Challenges Facing Secondary School Managers in Strategic Planning in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

It is a statutory requirement that public organizations in Kenya, schools included develop strategic plans. This will aid Kenya adjust to the dynamic and competitive world and realize vision 2030. However, it was established that many schools had strategic plans but their operationalization was an issue. The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges faced by secondary school managers in strategic planning in KakamegaCounty, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. Data were collected from a sample of 38 schools. Stratified and purposive sampling techniques were used to select schools and respondents respectively. Total study sample was 190 respondents comprising of principals, teachers and students. Questionnaires were used to collect data. Piloting of the instruments was done to ensure their validity and reliability. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings were presented in a histogram and table. Inadequate funds emerged as the main challenge. It was recommended that apart from government funds, schools device other ways of funding strategic management processes.

Keywords : Strategic Plan, Strategy, Strategy Formulation, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept strategy was first used in the military world and later in the 1920s borrowed in the business realm. In searching for the means to achieve improvement in institutions, governments and educators have looked to the quality techniques developed in business and industry to provide suitable tools. This pushed them into applying strategic planning in educational institutions (Thomson and Stickland, 2005). Strategic planning is the art, science and craft of formulating, implementing and evaluating cross-functional decisions that will enable an organization to achieve its objectives (Kalia, 2008). In schools, it is expected that strategic planning will; improve performance in curriculum and co-curriculum, provide consistency of actions, state future thinking habits, act as a tool for resource mobilization, a reference in monitoring and evaluation, enhance transparency and accountability, and encourage commitment and ownership of changes (Pearce and Robinson, 2007). While justifying the importance of

strategic planning, were (2007), argued out that institutions that embrace strategic planning run while those that don't, walk. Without strategy the organization would be like a ship without a rudder going round in circles. This makes it imperative for schools to embrace strategic planning.

Statement of the Problem

Strategic planning is a process that is expected to successfully go through the three major phases, namely; strategy formulation, implementation, and evaluation and monitoring (Pitts and Lei, 2003). Strategic planning is an emerging trend in secondary schools in Kenya owing to the recommendations by the Ministry of Education that all schools develop, implement, evaluate and monitor their individual strategic plans (Were, 2007). Therefore schools have to abide by the recommendation.

Nevertheless, strategic planning in schools has hardly been analyzed. If the issue of strategic planning is not

treated with the seriousness it deserves, then despite the significant input of resources into the education sector over years, its performance will still remain disappointing. This in the long run will affect the success of the kind of education that is expected to make Kenya a globally competitive and prosperous nation. There is an urgent need to find out challenges facing school managers in managing strategic plans in secondary schools in Kakamega County, Kenya.

The objective

To identify the challenges faced by school managers in strategic planning in secondary schools in KakamegaCounty.

Conceptual Framework

This study was guided by a conceptual framework that represents the interrelationship among variables used. Various factors act in combination to determine either the success or failure of strategic planning which has three stages, namely: formulation, implementation, and evaluation and monitoring. These factors can affect strategic planning at any of the above mentioned stages hindering the completion of strategic management. The independent variable was the school based challenges in strategic management. These challenges independently or interdependently influence the strategic planning process.

The dependent variable is strategic management recommendation which has to successfully pass through, formulation, implementation, and evaluation and monitoring. However, possible external challenges that may affect strategic planning in this study reveal themselves as intervening variables. Examples of such variables are external interest, political will, world inflation, and government policies. School based challenges such as inadequate resources, resistance from stakeholders, expensive consultants, high work load for teachers and inadequate knowledge in strategic management were investigated in this study. They affect the strategic planning process.
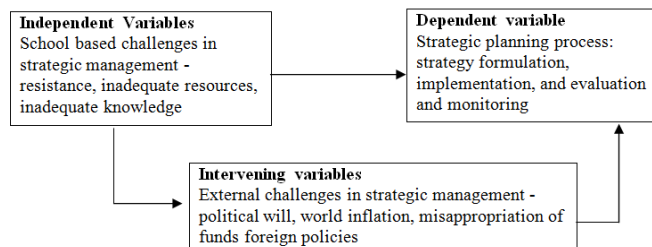

Figure 1 : A Conceptual Model of the interplay of Strategic Management in Secondary Schools

II. METHODS AND MATERIAL

A. Research Methods

The study used descriptive survey design to come up with both qualitative and quantitative data.

