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INFLUENCE OF STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION ON THE PERFORMANCE OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN KENYA. A SURVEY OF UNIVERSITIES IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to find out the influence of strategy implementation on the performance of private universities in Kenya. Specifically the study sought to examine the association between the markets focus strategy and performance of private Universities, to analyze relationship between differentiation strategy and performance of private universities in Kenya and to find out the relationship between product development and performance of private universities in Kenya. The study was a cross-sectional survey and used descriptive design. The study target population was private chartered universities in Nairobi County. From a total staff of 308 of all the staff in the selected universities, a sample of 92 which was 30% formed the top management staff. Data was obtained from members of top management staff by means of a google form (online questionnaire). The questionnaire comprised of both open-ended and closed-ended questions. Data was entered into SPSS 23 for analysis and descriptive statistics such as the frequency, percentages, mean and standard deviation presented the data through frequency tables and charts. Correlation and regression was also conducted to establish associations and relationships between the variables. The study results revealed that the implementation of cost leadership strategy to a large extent affect university's performance (R=0.63, P=0.00), F (6, 84) = 9.279, P=0.00. Secondly, a strong positive association between the Implementation of market focus strategy and university's performance (R=0.61, P=0.00), F(6, 84) = 8.106, P=0.00). Differentiation and product development strategies had an intermediate positive relationship with performance. The study recommended that chartered private universities need to define their own cost strategy as well as employ a strong research culture to attract grants funds, also develop more international partnerships in order to create focus on international students and academic exchange programs. Also develop more customized relevant programs that meet the industry needs as well as impacting skills for problem solving, competency based curriculum (CBC) and short-courses.

Key Words: *Cost Focus Strategy, Markets Focus Strategy, Differentiation Strategy, Product Development, Universities in Kenya*

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INTRODUCTION

As international competition becomes increasingly fierce, numerous countries have enthusiastically invested in higher education in an effort to enhance their competitiveness (Chen et al., 2009). To adapt to the great competition from all over the world, there is an important and immediate required improvement to the quality of higher education to meet international academic trend and raise overall academic standards and education quality (Ahmed et al., 2018). Similarly, the 21st century has brought challenges and opportunities for higher education in Kenya (Kuria, 2017). In this dynamic and competitive environment, the biggest challenges of private universities are how to increase the student's population, remain financially viable, create sustainable revenue streams, staff retention, and to provide quality service which includes the development of relevant programs, teaching, and efficiency in service delivery (Nderitu et al., 2018). The institutions need to understand their resources, capabilities and core competencies which have a direct link to the institutions' ability to achieve their strategic plans (Kinyanjui & Juma, 2014). These can be achieved by retaining the best of their traditional structures while embracing radically new structures that leverage the human capital and adds value to the customers (Pearse & Robinson, 2011).

Strategy can be defined as the balance of actions and choices between internal capabilities and external environment of an organization (Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990). Accordingly, strategy can be seen as a plan, play, pattern, position and perspective (Koks & Kilika, 2016). According to Fuertes et al., (2020), a strategy is a pattern of actions and resource allocations designed to achieve the goals of the organization. The strategy an organization implements should be directed toward building strengths in areas that satisfy the wants and needs of consumers and other key actors in the organizations' external environment (Mainardes et al., 2011). It therefore forms a comprehensive modern plan that states how the organization will achieve its mission and objectives, maximizes competitive advantage and minimizes competitive disadvantage (Khudair et al., 2019).

Implementing strategic change is a double-edged sword because it simultaneously generates expected performance gain and unexpected performance loss (Bonner et al., 2002; G. Fedato et al., 2017; Kaliappen & Abdullah, 2013; Waithaka, 2017). When unexpected performance loss dominates or drains away expected performance gain, change becomes ineffective. Moreover, the coexistence of performance gain and loss is likely to yield confounded evidence for strategic change outcomes (Spencer et al., 2009). organizations may fail to maximize the performance benefits of strategic change because they either do not detect the presence of performance loss or fail to diagnose and mitigate the loss (Koks & Kilika, 2016).

