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Investigating Challenges and Interventions in the Implementation of Libraries Strategic Plans in Selected Public University Libraries in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Strategic plan provides different avenues for libraries to make options that give emphasis to their relevance in a competitive environment and to create sustainable benefits. However, university libraries that have embraced strategic plans are usually faced with the challenges of implementing the formulated strategies. The purpose of the study was to establish the challenges experienced in the implementation of strategic plans in selected Kenyan public university libraries with a view to propose interventions that can be used to improve the implementation the plans in these libraries. The objectives of the study were to identify the challenges affecting implementation of strategic plans in Kenyan public university libraries, propose appropriate interventions to improve implementation of strategic plans in Kenyan public university libraries. The study adopted triangulation type of mixed methods research approach employing descriptive survey within a pragmatic philosophical paradigm. Quantitative data was collected by use of questionnaires while qualitative data was by use of interview schedule. The population of study was 277 respondents from purposively selected five public universities. Yamane's formula was used to get a sample of 134 respondents. Stratified sampling was used to sample library staff while purposive sampling was used to select Deputy Vice Chancellors, and Finance Officers. Quantitative data was analysed statistically and findings presented in tables, charts and graphs while qualitative data was grouped into themes and analysed using content analysis. The findings reveal that change of priorities, Leadership turnover, inadequate finances, lack of staff commitment strongly impacted on the implementation of strategic plans. The study recommends that management to consider allocating adequate budget and also recruitment of sufficient and qualified staff, stakeholder involvement, conducting regular training of staff as sensitization of staff, regular monitoring and evaluation among others.

Keywords: Strategic Plan, Strategy Implementation, Challenges, Public University Libraries; Strategic Planning, Kenya

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Universities in Kenya are operating in an unstable environment that has been occasioned by continuous changes that have been brought by, political, social and economic variations in internal and external working surroundings. These changes necessitate the transformed emphasis on the strategy improvement, implementation and answerability at various levels in order to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the plans (Shah, 2012). University libraries are set up and supported by the parent universities to support learning, teaching as well as research activities of the institution by assisting university community in ways of changing information into knowledge. University libraries are therefore required to adapt to changing circumstances in service delivery by adopting different approaches to the management of resources and services they provide to their users which demands for development and implementation of strategic plans. Strategic planning in university libraries have been used adversely in changing resources and services thus enhancing dissemination of knowledge (Adeyemi et al., 2014).

Strategic plan is a document that is used for communicating organizations' goals and objectives, actions that are required for achieving these goals together with important elements that were developed during the planning process. According to Aman, (2010) strategic plan helps library to be proactive instead of reactive by a process of scanning the environment that alerts the library of the outside forces that might affect the library on time in order to make right decisions about their impact on the organization thus preventing missed opportunities and minimizing exposure to threats. Aman, (2010) observes that strategic plan allows the library to prioritize its inventiveness based on provided external and internal information that may help in making informed decisions and also ensure better effective utilization of library services and resources. Sanches, (2018) observed that strategic plan focuses on future vision and are regularly linked to expansion. It seeks to identify priorities that are significant when resources are scarce thus organizations are encouraged to do more with few resources. The strategic plan recognizes the reason why an institution takes an explicit direction such as pressure from changes in technology, clientele and

shareholders, declining resources, work practices and prevailing failure to achieve the organization's mission (Vasilescu, 2013), (Enweani, 2018). The organization's ability to turn its documented plans into actions may be restrained by the organization characteristics of which unique organizational characteristics can be a source of contextual obstacles to an organizations effort to improve performance and also the challenges of implementing the formulated strategies (Pucko & Cater 2013).

1.1 Problem Statement

Strategic plan provides different avenues for libraries to make options that give emphasis to their relevance in a competitive environment and to create sustainable benefits. university libraries are at the cross road of being overwhelmed with problems of declining resources, inadequate suitable infrastructure, inadequate skilled staff and the advancement of new information technologies to provide required services thus the use of strategic planning in university libraries has become prevalent because many have found themselves in difficult situations in which application of old method in the current environment are not effective anymore to assure a secure future. However, many university libraries that have developed strategic plans are faced with the challenges of implementing the formulated strategies. Literature reviewed also reveal scarcity of studies on strategic planning in public university libraries especially in developing countries like kenya (Omuse et al., 2018).