According to Kombo and Tromp (2006), the design is efficient in collecting large amounts of information. The study was carried out in the larger Kakamega district which was later divide into Kakamega South, North, East and Central. The region experiences a high rate of unemployment and half of its residents live below poverty line of less than one U.S.A dollar a day, accordingly to the United Nations classification of poverty (Provincial Commissioners Office Report, Kakamega, 2005).

The study population included: 1452 teachers, 32,095 students, and 127 principals from the 127 schools both public and private (Provincial Education Office, 2008). Stratified sampling was used where schools were first grouped into strata of provincial, district, and private. This was also to establish a built in assurance that the sample accurately reflected the numerical composition of various samples of schools in the district (Cozby, 1977). The number of schools to be used in the study was determined by randomly sampling 30 % of the three categories of schools and therefore a total of 38 target secondary schools were selected as follows: five 5 private schools, 13 provincial schools and 20 district schools.

The sample consisted of one principal per school, 2 teachers from the Senior Management Team (SMT), and 2 students from the prefects' body. All respondents were selected purposively because this technique allows the researcher to use cases that have the required

information with respect to the objectives (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999). Hence the study sample comprised 38 school principals, 76 teachers and 76 students. Data were collected through questionnaires administered to school principals, teachers and students. To test the reliability of the research tools, test re-test method was used to calculate the correlation coefficient at 0.05. Data were analyzed quantitatively through the frequencies, means and percentages. The information was presented in the form of a histogram and a table.

B. Findings

Stages in Strategic Planning

Before identifying the challenges faced by school managers in strategic management in secondary schools in Kakamega District, the researcher sought to find out the stages at which various schools were in the strategic management process. This process has three main phases, namely; strategy formulation, implementation and evaluation. Competence with abilities, skills and techniques in strategic management by school principals and other stakeholders will facilitate successful movement of the strategic plan from one stage to another. The results were presented in Figure 2 below.
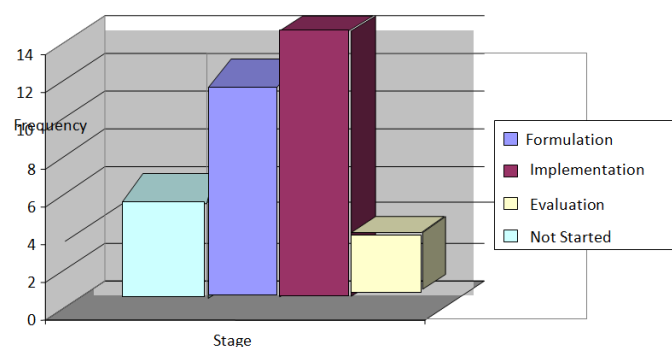

Figure 2 : Stages in Strategic Management
Source: Primary Data

Out of the 33 principals in the sample, 14 (42.4%) who are the majority stated that their schools were at the implementation stage, while only 3 (9.1%) of the schools are at evaluation level. The interpretation is that majority of the schools are at the implementation level. This indicates that they have formulated strategic plans and have gone ahead to implement them. The schools at the evaluation stage 3 (9.1), have formulated and

implemented their school strategic plans and are at their final stage of strategic planning.

The study revealed that there are some schools that do not have the strategic plans documents. These findings agree with were (2007), who asserted that many schools do not have strategic plans. He attributed this to lack of knowledge in strategic planning. This is controversial because the observation carried out in this district showed that all schools that were sampled had a public display of school motto, values, mission and vision displayed at the school gates and at the notice boards which is expected to reflect the presence of strategic plan documents in schools. It is not clear how these schools came up their school motto, values, mission and vision without formulating the strategic plan document. It is possible that such displays were meant to give a false impression of the presence of strategic plans in such schools and that their motto, values, mission and vision are a true reflection of what goes on in such schools. The Ministry of Education has a responsibility of making a follow up to find out if the recommendations they pass are implemented or not.