According to Zehir et al., (2015) performance can be measured with financial and operational (non-financial) indicators. Financial measures are related to economic factors such as profitability and sales growth (e.g. return on investment, return on sales and return on equity) and operational measures are related to non-financial success factors such as quality, market share, satisfaction, new product development and market effectiveness. Further, among other factors performance may be indicated by financial sustainability, Number of students-undergraduates, Masters and PHD. Quality of Learning, Achievement of goals and staff satisfaction (Ahmed et al., 2018; Kuria, 2017; Missouri, 2020)

Kenya has the fastest-growing universities in East-Africa. Private universities have increased remarkably over the years (Kinyanjui & Juma, 2014). At present, there are 30 chartered public universities with five constituent colleges, 18 chartered private universities with five private constituent colleges, 13 universities with a letter of interim authority, and one private institution (CUE, 2020). It is clear that university sector will continue to grow, but few will survive in the future (Manyeki et al., 2018). Therefore, this study sought to assess the influence of strategy implementation on the performance of private universities in Kenya.

Statement of the problem

Higher education plays a vital role in countries' economic growth and shaping the future of the nation. The provision of higher education, as a public good by governments across the developing world has run into resource constraints, including poor facilities, inadequate human capital, insufficient research funding among others (Muraguri,2010). Private investors have therefore zoomed in to fill the gap, by starting higher education institutions including private universities.

At the time of the research, there were 30 chartered public universities with five constituent colleges, 18 chartered private universities with five private constituent colleges, 13 universities with a letter of interim authority, and one private institution (CUE, 2020). It is clear that the university sector will continue to grow, but few will survive in the future, hence the need for strategic planning and implementation to beat competition.

However, many private universities have not performed well as the shareholders had projected (Aithal & Kumar, 2016). While these universities have exciting strategic plans in place, the situation on the ground differs with the good and focused strategies found in these plans. (Kinyanjui & Juma, 2014; Muoki & Okibo, 2016; Waithaka, 2017; Omuse, et al., 2018) studies found that public universities suffer resource constraints and lack vital facilities to support learning. Studies by Nderitu et al., 2018; Ndichu, (2014) focused on influence strategy on performance and effect of differentiation on competitiveness. There is scanty literature on private chartered universities in Kenya. Also, the question of whether the strategies are properly implemented or what hinders their implementation. Therefore, this study aimed at determining how strategy implementation in a private university setting affect performance of the university, and hence its ability to meet its academic objectives.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study was to find the influence of strategy implementation on the performance of private universities in Kenya. The study was guided by the following specific objectives;

- To determine effect of cost focus strategy on performance of Private Universities in Kenya.
- To examine the association between the markets focus strategy and performance of private Universities in Kenya.
- To analyze relationship between differentiation strategy and performance of the private universities in Kenya.
- To find out the relationship between product development and performance of private universities in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study was guided by theories which were discussed below;

Porter's Generic Competitive Strategies

Porter (1980) developed this theory and he hypothesis that the level of competitiveness within an industry is dictated by a complex interaction of suppliers, customers, substitute products and the threat of new competitive entry onto the market. Porter (1985) asserts that there are basic businesses strategies – differentiation, cost leadership, and focus – and a company performs best by choosing one strategy on which to concentrate. Many researchers are however of the divergent view that a combination of these strategies may offer a company the best chance to achieve a competitive advantage (Adimo, 2018; Kettunen, 2014; Nderitu et al., 2018; Wakhu & Bett, 2019).

Porter's Generic Competitive Strategies theory was relevant to this study as it informed the study on competition strategies adopted for universities survival. By using the competitive strategy, a University target to position itself in a sustainable and profitable position against the forces shaping the industry.

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The 7s Model, Strategy Implementation and Performance

McKinsey's (1982) model describes the seven factors critical for effective strategy execution. The 7-S model identifies the seven factors as strategy, structure, systems, staff, skills, style/culture, and shared values. Strategy is the plan of action an organization prepares in response to, or anticipation of, changes in its external environment (Cândido & Santos, 2019). Structure refers to the way in which tasks and people are specialized and divided, and authority is distributed; how activities and reporting relationships are grouped; the mechanisms by which activities in the organization are coordinated (Nandakumar et al., 2010). Systems are formal and informal procedures used to manage the organization, including management control systems, performance measurement and reward systems, planning, budgeting and resource allocation systems, and management information systems ("The Role of Performance Measurement Systems in Strategy Formulation Processes," 2010) Every organization has some systems or internal processes to support and implement the strategy and run day-to-day affairs. Staff refers to the people, their backgrounds and competencies; how the organization recruits, selects, trains, socializes, manages the careers, and promotes employees. Shared values which are the core or fundamental set of values that are widely shared in the organization and serve as guiding principles of what is important; vision, mission, and values statements that provide a broad sense of purpose for all employees (Card & Card, 2007).