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to establish the challenges experienced in the implementation of strategic plans in selected Kenyan public university libraries with a view to proposing interventions that can be used to improve the implementation of the plans in these libraries.

1.3 The Study was guided by the following Objectives

The objective of the study was to identify the challenges affecting implementation of strategic plans in Kenyan public university libraries, to propose appropriate interventions to improve implementation of strategic plans in Kenyan public university libraries.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Challenges Experienced in the Implementation of Strategic Plans

Strategic plans frequently fail because of emphasis on tools and analysis rather than synthesis and drawing strategic insights that would take library to the next level. Changes in the library leadership regularly resorts to each of them changing the strategic directions of the institution (Shah, 2012). Johnson (2002) in his survey established the five top reasons why strategic plans fail includes ownership of the document, communication, motivation of the staff, passive management and leadership. Kevogo & Waiganjo, (2015) indicates that poor coordination and sharing of responsibilities among staff, lack of commitment to the strategy, lack of awareness or misunderstanding of the strategy, unaligned organizational systems, inadequate resources and capabilities, competing activities, and uncontrollable environmental factors are some of the challenges to implementation of a strategic plan.

Chiware, (2014) observed that university libraries in Africa are experiencing challenges owing to the new ways of generating, storage, dissemination and use of information. He further notes that libraries are competing with other units in the universities for resources allocation.

The involvement of libraries in strategic planning has not been an entrenched activity because libraries have not valued their significance and thought they can continue to be acknowledged without any assessments. Although planning continues to be an unclear and avoided activity for libraries, the trend is changing as a result of challenges faced with declining budgets hence, they are now getting involved in strategic planning since they no longer enjoy the secure space which they were used in the past. Because of that, it becomes vital that these libraries actively demonstrate their contribution to institutional achievement of its goals (Mapulanga, 2013). Kabeyi, (2019) identifies various challenges experienced in the use of strategic plans as follows:

- a) When people who formulate the strategy are not involved in its implementation and also assigning tasks to staff who were not involved in the formulation.
- b) The process is generally complicated as it involves several steps that are associated to each other and necessitate to be continuously adjusted from time to time.
- c) The complexity and heavy commitment to strategic goals result to poor implementation.
- d) Strategic planning requires knowledge, experience and training for managers as well as conceptual skills and abilities to develop strategic plans. However, some institutions lack such managers with knowledge and skills to develop these strategic plans which impacts on the desired results not achieved thus huge financial losses for the institutions. According to Šuklev & Debarliev, (2012) Strategic planning is termed as expensive and requires substantial resources and investment since success is not always guaranteed.

University libraries have been trapped in a chain of changes that are affecting various sectors in the globe as a result of information and communication technologies. They consist of combination of digital and traditional library resources and this evolution of digital age has provoked a lot of changes in the library and information services (Enweani, 2018). Technology has transformed services that were traditionally offered by libraries with the introduction of online reading lists that are being widely adopted by university libraries as effective ways of creating, personalizing, updating and integrating reading lists into the online learning and teaching material and helping students to connect directly and seamlessly with the reading resources for their courses. The change in information behavior of the users with a shift in user demographics of academic libraries and the way patrons engage with the physical space, online open access information spaces, and also how to deal with intelligent Internet sharing tools and online social communication as well as networking technologies (Tait et al., 2016). Budget allocation to university libraries has also become a challenge that most library managers face on a regular basis in the quest for acquiring library resources. Complexities of fast changing technological environment with more expensive digital collections and strict financial management as universities cut back on their operating costs of which the

allocation covers all library materials required by the university which include books, journals and databases (Banks, 2014).

Rifaudeen, (2015) asserts that librarians engage in management of large and complicated digital information which has brought enormous challenges in managing the information. This calls for library managers to tackle these challenges through different strategies to ensure effective management of libraries for tomorrow and transformation for sustainable future. With new changing trends, there is need for libraries to put in place pragmatic and proactive measures to ensure they remain relevant in the educational discourse. Library managers in the university settings must brace up with existing challenges that require effective management of both human and infrastructural resources.