The schools that were at formulation stage were all district schools. Some of these schools had the document drafted and kept it among other important school documents. These findings attests to Were (2007), who asserted that a strategic plan is of no use if it lays gathering dust on the shelves , as is the case with very many blueprints that have been prepared and released over time. Sagimo (2002), terms such a document as wish full thinking if it cannot be turned into practical activity. In 2005, the Ministry of Education gave directives that schools adopt strategic planning yet not all schools had made initiative to impress the recommendation. The drafting of the document is not enough as it will not bring any change to the school unless it is implemented. Such a school would have wasted time and human resource in coming up with unworkable document. However, most secondary schools that are at the formulation stage have five- year strategic plans with the objectives that need to be achieved within five years. It is imperative that these schools live their plans lest they are rendered outdated.

Implementation stage which is a crucial stage in strategic planning process requires detailed management

attention. In schools this stage requires skills and resources in the form of people, financial, physical and technical. It is possible that most schools are at this level because of some challenges that face school managers. This scenario can be attributed to internal and external factors as outlined in conceptual frame of this study. Such factors as understaffing of teachers, lack of enough funds, resistance from stakeholders, transfer of teachers and school principals, political will, sponsors interests among others, can delay the implementation stage. The same views were shared with Kipng'etich (2007), who in his maiden speech when launching a school's strategic plan pointed out that the major challenge in any organization is the limitation of resources, a problem that is faced everywhere. It was revealed that most schools at this level were provincial and district schools. Evaluation stage comes after implementing a strategic plan for a specified period of time. There are few schools that are at evaluation level and all of them are provincial schools. This implies that the three schools that are at this stage started strategic planning early enough. It is important that school adopt government policies and works within a specified time to avoid delay.

Challenges encountered during Strategic planning

School principals, teachers and students were asked to state the challenges that are encountered by school managers in strategic management for their schools. The challenges are as presented in table 1.

Table 1 : Challenges encountered in Strategic Management

Challenges	Principals		Teachers		Students	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Inadequate funds	9	27.2	18	27.3	37	56.1
Inadequate number of teachers	3	9.1	8	12.1	10	15.2
Inadequate knowledge	8	24.3	16	24.2	19	28.7
Expensive consultants	4	12.1	5	7.6	-	-
High work load	2	6.1	12	18.2	-	-
Resistance from stakeholders	7	21.2	7	10.6	-	-
Total	33	100	66	100	66	100

From the findings presented in table 1 above, inadequate funding was cited as the main challenge that constrains strategic planning in secondary schools by 27.2% principals, 27.3% teachers and 56.1% of the students.

Lack of enough teachers came second having been cited by 9.1% principals, 12.1% of teachers and 15.2% of the students. However, it was also noted that inadequate knowledge in strategic planning had a large share of contribution to the factors hindering strategic planning in schools whereby 24.3% of the principals, 24.2% of the teachers and 28.7% of the students agreed to it. The others factors that affected strategic planning in schools were expensive consultants cited by 12.1% of the principals and 7.6% of the teachers, high workload for teachers was identified by 6.1% of the principal and 18.2% of the teachers while resistance to change by many stakeholders was cited by 21.2% of the school principals and 10.6% of the teachers.

Inadequate Funds

Implementation of strategic plans in schools largely depends on the availability of funds. Most activities in public schools are funded by the government and the parents. These findings contrast the speech given by the then Minister of Education, Prof. George Saitoti who reported that that the Ministry of Education sends all the money directly to school management committees and the Board of Governors to fund school level activities (Kamotho, 2007). These funds are meant to support the implementation of school programmes especially the tuition activities.

There are no funds designated to fund some projects within the schools' strategic plans and many management boards may be unable to secure funds to that effect. If schools have to develop strategic plans which are authentic they must engage stakeholders and mobilize them in the strategic planning process. The possible explanation to this kind of scenario could be that the Ministry of Education disburses funds to schools in several phases some of which delay to reach schools at the appropriate time, hence interfering with school activities and programs. The funds could also not be enough to meet all the budgeted projects in schools and therefore schools have to devise other methods of funding strategic plans.

Both private and public schools rely on parents as a source of funding school programmes. Okurut (2001) argues that schools get substantial amounts of funds from parents. However, not all parents in Kenya are able

to pay school levies with ease owing to poverty and other factors such as diseases. Western Kenya experiences a high rate of unemployment and half of its residents live below poverty line of less than one USA dollar a day, according to the United Nations classification of poverty (Provincial Commissioners Report, Kakamega, 2005). Some parents in this region are poor and therefore they find difficulties in paying school fees in good time.

