

Challenges of Formulation of Strategic Plans in Secondary Schools in Kenya: A Case of Mombasa County and Its Environs

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Abstract

The study is aimed at analyzing the factors that affect formulation of strategic plans in secondary schools in Mombasa County and its environs. The study looks at various variables namely leadership, training, resources allocation and education policy frameworks as the main challenges. The paper concludes that the above variables to a large extent affect formulation of strategic plans in schools. Finally, the paper recommends that there is need to equip schools leaders with the necessary leadership skills, train all the stakeholders, allocate adequate funds to school and develop clear guidelines and create mechanism to monitor formulation of strategic plans in schools. As such the study reveals that the education offices should to play a major part in providing high end human resource that is critical in addressing the challenges of strategic plans formulation so as to be improve their competitiveness. Much more empirical research of this subject is also recommended. It is a desk study that relies on secondary information such as previous research and analysis of scholars, newspaper/magazines as well as journals and articles that are related to the subject. Strategic planning has become a common phenomenon in all business organizations, schools included. It has been defined by various scholars differently. A strategy is a set of activities or processes that an organization intends to use in order to achieve its set goals and aims (Pearce, 2009). Strategic planning and thinking involves making choices and decisions about the long-term future of an organization (Pearce, 2009). A strategic plan helps to provide direction and focus for all employees. Clive (2005) defines strategic planning as a setting out decisions and actions that result in the formulation and implementation of actions designed to achieve an organizations objectives. However, it has now become a major challenge amongst various secondary schools in Kenya.

Keywords: Strategic Planning, Leadership, Training, Resource Allocation, Education Policy framework.

Introduction

The bottom line in business is strategic planning, as businesses must look to long-term solutions in order to compete effectively to survive in the currently very competitive society. The development of the education sector has been a long standing objective of the Government of Kenya since independence. Education is considered as a basic need and right of every individual. One of the main reforms embarked on by the Kenyan education sectors is development of strategic planning in schools. Strategic planning emerged in public education as a management tool in the mid-1980s. The term appeared in educational publications for the first time around 1984, and by 1987, an estimated five hundred school around the country were using some type of strategic planning (Conley, 1992).

Recently, Kenyan government policy initiatives focused on attainment of Education for all (EFA). This led to declaration of Free Secondary Education (FSE) in 2008. For this to be realized, there was need for continuous strategic planning of secondary schools. A survey by Ngware et al. (2006) showed that over 60% of schools in the country did not have strategic plans. Achoka, (2007) observed that despite the importance of a good strategic plan and the Kenyan government having put in policies and guidelines on strategic planning in public secondary schools, very few schools had adopted it.

This study was therefore, to find out the factors that act as challenges in formulation strategic plans in Secondary Schools in Mombasa County and its environs. The study will provide useful insights for Principals of secondary schools and the County education policy developers. It will help them chart the way forward in relation to strategic planning in secondary schools.

Methodology

This study was conducted using a mixture of secondary sources. It was, therefore, a desk study of an exploratory nature. Orodho (2003) argues that exploratory research is a good tool for analyzing social scenarios that are characterized largely by qualitative factors. Exploratory studies, therefore, help to formulate important principles, hypotheses and solutions to problems. Mugenda & Mugenda (1999) define secondary data as any publication by an author who was not a direct observer or participant in the events described. Development of this report followed an integrated and participatory approach. The study therefore relied on secondary information such as government policy documents, previous papers and analysis of scholars, newspaper/magazines as well as journals and articles. The study also involved an extensive literature review which critically analyzed the challenges of formulating strategic plans.

Findings

Strategic planning concept.

A strategy is a set of activities or processes that an organization intends to use in order to achieve its set goals and aims (Pearce, 2009). A strategic plan helps to provide direction and focus for all employees. If an organization has little idea where it is headed, it will wander aimlessly with priorities changing constantly and employees confused about the purpose of their jobs.

In the past, schools have mainly been concerned with operational planning rather than strategic planning. As such those in charge of managing schools are interested in operational efficiency and effectiveness. As a result there was lack of strategic thinking at higher levels of leadership. It is all mechanical planning method.

However as the societies have become more dynamic, many schools have already embarked on formulating strategic plans. Such an undertaking involves various stakeholders in the schools set-up. A strategic plan helps the various work units within an organization to align themselves with common goals.

Challenges of strategic plans formulation in secondary schools.

i) School leadership and formulation of strategic plans in schools.

