

# Determinants of Strategic Choice among Universities in Kenya

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**Abstract:** The education sector in Kenya has been shaped by both internal and external environmental dynamics. Universities have borne the brunt of these turbulent environments the most. The environments within which the universities operate keep changing. Therefore, there is a need for universities to make sound and robust strategic choices. The strategic choices adopted by the universities will influence their success or failure. This research sought to identify the determinants of strategic choice among universities in Kenya. Specifically, the research tested four hypotheses: resource allocation has no strategic influence on strategic choice; organization culture has no significant influence on strategic choice; competitive environment has no significant influence on strategic choice; vision and mission have no significant influence on strategic choice. The research was guided by the contingency and resource dependency theories. A cross-sectional survey research design was used in this research. The target population was all the 71 universities accredited in Kenya by the Commission for University Education. Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire. The independent variables were resource allocation, organization culture, competitive environment, and vision and mission. The quantitative data collected was cleaned, coded, and analyzed using Version 26 of the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) Software. A multiple regression model was used and the results obtained were summarized using tables. The findings of the study indicated that only organization culture and vision and mission have a significant influence on strategic choice. It also pointed out that resource allocation, organization culture, competitive environment, and vision and mission have explanatory power in explaining strategic choice. The findings also revealed that universities in Kenya adopt a clan culture. In light of the findings, the study recommends: that universities in Kenya should have defined procedures for strategic choice process, follow the defined procedures, and involve their employees in the process of developing the strategic choices to create a sense of purpose and belonging.

**Key Word;** Determinants, Strategic, contingency, dependence, regression

## I. INTRODUCTION

Strategic choice is a fundamental element in any decision-making process of an organization. Organizations operate in a complex, dynamic and unpredictable environment and face the challenge of choosing which strategy to adopt to cope with this fast-paced scenario (Christensen, Raynor & McDonald 2015). Strategic choice concerns the decisions regarding organizations' future and their response to the dynamic environment. Therefore, organizations need to

evaluate the existing options available to them before choosing the best strategy to implement (Wangui, 2011).

Selection of the best strategy that enables an organization to achieve its objectives is however not as easy as it sounds. Some strategies are often more appropriate than others since no single strategy can relate to all conditions all the time. Kabeyi (2019) observed that a strategy is useful and effective only if it is implemented and gives positive results for the organization. The choices made therefore, will determine the success or failure of an organization. Successful organizations are, therefore, those that consider their strategic positions and carefully select relevant strategies given the threats that they are exposed to (Ansoff et al.2019; Okwumba & Onyiaji 2019).

The study adopted the contingency theory and resource dependency theory. These theories present the argument that organizations can interpret their environment, make suitable choices and strategically respond. The contingency theory asserts that the selection of suitable strategies is dependent on the competitive environment of organizations. According to this theory, an organization's boundary is a statement of what is within and without the organization (Qiu, Luo, Jackson & Sanders, 2017). It explains how contingent elements such as tasks, culture, or environment affect organizations' function and design and asserts that the suitability of different strategies is dependent on the competitive environment of organizations. This theory predicts that the degree of an organization's effectiveness will depend on the degree to which its strategies match the contingencies it faces (Islam & Hu, 2012).

On the other hand, the resource dependency theory asserts that organizations depend on other stakeholders within their environment to acquire limited resources to survive (Celik & Buyukbalci 2020). It provides a powerful explanation of organizational actions and outcomes by conceptualizing strategic choice as an organizational action to align it with the environment. These two theories emphasize the role of the external and internal environment in determining the strategic choices made by organizations hence will resonate well with the study.

Universities are considered a fundamental segment of the education sector that has been sensitive to external and internal environmental changes. The universities in Kenya are

operating in a different environment than they did since their inception. The status of these universities has been affected by the increased influence of policies relating to quality and competence, demographic changes, local and international competition, inadequate and dilapidated infrastructure, increasing mobility of lecturers and students, unbalanced student to staff ratios, conversions of many middle-level colleges to universities, acute shortage of professors and expectations by stakeholders to address contemporary issues. Due to these factors, making strategic choices has become more challenging because of the complexity they present. Several campuses have been closed down because of poor strategic choices that do not create long-term value. The survival of these universities is therefore determined by how well they can make deliberate strategic choices that will steer them in a particular direction.