2.2 Inadequate Staff Skills and Competencies

For the libraries to manage resources and services well, libraries need experienced, professionally trained administrators who are equipped with modern techniques to support educational management for the achievement of the intended goal and objectives (Olaleye (2014). Peretomode (2012) observed that management of resources involves a set of activities which include planning, organizing and leadership that are essential for administrator for proper management and use of the available human and material resources in an appropriate way to achieve the desired goal . (Ojo, 2009) recommends that personnel should have the ability and the requisite skills to intelligently manage the available resources for successful accomplishment of the goals and objectives of the library.

Information management skills play an important role in managing libraries for a sustainable future which necessitates librarians to acquire and enhance the knowledge base, professional and technical skills to manage resources and services efficiently. Thus, for effective implementation of the strategic plan, new and higher skills as well as competencies are necessary. In a situation where staff do not have the required skills and competencies, there is always a disparity between the demands for a strategic plan and what they can offer. Chemwei et al., (2014) in their study on factors that impede the implementation of strategic planning in secondary school in Baringo, Kenya established that inadequate human resource was the major constraint to the effective strategy implementation. Kiprop and Kanyiri (2012) assert that poor management and lack of relevant skills, inadequate resources, ignorance of existing policies, lack of leadership qualities and commitment and the high headship turnover are the major challenges in the implementation of strategic planning. Shah, (2012) opined that Poor planning processes and lack of consultation among staff results to formulation of ineffective and poor strategies that translate into lack of ownership poor decision making. The change of users' information behaviour is also at the center of these changes where there has been changes in the way users engage with the physical space, online social communication, open access information spaces, how to deal with internet sharing tools and networking technologies (Tait et al., 2016). This is coupled by the existence of the millennia's where the main consumers of information are in university libraries. This change requires continued review of the libraries management strategies in order to meet changing user needs.

2.3 Inadequate Financial Resources

Strategic plans require financial support from the beginning of its development up to implementation, when libraries are not allocated adequate amount of financial and material resources required to come up with strategic plans, its implementation becomes difficult. Strategic plan determines the organizational direction and priorities and when priorities are not given adequate consideration, they may not attract the required resources for implementation. Shah, (2012) felt that financial position and resources of the institution are significant in the implementation of its strategic plan. Report from United Nations, (2013) Conference on Trade and Development indicated that resource allocation and priority setting are key elements to the effectiveness of an organization. Interventions to maximize specific objectives of an institution are constrained by budgetary issues This is supported by Kamau, (2012) in his study on challenges facing public secondary school managers in the implementation of strategic plan in Kiambu County found out that inadequate finances affect the implementation of strategic plans in a very serious way. Inyanga (2013) from her study on challenges of formulating and implementing school strategic plan in public secondary schools in Kakamega county established that lack of funding and knowledge on formulation and implementation process were the key obstacles of the strategic plans. Adeyemi et al., (2014) observed that reduced funding and the increasing cost of library and information resources and services calls for coherent utilization of available resources.

2.4 Interventions to Improve Implementation of Strategic Plans in Public University Libraries

In order for institutions to improve on strategic plans, they need to have adequate budgeting, carry out market research, recruitment of qualified personnel and motivation, and have an all-inclusive approach to have everybody on board to participate and contribute in formulating and implementing the strategy for it to be efficient and effective (Kabeyi, 2019). Aligning strategies with resources available and mobilizing for more is important considering the continuing decline in funding of universities that eventually trickles down to libraries. Conducting internal reviews, restructuring, and regular changes that may affect planning could be effectively managed to address risks and vulnerability in areas that need improvement.

