STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES FOR
REFOCUSING HIGHER EDUCATION AS SOLUTION
BEARING CENTERS IN SOUTH EAST, NIGERIA.

By

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Abstract

The study was designed to unveil the strategic management techniques for
refocusing Higher Education as solution-bearing centre in South-east, Nigeria and
to improve the internal process mechanisms of organizations. In line with the
objectives of the study, two research questions and two hypotheses were
formulated. The population of the study consisted of eight (8) tertiary institutions in
south-east geopolitical zone. A total of five (5) tertiary institutions constituted the

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sample size of the study. The respondents were 60 Heads of Departments and 30 Deans of faculties. The instrument used for the study was Strategic Management Techniques for refocusing Higher Education Questionnaire (SMTRHEQ) and the reliability coefficient was computed at 0.68. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions and t-test statistic was used forest the hypotheses. The findings of the study revealed among others that adequate provision of interconnectivity devices in the offices and modern gadgets accounts for the favourable condition for application of strategic management techniques in Higher Education. Some recommendations were put forward among them are that institutions should adjust towards internationalization to enable them face global competitiveness, and also that centres and faculties of Entrepreneurial/vocational training be accredited in Universities and adequately funded by the government.

**Keywords**: Strategic Management, Techniques, Refocus, Higher Education, South-East, Nigeria.

**Introduction**

The Research and development units which we have in most of our Higher are supposed to be points of call for clients, stakeholders, parents and the public for swift rescue intervention to the myriad of socio-economic, political, technological, scientific, cultural, as well as behavioural problems often encountered by the society. This lays credence to the envisaged cordial relationship between the "Gown" and the "Town" which has been much-talked-about in the tertiary education parlance. The "gown" in essence is the Academic environment which houses the professors, Researchers, Consultants in different fields, Associate professors, Readers, Lecturers of various cadres and development experts and so on. On the other hand, the "town" represents the entire environment outside the University which comprises the educational stakeholders, opinion leaders, parents, higher education subscribers and the general public. There is need for a forward and backward linkage connection between these two systems. The university takes in raw materials from her environment for processing into finished products. The processing system takes the form of teaching, Research and community development and thereafter churns out the supposed self-reliant functional graduates who are integrated back into the society. The unfortunate phenomenon in this circle flow is that the society that receives these graduates who are presumed to be "societal saviours" often vomit them like the Biblical Jonah and the fish as a result of the obvious mismatch and inconsistency between the theories acquired by these graduates from the universities and the actual needed skills and competences in the labour market.

It is the functionality of knowledge in problem-solving that validates its truth and utility. Universities are instruments of sustainable development. They are veritable
centres for knowledge production and generation. At the root of any appreciable advancement in life, is functional knowledge (Odum and Ezekwe, 2015). To Moja (2013), there are two areas in which higher education plays a direct role in development. The first is that higher education produces graduates/labour with skills needed to support the knowledge intensive economy. The second is that it produces knowledge through research and publications.

Strategic management in higher education is an ongoing process that evaluates and controls the institutions and industries, assesses their competitors and sets goals and techniques to meet all existing and potential competitors, and then reassesses each strategy annually and quarterly to determine how it has been implemented to meet changed circumstances and new technologies (Odum, 2014). To Ayodele and Osiki (2011), strategic management planning tries to identify the future direction of an institution and maps the way the direction will be reached. Similarly, in the view of Hussey (1999), a strategy is an overall approach and plan of action. Hence, he defines strategic management planning as the planning that facilitates the good management process. Herner (1999) is of the view also that strategic management is the one designed to move an educational organization through the steps understanding changes in the external environment, assessing organizational strengths and weaknesses, developing a vision of a desired future and ways to achieve that mission, developing and implementing specific plans and motivating that implementation so that necessary changes can be made. Therefore, strategic management has to do with systematic process of incorporating organizational staff into policy-formulation and making them understand the goals of the organization and the techniques that will be adopted to realize them. It is a model of strengthening the internal institutional process by the strengths, weakness opportunities and threats (SWOT) assessment of the organization to be able to compete favourably with her environmental rivals.

Core parameters of Strategic Management

More recently, the National University of Singapore, one of the emerging trailblazing universities, has relied Mostly on strategic alliances with Harvard, John Hopkins University United States of America, MIT, Duke, Eindhoven University of Technology in the Netherlands the Australian National University and Tsinghua University in China, to mention only better known partner institutions. This action by the University of Singapore is a strong challenge to Nigerian government and a “food for thought” for the Nigerian Higher education in particular. All (1992) succinctly outlines some other parameters of effective strategic management as follows:

- Clear direction and purpose
- Objectives, goals and strategic consistency
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- Continuous monitoring of internal and external environment of the organization.
- Integration of operating budget and profit plans with strategic plan.
- Continuous monitoring of progress with revision of plan and programs as appropriate.
- Creation of Strategic atmosphere that fosters a team spirit.
- Commitment of necessary resources and the development of a system to provide necessary management information.

