Original Research Article

Strategic Planning in Public University Libraries in Kenya

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Abstract

Libraries are competing with all the departments in their universities for resource allocation, even as universities continue to experience reduction of funding from the government every year. In addition, many public university libraries in Kenya lack strategic plans to offer direction as they are said to be difficult to develop, expensive exercise for the organizations and time consuming. The purpose of the study was to investigate the existence of strategic plans in public university libraries in Kenya. The study used descriptive survey research design and mixed method approach. The study population comprised 277 participants drawn from public universities in Kenya. A sample of 134 respondents was picked. Simple random sampling was used to select 124 library staff while purposive sampling was used to select 10 respondents comprising Deputy Vice Chancellors and Finance Officers. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used to collect data. The findings revealed that most university libraries do not have strategic plans. They rely on those of their parent institutions. It was established that official emails and meetings were the most used channels of informing staff and stakeholders about the existence of strategic plans in their institutions. The study will be significant in establishing models for strategic planning in pubic university libraries in the country.
Keywords: Strategic plan, public university libraries, strategic planning, library staff; Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

Strategic planning is extensively used by managers in organizations to envisage their future and come up with plans that have essential procedures and strategies of achieving their vision. It provides an outline for achieving an organizational goal as he organizations' objectives of a strategic plan is to assist in the creation of well-organized plans to guide the organization's growth (Root, 2014). Strategic planning in libraries is regarded as a process through which investigation of internal and external factors of a library are investigated which results in a set of mission, purpose, objectives, implementation of plans and strategies to achieve them. The process involves reviewing the library's mission and setting targets in the context of the internal and external environment of the institution. Strategic planning in libraries and information centre's is receiving much consideration from information specialists as a practical management tool for establishing objectives and deciding on strategies, policies, and operations that guide the acquisition and utilization of resources. Further it

guides on human and financial capital that are required to achieve the formulated objectives of an institution (Adeyemi *et al.*, 2014). Sheila, (2001) points out the importance of strategic planning to be a new perspective on the services to the users; strengthening cases for increased funding, delegation of duties and inculcating the feel of ownership in changes that take place. This is achieved especially when all stakeholders who include staff and users have participated in the planning process. Managers also identify significant issues as well as the requirement for measurement of performance in libraries. Strategic planning provides different avenues for the libraries to make options that give emphasis to their relevance in a competitive environment and to create sustainable benefits. This is achieved through coming up with strategic plans that are recognized as means of communication and assertion of the role of libraries, as well for present, medium and long term running of organizations and in academic libraries (Saunders, 2015). Maleka, (2014); David, (2011) views strategic planning as difficult, and complex process that at times may take an organization into unexplored area that doesn't provide a complete

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170

instruction for success but puts the organization through a journey and provides a framework for addressing queries. Strategic planning provides actions that help to shape and pronounce what the organization is, the clients it serves, and the reason why it exists at the same time focusing on the future. Effective strategic planning does not only communicate where the organization is going with the actions needed but it also shows how the success will be measured. Wayne, (2011) asserts that Strategic planning currently has become a yardstick of how an organization can be run effectively with an objective strategic planning process with a plan that is tailored to a specific library and which can be a significant instrument to help the library to navigate turbulent times. He further opined that a library that stumbles along without a solid plan doesn't prosper in the long term. Strategic planning strives to provide a way in which the university library could share its plan and academic mission of the institution through the review environmental aspects and formulation of strategies for dealing with the issues affecting them. This is because libraries are seeking a competitive edge, methods of improvement that provides data faster, changing formats and rise in user expectations given that parent organizations demand the sharing of costs or adding more services (Crumpton, 2015). According to Chiware, (2014) university libraries in Africa are facing difficult times because of the new ways of generating information, storage, dissemination and utilization

