

Strategic Planning in Public Secondary Schools in Kenya: Challenges and Mitigations

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges in the adoption of strategic planning in public secondary schools in Kenya and suggest mitigation strategies. The study was conducted in Kirinyaga Central district. The objectives of the study were: to establish leadership, policy, resource and institutional factors influencing the adoption of strategic planning in public secondary school in Nakuru Sub-County. The research adopted a descriptive survey design. The target population was public secondary schools in Nakuru Sub-County. Sampling was done through stratified, purposive and simple random sampling methods. The sample size was twelve (12) secondary schools, 12 principals, 96 teachers and one DQASO. Structured and semi structured questionnaires were used as data collection tools. Interview and observation schedules were also used. The responses to the items were tabulated and data organized through frequency tables and percentages based on the research questions and were used to generate conclusions and recommendations. The study revealed that the adoption of strategic planning in schools was greatly hindered by leadership, resource, and policy challenges. The findings hence indicate a need for training on strategic planning and proper resource and financial management in schools to allow for continuous improvement.

Keywords

Strategic planning, Challenges, Mitigations, Public Secondary School.

I. Introduction

Marmar (2001) explains that strategic planning originated from the army and the soldiers used it as a weapon to defeat their enemies. After the Second World War, business borrowed most of the successful management applications. Schools on seeing the positive effect of strategic planning in business, also adopted it for “with the changing patterns of education delivery from face to face to online, course content, nature of learners and organizational structures, the concept of quality has become an inherent component of educational process for its success” (Marmar 2001, p. 2). Strategic Planning has therefore been adopted in learning institution as a means of achieving school effectiveness.

According to McDonel (1990), Finlay (2000) and Katsiolouides (2002), strategic planning provides significantly better performance than unplanned, opportunistic adaptive approach. It provides an integrative framework for other forms of planning. The planners have to match the activities of the organization to its environment and also the organizations resource capabilities. Strategic planning has been used in schools in developed countries leading to school improvement.

In USA for instance, Strategic planning follows a four step process for planning a school wide program, conducting a comprehensive needs assessment, managing the inquiry process, designing the school wide program, and evaluating the program (Cook, 2006). In Europe, there have been some major strides made in school development planning although the sector is still faced with major challenges such as learning skills and attitudes in planning education and practice, role of new technologies in planning education (e-learning, e-tools and e-networking) and place of ethics in planning education (Deal and Peterson, 2008).

In developing countries, promotion of school development involves assessing the current state of the school development plan and providing information about it, by increasing the overall rate of development by carrying out special programs and trying to improve co-ordination between different stages of planning process. The main problem is in the implementation of these strategic plans (Lawrence, 2001).

In 2005, the Ministry of Education in an effort to achieve its goals as envisioned in the social pillar of Vision 2030 of ensuring

the provision of relevant and quality education to all Kenyan introduced strategic management in all the public learning institutions. In 2008, The Kenya Government through the Ministry of Education Science and Technology provided a blue print five years strategic plan, 2008- 2012. The vision was “to have a globally competitive quality education and training for Kenya’s sustainable development” and the mission is to provide, promote, coordinate quality education and training for empowerment of individuals to become caring, competent and responsible citizens who value education as a long life process” (MOE Strategic plan 2008-2009, p.9). The assumption is that, improvement in the quality of education will produce Kenyans with global competitive skills. This will then produce the manpower required to turn the country into a middle income status by the year 2030. In keeping with vision 2030 which has three pillars namely; economic, social and political. The social pillar is to be achieved through education and its mission is to create a just, cohesive and equitable social development in a clean and secure environment.

In 2013, the Government of Kenya through the Ministry of Education Science and Technology mandated all public institutions to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate its internal strategic plan as a means of enhancing result based management and efficiency in their operations. In Nakuru Sub-County, most schools operate under school development plans and very few schools have developed strategic plans. The fact that schools are operating without strategic plans is an indication of lack of commitment of quality management, which may jeopardize the provision of quality education services, leading to low student achievement. This study aims at investigating the challenges into the adoption of strategic planning in public secondary schools in Nakuru Sub-County.