**Capacity-Based Training in Higher Education**

Man is a multi-talented being and if he is not found in an environment where those talents and potentials are not harnessed, he becomes redundant. Skills can be acquired through organized training and can also be developed through training. Therefore, the success of capacity development of an individual depends on the possession of certain qualities in skill and knowledge aspect of technical conceited business. At this point, the institutions of higher learning are in position to give a leading role in inculcating into the learner the knowledge and skills that will be useful in future capacity endeavours. According to Kennedy (2003), capacity development education is a recognized venture and it is one of the vital determinant factors that could influence individuals career decision. Rao, Wright & Murkhnerjee cited in Ogundele (2006) state that the focus of capacity development is centered on entrepreneurship skills acquisition. To them, such skills are capable of building small and medium scale business (SMS), development and initiation of one* s own enterprise or self-employment and development of managerial capability to run business successfully. The implementation of the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) recognizes education as the vital tool and necessary apparatus for socio-economic empowerment To achieve this goal, it becomes necessary to;

i. Ensure that 50 percent of tertiary education graduates acquire skills and knowledge to create wealth and be self employed,

ii. Note that tertiary institutions in Nigeria have put in place small business management and entrepreneurship development courses to equip individuals with necessary technical and managerial skills.
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Male and female were used as moderator variables in this study in order to promote gender mainstreaming and to consolidate 35% Affirmative action in the tertiary education. Obviously, the higher education celebrates intellectual prowess over gender disparity because if competent and qualified personnel do not function in their specialized task areas owning the arbitrary preference to male gender, in the higher institutions, 'cult of mediocrity' will be institutionalized thereby breaking down the system.

Statement of Problem

Globalization and Information Technology have shifted the attitude of young people from functional education to acquisition of conventional knowledge. Inadequate knowledge capital and dearth of entrepreneurial learning seem to have caused low productivity, inefficiency and low performance in higher education in Nigeria. Objective observers perhaps can notice that manipulative dexterity in entrepreneurship is at a very low level among graduates of his/her education in Nigeria which has caused an incisive mismatch between the Knowledge accumulated by graduates and the demands of employers of labour. Universities in the South-East Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria seem to grapple with gross lack of intellectual rigour in the mindset of lecturers and teachers alike which caused their inability to leave an indelible example which has proved to be the hallmark of true entrepreneurship scholarship. So, it bothers the academic community on whether the quality of higher education service delivery can be improved upon through-the systematic adoption of strategic management techniques so as to refocus higher education as solution-providing centres.

Purpose of the study

The general purpose of the study is to examine the strategic management techniques for improving higher education in Nigeria. Specifically, the objectives are:

1. To examine the most favourable institutional climate when strategic management can be implemented.

2. To identify constraints that are likely to be faced when implementing strategic management techniques in higher education.

Research Questions

1. What are the favourable situations under which strategic management techniques can be applied and/or implemented?

2. What are the challenges that are likely to be faced when implementing strategic management techniques in higher education?
Research Hypotheses
The following hypotheses are postulated from the research questions:
1. There is no significant difference between the mean rating of male and female respondents on the conditions under which strategic management techniques can be favourable.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean scores of respondents from Federal and state institutions on the challenge could be faced while implementing strategic management techniques.

Methodology
The design for the study was a descriptive survey. The population consisted of 8 tertiary institutions in South-east geopolitical zone. A total of 5 tertiary institutions, constituted the sample size of the study and 60 Heads of Department and 20 Deans of faculties from the institutions served as respondents. A self-constructed questionnaire titled "Strategic Management Techniques for improving Higher Education Questionnaire (SMIEHQ) was used to collect data. The instrument was validated and the reliability index established at 0.86 using cronbach alpha method. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while Z-test was used to test the hypothesis.

Data Analysis and Results

Research Question 1: What are the favourable situations under which strategic management techniques can be applied and/or implemented.

Table 1: Mean and Standard deviation ratings on the conducive situations under which strategic management techniques could be applied in Higher education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Ideal climate for implementing Strategic management</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Institution sponsors research programmes by individual lecturers</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Greater autonomy is allowed because of government liberal measures</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>There are interconnectivity devices in the offices</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>There is good maintenance culture in the management of the institution</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Lecturers are sponsored to go for further studies abroad</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table above revealed that all the items, but in number 3 had mean scores below the criterion mean of 2.5 showing that they were not accepted by the respondents. Item 3 had mean score above 2.50 showing that it was accepted by the respondents as the ideal climate for implementing strategic management techniques. The respondents were homogenous in their responses since the standard deviation ranged from 0.48-1.09.

**Research Question 2:** What are the challenges that are likely to be faced when implementing strategic management techniques in higher education?

**Table 2:** Mean and Standard deviation ratings on the challenges likely to be encountered when implementing strategic management techniques.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/n</th>
<th>Ideal climate for implementing Strategic management</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>There is weak institutional process because lecturers seldom go for refresher programmes abroad</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Decision-making and goal setting are not participatory</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>Accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>There is death of foreign research scholars, students and lecturers because of non-functional school plants</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Lecturers are materialistic instead of knowledge-driven</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>There is quality control and assurance unit in the institution</td>
<td>262</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>accepted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The result in table 2 reveals respondents' responses on the challenges of Strategic management techniques. The respondents agreed to the suggestion in items and 10 that decision, making and goal-setting are not participatory, since the mean scores are above 2.50. The respondents rejected the other items (6,8 and 9) as the challenges of strategic management techniques since their mean scores ranged between 222 - 2.37 which are below 2.50. The standard deviation which ranged from 0.53 - 0.73 indicates that the respondents were not too far apart in their
responses.