### *Research Objective*

The general objective of this research was to identify the determinants of strategic choice. This was guided by the following specific objectives:

- i. To determine the influence of resource allocation on strategic choice.
- ii. To determine the influence of organizational culture on strategic choice.
- iii. To determine the influence of the competitive environment on strategic choice.
- iv. To determine the influence of vision and mission on strategic choice.

To measure the specific objectives, the following hypotheses were tested;

$H_{01}$  : Resource allocation has no significant influence on strategic choice.

$H_{02}$  : Organizational culture has no significant influence on strategic choice.

$H_{03}$  : Competitive environment has no significant influence on strategic choice.

$H_{04}$  : Vision and mission have no significant influence on strategic choice.

## II. EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

The strategic choice concept is linked to the work of John Child who stated that strategic choice encompasses the environment the organization is operating in, the organization's structure and the performance criteria against which the financial constraints are evaluated (Child 1972; Child 1997). Strategic choice is, therefore, a process that entails generating strategic options, assessing these options by analyzing the environment, evaluating alternatives to assess their achievability and suitability (Djordjević, 2014), and finally choosing a strategy that will allow the organizations to

capture the sustainable value. Choices about what to do, why it should be done, which approaches to take and whom to involve, have to be looked into critically before strategic decisions are made and applied to a practical situation.

The higher education system in Kenya has expanded considerably since 1970 when the University of Nairobi was established as its first national university. So far, there are thirty public chartered universities, eighteen private chartered universities, five public university constituent colleges, five private university constituent colleges, and thirteen institutions with a letter of interim authority (Commission for University Education, 2017). Jiang and Carpenter (2013) in their case study of the University of Derby acknowledged that issues and challenges arising from higher education have been given little attention. Therefore, this study intended to fill this gap besides developing interest for further studies in this sector.

A study of Kenyan public universities by Mathooko and Ogutu (2015) found that reforms in higher education, stakeholders' pressure, government policies and regulations, unethical response strategies, and location determined the choice of strategies. This study focused on public universities and thereby giving a limited generalization for universities in Kenya and further did not look at culture, resources, competition, vision, and mission as determinants of strategic choice in these institutions. Thiong'o, Wasike, & Yano (2021) found that the technology, product differentiation, marketing initiatives and strategic alliance adopted by Strathmore University all had a positive and significant effect on the competitive advantage of the university. The study only focused on a single private Kenyan university which also gives a limited generalization for determinants of strategic choice among Kenyan universities.

A study by Karanja and Wario (2014) sought the factors that influence the strategic choices adopted by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Nairobi and established that community involvement in the projects was the major factor that affected the choice. They also found that other factors such as finance and the sustainability of the project, networking, and staff competence influenced the strategic choices to a moderate extent. In the same line of research, Ndiao (2001) found that strategic choice by NGOs was influenced by the need and desire of key administrators, timing, past strategies, management attitude towards risk, vision and mission, leadership, corporate culture, and pressure from stakeholders. Nyambariga (2018) also sought to determine the influence of strategic choice on the performance of humanitarian non-governmental organizations in Nairobi County. The research found that there was strong relationship between strategic choices and performance. These studies only focused on the strategic choice among non-governmental organizations.

Kamau, Aosa, Machuki & Pokhariyal (2018) investigated the relationship between corporate governance, strategic choices

and performance of financial institutions in Kenya and concluded that though corporate governance was a key determinant of organizational performance, adoption of appropriate strategic choices enhanced the performance of those financial institutions. This was supported by Agili, (2020) who found out that strategic choices partially significantly mediated the relationship between corporate governance and the performance of universities in Kenya.

A study by Velcoff and Ferrari (2006) on the perceptions of university mission statements by senior administrators found that mission and vision statements and strategic management activities were positively related. Mullane (2002) who empirically established that mission and vision statements are useful for daily operations within an organization supports the finding by Velcoff and Ferrari (2006). These studies imply that the strategic management process of an organization is reliant on its mission and vision. This challenges a review by Campbell (1992) who asserted that mission statements are of little value to an organization if the management has no sense of mission. Based on the contradicting findings, the researchers sought to establish the influence of vision and mission on the strategic choices made by universities in Kenya.

Bretherton and Chaston's (2005) empirical research on the influence resources and capabilities has on strategy established that over-performers in the winery industry had adequate resources. The study however was limited to the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) particularly in New Zealand and therefore has limited generalizations. Pfeffer and Salancik (2003) hypothesized that resource allocation decisions are shaped by political strength and bureaucracy. They found that the more powerful a department was, the less its budget allocation depended on the conventional scope of departmental workload. The study intimated that political strength formed the basis for decision-making but did not look at the competitive environment, culture, vision, and mission.