A. Statement of the Problem

Strategic planning is key to school success. The school should meet the expectations of the stakeholders. Strategic planning helps school managers to acknowledge the future, spot significant trends and tendencies, and the need to respond to them skillfully, adapt, modify systems and structures so as to tackle new challenges and circumstances. Available data show that many schools in

Nakuru Sub-County are operating without strategic plans. This has led to some schools being characterized with inverted priorities and incomplete and dilapidated structures. In addition the few schools that operate under development plans are found to be ineffective and programmes are not completed on time (Dan, 2013). As a result there has been concern expressed by government bureaucrats, politicians professional and a big proportion of the public over what they perceive as lack of or inadequate planning practices in secondary schools, leading to haphazard planning techniques.

It is a ministerial requirement that all schools formulate strategic plans with a time frame of 3-5 years and action plans for each year. According to DQASO, Nakuru Sub-County, it has been established that some schools rarely develop strategic plans leading to poor school management hence lowering the academic standards and poor school environment. The study therefore sought to establish the challenges faced by public secondary schools in developing and implementing strategic planning and suggest mitigation strategies. Thus, the study was guided by the following research questions:

- I. What are the leadership challenges that influence the adoption of strategic planning in public secondary schools?
- II. What are the resource challenges that influence the adoption of strategic planning in public secondary schools?
- III. What are the policy challenges that influence the adoption of strategic planning in public secondary schools?
- IV. What are the institutional challenges that influence the adoption of strategic planning in secondary schools?

B. Methodology

This study was carried out in Nakuru Sub-County, Nakuru County, Kenya, which was one of the white highlands during the British colonial era. It is 160 kilometers North West of Nairobi and occupies an area of 290 square kilometers. It is located in Nakuru town which is the fourth largest town in Kenya after Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu. Nakuru is a cosmopolitan town with a population of approximately 700,000.

The target population comprised 25 public secondary schools, all head teacher, all teachers, and DQASO. Gay (1992) asserts that for a survey design a sample of at least 20% is justifiable for the study. On this strength the researcher took a sample of twelve (12) schools which comprise 38% of the total schools. Stratified random sampling was employed to select the sample by status of the school. Simple random sampling was used to select three from six provincial secondary schools one from three district boarding secondary schools and eight from 22 mixed day secondary schools. The Head teacher, eight teachers per school, and 1 DQASO constituted the study sample. The total sample size yielded 109 respondents. Data was collected using questionnaires, interviews guide and observation schedule. Data analysis involved both qualitative and quantitative procedures as both qualitative and quantitative. Data was analyzed and reported using frequency distribution and percentages. Data presentation was made by use of tables and bar graphs to enhance clarity.

II. Results and Discussions

The results and discussions of the findings are presented according to the research questions of the study as follows:

Leadership Challenges

The first research question sought to investigate the leadership

challenges that influence the adoption of strategic planning in public secondary schools. The results are presented on the table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Leadership Challenges in the Adoption of Strategic Planning

Leadership challenge	Agree		Not sure		Disagree	
	frequency	percent	Frequency	percent	frequency	percent
Poor management and lack of relevant skills.	94	93.1	2	2	5	5
Lack of leadership qualities and commitment	90	89.1	3	3	8	8
Rigidity to change and misappropriation.	87	86.2	3	3	11	8.9

With regard to poor management and lack of relevant skills 93.1% of the respondents agreed that this is a major challenge in the adoption of strategic planning. However 5 % of the respondents disagreed. The lack of relevant skills made head teachers ineffective and inefficient in carrying out their duties. The Koech Report (R.OK,1999) pointed out that the school head requires to be well versed with administrative skills for a school to be successful. The report says that most head teachers had not been trained in administration and this made them inefficient, ineffective and lacked accountability. Eshiwani (1993) and Maundu (1986) in their separate studies recommended that it is necessary to determine the minimum level of experience for a teacher to be promoted to headship. Most of the respondents indicated that they have attended a management course at KESI but the courses were short hence did not instill the necessary administrative and managerial skills necessary to carry out strategic planning

