The Roles of School Strategic Plan on Students' Academic Performance in Tanzania: A Case of Iringa Municipality

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Abstract

The study sought to examine the impact of the strategic plan on students' academic performance in Tanzania. The study used mixed method research approach with descriptive and case study research designs. The sample for the study was 72 respondents including 06 heads of school, 06 teachers and 60 students. The study used both purposive and simple random sampling techniques to get the required sample. Data were collected through interviews, questionnaires and focus group discussion. From the study, quantitative data were analysed through descriptive statistics and presented using frequency distribution tables and percentages. The qualitative data were categorized into themes and presented in forms of narratives. The study findings revealed that strategic plan has positive impacts on students' academic performance in public secondary schools in Tanzania. It is concluded that strategic plan implementation has led to school effectiveness and consequently high students' academic performance to the public secondary schools.

Keywords: *Academic Performance, School, Strategic Plan*

1.0 Introduction

Strategic plan is used by public and private institutions to provide a road map to what an organization is, does and for what purpose. Strategic plan requires information gathering, development of strategic choices and careful assessment of the present decisions on future results (Bryson, 2019). While strategic plans vary among organizations, there are some common components to all plans namely vision, mission and goals. An organization's mission articulates its reason for existing. Vision describes where an organization hopes to be or who it will serve in the future. Goals included in strategic plans typically describe how an organization will carry out its vision and mission (Bryson, 2019).

The strategic plan in education is used by management to establish objectives and schedule activities for achieving those goals and includes the methods for measuring progress. These goals can be accomplished through the steps of the strategic plan. The steps begin with an external and internal analysis, a clearly defined mission statement, goals and objectives, formulation of specific strategies,

concluding with the implementation of the strategies and managed the control process (Zwikael, 2015).

Strategic plan process is conducted in the organizations to facilitate setting of spending priorities. This includes focusing energy and resources, strengthening operations, ensuring employees and other stakeholders shared common goals. The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology acknowledged the importance of school strategic plans and have made it a requirement for all public secondary schools in Tanzania. The process of strategic plan in schools has an impact on schools' academic performance and lack of it led to general lack of direction in the school effectiveness. Academic performance in most of public secondary schools in Iringa Municipality is poor based on the performance in the national examinations over a period of time (BEST, 2022).

A strategic plan in school set-up gives it a focus and direction for the future by continuously adjusting to academic direction in response to changing academic circumstances (Camp, 2016). In examining secondary school performance, the main cornerstone used by the MoEST is based upon key challenges which face this sub-sector namely: access, quality, completion, retention and relevance. To ensure that these challenges are mitigated schools normally prepare strategic plans that run between 3 and 5 years out of which they identify key strategies that are relevant for their existence. Among the strategies that are set by schools include the following: formulation of mission statement, continuous assessment, bench marking and syllabus coverage to affect students' academic performance (Camp, 2016). Ridia (2018) established that effective leadership and supervision of teaching and learning strategies had influenced pupils' academic performance. The overall findings indicated that there was a positive and significant influence of the school strategic plan on pupils' academic performance with the greatest influence from teacher preparedness strategy.

Furthermore, Gwakama (2020) researched on the effects of strategic planning on the academic performance of secondary schools in Mbarara Uganda. The study wanted to establish how strategic plan affects the academic performance specifically dealt with establishing the nature of plan, effects of planning and effects of strategic choice on the academic performance. Strategic Plan intent helped to spell out the field of education at all levels as it enables employees to think more clearly about their work in their respective departments. The study therefore intended to find out the roles of school strategic plan on students' academic performance in Tanzania.

2.0 Materials and Methods
The study employed mixed method research approach to build on the synergy and strengths, which exist between quantitative and qualitative methods in understanding phenomenon more fully than using a single approach in a study. The qualitative approach was applied to gather qualitative data obtained through interview, focus group discussion, whereas the quantitative approach was applied to obtain quantitative data through questionnaires. A descriptive research design was considered more effective for this study because it is an efficient method of collecting original data from a wide range

of respondents and provides an opportunity for the researcher to study and explore the status of the program activities in the school (Kombo, 2012).

