation of the strategy. Inclusive is the needed changes in resource profile and authority of each functional area in the organization. He opines that strategy implementation is focused on instilling more skills to the employees who will manage the change.

Thompson, Strickland, and Gamble (2012) say that effective SI depends on implementation strategy adopted; each level of management plays an important part in the process of SI. Implementation strategies which are tactical in functional areas of production, marketing and procurement will be carried out by middle level management. Lower level management operationalizes tactical strategy implementation through work design and scheduling, job performance and achievement of targets. They argue that SI is an integrative and participative process that involves the whole organization.

Ahmadi, Salamzadeh, Daraei, and Akbari, (2012) focused on the culture of the organization and implementation of organization strategy they confirmed that culture of organizations should be flexible in the process of implementing the chosen strategy. They argue that efforts of SI are often met with challenges which are deeply rooted cultural practices. Culture causes resistance to implementation

of new strategies if the intended strategies are perceived to go against the existing organization culture.

Lack of sufficient resources is a handle to SI Wudhikarn, (2016), it could be as result of insufficiency of both capital and skilled employees. He further postulates that resource direction to particular areas does not promise success in SI. This is because many issues are responsible for deterring effective resource allocation among them emphasis on short term financial benefits, organization procedures unclear strategic targets and lack of clear dissemination of information.

Methodology

The study used Cross sectional survey design, a method used to study populations by choosing a sample to analyze the occurrences (Oso & Onen, 2011). Data was collected through a questionnaire administered to sample of principals of schools. Kinoti (1998) observe that the design permits a study with a large sample of respondents' with quick analysis of results.

Target population was principals of secondary schools in Meru, Tharaka Nithi, Embu, Kitui and Machakos counties of eastern Kenya with a frame 919 schools. The sample was 273 computed by survey monkey formula (2016).

A pilot was conducted in 30 schools representing 10% of the sample. Baker (1994) argues that 10-20 % of the sample is sufficient to conduct a successful pilot study. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient was used to determine correlation of the constructs. Reliability score of 0.70 and higher as suggested as by Mugenda & Mugenda, (2003) was used. Data was analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics where regression analysis was done to indicate the correlation between strategy implementation and competitive academic performance

Findings

Academic Programs and Processes

Programs are plans of action meant to achieve a clear business objective with clarity on what action is to be taken, by whom, when, and with which strategies or resources. Processes are a series of mechanical operations performed in order to change or preserve something. Descriptive analysis of academic programs and processes carried out by the schools in implementation of strategy are presented in Table

Table 1 *Academic Programs and Processes*

Statements on Programmes	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The average lessons per week for every teacher is 18-26 to enable preparation and proper delivery of content	232	4.13	1.025
The syllabus in every class is covered mid-year to give sufficient time for revision	231	3.20	1.327
Remedial teaching is carried on beyond the normal class timetable and the weekends	229	3.52	1.202
Regular assessments are carried out to ensure student preparedness towards academic achievements	230	4.33	.757
Financial rewards are good motivators for teachers and students to improve performance	231	3.76	1.187
We implement strict routines to achieve good academic performance	230	4.20	.900
We perform well because of our culture	230	3.63	1.132
Student entry marks is related to the academic Performance	232	3.53	1.255
Academic programs and processes		3.75	0.565

The results revealed that most schools agreed that average lessons per week for every teacher is 18-26 to enable preparation and proper delivery of content, Mean = 4.13, and SD = 1.025. On regular assessments to ensure student preparedness towards academic achievements, the respondents indicated Mean = 4.33, and SD = 0.757. The respondents agreed that school administration implemented strict routines to achieve good academic performance, with Mean = 4.20, and SD = 0.900. They also agreed that schools perform well because of their culture, at

Mean = 3.63, and SD = 1.132, and that remedial teaching is carried beyond normal class timetable and the weekends, Mean = 3.52, and SD = 1.202. They also agreed that the student's entry marks in form one was related to the final academic performance, at Mean = 3.53, and SD = 1.255. The respondents also agreed that financial rewards were good motivators for teachers and students to improve performance, at Mean = 3.76, and SD = 1.187. The respondents were neutral on syllabus coverage by mid-year to give sufficient time for revision, (Mean = 3.20, SD = 1.327).

On average, the respondents agreed with the academic programs and processes indicating strategy implementation, (Mean = 3.75, SD = 0.565) as being very critical to the performance of schools competitively. Allio (2005) posits that programs, milestones, and resources should be precise, anchoring implementation activities in the firm's budget, metrics, and rewards. When the programs and resources meet the necessary thresholds, SI becomes self-driven and acts as a motivator for employees to work and their attitude towards management becomes positive because they feel that management becomes a bridge to SI rather than a handle. Musomba, Kerongo, Mutua, & Kilika (2013) argue that there is need to improve governance through an integrated system that would provide a reliable mechanism for measuring the efficiency of programs and their effectiveness revealing the need to develop viable measurable programs in schools.

Influence of Strategy Implementation on Competitive Academic Performance

A simple linear regression analysis was performed with academic performance as the dependent variable and SI as the independent variable to assess the relationship between SI and competitive academic performance of schools in eastern counties, Kenya. The following hypothesis was tested and the results are presented in Tables 2 and 3.

H0i: Strategy implementation has no influence on competitive academic performance of schools in eastern counties, Kenya

Table 2 *Strategy Implementation Model Summary*

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of The Estimate
626a	.391	.387	.02823

According to Table 2, strategy implementation explains 38.7% of the variation in Academic Performance as indicated by a coefficient of determination (R²) value of 0.387.

Strategy Implementation Model Coefficients

Data revealed that strategy implementation significantly predicted academic performance at 5% level of significance, ($p = <0.0001$) and that a unit increase in the reciprocal square of SI increased the reciprocal square of academic performance by 0.947. Kohtamäki, Kraus & Rönkkö (2012) agree with the results by opining that participating of personnel in SI increases company performance..

Allio (2005) intimates that breaking down SI programs into yardsticks enables managers to monitor progress by establishing targets converted into measurable units and time frames. The management of schools should practically accord sufficient time for implementation of programmes geared towards academic performance, and delegate sufficient authority to the operational heads so that they may be accountable for the results of SI in the schools. The results of this regression analysis clearly allow the rejection of the hypothesis that strategy implementation has no influence on competitive academic performance of schools in eastern counties, Kenya.

Conclusions

Due to the significant relationship between SI and competitive academic performance of schools it can be concluded that SI on its own significantly influences academic performance but requires precedence by proper strategy formulation. Implementation activities are basically the prerogative of the Heads of Departments who guide the actions of the ground employees who on the other hand must be properly trained and imparted with necessary skills for the operationalization of the strategies. This makes strategy implementation self-driven and acts as a motivator for employee's attitude towards management becoming positive because management becomes a bridge to implementation rather than a hurdle. This has implications both for the government and the Boards of Management that if success has to be achieved in performance through SI, then resources must be allocated sufficiently to act as a motivator to the implementers

Recommendations

Schools must invest in strategic management practices (SMP) to improve the schools' competitive academic performance. Principals should be trained on strategic management practices to enhance their performance. Qualified personnel on SMP should be deployed to the counties to ensure training of newly deployed principals. Finally, the government should realize that school operating environment and SMP influence competitive academic performance of schools. It should therefore speed up infrastructure development and provision of resources to the schools so as to leverage the disadvantaged schools to ably

compete with the extra county and national schools. The government should allow school managers to practically be in one school for more than five years so that they may complete the whole cycle of strategic management in schools and therefore proper decisions may be reached on their tenure in a particular school.

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