The 7-S model was paramount to this study since private universities can be successful when they achieve an integrated harmony among three "hard" "S's" of strategy, structure, and systems, and four "soft" "S's" of skills, staff, style, and super-ordinate goals (now referred to as shared values)(Semuel et al., 2017). Therefore the 7's theory applies to this study since for the strategy to be implemented successfully the 7's are prerequisites that the private chartered universities must employ wisely in order to achieve the required level of performance.

Resource Based Theory

The resource-based view theory regards the firm as a cognitive system, which is characterized by idiosyncratic and context-dependent competences that are core to strategic purpose. These are conditioned by hierarchical capabilities, or sets of routines, involved in the management of the firm's core business processes that help to create value. Competences typically involve the development of specialist expertise, and firms may become locked into a trajectory that is difficult to change effectively in the short to medium-term (Hooley et al., 2001; Nderitu et al., 2018). The premises of the resource-based view is that successful firms develop distinctive capabilities on which their future competitiveness will be based; which capabilities are often idiosyncratic or unique to each firm, and may also be tacit and intangible in nature. Competitive advantage is seen to be founded on a complex of competences, capabilities, skills and strategic assets possessed by an organization, or in other words from the astute management of physical and intellectual resources which form the core capability of the business(Hooley et al., 2001).

In the context of this theory, it was evident that the resources that a University plays a big role in the strategic management practices. This is because no matter how good the strategies are, without the necessary resources to enable the implementation, they remain in the planning phase. The resource-based approach will see the universities with superior systems and structures being profitable not because they engage in strategic investments that may deter entry and raise prices above long run costs, but because they have markedly lower costs, or offer markedly higher quality or product performance(Kuria, 2017). Therefore, this theory was found relevant to this study.

Empirical Review

Kurt & Zehir, (2016) Defines cost leadership as the ability of an organization to have a competitive advantage over its rivals in terms of prices of the services or goods offered. The main focus of cost leadership strategy is to achieve a market edge while reducing cost incurred in innovation and development of new product (Kaliappen & Abdullah, 2013). Firms that gain competitive advantage receives very huge returns and income both in the short-term and in the long-term(Adimo, 2018; Lorenzo et al., 2018; Wakhu & Bett, 2019, 2019). Therefore it is the aim of any organization including the universities to gain competitive edge in provision of education services even in the presence error when there are many other universities offering similar services (Durkin et al., 2016).

According to Manyeki et al., (2018) in his study found that school that implement market focus strategy have a high chance of performance. The other generic porters competitive strategies had a no significant impact on the university performance (Wakhu & Bett, 2019). Klein (2015) noted the need for target market niche focus when providing a service. Especially due to high competition among private universities. The segmentation can be done on the basis of gender, demographic characteristics and need analysis (Koks & Kilika, 2016). The study found the need for market focus strategy among institutions of higher learning (Kettunen, 2014).

Kolding (2013) on the other hand noted that a specific customer base and concentration on provision of services to a particular market niche can add competitive advantage to the universities (Manyeki et al., 2018). It enables the universities focus on specific customers, product line, or geographic market. In the case of universities market focus may lead to identification of new marketing strategies (Wakhu & Bett, 2019). These strategies concentrate may on student who want to purse certain courses or those who come from a certain geographic location (Nazim et al., 2019).

According to Kurt & Zehir, (2016) the main focus of differentiation strategy is to provide services that are required by the students in an unique way that is different from the other universities. This way the universities are able to attract customers who seek certain solutions and specific services that are not offered elsewhere (Animesh et al., 2010; Mosakowski, 1993; Zott & Amit, 2008). So providing services unique to the students will give the university an edge from its rivals (Manyeki et al., 2018). Nderitu et al., (2018) argues that differentiation can take many forms including a unique brand, technology, referral network as well as unique customer services. The study by Spencer et al., (2009) found that organizations that pursue differentiation strategies succeed in organizational performance.

Following the study by Manyeki et al., (2018) the universities must put efforts to provide different programs that are solving certain market problems (staying relevant). Therefore innovation and creativity is essential in order to attract customer loyalty (Cândido & Santos, 2019). Through differentiation a university is able to charge premium prices whenever the customers can find value for the services they receive (Ahmed et al., 2018). This can eventually give the organization a pool of customers thus increasing its market share. So the finding of notes that once the university is able to after programs different form its competitors which are of value to specific customers; then it focus makes the differentiation strategy succeed (Kettunen, 2014).