Gupta (2011) examined the linkage between strategy and culture of the construction, information technology, banking, power, telecom, pharmaceuticals, and steel industry in India and found that there is a significant difference in the strategy and culture among these industries. The study found that organizations with adhocracy culture adopted prospector strategy, organizations with adhocracy and clan cultures adopted analyzer strategy, and finally, organizations with hierarchy and clan culture adopted defender and reactor strategies. In contrast, a study by Nikčević (2014) tested the hypothesis about the effect of organization culture in strategy determination by Montenegrin companies and established that there is no statistically significant relationship between the culture and the strategy chosen which contradicts the theoretical elaboration that organization culture can legitimize or illegitimate the strategy chosen. In their study of medium and large institutions in Algeria, Mohammed et al. (2017) focused on the fit between strategic choice and organizational

structure and found that organizational structure determines the strategy to achieve its goals. The researchers did not determine whether resource allocation, competitive environment, vision and mission also determine strategic choice.

Studies by Amoako-Gyampah and Acquah (2008), found that there is a positive correlation between competition forces in the manufacturing and service industries in Ghana and the strategies employed by these organizations. They concluded that the choice of strategy by an organization is influenced by the competition but did not address the university education sector.

Despite the studies that have been carried out on the various determinants of strategic choice, there are limited studies done in the context of universities. Questions remain unanswered on the decisive factors in Kenyan universities' strategic choices. This study therefore sought to answer the question; what determines the strategic choices made by universities in Kenya?

### III. METHODOLOGY

The research adopted a cross-sectional survey design because it allows collection of information from a study group in one moment. According to Tari, Kessler & Kelloway (2021), cross-sectional studies are suitable for testing the relationships that may exist between variables and also provide a clear impression of an organization's environment. The study sought to identify the determinants of strategic choice among universities in Kenya. This enabled determination of the relationships between the explanatory variables and the strategic choice. The sampling frame consisted of all the private and public universities in Kenya. From this, a sample size of 51 was picked. Structured questionnaires which were in the form of the five-point Likert scale ranging from one (strongly disagree) to five (strongly agree) were used to collect the data. The university registrars and heads of department were identified as the key respondents. A pilot study was done before data was collected. The data collection tool was subjected to validity and reliability tests and was found to be reliable, valid and consistent.

Multiple regression model was used as given by equation 1

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + \varepsilon_i$$

Where  $Y_i$  = Strategic Choice

$\beta_0$  = Constant

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$  and  $\beta_4$  = coefficient

$X_1$  = Resource Allocation,

$X_2$  = Organization Culture,

$X_3$  = Competitive Environment,

X4=Vision and Mission,

$\varepsilon_i$  = error term

IV. RESULTS

Correlation and regression analysis were carried out to measure the strength of the relationship between the dependent and independent variables.

Correlation

Pearson correlation coefficient ( $\rho$ ) was computed to measure the strength of the relationship between each covariate and the response variable. It also determined the nature of the relationship. The results obtained are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Correlation between the Study Variables

Variables		A	B	C	D	E
strategic choice (A)	$\rho$	1				
	n	51				
resource allocation (B)	$\rho$	.115	1			
	P value	.124				
	n	51	51			
organization culture (C)	$\rho$	.676**	.460**	1		
	P value	.000	.001			
	n	51	51	51		
competitive environment (D)	$\rho$	.117	.438**	.274	1	
	P value	.09	.000	.051		
	n	51	51	51	51	
vision mission (E)	$\rho$	.780**	.363**	.308**	.415**	1
	P value	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	n	51	51	51	51	51

Source: Primary Data

Results show that there was a strong correlation between strategic choice and vision and mission with a correlation factor of 0.78. This concurred with the expectation that vision and mission determines the strategic choices among universities in Kenya. It was further noted that a strong direct relationship exists between strategic choice and organization culture as shown by the correlation factor of 0.66. This also concurred with the expectation that organization culture determines the strategic choice among universities in Kenya.

Regression Analysis

Linear regression model was fitted to determine the probable form of the relationship between the covariates and the response variable.

Table 2: Model Summary for Linear Regression

Mode	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.821 <sup>a</sup>	.674	.646	.34177

<sup>a</sup> Predictors: (Constant), vision mission, organization culture, competitive environment, resource allocation

Source: Primary Data

The results on Table 2 shows that resource allocation, organization culture, competitive environment and vision and mission, had explanatory power on the Strategic choice since they accounted for 67.4% of its variability (R Square = 0.674). This implies a strong direct relationship between the covariates and Strategic choice.

