

Walking the Talk in Strategy and Policy Implementation: A Survey of Secondary Schools in Meru Central District

GITAU PAUL MUCAI

School of Business and Public Management
Mt. Kenya University- Nkubu University Campus P.O. Box 511 Nkubu
E-mail: pegmucai@gmail.com
Tel: +254722 818 136

GITUMA SALOME KINYA

Dedan Kimathi University of Technology, School of Business
Department of Business Administration and Management
P. O. Box 657, 10100, Nyeri – Kenya
E-mail: Salome.kinya@kemu.ac.ke

ADEN ISSACK NOOR

Kampala International University College of Higher Degrees and Research
P. O. Box 20000 Kampala- Uganda
E-mail: adnur10@gmail.com

MUSYOKA JUSTUS MUTAI

Ministry of Education Science and Technology Meru Central District
P O. Box 1249-60200, Meru –Kenya
E-mail: jtaim@gmail.com

Abstract

Strategic planning is one of the major strategies for improving secondary school performance in Kenya. However, the implementation of strategic planning has been faced with challenges that need to be investigated. This study investigated the influence of stakeholder involvement, availability of financial resources, leadership styles and technical competence on the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools within Meru Central District. The study adopted a descriptive research design and a stratified random sampling technique to select 334 respondents comprising of 17 Principals, 114 teachers and 203 members of school Boards of Governors. The data was collected using a questionnaire and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program aided in analysis. Inferential statistics of Regression analysis model was used to test the hypothesis. The study concluded that technical competence, financial resources, stakeholder involvement and leadership styles had a significant relationship with the implementation of the strategic planning policy. The study recommends that policy makers at the Ministry of Education improve the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools through pointing out loopholes in the implementation of the strategic planning policy in schools, principals to create a higher level of stakeholder's involvement in any further strategy development and review. It is also critical that a review is done to distinguish between strategic plan implementation and other performance and quality management tools, besides institutionalizing policies so that their guiding philosophies are shared across the faculty membership. Further study can also be executed on the effectiveness of the strategic management plans being implemented in the Secondary schools.

Key Words: *Strategic Planning, Policy, Technical Competence, Stakeholder Involvement.*

Introduction

Background Information

Kenya has a highly developed educational infrastructure both in terms of coverage and organization. In formulating the current education system, the Kenyan government is guided by the fact that the education offered must be national, democratic and must also cater for the people's cultural aspirations. The participation of the Republic of Kenya (RoK) in the Jomtien Conference in 1990 and its subsequent endorsement of the Education for All (EFA) declaration in 1999 reinforced the commitment Kenya made on the provision of education to its citizens. The EFA 2000 assessment report in Kenya reveals that the past decade witnessed a renewed government's commitment to EFA goals.

The development of education in Kenya has faced various challenges. These challenges have revolved around the need to increase access to education, improve relevance, quality and efficiency of the country's education system as well as attainment of gender parity across all levels of education. The desire to overcome these challenges is demonstrated through the Ministry of Education's vision "To provide, promote and co-ordinate quality education, training and research for the empowerment of individuals to become competent, caring and responsible citizens who value education as a life-long process" (Ministry of Education, 2006).

To address these challenges, the education sector has undergone major transformations over the years with several reviews by official reports, sessional papers and studies of commissions, task forces and working parties established by the government. These reports examined Kenya's education system and made recommendations.

Among these were the Ominde Report (1964) or the Kenya Education Commission, the Gachathi Report (1976) or the National Committee on Educational Objectives and Policies (NCEOP), the Mackay Report (1981) on the Presidential Working Party on the Second University, the Kamunge Report (1988) on the Presidential Working Party on Education, Manpower and Training for the Next Decade and Beyond and the RoK Report (1999) of the inquiry into the Kenyan Education System.

Interventions made out of these various reports have in the recent years included the introduction of FPE in 2003, introduction of Free Day Secondary Education in 2008, provision of bursaries to the needy students, expansion of existing schools and starting of new ones, integration of Information Communication Technology into the teaching-learning process and strengthening of the teaching of science and mathematics among others (RoK Report, 1999)

To accelerate these achievements, the government of Kenya and development partners developed the Kenya Education Sector Support Programme (KESSP). The KESSP was fitted within the broader National Policy Framework as set out in the Economic Recovery Strategy (ERS) and the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 on a Policy Framework for Education, Training and Research. The broad objective was to give every Kenyan the right to quality education that is accessible and relevant.