Statement of the problem

Libraries are competing with all the departments in their universities for resource allocation, even as universities continue to experience reduction in funding from the government every year. Considering that libraries are facing high expectations from users, introduction of new technologies and budget reductions, libraries have to do more with less (Casey 2011). Change in information seeking behavior of users; online social communication, intelligent internet sharing tools and networking technologies (Tait *et al*., 2016). This requires libraries to develop strategic plans , however most public university libraries in Kenya lack strategic plans in place to offer direction as they are said to be difficult to develop, expensive exercise for organizations and time consuming (Mutie & Irungu, 2014). Fredua-Kwarteng, (2020) observed that African public universities that have strategic plans in place display them on their websites. Further, although some of them have included their strategies in their parent university's strategic plans, they are not fully implemented due to constrains such as budget reduction, wrong procedures in formulating them, poor communication to the staff and stakeholders, poor library staff engagement, poor communication of library aims and objectives, inadequate leadership, lack of support from top management and inadequate resources allocation Enweani, (2018); Casey (2011);

Thompson *et al*., (2019); (Shah, 2012) and (Germano & Stretch-Stephenson, 2012).

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the existence of strategic plans in Kenyan public university libraries. It sought to address the following research questions:
1. Do public university libraries have strategic plans?
2. How are the strategic plans communicated in public university libraries?
3. What are the procedures of developing a strategic plan?

LITERATURE REVIEW
Existence of strategic plans in university libraries

Development of a strategic plan involves coming up with a vision and mission, determining internal strengths and weaknesses, identifying external opportunities and threats, creating long term objectives aw wall as generating alternative strategies and choosing the specific ones that will achieve the set objectives. Strategic plan is needed when institutions, such as African universities, are facing difficult challenges posed by their external environment, including dwindling and delayed government funding, competition from other institutions and decreasing student enrolment (Fredua-Kwarteng, 2020), (Miller, 2018). In study conducted by Mutie and Irungu's (2014) established that when the need for strategic plan rises, then there must have been the realization that strategic planning enables companies to be competitive and to be adoptive to the new dynamics in the market place. Therefore, planning for resources and services in libraries and information centers encompass establishing goals, setting time frames, and establishing the level of financial support that is needed. According to Sanches, (2018) strategic plan is a process and framework used for linking an organization to its environment, defines coverage, direction and actions necessary to achieve specified goals. Strategic plan is a tool that defines the direction of the organization and determines goals and objectives that are as realistic as achievable (Kabeyi, 2019). It is a document for communicating with an organization on the goals, actions needed and all the essential components that are developed during the planning process (David, 2015). Rossmann, (2019) in his study found that the creation of a communication plan for libraries is informed by values statement, a mission statement, a vision statement and a strategic plan. According to Aman, (2010) strategic plan helps library to be proactive instead of reactive by environmental scanning process that alerts the library of the external forces that might affect the library far enough in order to make intelligent decisions about their impact on the organization thus preventing missed opportunities and minimizing exposure to threats. Aman, (2010) further notes that strategic plan allows the library to prioritize its

inventiveness based on provable internal and external data that helps in making informed decisions. It ensures effective use of library 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 for example when organizations are encouraged to do more with less thus strategic plans becomes a relevant tool The strategic plan recognizes the reason why an institution takes a specific direction such as pressure from customers and stakeholders, changes in technology, work practices and existing failure to achieve the organization's mission (Vasilescu, 2013). 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 (Pucko & Cater 2013). (Muthoka *et al*., 2019) indicated that some strategies fail because there was no effective communication of the strategy to the concerned employees which should be done explaining the new responsibilities, tasks and duties to the affected employees and also why the new strategic decision is being made and also lack of staff engagement in the process