Table 3: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	11.107	4	2.777	23.771	.000
	Residual	5.373	46	.117		
	Total	16.480	50			

Source: Primary Data

Table 3 presents the analysis of variance of resource allocation, organization culture, competitive environment vision and mission and strategic choice. The results reveal that a significant relationship exists between at least one of the independent variables and strategic choice (F = 23.771, p value= 0.000).

Table 4: Regression Coefficients

Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig. (p value)	
B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	.974	.382	2.553	.014	
Resource allocation	.050	.153	.048	.327	.745
Organization Culture	.213	.074	.322	2.881	.006
Competitive Environment	.005	.133	.005	.038	.970
Vision Mission	.417	.125	.544	3.340	.002

Source: Primary Data

Table 4 displays the regression coefficients results of Resource Allocation, Organization Culture, Competitive Environment and Vision and Mission. It can be seen that only

organization culture (supported by  $\beta=0.213$ , p-value = 0.006) and vision and mission (supported by  $\beta=0.417$ , p-value = 0.002) are statistically significant in explaining the strategic choice. The multiple regression model can therefore, be summarized as

$$Y_i = 0.974 + 0.213x_2 + 0.417x_4 \quad (2)$$

Where  $X_2$  represents organization culture and  $X_4$  represents vision and mission.

Equation 2 shows that for every unit change in organization culture strategic choice increases by 21.3% keeping other factors constant. While on the other hand for every unit change in mission and vision, strategic choice increases by 41.7% keeping other factors constant.

The results in Table 4 assist in testing the null hypothesis of the study. In this research the following hypotheses were tested and decisions made as per Table 5.

Table 5: Hypotheses Decisions

Null Hypothesis	Decisions
1. There is no statistically significant influence of resource allocation on strategic choice.	Not rejected
2. There is no statistically significant influence of organization culture on strategic choice.	Rejected
3. There is no statistically significant influence of competitive environment on strategic choice.	Not rejected
4. There is no statistically significant influence of vision and mission on strategic choice.	Rejected

## V. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This study aimed to identify the determinants of strategic choice among Universities in Kenya. Of the 71 questionnaires distributed, 51 were returned which denotes a 72% response rate. No respondents agreed that the university follows a defined set of procedures in its strategic choice process which confirmed Verma and Agarwal's (2003) finding that universities adopt barely any logical approach in making strategic choices. Despite this, 56.9 % of respondents agreed that their respective university considers the effect of strategic choice made to its environment and revises strategic decisions appropriately. This indicates that universities view the environment as integral when making strategic choices. 72.5% of the respondents agreed that the availability of resources determines the strategic choice made by the university and on the other hand, 58.8% agreed that vision and mission determine the strategic choice made. It was also established that universities adopt a clan culture which is a surprising result because given the changes within the industry, it was expected that they would have an adhocracy culture that emphasizes adaptation to changing conditions and trendsetting but this appears not to be the case. In addition, 49% of respondents agreed that the competitive environment determined strategic choices made.

The regression analysis showed that the independent variables had explanatory power on strategic choice since they

accounted for 67.4% of its variability. This signified that 32.6% is still unaccounted for. Analysis of variance also revealed that a relationship exists between the independent variables and strategic choice because they exhibited a p-value of 0.00. However, the regression coefficient identified that only organization culture and vision, and mission were the only statistically significant variables to explain strategic choice having a p value of 0.006 and 0.002 respectively. The competitive environment and resource allocation were considered insignificant statistically. The study nonetheless brought out a strong correlation between the competitive environment and resource allocation which implies competitive environment and resources allocation are in tandem. The study also established a strong correlation between vision and mission and resource allocation and between vision and mission and organization culture.

## VI. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The objective of this paper sought to establish the determinants of strategic choice among universities in Kenya. The study found that universities do not follow a defined set of procedures in their strategic choice process and the process involves a few selected individuals. However, it was established that most respondents believed that resources allocation, competitive environment, and vision and mission determine the strategic choice among universities. In addition, the results indicated that the universities adopted a clan culture that emphasizes teamwork and cohesiveness of values which cultivates an atmosphere of cooperation leading to successful strategy implementation (Njagi, Kamau & Muraguri 2020).