According to Mbithi et al., (2016), new services or programs or product are helpful to the financial health of universities. Universities must keep on coming up with new products since with time the programs are adopted by other universities therefore profitability cannot be sustained for a longer period of time (Ayuya, 2015). A number of studies relates innovation and product development and their positive effects of profitability and overall organizational performance(Bonner et al., 2002; Cohen et al., 1996; B. Mbithi et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2009). Therefore, innovative product development is directly linked to firm's growth and performance. Following Durkin et al., (2016), Universities must be keen not only to be biased on some programs leaving others, for instance focusing on funded research at the expense of teaching. Universities must consider higher student fees, the question of value for money combined with an associated increase in the expectations of university stakeholders, since they all significantly affect the universities performance (Durkin et al., 2016; George et al., 2002). Accordingly to (Waithaka, 2017), the future viability of some degree programmes and, perhaps, even the long-term survival of some institutions may be dependent on the adoption product development strategies.

Organization's performance is the measure of standard or prescribed indicators of effectiveness, efficiency, and environmental responsibility, productivity, waste reduction, and regulatory compliance (Manyeki et al., 2018) . Performance also refers to the metrics relating to how a particular request is handled, or the act of performing; of doing something successfully; using knowledge as distinguished from merely possessing it. It is the outcome of all of the organization's operations and strategies (Adimo, 2018). It is also the extent to which an individual meets the expectations regarding how he should function or behave in a particular context, situation, job or circumstance (Chen et al., 2009).

According to Parakhina et al., (2017) implementation is an important component of the strategic planning process. It has been defined as "the process that turns strategies and plans into actions to accomplish organizational objectives". It addresses the who, where, when, and how to carry out organizational activities successfully to achieve better results (Waithaka, 2017). Implementing strategic change is a double-edged sword because it simultaneously generates expected performance gain and unexpected performance loss (Chiuri, n.d.; G. A. de L. Fedato et al., 2017; Kagumu, 2016). When unexpected performance loss dominates or drains away expected performance gain, change becomes ineffective. Moreover, the coexistence of performance gain and loss is likely to yield confounded evidence for strategic change outcomes (M. B. Mbithi, 2017; Nyaga et al., 2018). Organizations may fail to maximize the performance benefits of strategic change because they either do not detect the presence of performance loss or fail to diagnose and mitigate the loss (Njagi & Kombo, 2014b; Waking'a & Ouma, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the descriptive research design and employed survey methods. The target population of the study comprised all the non-teaching staff in private universities in Nairobi County that had been in existence for more than ten years. The five universities studied had a total of 308 non-academic staff members. The researcher used simple random sampling to obtain the sample. The researcher settled on a sample of 30% from the target population making 96 workers. Data for the study was collected by self-administered questionnaires. The questionnaires were first assessed for accuracy, usefulness, and completeness. Quantitative data was then coded into SPSS which was analysed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics included the mean, the standard deviation, percentages, and frequencies.
The inferential statistics such as Pearson correlation coefficient was used to test the significance of the relationship between variables of the study. Correlation was used for describing the degree and direction of relationship between the variables.

FINDINGS

Effect of cost strategy on performance of Private Universities in Kenya

The study sought to find out the effect of cost strategy on performance of private Universities in Kenya. The results in this section were divided into descriptive statistics and the inferential statistics. The respondents were asked to state their level of agreement with the following statements; the results were presented starting with the frequency, followed by a percentage.

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On whether the university offered affordable prices relative to other universities, majority of the respondents 26% strongly disagreed. This meant that most private universities fee prices vary relatively. Some very few private universities offered low fee prices to attract many number of students while others charged a premium price for their offerings. Majority of the respondents 24.2% disagreed that their university offered scholarship program for financial aid to their students. However, a few of the respondents 15.4% agreed. This implied that though the scholarships given to students may create a good image of the university, they have no financial implication of cost reduction.

On the statement that the university serves a segmented market to minimize cost of operations and salaries, majority of the responses 41.8% agreed. This might imply a causal relationship between market focus strategy and cost leadership strategy, though not an objective of this study.

Regarding the statement, Low cost strategy has improved the university financial performance over the years. Majority of the respondents 53.8% strongly agreed. This implied that the universities that applied the low cost strategy reported high performance levels over the years. This results was confirmed by the fact that majority of the respondents in those private universities had a long job experience of at least 11 years in the private universities. Majority of the respondents 41.8% strongly agreed that the university they worked for continuously sought to reduce prices without sacrificing quality. Moreover, most respondents strongly agreed with the statement that the funds received from research grants provided a cushion to the university expenses. This implied that universities that gives emphasis to research and grants are able to easily achieve cost leadership due to economies of scale boost and cushion that the external funds provides to the university. The Table 1 below represented the results.