Procedure in Developing Strategic Plans

Developing a strategic plan requires step by step by step procedure in order to come up with a realistic document. Siambi, (2021) observed that effective execution of a strategic planning procedure is founded on having in place a well-functioning and integrated system and on attaining operational involvement by including all significant stakeholders. Tapera, (2014) in his study identified five phases of strategy making process which includes drafting a strategic vision of where the company desires to be and its future product, market, customer and technology that the focus should be and setting objectives to be used as a yardstick for measuring the organization's performance and progress. Crafting a strategy is also needed to achieve the objectives and move the company along the strategic course that management desires, implementing and executing the chosen strategy efficiently and effectively. Evaluating the performance and initiating corrective measures in the company's long-term direction is necessary as well as strategy or execution in light of actual experience, changing conditions , new ideas and new opportunities. Riboldi, (2019) identified seven steps which are: Assessing the industry, competitors and market trends; identifying opportunities and threats by conducting a SWOT analysis; reviewing organization's mission and vision; set business goals and priorities; defining functional objectives and key initiatives; determining staffing, budgets and financing needs; identifying and tracking success measurement on monthly and quarterly basis. In a study conducted by Karanja, (2018)) on strategic

planning, external environment and on organizational performance 66.67 % established that external factors (PEST) had effect on performance.

Communicating strategic plans to Staff and Stakeholder

Sensitizing staff and stakeholders on the new developed strategic plan is necessary because it creates an enabling environment for all of them to interact with the document to understand and own it before the start of implementation. This allows them to identify strategic issues in which each and everybody is supposed to plan in the process of implementation. The study sought to find out the channels through which library staff and other stakeholders received communication about developed strategic plans. Findings established that official emails were the most used channels, closely followed with holding meetings. In a study conducted by Wairimu and Theuri (2014) established that lower levels staff are usually unaware of the organization's strategic planning processes and this non-involvement leads to some staff members being unaccountable of the strategic planning process. Therefore leaders in organizations are responsible in ensuring strategy is effectively communicated (Abass & Munga, 2017). The above findings are corroborated by the conclusions of Wairimu and Theuri (2014 who argue that Staff involvement in strategic decisions is important in every organization since they are supposed to be directly involved in the implementation of strategies. Additionally, the literature also points to the vital role employee involvement plays employees in strategic planning and implementation as it increases motivation, ownership and commitment to the organization; and that as they participate and work in teams, this ultimately helps in empowering them; to retain best employees and to create an environment for managing change (Kivuva, 2015); (Mutuku and Misango, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The study used mixed method. The population of study consisted of 277 respondents purposively selected five universities. A sample of 134 respondents was picked where simple random sampling was used to select 124 library staff while purposive sampling was used to select 10 respondents, Deputy Vice Chancellors (DVCs) in charge of Academic and student affairs and Finance Officers. Questionnaires and structured interview schedules were used to collect data from respondents.

RESEARCH FINDINGS
Existence of Strategic Plans

The study sought the opinion from respondents on certain aspects about strategic planning in their libraries. Overall, all the respondents affirmed that their libraries had vision and mission statements; that they

had outlined goals and objectives; and that they also

had outlined values. Table 6 analyses the findings

Table 1: Existence of Strategic Plan, (n =119)

Statement	Yes	No	Don't know
Has your library developed a strategic plan	3(2.5%)	114(95.8%)	2(1.7%)
Does your library have vision and mission statements	119(100%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Has your library outlined goals and objectives	119(100%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Does your library have outlined values	119(100%)	0(0%)	0(0%)

Additionally, study sought to find out whether the participating libraries had developed their own departmental strategic plans. Majority of the respondents that is (114) 96% admitted their libraries did not have strategic plans in place with only (3) 3% who said yes and (2) 2% picking not sure.

For the ones who reported to have the strategic plan in place, the library committee and top library management senior librarians participated in developing the plans. For instance, a respondent observed that top management and senior librarians were involved in developing and ensuring that the formulated strategic plans are implemented. On further probing on the role of librarians in the process of developing and implementing the strategic plan, findings revealed that Librarians ensures that the formulated strategic plan is implemented as well as identifying items and activities to be included in the plan and setting timeline for implementation

Respondent observed,
"Heads of libraries and functional areas representing their staff in special meetings that discuss the process of developing the strategic plan…. Librarians are engaged in awareness, sensitization, and generation of ideas to enhance services; and ensure effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the process".

When triangulated with findings from senior administrative staff of the participating universities, the

above findings were corroborated. Apart from one participating university library, the rest did not have their own departmental strategic plans. Components of what the libraries planned for were included in the institutional strategic plans of their mother institutions. One officer explained,

".. they use the strategic plan and implement the library items documented in the main plan of the university. There are no independent plans for the sections as the institutional one is adequate".