The study revealed that 89.1% of the respondents strongly agreed that lack of leadership qualities and commitment posed a challenge in the adoption of strategic planning while 6.0% disagreed. This is largely due to the criteria used in appointment of head teachers. The Education Master Plan, 1997-2010 noted that the secondary school system is marred by nepotism and corruption allegations on the promotion of teachers. Such malpractices affect the teacher's morale, performance and commitment to strategic planning as non performers are rewarded. According to Graham and Bennett (1998) the official leader motivates and controls subordinates to work towards goals that are regarded desirable and possible to the organization. The leader must be able to control and initiate or set patterns of behavior for others to ensure attainment of schools objectives.

With regard to rigidity to change and misappropriation as a leadership challenge in the adoption of strategic plans, 86.2% of the respondents strongly agreed, while 11.9% of the respondents disagreed. This indicated that a majority of the leaders are not flexible hence resist change regardless of the social, economic, political and technological changes taking place in the environment. Due to an ever changing environment and policies, strategic planning should be a continuous activity. Effective leaders should therefore embrace change, initiate action and influence the organization environment (Steiner, 1969). They should be flexible in the way they interact with subordinates to be able to

adjust to the people they lead and also achieve the mission they are assigned.

Resource Challenges

The second research question sought to investigate the resource challenges that influence the adoption of strategic planning in schools. The results are presented in table 1.2.

Table 1.2: Resource challenges in the Adoption of Strategic Planning

Agree		Not sure		Disagree		
Resource challenge	Frequency	percent	frequency	percent	frequency	percent
Poor time management and inadequate funds	91	90.1	3	3	7	7
Inadequate teaching staff and teaching resources	81	80.2	3	3	17	16.8
Inadequate physical facilities	56	55.5	2	2	43	42.6

The study revealed that 91% of the respondents strongly agreed that poor time management and inadequate funds are resource challenges into the adoption of strategic planning in schools while 7 % of the respondents disagreed. Inadequate funds and financial constraints prevented the execution of set priorities such as building physical facilities and stalling of projects. The resources available in a school determine the quality of the school. These resources are reported by many studies as teaching learning materials, physical facilities and human resources. Many studies have shown that provision of adequate and quality resources facilitates effective implementation of the curriculum in schools and results in improved achievement of students (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985). The availability and use of such materials have a positive effect on school effectiveness.

From the study it emerged that 81% of the respondents agreed that inadequate teaching staff and teaching resources posed a challenge into the adoption of strategic planning in school while 6.0% disagreed. Education is labour intensive and requires human resource who are directly or indirectly involved in carrying out all related activities of teaching and learning. In the Kenyan context school quality is heavily dependent on the quality of staff in terms of their academic qualifications, professional training, their commitment, dedication, conducive working environment and appropriate terms of service (Republic of Kenya, 1999).

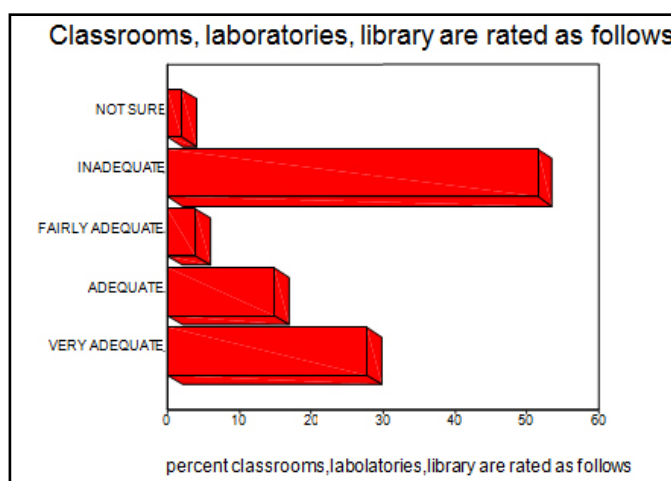


Fig 1.1

With regard to adequacy of physical facilities in the schools, the study revealed that only 28% of the schools studied had adequate classrooms, libraries, laboratories, hall and sanitation while 52% of the schools had inadequate classrooms laboratories and libraries. Of these schools, 14.9% had adequate physical facilities. Library facilities were most inadequate followed by laboratories, special rooms and land. It is generally agreed that physical facilities such