To provide a framework for implementing KESSP, the Ministry of Education developed its own Strategic Plan 2006-2011 that was to provide the strategic direction to the MOEST with regard to resource targeting and implementation. Strategic planning would in turn be cascaded down to the school level as a means of improving school performance.

Despite all these interventions, many problems still face our education system which the MOEST hoped to solve through the introduction of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools. This study is therefore necessary as it aims to investigate the factors influencing the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools with a view to making a contribution to their successful implementation.

Education Reforms in Kenya

Remarkable progress has been evidenced in the education sector since Kenya gained independence, and it is well off in this respect compared to many low-income countries (Kimalu, 2001). According to the RoK (1999), there has been a tremendous increase in both the number of secondary schools and the enrolment of students.

In the last few years, more reforms in the education sector have been undertaken in order to address the overall goals of the national Economic Recovery Strategy (ERS), as well as international development commitments, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Education for All (EFA) and deliver the policies as set in the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005 on Policy Framework for Education, Training and Research. The first major initiative of these reforms was the launch and the implementation of the Free Primary Education (FPE) in January 2003. The Kenya Education Sector Support Programme (KESSP) incorporates all of the work undertaken to date by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MOES&T) and the stakeholders in education and training. It is based on a number of key documents, which the MOES&T has developed in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the issues and reform priorities across the education and training sector, as well as establish a strong policy framework within which to implement the KESSP.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning originated in the business community in the 1960s. It attempts to combine short-term and long-term planning. Organizations conducting strategic planning commit themselves to a formal process in which a group of planners articulates a mission statement, sets goals and objectives, audits the organization for internal strengths and weaknesses, assesses the external environment for opportunities and threats, evaluates strategic options, and then selects and operationalizes an organizational strategy. In this regard, the basic aim of strategic planning is to link daily organizational decisions with a vision of where the organization wants to be at some point in the future, usually five years (Bell, 2002).

The strategic planning policy in public education emerged as a management tool in the mid-1980s. The term appeared in educational publications for the first time around 1984, and by 1987 quite a number of schools around the world were using some type of strategic planning (Conley, 1992). Strategic planning is a management tool to help an organization to improve its performance by ensuring that its members are working to the same goals and by continuously adjusting the direction of the organization to the changing environment on the basis of results obtained. According to Conley (1992) strategic planning is sensitive to the environment and therefore it should be based on the belief that the successful development of an organization is the result of finding the right fit between its internal strengths and weaknesses and the external opportunities and threats stemming from the environment.

Bell (2002) states that monitoring strategic planning policy implementation has to do with making sure that the necessary inputs are being provided as foreseen and that the different activities are being carried out as scheduled. This is often referred to as compliance monitoring that is checking whether the inputs and activities are in compliance with original plans and budgets. Strategic planning considers compliance monitoring as not good enough and prefers to concentrate on whether the expected results have been obtained. In other words, the main emphasis is shifted away from compliance monitoring to performance (or results) monitoring. Results of a specific activity are then usually measured at three successive levels: immediate outputs, intermediate outcomes and long-term impact.

In order to be able to measure properly the different types of results obtained, the overall broad policy goals will have to be translated into more precise objectives that must be reached during the medium-term plan. RoK (1999) states that those objectives will have to be made measurable – or SMART. In order to make objectives SMART, a specific indicator will have to be identified for each objective, specifying exactly what is to be measured and for each indicator, precise targets must be fixed, namely the expected

level of result to be achieved by a specific date. This in turn implies the identification of baseline values against which progress can be assessed later on. According to Bell (2002) implementation of the strategic planning policy cannot succeed without the commitment of the plan implementers and the different stakeholders. Implementation of the strategic planning policy should therefore not be carried out in isolation by experts alone, but rather as an inclusive process in which the implementers and stakeholders are actively involved in one way or another.

It creates a privileged moment for opening new lines of communication and dialogue, for promoting understanding and ownership of what is being planned for and disseminating a spirit of strategic thinking throughout the whole organization. Strategic planning is based on the belief that no neat, final plan can be prepared, simply because situations have become too complex and environments too unpredictable, and because it is impossible to foresee every possible consequence of future decisions that will be made. A strategic medium-term plan should lay out the final goal and the general path to be followed, rather than the precise steps to be taken to reach that goal.

There are many reasons for the secondary schools to embrace the strategic planning policy. According to Boddy (1999), it has the potential to be a low cost way of making public spending on education more efficient by increasing the accountability of the agents involved and by empowering the clients to improve learning outcomes. And by putting power in the hands of the end users of the service (education), implementing strategic planning eventually leads to better school management that is more cognizant of and responsive to the needs of those end users, thus in creating a better and more conducive learning environment for the students.