Sharing the vision of the library by university librarians with other staff at different levels contributes to its effective implementation. This statement is supported by Victoria (2010), whose view is that key stakeholders' engagement from the start of the strategic planning process results in ownership and the shared vision. This provides an understanding and sense of purpose about how the library achieves its intended goals. According to Siambi (2021), developing and implementing a strategic plan is entirely dependent on several factors such as access to resources, communication skills, different approaches, and diverse duties performed by different stakeholders. Aman, (2010) opined that a good plan that is not implemented, regularly reviewed and evaluated serves no value to the institution since it does not help in making decisions on the changes that are required, incorporating the changes and developing action plans. The strategic plans provide the framework for the action plans. Putting objectives in a priority order when implementing plans, determining the mission, purpose, and long-term goals of the organization is necessary

when implementing the plan. Plans must be monitored and evaluated to measure the performance of the institution every year. He gives reasons why strategic plans fail, which include: setting ambitious goals; poor or unrealistic assumptions made; inadequate resources; inadequate staff; and also change in management of an organization. The library needs to identify and evaluate its strengths and weaknesses and carry out an inquiry to establish if the strategies have produced practical results in achieving the goals and objectives. Kevogo & Waiganjo, (2015) observed that commitment to strategic direction is a requirement for strategy implementation, and therefore, top managers must put their commitments towards the achievement and also should not assume that staff at lower levels have the same opinions with regard to the strategic plan and its implementation, which is the fundamental justification and its urgency.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted triangulation type of mixed methods research approach employing descriptive survey design within a pragmatic philosophical paradigm. Quantitative data was collected by use of questionnaires while qualitative data was collected by use of interview schedule. The population of study consisted of 277 respondents drawn from purposively selected five public universities. Yamane's formula was used to get a sample of 134 respondents from library staff while purposive sampling was used to select Deputy Vice Chancellors, and

Finance Officers. Quantitative data was analysed statistically and findings were presented in tables, charts and graphs while qualitative data was grouped into themes and analysed using content analysis.

4. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Challenges Experienced in the use of Strategic Plans

Through a Likert Scale Where, 1 = Very Challenging, 2 = Challenging, 3 = Less Challenging, 4 = Not Challenging at All, 5 = don't know. The study sought to identify the challenges that impacted the implementation of strategic plans in participating university libraries. Overall, the findings reveal that many of the identified challenges are not perceived to be majorly impacting on implementing strategic plans. This is because, cumulatively, only change of priorities scored above 50% against all the indicators; and as a challenging issue, with 61 (51.3%), closely followed by leadership turnover with (51) 43%. Lack of finances had the highest score of 41(34.5%) as a Very Challenging factor, while it scored 49 (41.2%) as a Challenging issue. Lack of staff commitment received the highest score of 43 (36.1%) for a less challenging factor, as well as the highest score of (23) 19.3% for not challenging at all. The following Table 18 gives a summary of the findings.

Table 1: Challenges experienced in the use of strategic plans

Statement	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std. Dev
Lack of effective communication	22(18.5%)	35(29.4%)	41(34.5%)	18(15.1%)	1(0.8%)	2.45	1.04
Poor Leadership	16(13.4%)	40(33.6%)	31(26.1%)	21(17.6%)	4(3.4%)	2.46	1.19
Lack of Finances	41(34.5%)	49(41.2%)	15(12.6%)	8(6.7%)	2(1.7%)	1.90	1.01
Inadequate skills and training	8(6.7%)	43(36.1%)	41(34.5%)	17(14.3%)	4(3.4%)	2.56	1.08
Lack of commitment among staff	14(11.8%)	30(25.2%)	43(36.1%)	23(19.3%)	3(2.5%)	2.61	1.15
Inadequate stakeholder participation	15(12.6%)	43(36.1%)	35(29.4%)	13(10.9%)	3(2.5%)	2.29	1.16
Change of priorities	18(15.1%)	61(51.3%)	16(13.4%)	14(11.8%)	5(4.2%)	2.26	1.11
Leadership turnover	18(15.1%)	51(42.9%)	28(23.5%)	14(11.8%)	3(2.5%)	2.31	1.07

The findings show that lack of commitment among staff, with a mean of 2.61, inadequate skills and training, with a score of 2.56, and poor leadership, with a score of 2.46, take the first three positions, respectively. It is also interesting to note that although respondents gave feedback in other sections of the study implying their libraries were inadequately funded, this variable takes the last position in relation to its being perceived as a challenge in the use of a strategic plan, with the lowest mean score of only 1.90. The findings point to a scenario where the identified variables seem to be very strong in impacting on the development and implementation of the strategic plans as their mean scores range from 2.61 to 1.9.