Table 1: Cost strategy descriptive statistics

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	(F %)	(F %)
This university offers affordable fee prices comparatively.	20(22)	21(23.1)	10(11)	14(15.4)	26(28.6)
This university has a scholarship program to offer financial aid to students	14(15.4)	12(3.9)	9(9.9)	22(24.2)	14(15.4)
This university serves a segmented market to minimize cost of operations and salaries.	28(30)	38(41.8)	5(5.5)	10(11)	10(11)
Low cost strategy has improved the university financial performance over the years.	49(53.8)	16(17.6)	3(3.3)	9(9.9)	14(15.4)
This university continuously seeks to reduce prices without sacrificing quality.	38(41.8)	23(25.3)	0	10(11)	20(22)
The funds received from research grants provides a cushion to the university expenses.	37(40.7)	26(28.6)	12(13.2)	9(9.9)	7(7.7)

From the open ended question which formed the qualitative data, there responses were arranged into categories and the most emerging statements formed the main theme from which the inferences were drawn. The respondents were asked what cost strategy would they recommend the university, the main categories were as follows; "*Reduce school fee to attract more students", "reduce cost of administration and operations by employing intern students", "diversify the universities investments and manage cost", employing technology* which was divided into subcategories like, *"go paperless", "go online courses".*

The study results revealed that the implementation of cost leadership strategy to a large extent affect university's performance. (r=0.63, p=0.00). This implied that the changes in the cost strategy indicator variables explained 63% of the universities performance. The ANOVA results F (6, 84) = 9.279, p=0.00) on the Table 2 below confirmed the association between the variables, thus leading to a conclusion that the cost leadership strategy significantly affect the private university performance.

Table 2: Regression model for cost strategy

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.631[a]	.399	.356	.184	.399	9.279	6	84	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Cost strategy

b. Dependent Variable: Strategy implementation

Table 3: ANOVA results for cost strategy

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.884	6	.314	9.279	.000[b]
	Residual	2.842	84	.034		
	Total	4.725	90			

a. Dependent Variable: Strategy implementation

b. Predictors: (Constant), Cost strategy

Markets focus strategy and performance

The study sought to examine the association between the markets focus strategy and performance of private universities in Kenya. The respondents were required to indicate in a 5 Likert scale the level in which they agreed with the following statements. On the statement that the programs were aligned with the interests of the students and industry; majority of the respondents 69.2% strongly agreed. This implied that the private chartered universities strive to tame their programs with their customer's preferences and industry demand forces. This ensured that the programs offered were relevant to the current market needs which in turn kept the university competitive.

Secondly, the respondents were required to indicate what level they concurred with the following statement, that the university has a focus on local and international students and their preferences. Among them, 52.7% strongly agreed, and this is perhaps because focusing not only on the local student's but also international student's places the university on a high bar in the global arena thus improved performance.

On the statement that the university embraces and implements new market trends as they emerge. 59.3% strongly agree. This was perhaps due to the fact that the university want to remain relevant and also ensure that the programs offered do not become obsolete. This could lead to sustainability and improved long-term performance. Additionally the exposure of students to a multicultural environment can increase their image and loyalty about the university thus adding value to the universities perceived image. This in turn could lead to improved brand image a social asset.

Further the Pearson's correlations indicated a strong positive association between implementation of new market trends and university performance. (R=.300, P=.004). The results revealed that the universities that applied market focus strategy were more likely to perform highly (r=.454, p=0.00). The parameters of University performance included student's turnover, financial stability, staff satisfaction.

Regarding the statement the university has successfully conducted an online exam for students in the past, 61.67% agreed. This implied that most private universities had adopted the online distancing learning academic model. However, 17.6% of the respondent's strongly disagreed meaning they have not focused on targeting those distance learners programs. Online exam was a solution to pandemic risks i.e. Covid 19 that caused social distancing. It was therefore, noteworthy that there is still a large market of students that can be captured or attracted to the university through online distance learning programs that could eventually lead to improved performance of the University. Table 4 below indicated the above results.