Research Problem

The Ministry of Education introduced the strategic planning policy in secondary schools because once the policy is implemented, it makes public spending on education more efficient by increasing the accountability of the agents involved and by empowering the clients to improve learning outcomes. The implementation of the policy puts power in the hands of the end users of education and eventually leads to better school management that is more cognizant and responsive to the needs of those end users, thus creating a better and more conducive learning environment for the students. However, despite the introduction of this policy and the government's allocation of substantial resources towards its implementation in secondary schools, there has been no significant improvement in school performance. Therefore, it is obvious that there lie huge obstacles to effective implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools. This means that the ongoing efforts to improve the education standards in Kenya are not being properly implemented.

These difficulties are perhaps connected to factors such as technical competencies, financial resources, leadership styles and stakeholder involvement; factors that have been positively and negatively influencing the progress of implementing strategic planning policy in secondary schools. Although the degree to which each factor influences the implementation of the strategic planning policy vary, it has to be recognized that without appropriate application of these factors, the extent to which the strategic planning policy succeeds is limited and hence the need to carry out this study on the factors influencing the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools in Meru Central District.

Research Objectives

General Objective

The general objective of this study was to investigate the factors influencing the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools in Meru Central District, Meru County.

Specific Objectives

Specifically, the study sought:

- i. To determine the influence of technical competence on the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools.
- ii. To investigate the influence of financial resources on the implementation of the strategic planning policy secondary schools.
- iii. To determine the influence of leadership styles on the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools.
- iv. To investigate the influence of stakeholder involvement on the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools.

The Research Hypothesis

- H0:** There is no significant relationship between technical competence and the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools.
- H0:** Financial resources do not significantly influence the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools.
- H0:** There is no significant relationship between leadership styles and the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools.
- H0:** Stakeholder involvement does not significantly influence the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools.

The Significance of the Study

The findings and recommendations of this study will help policy makers at the Ministry of Education to make guidelines which will improve the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools. This is because the study will assist in pointing out loopholes in the implementation of the strategic planning policy in schools, therefore leading to the improvement of the actual practice of the implementation of the strategic planning policy in the country. It will also serve as an input to producing data that can be used in the Kenyan context, thus avoiding the use of unsuitable literature exported from elsewhere.

Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter discussed the research design, location of the study, population of study, sample design and sampling procedures, data collection instruments, data collection procedures, piloting, validity and reliability and data analysis relating to the study on the factors influencing the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools in Meru Central District

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive design. According to Gay (1973) the descriptive method of research is a process of collecting data in order to test hypothesis or answer questions concerning the current status of the subject in the study. Such method of study determines and reports the way things are. Lawson (1971) also says that descriptive research is concerned with conditions that exist, practices that prevail, beliefs and attitudes that are held, processes that are ongoing and trends that are developing. Therefore, for this study the research design was a descriptive survey design.

The descriptive survey was relevant in this study as it enabled the researcher to find out the factors influencing the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools in Meru Central District. The study therefore attempted to establish the relationship that existed between the variables without manipulating them.

Location of the Study

The study was done in Meru central district and the sample was sought from both public and private secondary schools. The location was chosen due to its proximity to the researcher making it cost and time effective.

Target Population

The study targeted all the public and private secondary schools in Meru Central District, Meru County. The study focused on the factors influencing the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools. The population for this study comprised 676 Boards of Governors, 52 Principals and 381 teachers, making a total population of 1109 respondents.

Table 1: Target population

Category	Target population
Principals	52
Members of schools' Boards of Governors	676
Teachers	381
Total	1109

Source: District Education office records, Meru Central District (2012)

Sampling Design

In this study, the researcher used stratified random sampling techniques at various stages of the research process. This is because the population under study was heterogeneous. There were differences among the respondents in terms of gender, age, experience, profession, rank and academic qualifications. 30% of the population was established in each of the stratum in each institution from the three identified i.e. the principals, teachers and the stake holders. Therefore using the stratified random sampling design, the researcher selected 334 respondents on whom to conduct the survey. This sampling procedure was preferred since the factors influencing the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools are different in each category.

Table 2: Sample size

Category of employees	Target population	Sample size
Principals	52	17
Members of the schools' Boards of Governors	676	203
Teachers	381	114
Total	1185	334

Data Collection Instruments

A questionnaire was used to collect data related to the factors influencing the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools in Meru Central District. The questionnaire was suitable in this study because the data to be collected was first hand, the same questions were used for many respondents and therefore comparisons could be made, it saved time because they could be filled by many people within a short time and lastly a well prepared questionnaire collects a lot of information.