Procedures involved in producing a strategic plan

The study sought to establish from the respondents the procedures involved in producing a strategic plan. *Identifying strengths and weaknesses* scored highly as (109) 92% of the respondents thought it formed part of the procedure for developing a strategic plan for their libraries. This was closely followed by *Identifying strategic issues* at (105) 88.2% and Prioritizing objectives at (104) 87.4% respectively. Determining your strategic position, identifying opportunities and threats and conducting a competitive analysis followed with scores of (96) 81% (94)79% and (81) 68.1% respectively. Overall, conducting an environmental scan (PEST) had the most interesting finding as (64) 53.8% felt it was important in developing a strategic plan while an almost equal number at (55) 46.2% of the respondents felt it was not necessary for the exercise. The following Table 8 gives a summary of these findings:

Table 2: Procedures of coming with a strategic plan, (n=119)

Statement	Yes	No
'Determine your strategic position	96(80.7%)	23(19.3)
Identify strategic issues	105(88.2%)	14(11.8%)
Prioritize your objectives	104(87.4%)	15(12.6%)
Conduct an environmental scan (PEST)	64(53.8%)	55(46.2%)
Conduct a competitive analysis	81(68.1%)	38(31.9%)
Identify Opportunities and Threats	94(79.0%)	25(21.0%)
Identify Strengths and Weaknesses	109(91.6%)	10(8.4%)

When asked about the procedures used in coming up with the library strategic plan, senior university managers had varied feedback. For instance, one emphasized on the need for environmental scanning; another one listed the following: needs assessment; setting objectives; drafting the plan; hiring a consultant or putting a committee in place; and having

public participation; and drafting the plan. On the other hand, another officer had the following as the best procedure: looking at where you are and where you want to go; reflecting on the core mandate; establishing your own identity; positioning yourself to meet the mandate; setting up a task force and consulting at every level. The third officer from another institution had the

view that coming up with a strategic plan involves the following: establishing where the library wants to go; looking at internal and external factors; stakeholder participation; global trends; and the department's strategic objectives. Another respondent in this category had the following as the procedure for developing a strategic plan: Establishment of committee; Setting priorities; Scanning the environment; Allocation of resources; Development of the strategic plan; and communicating the strategic plan to the stakeholders.

Communicating strategic plan to staff and stakeholders

The study sought to establish the channels through which library staff received communication about strategic plans. It was established that official emails were the most used channel at (94), 79% closely followed by meetings at (93) 78.2%. The library website; and Memos and Letters came in at second and third place with scores of (69) 58% and (65) 54% respectively. Last on the list was distribution of copies of the strategic plan with only (46). 39% as indicated in Figure 1 below.
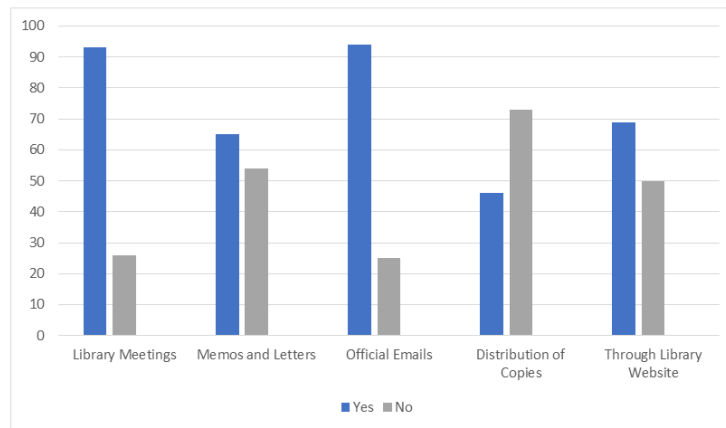

Figure 1: Communicating strategic plan to staff and stakeholders, (n =119)