Table 4: Market focus strategy

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	F (%)	**F (%)**	**F (%)**	**(F %)**	**(F %)**
Programs are aligned with the interests of the students and industry	63(69.2)	18(19.8)	6(6.6)	4(4.4)	
The university has a focus on local and international students and their preferences	48(52.7)	37(40.7)		2(2.2)	4(4.4)
The university embraces and implements new market trends as they emerge.	54(59.3)	25(27.5)	8(8.8)	4(4.4)	
The university has successfully conducted an online exam for students in the past.	61(67)	6(6.6)	3(3.3)	5(5.5)	16(17.6)

The study results revealed a strong positive association between that the implementation of market focus strategy and university's performance. (r=0.61, p=0.00). This implied that the changes in the market focus indicator variables explained 61% of the universities performance. The ANOVA results F(6,84)= 8.106 , p=0.00) on the Table 5 below confirmed the association between the variables, thus leading to a conclusion that the Market focus strategy is strongly associated with the private university performance.

Table 5: Regression model of market focus strategy

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.606[a]	.367	.321	.343	.367	8.106	6	84	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Market focus strategy

b. Dependent Variable: High performance

Table 6: ANOVA results Market focus strategy

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5.722	6	.954	8.106	.000[b]
	Residual	9.883	84	.118		
	Total	15.604	90			

a. Dependent Variable: High performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Market focus strategy

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Table 7: Pearson's correlation on market focus strategy
Correlations

		The university embraces and implements new market trends as they emerge.	In your opinion has this university applied market focus strategy	Does strategy implementation affect the University performance	High performance
The university embraces and implements new market trends as they emerge.	Pearson Correlation	1	.297**	-.170	.300**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.004	.107	.004
	N	91	91	91	91
In your opinion has this university applied market focus strategy	Pearson Correlation	.297**	1	-.058	.454**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004		.584	.000
	N	91	91	91	91
Does strategy implementation affect the University performance	Pearson Correlation	-.170	-.058	1	.221*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.107	.584		.035
	N	91	91	91	91
High performance	Pearson Correlation	.300**	.454**	.221*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.000	.035	
	N	91	91	91	91

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Differentiation strategy and performance

The study sought to analyze relationship between differentiation strategy and performance of the private universities in Kenya. The respondents were asked the level in which they agreed with the following statements. The university offers a variety of courses in different sectors relevant to 21st century problems. Majority of the respondents 59.3% strongly agreed. This implied that the only easy way to reach the target market; is to differentiate them enough to meet the student's needs. Further, on the statement the university differentiates its programs through skilled & qualified staff; majority of the respondents 59.3% strongly agreed, this might emphasize the need for technical, skilled and highly competent professionals to set a university in a unique position from others in the market. The appeal of the customer and perceived image of the institution might increase with availability of highly skilled competent staff.

In regard to the statement that the university has a desired brand position differentiated enough to survive in the market; majority of the respondents 78% strongly agreed. This implied the specific brand desired in the market may cause a private university to be recognized. For instance, Strathmore University has stood out as a college of Commerce and accountancy, while Daystar University has stood as a communication and media giant. Kenya Methodist University stands tall as an icon for medicine and theology.

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Table 8: Differentiation strategy

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	(F %)	(F %)
The university offers a variety of courses in different sectors relevant to 21st century problems.	54(59.3)	35(38.5)	2(2.2)	0	0
The university differentiates its programs through skilled & qualified staff	54(59.3)	29(31.9)	0	4(4.4)	4(4.4)
The university has a desired brand position differentiated enough to survive in the market	71(78)	16(17.6)	4(4.4)	0	0
The university offers distinct programs that meet specific students' needs	44(48.4)	40(44)	4(4.4)	0	3(3.3)
The university only offers programs sponsored by national government	49(53.8)	9(9.9)	2(2.2)	15(16.5)	16(17.6)
The university has a promotion and advertising campaign on its product and services	51(56)	26(28.6)	2(2.2)	2(2.2)	10(11)

The study found an intermediate relationship between differentiation strategy and Private university performance (R=0.55, P =0.00). This implies that 55% of the performance of the university is explained by the model. The ANOVA table revealed the relationship exist between differentiation strategy and University performance F (8, 82) = 4.451, P=.000). This therefore led to a conclusion that an intermediate relationship exist between differentiation strategy and the private universities' performance.

Table 9: Regression model on differentiation strategy

Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.550[a]	.303	.235	.200	.303	4.451	8	82	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), differentiation strategy

b. Dependent Variable: Strategy implementation

Table 10: ANOVA table for differentiation strategy

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.431	8	.179	4.451	.000[b]
	Residual	3.295	82	.040		
	Total	4.725	90			

a. Dependent Variable: Strategy Implementation

b. Predictors: (Constant), Strategy implementation

Product development and performance

The study sought to find out the relationship between product development and performance of private universities in Kenya. The respondents were required to indicate their level of agreement with the following statements.