Data Collection Procedures

Both closed or structured and open-ended or unstructured questionnaires were used. They were distributed in advance to enable those involved to gather the necessary data and give the appropriate answers. Completed questionnaires were collected three weeks after distribution.

Piloting

The researcher conducted a pilot study in eight public secondary schools (15.4% of the population) within the study location. These schools were then excluded from the main study. The subjects of the study included 8 principals, 15 members of Boards of Governors and 27 teachers. This amounted to 50 respondents. Piloting helped identify misunderstandings, make necessary adjustments on the items found wanting and thereby improved the validity and reliability of the instrument.

Data Analysis

In this study, both qualitative and quantitative data was collected. Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) say that in order to save time and increase the accuracy of the results, a computer should be used. The data collected was organized, coded and entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program for data analysis.

Logistic Regression model (Logit model) analysis was used to test the hypothesis because it makes it makes it possible multivariate analysis of data in which the variables in the analysis are made up of categories that are nominal or ordinal.

The Logit regression model used was $\text{Log} (V/ (1-V)) = a + b_1 Z + b_2 L + b_3 P + b_4 V$

Where

$\text{Log} (V/(1-V)) =$ Implementation of the Strategic Planning Policy $a =$ Constant $e =$ Error term.

Table 3: Hypothesis Testing: Logistic Regression

	Variables in the Equation	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a	Z	1.259	.451	7.783	1	.005	3.521
	L	.375	.330	1.295	1	.255	1.456
	P	.128	.417	.094	1	.759	1.137
	V	.818	.410	3.981	1	.046	2.266
	Constant	-11.230	2.306	23.724	1	.000	.000

- Z= Technical Competence on the Implementation of the Strategic Planning Policy
- L= Stakeholder Involvement on the Implementation of the Strategic Planning Policy
- P= Leadership Styles on the Implementation of the Strategic Planning
- V= Financial Resources on the Implementation of the Strategic Planning Policy

This includes other factors that affect performance of the institutions of learning not covered by the study. The output was presented in frequency tables, numerical values and percentages based on which interpretations and conclusions were made. The level of implementation will be measured on the strengths established by the Logit model viz $\text{Log} (V/(1-V))$.

Discussions, Conclusions and Recommendations

Discussion

Ho: There is no significant relationship between technical competence and the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools.

The study found that the Technical Competence on The Implementation of The Strategic Planning Policy had significant relationship. These findings agree with Gillen (2007) who found that from the experience of years, it was evident that inadequate and un sustained training offered to the school principals formed one of the challenges facing effective implementation of strategic planning policy in schools. Though Gillen (2007) supported earlier findings by Ongiri, (2004) who had found that the implementation of strategic planning policy in most of the secondary schools in Kenya was considered as below average; a fact that was supported with what the Republic of Kenya (2009) noted in its Master Plan on strategic planning and their implementation (1997-2010) that the majority of schools fall short of providing for the implementation needs of the schools, leading to poor strategic plans implementation. However the reason of this is explained by Omboi and Gitau (2011), who found that Institutional policies were weak in influencing strategy implementation because of low awareness among the stakeholders.

Ho: There Is No Significant Relationship Between Leadership Styles And The Implementation of The Strategic Planning Policy In Secondary Schools.

The study found that leadership styles on the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools have no significant relationship. These findings agree with Onyango (2001) who found that it was the responsibility of the school principal to promote the stake holders relations. This is further supported by Omboi and Gitau (2011), that the weak influence of managerial behavior was as a result of strategic thinking of the management and the influence of rewards and incentives which are weak and that it was the intrinsic motivation of the stakeholders than extrinsic motivation by management through tangible reward that made the stakeholders co-operate in the implementation of strategic plans.

Ho: Stakeholder Involvement Does Not Significantly Influence The Implementation of The Strategic Planning Policy In Secondary Schools.

The study found that the Stakeholder involvement on the implementation of the strategic planning policy has no significant relationship. These findings disagrees with Kilonzo (2011) who indicated that implementation of strategic planning system had reduced stakeholder confidence of the system, reduced their level of motivation, made them less concerned of the system, lowered their morale and eventually led to job withdrawal. The findings however contradict Lepak, (2010) who postulated that one of the stereotypes about organizations are unclear objectives, poor interpretations of goals as well as frequency interruption from the stake holders which reduce the effective implementation of the strategic planning policy hence making employees to be a position of not knowing where exactly their efforts are directed. Lepak (2010) study would therefore explain the disparity between the findings of Kilonzo (2011)

Ho: Financial Resources Do Not Significantly Influence The Implementation of The Strategic Planning Policy In Secondary Schools.