The study employed 72 respondents from 06 public secondary schools. The respondents consisted of 6 heads of school 06 teachers and 60 students. In this study, interviews were given to heads of schools, whereas questionnaires were given to teachers, focus group discussion was given to students. Furthermore, the collected data were classified and synthesized into major themes and sub-themes and some of the arguments and explanations of respondents were presented as quotations. The qualitative data were analysed through thematic analysis, whereas descriptive statistics was used to analyse the quantitative data where frequency distribution tables were also used to display the information. Lastly, all research protocols were observed during the data collection process.

3.0 Findings
This part of the study aimed at presenting the findings obtained from the study.

3.1 Strategic plan process provides guidance on teaching methods which lead to good academic performance
The study findings revealed that strategic plan process by staff members provides direction and focus on the way of implementing school activities.

Table 1: Responses on Whether Strategic Plan Process Provide Direction and Focus on the Way of Implementing Schools Activities

Response	Frequency	Percent
Disagree	10	16.6
Neutral	9	15.0
Agree	41	68.4
Total	**60**	**100.0**

Source: Field data (2023

On one hand, 41(68.4%) respondents agreed that strategic plan process provides guidance on teaching methods which lead to good academic performance. On the other hand, 10(16.6%) respondents disagreed with the statement. It implies that strategic plan process does not provide guidance on teaching methods to lead good academic performance. Furthermore, 9(15%) respondents were neutral on whether strategic plan can provide guidance on teaching methods which may lead to better academic performance or otherwise. General implication is that 68.4%, which is almost two-thirds of the respondents are in the view that strategic plan process provides guidance on teaching methods, which in turn, lead to good academic performance as opposed to one-third of the respondents who opined differently.

Similarly, Nulkic (2019) expressed that strategic plan is necessary to determine the direction for organization's future and determine how best to achieve it. Its primary purpose is to connect three key areas namely, organization mission (defining the purpose to the organization), Organization vision (describing achievement needed by the organization) and describing how to achieve the ultimate goals.

3.2 The Strategic Plan Process Encourages the Commitment to Work within the School Community

Furthermore, it revealed that strategic plan helps schools to identify what it intends to achieve when it come to their student success objectives and organizational goals. A combination of good plan and communication ensure all stakeholders including parents, teachers, board members and community are all striving for the same goals. Bradford (2020) declares that plans encourage commitment by showing staff members that their work is essential, part of a larger strategy to help their students succeed. A well implemented and communicated plan holds all staff accountable for their actions and encourages collaboration. Best of all, strategic planning provides a framework so that the most important priority of the school students' educational achievement is taken care of.

Moreover, Bradford (2020) explained that strategic plan effectively organizes schools and their staff encourages commitment by showing staff members that their work is essential and strategy help the schools succeed. A school with strategy can monitor its progress towards key outcomes and evaluate where and how it may have gotten off track. The strategic plan assists management and staff members with governance decisions and provides direction for the future with a plan in place, schools can use the plan as a roadmap which it can track, evaluate and modify to facilitate better governance decisions and provide direction for the future of the school. One of the head of schools had this to say:

> *The strategic plan has helped teachers to see and own their responsibility from different angles and adjust their plan according to the needs and it has promoted the commitment of teachers. Through what have already planned, all school departments, teachers as well as students put their plan into daily basis action to accomplish the strategic plan* (Interview with Head of School B, 27th May, 2023).

The results have reflected that effective planning have contributed to better academic performance in public secondary school students. Most of the schools which had put strategic plan in place and incorporate students' academic issues in their strategic plan had made considerable value-added in their students' academic performance.

3.3 Strategic Planning Process Motivates the School Community to Work together As a Team

The question was sought to ascertain if strategic planning process motivates the school community to work together as a team. The findings were analysed and reported on Table 2.