However, some may be stubborn especially after their children have registered for their KCSE because they are sure that even if their children stay away from school, they will definitely sit for their secondary exams. The main concern of such parents is to see their children complete their secondary education other than pass their KCSE exams. Lack of funds is a critical challenge that needs to be addressed because for strategic planning to succeed in schools, there is need for enough funds (Njino, 2008).

Inadequate Number of Teachers

Teachers form the fundamental resource in every educational institution. They facilitate the teaching and learning processes, and also perform administrative tasks. Teachers have huge professional and societal expectations and their role in strategic management in schools therefore cannot be underestimated. Without adequate teachers in schools, the few present will always be overworked. To fill the gaps of staffing in schools, the Teachers Service Commission has recommended the work load for teachers including school principals to be increased and principals in particular to teach at least 18 lessons per week (Siringi Daily Nation Jan. 25, 2010).
The factors contributing to teacher shortage started in the 1990s. According to Chiuri and Kiumi, (2005), the government froze teacher employment due to debt crisis, a factor that has led to candidates' dismal performance in national examinations. Other factors contributing to teacher shortage are; dismissal from duty, retirement or resignation, access to well-paying jobs, and death without replacement.
The challenge of teacher shortage has also been identified by the Ministry of Education as the first and immediate challenge facing the education sector in transforming Kenya to vision 2030 (GOK, 2007). It is therefore imperative that the issue of teacher shortage be

addressed for effective implementation of schools' strategic plans. Lack of regular teachers has pushed some schools to employ teachers on Board of Governors terms. This comes at a time when most schools are already faced by a problem of inadequate funds. This challenge was cited by both public and private schools. However in the same region, there were some teachers who did not respond to this item and the possible explanation would be that they are ignorant of the concept of strategic planning process in their schools.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Expensive Consultants

Some school principals who were unable to develop their school strategic plans hired consultants. This was attributed to lack of enough knowledge in strategic planning by many school stakeholders. In Kakamega district, school principals were inducted on strategic planning for three days and those who missed the training were to be inducted by those who attended. It is possible that some despite the fact that they missed the induction course, they have not bothered to access information on strategic planning and neither have they enrolled in any courses that offer strategic planning.

These findings should be an eye opener to the Ministry of Education and the training agencies in identifying the training needs for teachers and schools managers. Though the Ministry of Education conducts in-service training for teachers annually to improve delivery of quality education and management operations in schools (GOK, 2003), the subject of strategic planning has not been adequately addressed. Inadequate knowledge in strategic planning explains why majority of school managers hired consultants to develop their school strategic plans irrespective of the amount of money demanded by the consultants. Use of consultants to draw strategic plans could only be tenable by established schools while small schools would be drained off the meager financial resources they would have used for other projects. It was out of this that many small schools do not have strategic plans to date.

However, it is important that school stakeholders develop their own strategic plans to create ownership of the strategic plans and to enable them use them with

ease at the strategy implementation stage. Ideally in strategic planning; according to Were, (2007), schools should use committees made up of school stakeholders so as to save on the cost of hiring consultants since paying consultants goes beyond the means of most public schools.

High Workload for Teachers

It was also found out that many schools do not have strategic plans because teachers claimed to be too busy because of being bogged down by heavy work load. The issue of workload is supported by the argument by Marchington and Wilkinson (2003), who report that when there is too much work in an organization, managers and supervisors are asked to take up extra duties. Such duties for teachers in this region could be teaching extra hours, giving exams and assignments and marking, training and accompanying students in co-curriculum activities, attending meetings in schools, among other duties. All these additional duties are aimed at achieving the schools' missions and visions.

These opinions by school principals and teachers can also be attributed to the introduction of the Day Free Secondary Education, which aimed at enhancing access, equity, quality and relevance in secondary schools (GOK, 2008). This policy attracted many students into secondary schools because school fees were reduced. A large students' body can affect the strategic planning process and other managerial issues in schools in that teachers may not find time to attend to other added responsibilities. Teachers under such strenuous working circumstances get constrained and they may easily suffer burnout or ignore some of added responsibilities such as participating in committees to develop strategic plans (Chiuri and Kiumi, 2005; Ayot and Briggs, 1992).