**Test of Hypothesis I:** There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female respondents on the conditions under which strategic management techniques can be favourable.

**Table 1:** Z-test analysis on the responses based on gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>Std</th>
<th>Z-cal</th>
<th>Z-tab</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.473</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of the analysis in Table 1 show that the calculated z-value (0.473) is less than the critical z-value (1.96) at 0.05 level of significance. Hence, the hypothesis one was accepted. This means that there is no significance different in the mean ratings of male and female respondents on the conditions under which strategic management techniques can be favourable.

**Hypotheses 2:** There is no significant difference between the mean scores of respondents from federal and state institutions on the challenges that could be faced while implementing strategic management techniques.

**Table 2:** Z-test analysis on the probably challenges based on institution affiliation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>Std</th>
<th>Z-cal</th>
<th>Z-tab</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>1.298</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data in Table 2 indicate that the calculated z-value (1.298) is less value (1.96) at 0.05 level of significant difference. Hence, the null hypothesis two (2) was accepted. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the rating of respondents from federal and state institutions on the probable challenges that can be faced while implementing strategic management techniques.

**Discussion**

The findings of this study revealed that adequate provision of interconnectivity devices in the offices and modern gadgets account for the favourable conditions
under which the application of strategic management techniques flourishes. Hence, quality management and effective utilization of modern office and teaching gadgets create greater chances of institutional transformation and modernization. When academic staff are motivated by sponsoring their research programmes by the institution, the achievement of set objectives of strategic management will be possible. This promotes skills, knowledge, understanding is and healthy competition among academic staff. Strategic management plays the crucial role in human resources creation and empowerment thereby improving the internal process system of higher institutions. Contrarily, lack of maintenance culture in the management of institutions' plants constitutes a source of job dissatisfaction for the professional staff, which affects students' academic achievement negatively. Strategic management is found to also prevail where through the government liberal policies. This is in line with the findings of Odum (2014) who found the usefulness of strategic management in higher education when he posited that annual and quarterly evaluation of the entire institute and staff capacity empower the institution to compete favourably, with all existing and potential rivals and to determine how it has been implemented to meet dynamic circumstances and new technologies. The test of hypothesis one showed that there is no significant differences between the mean scores of male and female respondents on the conditions under which strategic management techniques can be favourable in south-east Geo-political zone. Thus, when institutions sponsor and support researches by individual lecturers, institutional transformation and modernization will be achieved. Therefore, academic staff should be properly managed and reinforced for quality service delivery.

The findings of this study further unveiled that decision-making and goal-setting are not participatory in institutions of higher education in south-east geo-political zone. Hence, this can cause indifference and apathy among professional staff against the institution. Participatory decision making and goal-setting help the staff to be continuously motivated to meet the expectations and objectives of the institution, hence they are part of the people that set the objectives. When there is control and assurance unit in the institution, the institutional process is made stronger. Weak institutional process contributes to dearth of foreign research scholars, students and lecturers and makes lecturers to be corrupt and materialistic instead of knowledge-driven. This agrees with the findings of Herner (1999) who found that strategic management process is designed to move an educational institution through the steps of incorporating organizational staff into policy-formulation and making them understand the goals of the institution and the techniques that will be adopted to realize them. Democratic decision-making helps the institution to strategize with the principle of management by objectives (MBO). The test' of hypothesis two showed that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of respondents from federal and state institutions on the challenges that could be faced while implementing strategic management techniques. They all
agreed that decision-making and goal-setting are not participatory. Hence, existence of a quality control and Assurance mechanism will contribute to strengthening the institutional process.

Conclusion

Strategic Management is a current developmental tool that seeks to thoroughly decipher and analyze the general and competitive organizational environment so as to enjoy a comparative advantage not only locally but also internationally. It helps the manager identify and systematically describe all the activities that leadership in the universities carry out in an effort to implement their quality policy decisions such as quality planning, quality control, quality Assurance, participatory decision-making and quality improvement. Internationalization of higher education in Nigeria can only be possible through implementation of strategic management techniques. Quality decision to standout in cutting-edge research, academic programmes, teaching, entrepreneurship training and community service will launch our universities to global reckoning. However, Nigeria's privately-owned covenant University Ota, Ogun State is bracing up presently as the best private university in Nigeria and among the first ten in Africa.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Institutions should adjust towards internationalization to enable them face global competitiveness.

2. Institutions should incorporate their academic staff into the core of decision-making and goal-setting as a major thrust of management of objectives (MBO)

3. Centres and faculties of Entrepreneurship/vocational training should be created in the universities and adequately funded by the government

4. Institutions Managers should create a platform for making the universities centres of knowledge and skill generation by re-strategizing their teaching and researches to align to international knowledge synergy.

References

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