3.1 Appropriate interventions to improve Implementation of strategic plans

In an open question, respondents were asked to suggest measures they deemed useful to improve the implementation of strategic plans in university libraries. The major feedback ranged from adequate funding, stakeholder involvement, sensitization and continuous staff training, completing new

library buildings and frequent review of strategic plans, among others. The study findings further suggested the need to set realistic and achievable goals and objectives and conducting regular monitoring and evaluation to assess the level of implementation. The issue of general non-involvement of some library staff in developing the strategic plan recurred again thus respondents suggested the inclusion of lower cadre level staff in the development of the strategic plan. Support from management was also prominent in the findings as well as good working relationship between departmental management and other staff.

The issue of library staff being left out at key decision-making levels was also mentioned and suggestion of representation of library featured where university instruments such as Chatter and also adherence to CUE Standards should provide for inclusion of the University Librarians in the university management board and other university committees. Further to allow them to participate in the major university strategic planning process and cascade it down to the departments.

Respondents also felt that benchmarking among libraries should be continually done so as to improve their departments in their various universities as well as increasing opportunities for resources mobilization and linkages.

Respondents recommended communication of strategic plan to staff after development thus one observed,

“Communicate to staff and discuss long-term solutions to identified issues; work as a team towards implementing and gradually communicate achievements and successes.”

Other suggestions brought forward were: the need to align priorities to the strategic plan; Enhance channels of communication; the need to build a culture of ownership and studying the overall needs of the user. Other suggestions were the need for libraries to carry out SWOT analysis; advocating for technological advancements; technological adoption of management services; proposer communication; and facilitation during development to the implementation phase.

Some of the Deputy Vice Chancellors from the participating libraries agreed with suggestions from other respondents and had the following to say with regard to interventions for their university libraries to improve use of strategic plans where one senior staff had the view that the best would be,

“Sensitization of the staff; target setting; continuous training; performance evaluation; encourage teamwork; reward assumption; mentorship; and having a succession plan”

For another senior staff, their university needed the following interventions,

“Develop research skills; follow CUE guidelines; provide funding; initiate IGUs; and employ appropriate staff. We also need to engage on professional development for the library staff. Joining consortiums to cut cost would also be appropriate as it will cut out isolationism. Additionally, we need a clear articulation of roles; and automation of the library”

The qualitative findings further revealed that adequate allocation of funds was to ensure more capitations to the university during budgetary allocations; Regular promotions; development of library strategic plans; and Propose to the government the proposal for building the library for funding would go along with improving the use of strategic plans in public university libraries.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Challenges Experienced in the implementation of Strategic Plans

The study sought to establish the challenges that impacted on implementation of strategic plans in participating university libraries. Overall, the findings reveal that many of the identified challenges were perceived not to be majorly impacting on implementing strategic plans since only change of priorities scored above 50% against all the indicators; followed by

challenging issue with (61), 51.3%, Leadership turnover with (51), 43%. Lack of finances had the highest score of (41) 34.5% as the most challenging factor with (49) 41.2. Lack of staff commitment scored (43) 36.1% being the highest score for the least challenging factor; and the highest score at (23) 19.3% as not challenging at all. None of the identified variables strongly impacted on development and implementation of the strategic plans as none of them had a strong score with a mean nearing 5. Lack of commitment among staff with a mean of 2.61, inadequate skills and training with a score of 2.56 and poor leadership scoring 2.46 took the first three positions respectively. Although respondents gave feedback in other sections of the study implying that their libraries were inadequately funded, this variable was least perceived as a challenge in use of a strategic plan with the lowest mean score of only 1.90.

All respondents from the participating libraries agreed that inadequate funding was an obstacle to the effective implementation of their strategic plans. Findings also revealed that there was lack of knowledge among the staff to undertake the strategic plan implementation. Another challenge reported in the study was lack of exposure by staff on resource mobilization that could bridge the gap created by low funding. Institutional culture remained to influence the way libraries address their issues. Further, the finding reveal that personal attitude of staff towards other staff affect the good working relationship. shortage of resources such as physical space due to some of the libraries being small affect service delivery. Lack of motivation among staff occasioned by delayed staff promotions was another impediment.