classrooms, laboratories and libraries have a direct bearing on good performance among students in developing countries. A study by Eshiwani (1983) in western province on the factors affecting performance pointed out that schools that had the best facilities like libraries, laboratories, play fields and electricity were among the high achieving schools and those with inadequate facilities performed poorly in Kenya Certificate of Education (KCE). The study concluded that the presence or absence of school facilities distinguished high and low achieving schools.

Policy Challenges

The third research question sought to investigate the policy challenges that influence the adoption of strategic planning in public secondary school. The results are presented in the table 1.3.

Table 1.3: Policy Challenges in the Adoption of Strategic Planning

Agree		Not sure		Disagree		
Policy challenges	Frequency	percent	frequency	percent	frequency	percent
Ignorance on existing policies.	88	87.1	3	3	10	10
Old policies not reviewed	90	89.1	3	3	7	7
Lack of trained man power	88	87.1	3	3	10	10
High headship turnover	89	88.1	3	3	9	9
Lack of regular school inspection	8.9	8.9	3	3	88.1	87.2

The study revealed that 88% of respondents strongly agreed that ignorance to existing policy influenced the adoption of strategic planning in public secondary school however while 10.0% of respondents disagreed. This implies that school stakeholders do not keep pace with the changes taking place in the education system and other issues happening in the environment related to education. School administrators must continually update themselves on the new policies and be able to translate the policy into action.

It emerged that 90% of the respondents agreed that old policies were not reviewed and influenced the adoption of strategic planning in schools while 7.0% disagreed. Old policies are no longer responsive to the current emerging trends in education and training hence a need to review and harmonize the policies. Once formulated and implemented, policies need constant evaluation to identify and measure outcomes and impacts of the policy. This helps judge how well its objectives were met hence help design better policies and methods in future in line with changes in the environment.

The study revealed that 88% of respondents agreed that lack of trained manpower poses a challenge in adoption of strategic planning. However, 10% of respondents disagreed. This indicates that majority of respondents lacked the necessary skills in strategic planning. Proper implementation of policy depends on several basic requirements which include sufficient resources to accomplish goals, participation of all stakeholders, political and legal backing, supportive socioeconomic environment and necessary skills. KESI was established by legal notice No. 565 of 1981 and is responsible for training school administrators in managerial skills. Most of the respondents agreed that the training offered by KESI is not sufficient to equip the school administration with the necessary skills for strategic planning. Konchari (1988) pointed out that the principal is the major component of school administration whose

ability and skills, personality and professional competence will largely depend on the efficiency of the school

Regarding effect of high headship turnover 89% of the respondents strongly agreed that it influences the adoption of strategic planning in schools while 9.0% disagreed. Frequent transfer of head teachers means that they do not stay long enough in a school to develop the urge for strategic planning. The school head teacher more than any other individual is responsible for the school climate for outcomes of productivity and satisfaction attained by students and staff. The head teachers thus, need to stay in a school for a period that allows them to study and understand the school and its environment so as to participate fully in strategic planning.

The study revealed that 87.2% of respondents strongly disagreed that lack of regular school inspection hinders strategic planning. However 8.9% strongly agreed that lack of regular school inspection influenced strategic planning in schools. The respondents indicated that school stakeholders were motivated and committed to strategic planning and only required the professional guidance of the directorate in preparation of strategic plans. The role of the directorate of quality assurance and standards is to offer support and advice schools in relation to best practices and thereby influence planning for quality enhancement and support services through career development of teachers (Jackson, 2005). The respondents indicated that school stakeholders were motivated and committed to strategic planning and only required the professional guidance of the directorate in preparation of strategic plans.

Institutional challenges

The fourth research question sought to investigate the institutional challenges that influence the adoption of strategic planning in schools. The findings are presented in the table 1.4.