The study found that the financial resources on The Implementation of the Strategic Planning Policy had a significant relationship. These findings are in support of Wolff (2005) who noted that financial resources are another factor which influences the implementation of strategic planning policy in most institution this agrees with Bower and Joseph, (1986) who found that regardless of the source of the strategies, they must flow through a common filter – the resource allocation process. This is because a company's actual strategy is manifest only through the stream of new products, processes, services and acquisitions to which

resources are allocated. This agrees with Mintzberg and Waters (1985), who posited that the resource allocation process acts like a filter that determines which intended and/or emergent initiatives get funding and pass through, and which initiatives are denied resources.

Conclusion

The study concluded the respondents had been members of BOG in a secondary school for less than 5 years and were aware of the Ministry of Education strategic planning policy and further concluded that the schools have developed strategic plans of which majority of the strategic plans developed covered a period of 5 yrs.

Technical Competence

The study concluded that Technical Competence had a significant relationship with the Implementation of The Strategic Planning Policy and supported by earlier findings that from the experience of years, it was evident that inadequate and un sustained training offered to the school principals formed one of the challenges facing effective implementation of strategic planning policy in schools.

Financial Resources

The study concluded that financial resources had a significant relationship on The 4Implementation of The Strategic Planning Policy and

Stakeholder Participation

The study found the strategic plans were developed with stakeholder participation and the stakeholders had undergone training on strategic planning process done outside the school. The study concluded that the respondents were highly involved in the implementation the strategic management plan and that the rate of implementation of strategic planning policy was rated as adequate and on course.

Leadership Styles

leadership styles has a significant relationship with the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools ,The study concluded that Stakeholder involvement has significant relationship on the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools

Recommendations

The study makes specific recommendations guided by the objectives of the study and which are workable and tentative in nature if implemented by the stakeholders as identified in the study

Recommendations for Policy Makers.

The study recommends that policy makers at the Ministry of Education improve the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools through pointing out loopholes in the implementation of the strategic planning policy in schools.

Recommendations for institutional managers.

The study recommends that principals create a higher level of involvement of stakeholders in any further strategy development and review to avoid hands off approach and lack of ownership on their part. It is also critical that a review is done to distinguish between strategic plan implementation and other performance

and Quality management tools. There is also need to institutionalize policies so that their guiding philosophies are shared across the faculty membership and to avoid them being vied as managerial propensity to lord over staff.

Recommendations for Government Agencies

The government agencies charged with management of secondary school education should ensure that adequate resources are availed to the institutions for purposes of strategy implementation as this is an expensive exercise which must be deliberately budgeted for. The Agencies must also ensure a high level of sensitization among stakeholder, and where practical programmes for capacity building to give skill and willingness to Participate to a wider audience like students involvement

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to the specific factors influencing the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools in Meru Central District, Meru County. The study used questionnaire which allow grate latitude to the respondents and more appropriate for large diverse populations like in this study. However the tool has an inherent weakens on ability to verify authenticity of the responses which would be easy with an interview guide. However, for this study Cronbach's Alpha was used to test response reliability and whose level of 0.650 (655) was found satisfactory.

Implications on Policy Theory and Practice

This study has policy implications as there has not been a standard benchmark on the secondary Schools implementation of strategic plan as it is for Universities in the east Africa region. Currently several universities are now participating in the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) common quality assurance system, which aims at harmonizing higher education standards in East Africa thereby promoting comparability of academic programs among universities, based on regional benchmark standards. This makes this study therefore a critical part of the link between theory and practice within the confines of strategic education management in East Africa and therefore there is need for the Kenya Government to review the education policies that are related to quality management and strategic planning and management in the Secondary schools sooner.

Suggestion For further Study

This study was limited to factors influencing the implementation of the strategic planning policy in secondary schools in Meru Central District, Meru County. There is therefore room for further study on factor that influence implementation of strategic management plans at secondary schools level in Kenya. Further study can also be executed on the effectiveness of the strategic management plans being implemented in the Secondary schools and finally a study on the Ministry of Education Human resources capacity to effetely participate in training strategic management planning and implementation in secondary schools in Kenya would be critical to any conclusions on the effectiveness of strategic management implementation.

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