Following the statement, the university offers distinct programs that meet specific students' needs, majority of the respondent's 48.4% strongly agreed, followed by 44% who agreed. This implied that, it was the pursuit of a highly performing university to offer programs that meets the customer's specific needs. Therefore, a well differentiated program is a stop shop for a variety of customized programs. The Spearman's correlation results revealed that a positive association exist between developments of new programs distinct from the other universities, with university performance (rho=.30, p=0.04).

Following the statement the university has a promotion and advertising campaign on its product and services, majority of the respondents 56% strongly agreed. This meant that product development strategy can only work very well dependent on good sales and marketing tactics employed by the university. The new courses must be advertised targeting the potential students in order to reach a threshold for classes.

Table 11: Product development strategy

Statement	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	(F %)	(F %)
The university offers distinct programs that meet specific students' needs	44(48.4)	40(44)	4(4.4)	3(3.3%)	3(3.3)
The university only offers programs sponsored by national government	49(53.8)	9(9.9)	2(2.2)	15(16.5)	16(17.6)
The university has a promotion and advertising campaign on its product and services	51(56)	26(28.6)	2(2.2)	2(2.2)	10(11)
Programs of this university are aligned to the industry requirement hence relevant	48(52.7)	29(31.9)	4(4.4)	7(7.7)	3(3.3)

Following the open ended question, the respondents were asked which new programs they would recommend. The responses were categorized into the most emerging categories for which main themes were extracted. The responses differed from one university to next while some programs suggested as new in some universities already, existed in other universities. Some of the respondents suggested *law programs*, engineering, while others suggested *competency based courses*, *international relations* and "*short courses i.e. android programming".*

The study found an intermediate positive relationship between product development strategy and performance (R=.535, P=0.00). This means that 53.5% of the university performance is explained by the model. The ANOVA results of F (8, 85) = 6.832, P=0.00) confirms the relationship and therefore a conclusion that a positive relationship exist between product development and university performance.

Table 12: Regression model on product development

Model Summary

					Change Statistics				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.535[a]	.287	.245	.688	.287	6.832	5	85	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), product development
b. Dependent Variable: Strategy Implementation

Table 13: ANOVA table on product development

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	16.180	5	3.236	6.832	.000[b]
	Residual	40.259	85	.474		
	Total	56.440	90			

a. Dependent Variable: Strategy Implementation

b. Predictors: (Constant), product development

Table 14: Spearman's Rho on product development

Correlations

			The university offers distinct programs that meet specific students' needs	Does strategy implementation affect the University performance	High performance
Spearman's rho	The university offers distinct programs that meet specific students' needs	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.017	.300**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.870	.004
		N	91	91	91
	Does strategy implementation affect the University performance	Correlation Coefficient	.017	1.000	.221*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.870	.	.035
		N	91	91	91
	High performance	Correlation Coefficient	.300**	.221*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	.035	.
		N	91	91	91

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Strategy implementation and Performance

The study main purpose was to assess the iinfluence of strategy implementation on the performance of private universities in Kenya. The respondents were required to show to what extent had their university succeeded in implementing its strategies. Majority 52.7% indicated to a high extent while 44% indicated to a very high extent. This implies that there was still a gap in implementation of the strategy. Further the respondents were asked whether strategy implementation affect the University performance. Majority 86% indicated yes while 5.5% indicated no.

Table 15: Strategy implementation

To what extent has your university succeeded in implementing its strategies

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	not at all	3	3.3	3.3	3.3
	high extent	48	52.7	52.7	56.0
	very extent	40	44.0	44.0	100.0
	Total	91	100.0	100.0	

Further the respondents were asked their level of agreement with the following statements, the university performs highly and majority, 49.5% agreed. This implies that every staff of the university would want to rate their private university a high performer. This is perhaps a marketing strategy and identification with a successful brand.

The respondents were required to show indicate their degree of agreement with the following statements. In regards to the statement, the university achieves its goals within the set timelines, majority 31.9% agreed. This implies that strategic management of the university goals must be employed in order to ensure monitoring and evaluation of the set objectives and the achieved goals. On the statement the teaching and non-teaching staff are remunerated on time & highly satisfied, majority of the respondents 35.2% strongly agreed. However, this implies that there is still a gap, satisfied staff can deliver quality services and thus delight the customers which will in turn boost universities performance. Therefore, it is imperative that the universities that wants to improve their performance ensure that the staff are highly satisfied. On the statement the university highly meets stakeholder expectations, majority of the respondents 46.2% agreed. This doesn't mean that all the shareholders of the private chartered universities are contented with the performance. It is the interest of every shareholder to see the University excels in all parameters of performance and therefore its means that the top management must ensure continuous improvement and value addition in order to reach a satisfactory level of performance. In regard to the statement a very high number of student reports after admissions a majority of the respondents 35.2% strongly agreed. This implies that top performing universities easily reaches the threshold number of students admitted during very intake. Notably the Private universities must grow their capacity in terms of infrastructure and technical capacity to handle high number of students especially with the Government sponsored students now joining the private universities.