Table 1.4: Institutional Challenges Influencing Adoption of Strategic Planning

Agree		Not sure		Disagree		
Institutional challenges	Frequency	percent	frequency	percent	frequency	percent
School organizational culture	90	89.1	3	3	8	8
Visionless BOG and PTA	85	84.1	4	4	12	11.9
Failure to conduct SWOT analysis	85	84.1	5	5	11	10.9
Hostile community or external interference.	87	86.1	4	4	10	9.9

The study revealed that 90% of the respondents strongly agreed that the school organizational culture influenced the adoption of strategic planning in schools while 8.0% of the respondents disagreed. The respondents agreed that schools lacking good organization culture will be ineffective in strategic planning as members may lack commitment and good will towards the school philosophy. Organization cultures are developed and reinforced in a variety of ways. These include the organization design and structure, organization system and procedures, designs of physical space and buildings and formal statements of organizations philosophy, creed and charters. These contribute to effective organization culture and can be used to shape the employees attitude and behavior (Gongera, 2002)

The study revealed that 84.1% of respondents strongly agreed that uncooperative members of thw BOG and PTA posed a challenge in adoption of strategic planning in schools while 11.9% disagreed.

The BOG is the agent of the ministry and head teachers and PTA work in conjunction with them through regular consultation. Parents and communities expect commitment, good will and prudent management of schools hence BOG requires knowledge and skills to enhance proper professional management of resources entrusted to them. The role of the BOG is specified by the Education Act (1968) revised (1980). They are therefore expected to identify the schools' short, medium and long term priorities and quantify the resources required towards achievement of the school goals and objectives. Their role is critical and therefore should be appointed in the time and members carefully selected to ensure commitment and efficiency.

Regarding failure to conduct a SWOT analysis 84.1% of the respondents agreed that this affects strategic planning in schools while 10.9% disagreed. Schools that fail to carry out SWOT analysis will not be in a position to make correct judgment of

the school's situation that will be of a maximum benefit. Insights gathered from SWOT analysis should help assist school managers initiate competitiveness into the school by weeding out redundant and irrelevant activities and initiate relevant ones. SWOT analysis is an important step in strategic planning and decision making. It is a management tool that helps school managers to get an overall picture of the schools present situation in relation to other schools by identifying all major factors affecting competitiveness therein before designing an appropriate strategy (School Management Series, 2004). The analysis is a process of monitoring the environment to identify both present and future threats and opportunities that may influence the organization's ability to reach its goals.

The study revealed that 86.1% of respondents strongly agreed that hostile community or external interference may influence strategic planning in schools while 10% of the respondents disagreed. Respondents cited external influences from the community such as drug trafficking, insecurity and general hostility towards the school community making it hard for their incorporation in the school programmes and activities. This may also include unfavourable situations that may arise from external developments that are likely to endanger the operations and effectiveness of the school. In order to survive, maintain growth, expansion and competitiveness, the school management must protect the school from potentially harmful influences. The school management thus needs to be responsive to changes that have occurred and plan for anticipated significant changes in the environment and be prepared to meet them.

II. Conclusions

The study concludes that most school leaders lacked relevant skills, leadership qualities and commitment to strategic planning; that strategic planning in schools is greatly hindered by inadequate resources in terms of physical facilities, finances and human resources; that ignorance of existing policies, high headship turn over and lack of training hinders strategic planning in schools. From the findings it can be concluded that the process of strategic planning is an essential element in school development and focuses on improving the quality of learning by strategizing, setting priorities, targets and resource allocation. With the commitment of all stakeholders to school improvement through application of best planning practices this can go a long way in improving the quality of education in schools.

III. Recommendations

The findings indicate the need for a comprehensive in-service training for all head teachers adjusting it to new challenges so as to understand and implement strategic plans with limited teaching and learning resources.

There is need to review and harmonize existing policies on strategic planning in schools. Policies should work towards strengthening of local participation in education service delivery.

There is need to actively involve all stakeholders in strategic planning as successful school level change will only occur if supported by all stakeholders.

School management should seek collaboration with other stakeholders such as NGO, civil society, government and other development agencies that are good at resource mobilization.

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