Findings shows that majority of the libraries lacked their own strategic plan leading to library strategic objectives being included in the university strategic plan, which was found not being exhaustive to the mandates of the library. The findings also indicated that majority of the libraries under study were struggling with lack of adequate and trained staff leading to non-professionals working in the university library. Respondents reported that their libraries had poor goals set and felt that this could result to lack of alignment with the university vision and mission and inability to track progress. From the findings it was established that staff were not connected to the strategic plans/strategies already developed. Respondents also indicated that some of the participating libraries lacked proper library policies as guiding tools to achieve the objectives of the university library. Another finding from the study was non-involvement of all stakeholders in the strategic planning process and poor attendance of the meetings when they are organized.

The above findings are in line with a study by Muthoka (2019) who emphasized that resource allocation is a challenge to strategy implementation if they are not allocated according to priorities established by annual objectives. The author further suggested that between strategy and structure, allocation of resources, organizational culture, leadership, rewards system and the nature of strategy itself as reasons for failure in strategy implementation. Organizations have to strike a balance between all these factors to ensure that developed strategies are implemented. Dandira, (2011) reports that the major challenge in strategic planning is the implementation of such strategic plans. Siambi, (2021) in his study asserts that most

implementers of strategic plans faced challenges and therefore called for adequate preparation in implementing an adequately following up the implementation process. Abuya, (2011) in his study identified challenges that hamper implementation of strategies which include key formulators not playing an active role in implementation, changes in responsibilities of key employees not being clearly defined, and problems requiring top management not being communicated early enough.

5.2 Appropriate Interventions to Improve implementation of Strategic Plans

The study sought suggestions from respondents on the measures they deemed to be useful in improving the use of strategic plans in public university libraries. The major feedback from the findings proposed that adequate funding from the government need to be increased to public universities for quality delivery of curriculum, stakeholder involvement at the point of strategy formulation is essential because it promotes ownership of the strategy plan during implementation., conducting regular training of staff to equip them with knowledge and skills in development and implementation of a strategic plan as well as sensitization on the necessity of strategic planning. Respondents proposed the need to completion of the library buildings under construction and building new ones to accommodate new services and adequate space thus creating good atmosphere for the users; conducting regular monitoring and evaluation should be carried out using appropriate tools to assess the level of implementation of the strategic plans by carrying out mid-term and long-term reviews. Further, the most mentioned suggestions needed to improve strategic planning in public universities were adequate budget allocation; recruitment of more qualified staff to support development and implementation of the strategic plans. Respondents also observed that a departmental strategic plan should be developed with clear and realist goals and short-term and long-term objectives. Respondents also suggested that junior staff need to be involved in formulation of the strategic plan. Support from management in the implementation of the strategic plans was also mentioned. Representation of library staff by university librarians in university strategic planning process and cascade it down to the department strategic planning was also suggested. The possibility of the library staff not working well amongst themselves also came up and findings indicated that good working relationship should be cultivated between departmental management and other staff. The study proposes that divisions under whose libraries fall need to ensure their libraries develop and implement strategic plans. This will help in consolidating the strategic issues that need to be addressed as they strive to offer quality services to the university community. The study also proposes that libraries need to set strategic activities in the order of priorities within a given timeframe so that ones that are crucial are addressed in the first year of the plan. From the interviews, respondents proposed the need to carry out performance evaluation to ensure achievement of the set goals; further teamwork should be encouraged so that everybody works towards a common goal. rewarding excellent performance need to be practiced in order to motivate staff to strive perform better as well as employing appropriate staff. Another important element in strategic planning is mentorship of the new and young professionals as

well as having a succession plan to ensure continuity when the library head vacates the office.

6. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The success of any strategic plan is dependent on the availability of resources, and other factors in order to actualize the formulated strategy. The study concludes that public university libraries implementing strategic plans are faced with several challenges that are hampering successful implementations for effective service delivery. The study recommends need for development and implementation of strategic plans, regular monitoring and evaluation, adequate resources and good leadership.

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