Resistance from some Stakeholders

Resistance to change is a common phenomenon in all organizations. Change can be planned for, unplanned for or gradual. Change alters traditions, challenges deeply held ideas, creates fear of the unknown and it can be harmful or inconvenient. Change requires learning new ideas and accommodating them rather taxing the organizational personnel. Despite the general behavior to resist change, it can bring new advantages, relief where there was suffering and acceptance depends on perceived benefits. The behavior to resist change attest to the arguments by (Ivancevich et al., 1997; Nzuve, 1999; Sagimo, 2002; Were, 2007), that stakeholders resist changes due to; lack of finances to effect the transformation, fear of unknown, fear that change will interfere with their lifestyles, fear of inadequate pay and failures due to need for new skills, dislike of surprise, and also dislike of imposed change or lack of being involved.

The possible explanation to the school stakeholders' resistance to accommodate strategic planning in this region could be the unwillingness to pay additional fees by some stakeholders since strategic management requires finances. Change may not have been embraced by some stakeholders because it interferes with their lifestyles and work since some, like teachers would spend most of their time in school working, learning new ideas and implementing them. Other stakeholders also resisted embracing strategic management because most of them were not involved in strategic planning process especially in the schools where consultants were used to develop the strategic plans.

Strategic plans developed by consultants are preferred by the users because the experts have good understanding of the planning process and they produce timely and professional looking plan. However, its limitations are that it limits the board and staff participation and may lead to limited sense of ownership of the plan details by the main stakeholders and limited Board of Governors leadership. Lack of respect and trust in persons promoting the change process and the fear for accountability among teachers could also have led to resistance to strategic management in schools.

Inadequate Knowledge in Strategic Planning

Failure to embrace strategic planning may also have been attributed to inadequate knowledge in strategic planning. The explanation to this finding could be that some school principals are not well versed with the concept of strategic planning and management. Although the Ministry of Education asked each school to develop a strategic plan, there was lack of knowledge in strategic management. Were, (2007) argues that strategic planning is a new concept in school management and an

emerging trend in Kenya today and therefore principals are finding it hard to develop strategic plans because the concept requires great technical knowhow.

In Kakamega district, the induction course on strategic planning and management took only 3 days. Some principals attended while others did not. Those who attended were instructed to induct those who were absent. This could possibly explain why many principals used technocrats to develop strategic plans. Those who did not hire consultants do not have strategic plans for their schools to date despite the government's requirement that all schools should have strategic plans. However, the same region has some school principals who grasped the concept and came up with strategic plans for their schools. Thus, the three days' workshop had some impact on strategic planning to some of the participants. This discovery agrees with Chiuri and Kiumi, (2005), who asserted that through relevant training the government can improve the competence of educational planners and mangers to enable them carry out their tasks effectively.

IV.   CONCLUSION

From the findings of the study, it was concluded that most schools were at the implementation stage in strategic management while a hand full of them were at evaluation. There were yet others that did not have strategic plan documents. The main challenge to strategic planning in schools was shortage of financial resources. Resistance to change especially among teachers emerged as another challenge to strategic planning. This was tied to lack of knowledge of strategic planning and the complaint that some teachers are usually over worked due to the many lessons they handle weekly. It was also concluded that lack of enough teachers and hiring consultants who turned out to be expensive made many school principals not to embrace strategic planning.

V.   RECOMMENDATIONS

From the above conclusions it was recommended that:

1) Considering the importance of resources in strategic planning and implementation project the Ministry of education and school managers should set aside some funds to facilitate the strategic planning process. Secondary schools should devise other means of raising additional funds in support of strategic planning.

2) Owing to resistance occasioned by teacher work load, it was recommended that the Ministry of Education revises its stand on teacher employment and provide enough teachers in schools especially the affected ones.

3) There should be capacity building of school stakeholders through training on strategic management. This would help them participate effectively in the strategic planning and implementation processes.

4) The Ministry of Education should make a follow up on the recommendation of strategic planning and ensure individual schools have strategic plan document.

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