The top school leadership includes the Principal, the Board of Governors and the Parents Teachers Association. They give leadership and vision to the organization. The Principal has for a long time been expected to offer leadership on matters of quality improvement in schools (Ngware et al., 2006). This view has however been challenged by some scholars. Bell (2002) is of the opinion that a school principal cannot offer leadership on school vision since it is a collective responsibility of all stakeholders. In Kenya although principals are professionally qualified teachers it is questionable whether they are visionary enough to strategically propel schools. Sherman, Rowley and Armandi (2007) argue that it is usual to find people appointed in positions in which they do not have the necessary skills in Africa.

Andrews (1980) argues that boards of governors are in a great position to contribute on the strategic planning and formulation. He asserts that an effective board is pivotal in generating alternatives and supporting school's vision as well as facilitating implementation and review of the strategic plans. Davies and Ellison (1998) and Dandira (2011a) suggested that an organisation must appoint an executive committee which has a vision and a dream beyond everybody in the organization and which is driven by results.

The board is also in charge of ensuring the general smooth running of the school and making sure that the interest of all stakeholders is well looked into. The board's roles involve interaction and interdependence during the strategic process. John (2007) argued that the role of adviser and counselor is linked to the strategic role of board members.

Therefore it is evident that for a school to formulate a strategic plan, these leaders should provide the necessary direction and be very visionary. We find that majority of these leaders are not even aware of the importance of strategic planning, some hold these offices by chance more so because of political correctness. Time and again leaders have been promoted through management rather than strategic leadership.

Effective formulation of strategic plans in schools requires that principals are able to give the guidance necessary. They are the senior executives in the schools and as such they require to have leadership skills, hence better position to lead in strategy formulation.

The board members also being top leaders in a school, should possess the necessary leadership skills. They have to be aware and to genuinely appreciate the importance of strategic management. Members of parents Teachers Association also are important school leaders and can contribute positively to strategic plans formulation.

ii) Training and formulation of strategic plans in schools.

The heads of school play a major role in strategic planning. Principal's training on strategic planning helps them to effectively guide in strategic planning. Principals trained on strategic planning are statistically more likely to formulate strategic plans for their schools than the untrained ones. The Master plan on Education and Training (1997 – 2010) however states that many secondary school Headteachers have not been adequately trained in management and administration and are ineffective and lacking accountability. The plan points out that the poor terms and conditions of service have led to poor morale. The report also mentions that the school system is dogged by nepotism and corruption allegations in the promoting teachers. Needless to say, these malpractices are likely to affect teachers' performance and commitment to strategic planning since non-performers are rewarded. The academic qualification of the board chairperson also plays a critical role in strategic planning. Previous knowledge assists them in formulating and implementing beneficial strategic plans. Building capacity through staff development is yet another critical issue. Training is essential in increasing opportunities to recognize the skills of strategic management and the opportunities to practice these skills across any department so as to promote capacity building.

Employee, who are also stakeholders who should be involved in formulating strategic plans do not have prior

training or knowhow in issues relating to strategic planning. Employee's know-how is useful in formulation of strategic plans and as such training is very important.

iii) Resources allocation and formulation of strategic plans in schools.

One major challenge facing those who run secondary schools in Kenya is the scarcity of finances. Funds are very critical in the process of formulating strategic plans. Money should be available to train the teams regarding their responsibilities and expectations (Jackson, 2005). Funds are needed for data collection since collection of information from the environment is required. This involves traveling, holding meetings, or publishing tools for communications like pamphlets and fliers. Recklies (2008) suggested that only the programs which yield highest returns should be funded after identifying key action areas.

In Kenyan secondary school, financial assistance comes from the government funding/ government grant, parents' contribution, income-generating school projects and donors. Employee's know-how is useful in formulation of strategic plans and where an organisation does not have qualified manpower it has to outsource from expert consultants. In Kenyan school set-up the various stakeholders have no skills in strategic plans formulation. Yet in the school expenditure budget there is no vote head to help train the right human capital for strategy formulation. Neither are their funds allocated for outsourcing consultancy services. This becomes a major challenge to leaders because policy developers expect schools to formulate the plans. One wonders where the funding is expected to come from.

iv) Government Policy framework and formulation of strategic plans in schools.