Table 16: Performance

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	F (%)	F (%)	F (%)	(F %)	(F %)
The university performs very high	27(29.7)	45(49.5)	6(6.6)	7(7.7)	6(6.6)
The university lacks sufficient competent trained staff	27(29.7)	29(31.9)	6(6.6)	11(12.1)	16(17.6)
The university achieves its goals within the set timelines	55(60.4)	23(25.4)	5(5.5)	0	0
The Teaching and non-teaching staff are remunerated on time & highly satisfied	32(35.2)	30(33.3)	7(7.7)	6(6.6)	3(3.3)
The University highly meets the shareholder expectations	42(46.2)	27(29.7)	6(6.6)	3(3.3)	0
A very high number of student reports after admissions	32(35.2)	26(28.6)	17(18.7)	3(3.3)	0

Table 17: Performance Correlations

Correlations

	High performance	Learning quality is very high	financially stable	The university it's achieves its goals within the set timelines

High performance	Pearson Correlation	1	.274**	.346**	.404**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.008	.001	.000
	N	91	91	91	83
Learning quality is very high	Pearson Correlation	.274**	1	.553**	.494**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008		.000	.000
	N	91	91	91	83
financially stable	Pearson Correlation	.346**	.553**	1	.640**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.000		.000
	N	91	91	91	83
The university it's achieves its goals within the set timelines	Pearson Correlation	.404**	.494**	.640**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	83	83	83	83

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study results revealed that the implementation of cost leadership strategy to a large extent affect university's performance (R=0.63, P=0.00), F (6, 84) = 9.279, P=0.00). The cost strategy employed by one Private University to the other differs.

The study results revealed a strong positive association between that the Implementation of market focus strategy and university's performance(R=0.61, P=0.00), F (6, 84) = 8.106, P=0.00). Preferably, customizing programs ensures that the programs offered are relevant to the current market needs which in turn maintains the university competitive.

The study found an intermediate relationship between differentiation strategy and private university performance (R=0.55, =0.00), F (8, 82) = 4.451, P=.000). Specific brand desired in the market for instance may cause a private university to be recognized. Further, a well differentiated program is a stop shop for a variety of customized programs.

The study found an intermediate positive relationship between product development strategy and performance (r=.535, p=0.00), F (8, 85) = 6.832, p=0.00). However, once the new programs have been rolled out; there must be advertisement targeting the potential students in order to reach a threshold for classes.

For universities to improve their performance they must ensure that the students and the staff are highly satisfied. Satisfied customers are delighted and they always buys back or keep referring other customers. Therefore, that is in order with the shareholder interests. It is the interest of every shareholder to see the University excels in all parameters of performance and therefore its means that the top management must ensure continuous improvement and value addition in order to reach a satisfactory level of performance.

On the basis of the findings in this study, the following recommendations weare made; that the chartered private universities need to define their own cost strategy as well as employ a strong research culture to attract grants funds. This is due to recognition that different private universities though having similar goals, their parameter of performance measures may differ. Therefore the cost strategy employed by private University may not work in the University y depending on a number of factors.

That the Private universities develops more international partnerships in order to create focus on international students and academic exchange programs that can set a university as a high performer.

That the private university needs to establish a unique specific brand desired in the market and that cannot be easily imitated by the rivals. This for instance may cause a private university to be highly recognized. For instance Strathmore University has stood out as a college of Commerce and accountancy, while Daystar University has stood as a communication and media giant. Kenya Methodist University stands tall as an icon for medicine and theology.

The study recommends the university to develop of more customized relevant programs that meets the industry needs as well as imparting skills for problem solving. Therefore competency based curriculum (CBC) and short- courses. For example, should a student be interested with Android programming which is part of IT full course, it needs to be availed.

Recommendation for further study

This study recommended that a further study to be carried out to seek whether a causal relationship between market focus strategy and cost leadership strategy. It also finds that the concept of research funds grants and their influence on university performance should be studied, to examine how universities are able to leverage research funding as a source of university revenue.

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