In addition to the above, other channels through which strategic planning was communicated to staff included Staff WhatsApp forums, Sensitization forums, Telephone and mobile calls, Sectional meetings were mentioned as some of the other channels of communication. In this regard, one respondent from a large public university library observed that staffs at the lower category were not provided with strategic plans. From the qualitative data, email was established to be the most commonly channel of communicating strategic plans to library staff as an alternative to what was listed in the quantitative question above.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study also sought to establish whether public universities libraries under study had developed their strategic plans. The findings revealed that most of the university libraries do not have their own departmental strategic plans for implementation. The findings revealed that these libraries rely on their institutional wide strategic plans in which their strategic issues are captured. Findings also show some of the staff were involved in the process of developing and implementing the strategic plans thus leaving others out and at the same time these strategic plans are not well communicated to the library staff. Findings furthers indicated that the library committee and top library management were most mentioned as the developers of the strategic plans. When triangulated with findings from senior administrative staff of the participating

universities, the above findings were corroborated that apart from one participating university library, the rest did not have their own departmental strategic plans and indicated that components of what the libraries planned for were included in the institutional strategic plans of their mother institutions.

Procedures Involved in Developing with Strategic Plans

The findings established that respondents considered many aspects as a procedure in coming up with their strategic plans. The high score from majority of the respondents who participated in the study reported that identifying strengths and weaknesses was thought be part of the procedure for developing a strategic plan for their libraries while closely followed by identifying strategic issues with the high score as well as Prioritizing objectives. Determining the strategic position, identifying opportunities and threats and conducting a competitive analysis were also mentioned as the procedures. Overall, conducting an environmental scan (PEST) had the most interesting finding as fewer respondents felt it was important in developing a strategic plan while an almost equal number of the respondents felt it was not necessary for the exercise. When triangulated with the quantitative, senior university managers had varied feedback on the procedure of coming up with a strategic plan where some were in consensus that there is the need for setting priorities, environmental scanning considering internal

and external factors; needs assessment; stakeholder participation; global trends; and the department's strategic objectives; while one senior officer felt that hiring a consultant or putting a committee in place was a procedure of developing a strategic plan. It was also established that also some of the senior officers had the following as the best procedures of coming up with the plan by: looking at where the organization is and where it wants to go; reflecting on the core mandate; establishing own identity; positioning oneself to meet the mandate; as well as setting up a task force and consulting at every level. Another respondent in this category had the following as the procedure for developing a strategic plan: Scanning the environment; Allocation of resources; development of strategic plan and communicating the same to the stakeholders.

Communicating strategic plan to staff and stakeholders

Findings established that official emails were the most used channels, closely followed with holding meetings. The findings further revealed that library websites; memos and letters were also mentioned to be use used for communication. Distribution of copies of the strategic plans was also used although it was not so popular among university libraries because some respondents in the lower cadre of staff from a large public university library reported not to have been facilitated with the latest strategic plan. Other channels of communication that were mentioned included staff WhatsApp forums, sensitization forums, telephone including mobile calls, sectional meetings.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Strategic plans are important in setting the direction of the library as they strive to support the core mandate of their parent university which is teaching, learning and research by providing quality services and resources to the users. The study concludes that most of the public university libraries do not have their own strategic plans in place but their strategic objectives are captured in the university wise strategic plans. Thus, in order for effective service delivery to the users, public university libraries should develop their units' strategic plans to adequately accommodate all the strategic issues affecting their libraries. The study also found out that not all the stakeholders are involved in development and implementation of strategic plans. The study recommends involvement of stakeholders from the beginning in order for them to own the entire process as well as cascading the plans to all the staff. The study established that channels used to communicate strategic plans were not effective. The study recommends that libraries need to use various channels to complement one another in communicating strategic plans in order to reach a wider audience. The study established varied opinions on the procedures of coming up with the strategic plans. The study recommends the use of appropriate procedures in order to come up with

realistic achievable goals and objectives. The study will contribute positively to establishing models of strategic planning in pubic university libraries on resources management that will account for the shortcomings in the process of managing resources and services.

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