Kenyan government has made it compulsory for government agencies and ministries to make periodic strategic plans (GoK, 2006). In Kenya, the education Act (GoK, 1980) does not clearly show whether schools must formulate strategic plans and as a result many schools have ignored the issue. Literature review has attributed this problem to availability of funds (Allio, 2005 and government policy (Recklies, 2008). There are no explicit instructions to schools to formulate strategic plans. The Rationale of the Republic of Kenya, Ministry of Education Strategic Plan 2006-2010 states: "It is a statutory requirement that public organizations, including Government Ministries, develop strategic plans as a means of enhancing result-based management and efficiency in their operations" The MoE Strategic Plan's Contextual Background only expresses a wish that "the process (strategic planning) will cascade to institutional level". There is no direct clear instruction requiring schools to formulate strategic plans.

In formulation of strategic plan, government policy is very important because it provides guidelines. This is because education policy and the curriculum are provided by the government. Currently, there is much ambiguity on efforts taken by the government on formulation of strategic plans by schools. In some countries, the government has made it mandatory for schools to formulate strategic plans, for example the go Australian government has made a guideline of what schools should include in their strategic plan (State of Victoria, 2010). There is also lack of structures to monitor formulation of strategic plans by secondary schools. There are also no programmes to sensitize people or create awareness in relation to the importance of strategic plans in secondary schools in Mombasa

Conclusion

Principals are in top leadership in a school. They may act as a challenge in strategy formulation because the vast majority lack the relevant leadership skills. Most secondary schools Headteachers lack skills and knowledge and expertise on strategic planning and hence cannot offer effective leadership in this area. This is glaringly evident in the area related to strategic management. Majority the members of board of governors also lack in academic and professional qualifications especially in strategic management. As such they have no necessary expertise and experience in leadership.

This study also concludes that training poses a major challenge a strategy formulation. There is no formal training of school leaders in relation to strategy formulation. As such they cannot be effective in this area. Most principals do not have strategic management knowhow. Members of board of governors and PTA team also have no strategic management background. Their wanting knowhow also does acts as a challenge in formulating strategic plans. Other stakeholders like teachers and non-teaching staff who constitute the strategy formulation panel also have little or zero knowhow on strategic management.

Resource allocation is a major challenge in strategic plans formulation in schools. There is no expenditure vote heads assigned for this exercise. As such most schools in Mombasa just ignore this exercise because the institutions cannot afford to carry it out.

The study concludes that educational policies are weak. They hardly assist in effective strategic plans formulation because supervision of policy implementation is wanting. There are no clear and practical structures laid down on how to effectively monitor whether schools are creating strategic plans. There are no clear policy guidelines on what should be included in the school strategic plans.

Recommendations

School leaders should be appointed through a very rigorous process to ensure that they have the necessary leadership skills most importantly visionary leadership. This is important when selecting school Principals. All Principals should have some qualifications in strategic management. Academic and professional qualifications to be thoroughly scrutinized when appointing members of school board of governors. Board members should be people who are properly trained in management issues. More importantly they should have expertise in analyzing and solving problems through their past experiences. They will thereafter be able to make informed contributions so as to help school management in strategic formulation.

The Strategy formulation team should undergo relevant training in the strategic planning process. This will empower them with skills necessary to formulate strategic plans for the schools. In regard to training, the recommendation is that principals and other stakeholders be taken to seminars and workshops annually so as to be updated on emerging issues. This will equip them with adequate knowledge and skills useful in strategic planning. Other stakeholders and employees in school should also be exposed to strategic management courses so as to empower them in this very important area of management. Better still, teacher training should include strategic management in the curriculum so that graduating teachers will have the necessary skills and knowledge needed for strategic planning.

As far as Resources allocation is concerned, adequate funds should be set aside for strategy formulation. There is need to realize that this is a continuous process so that funds are made available for strategy formulation, implementation as well as monitoring and review. This area should be in top expenditure vote heads for schools. The Education departments concerned with management of secondary schools should ensure that adequate resources are availed to the schools for purposes of strategic plans formulation. This is because it is an expensive venture which must be deliberately budgeted for. There is also need to allocate adequate time and energy in the process. Finances can be availed to the schools as a vote head in the Free Secondary Education (FSE) funds. Such funds should be timely disbursed for effective strategic planning.

The education offices concerned with educational policy implementation must ensure a high level of sensitization among schools leaders and the necessary supervision be thoroughly carried out. The main recommendation here is that the policy developers through Ministry of Education to enhance strategic planning in secondary schools through effective supervision follow-ups. There should be clear guidelines on what should be included in the strategic plans. This was tried in countries like Australia (State of Victoria, 2010) and it proved worthwhile. In addition it is important for the government to put in place stringent measures to ensure all schools adhere to the policy guidelines. The Ministry of Education needs to rethink the policy framework making it compulsory for schools to have a strategic plan as well as put in place very clear mechanism to ensure and that schools comply.

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