Table 2: Responses on Whether Strategic Planning Process Motivates the School Community to Work Together as a Team

Response	Frequency	Percent
Disagree	9	15
Neutral	9	15
Agree	42	70
Total	60	100

Source: Field data, (2023)

Findings from Table 2 indicate that 9(15%) respondents disagreed with the statement that strategic planning process motivates the school community to work together as a team, 42(70%) respondents agreed and 9(15.0%) respondents were neutral. It implies that 70% of the respondents believe that strategic plan processes motivate the school community to work together as a team, which is contrary to 30% of the respondents, believing differently. This implies that strategic plan has effect on students' academic performance as the school community is influenced by strategic plan to work as a team, which unifies all respondents to bring about good work performance.

3.4 Strategic Planning is Accompanied with the Increase in Budget to Lead Academic Issues

The question sought to ascertain if strategic plan is accompanied with the increase in budget to lead academic issues in public secondary schools as reported in Table 3.

Table 3: Responses on Whether Strategic Planning is Accompanied with the Increase in Budget to Lead Academic Issues

Response	Frequency	Percent
Disagree	11	18.4
Neutral	8	13.3
Agree	41	68.3
Total	**60**	**100.0**

Source: Field data (2023)

However, from the findings, 41(68.3%) respondents agreed, 11(18.4%) disagreed and 8(13.3%) were neutral on the statement to show that the strategic plan has impacts towards students' academic performance due to the fact that it is accompanied with the increase of budget to lead academic issues. So, from these findings, it is evident that majority of respondents were in favour on the fact

that students' academic performance can be positively affected by strategic plans. This implies that reallocation of budget into various academic issues, can bring changes since the requirements which demand money can be attained.

4.0 Results and Discussion

The study findings revealed that strategic plan can have impact on students' academic performance in public secondary schools. The research findings show that strategic plans have the impact on students' academic performance. The impacts can be positive or negative depending on the extent in which the planning will be accompanied with some implementing forces. This was found in this study when it was agreed by respondents that "schools' strategic plan is very important for schools which are aiming at increasing their academic performance. This is because of strategic plans to have impact on students' academic performance and revealed that it provides guidance on teaching methods". Also, it found that there is a relationship between strategic plan and schools' academic performance in public secondary schools.

Additionally, it found that strategic planning process encourage the commitment of teachers to work within the school community. Since the performance of any work depends much on the extent to which the worker will be committed. The result of strategic planning towards teachers' commitment has the impact on students' academic performance. A school that formulates and implements a strategic plan derives benefits such as having negotiated and agreed clear goals and objectives, communication of the set goals to various stakeholders, providing a base upon which progress can be measured, building strong and functional teams in management staff who have clear vision on how the school will be in future. Also, providing the school management with new ideas which can steer the school to greater heights of excellence and commits the school funds to a well-organized and coherent development agenda.

Furthermore, the findings on the impact of school strategic plan on students' academic performance in public secondary schools are line with other studies. For instance, a study by Ozdem (2021) who asserted that through strategic planning a school can make long-term plans in consideration of the risks and opportunities faced by the school and set strategies to evaluate performance and take the school into the future. Through schools' strategic plan, students' academic performance can increase or decrease depending on the measures of implementation. However, the limited budgets can affect the quality of the strategic planning process and school improvement in general. It must be understood that effective strategic planning includes the need for an organization to manage scarce resources wisely.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

There is an overwhelming agreement that the implementation of strategic plan has led to school effectiveness especially in area of sustained focus on instruction and learning. Therefore, strategic

plan implementation has led to school effectiveness and sustained focus in instruction and learning and consequently high students' academic performance to the public secondary schools. It is high time now, the government, through the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, should organize a comprehensive in-service training program for all public secondary schools' heads of school and teachers to enable them to adjust to the new challenges of developing and implementing strategic plans with available resources. There is also a need to actively involve all stakeholders in strategic plan development to successfully impact a schools' academic performance.

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