The study further sought to establish the correlation between the study variables and found that there was a strong correlation between strategic choice and vision and mission and between strategic choice and organization culture. This concurred with the expectation of the study. However, there was no correlation established between strategic choice and resource allocation and between strategic choice and competitive environment.

The study found that resource allocation, organization culture, competitive environment, and vision and mission, had explanatory power on the strategic choice and thereby implying a strong positive relationship between the independent variables and strategic choice. However, given that the independent variables accounted for 67.4 % of the strategic choice variability, this shows that 32.6% is unaccounted for. The multiple regression model suggested that only organization culture and vision and mission are statistically significant in explaining strategic choice because they exhibited a p value less than the significance level therefore the data favored the hypothesis that there is a none zero correlation. This contradicted Nikčević's (2014) hypothesis that there is no statistically significant relationship between the culture and the strategy chosen. On the other hand, the p-value for competitive environment and resources

allocation was greater than the significance level indicating that there was unsatisfactory evidence to conclude that a none zero correlation exists.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Strategic choice is a fundamental element in any decision-making process of an organization since organizations operate in a complex, dynamic and unpredictable environment. The choices made therefore will determine the success or failure of an organization. The study, therefore, concludes that to survive the dynamic nature of the environment, universities in Kenya need different strategic choices to enable them to streamline the operations that will enable them to gain a competitive advantage. This can be achieved by considering their strategic positions and carefully selecting strategies.

The study concludes that resources allocation, organization culture, competitive environment, and vision and mission have explanatory power on strategic choice among universities in Kenya. The study also considers organization culture and vision and mission as being the most statistically significant determinants of strategic choice among universities in Kenya. However, the study also concludes that the competitive environment and resource allocation may affect decisions made by the universities in Kenya. More comprehensive research is necessary to provide a clearer picture of this conclusion.

## VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study recommends that the Kenyan universities should treat strategic choice as an essential part of their daily responsibilities and should not be interpreted as an inflexible hierarchical sequence of activities. To develop more alternatives, the decision-makers in these universities should encourage active participation of the major stakeholders; faculty, students, alumni, and the industry, while keeping the objectives of the universities in mind. Involving these stakeholders and building a consensus in the strategic choice process right from the beginning will generate a sense of ownership and purpose in the organization. It is particularly prudent to encourage heads of departments to participate in their strategic choice process to discover their specific capabilities which are in line with the university's strategy as a whole.

Before the adoption of any strategic choice, the universities need to carry out a strategic analysis to ensure that the choice addresses the issues essential to the success of the university. The study found that the universities do not follow a defined set of procedures in their strategic choice process. The study, therefore, recommends that universities should have defined procedures during the strategic choice process and ensure that they are followed. For this to be achieved, directors of quality assurance can be employed to monitor and evaluate the strategic options to be adopted to ensure that they meet the universities vision and purpose.

The study has demonstrated that the universities in Kenya adopt a clan culture thus it is recommended that university employees are encouraged to get on board with their universities vision so that they can perform at their full capacity. The university administration should therefore ensure that the university's objectives, goals, vision, and mission are clear and that managers in these universities be enlightened on the importance of comprehensive strategies on their success. The universities should also focus on creating their niches instead of emulating their competitors. This can be achieved by developing and investing in curricula that give them a competitive advantage over competitors. What works for one university may not work for the other.

From the findings of the study and conclusions, the researcher recommends that additional studies should be conducted to account for the 32.6 % of the variability that this study did not account for on the determinants of strategic choice among Kenyan Universities to enable the generalization of the study findings. It is also recommended that a similar study be done in the other sectors in Kenya such as the communication industry, transport industry, and county governments to have an understanding, views, and approaches pursued by these sectors as well.

### *Value of the study*

The results of this study will be significant in various aspects. First, the findings of the study may help universities to align their strategies and make appropriate strategic choices because they will understand how various elements in their institutions influence their choices and the magnitude of the effect of each element such as resources, competition, culture, vision, and mission. This will be necessary for improving efficiency, effectiveness, and quality as well as formulating strategies within these universities.

Second, the findings of this study seek to contribute towards industry policy formulation by giving input that will enable the Commission for University Education and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology to examine and design more unprejudiced and effective policies that will improve the higher education sector service delivery to achieve the vision 2030 to the benefit of the major stakeholders; students and university staff.

Finally, the research findings will serve as a reference for academia and researchers by providing a foundation on which further research can be based. The findings will also add to the existing strategic management body of knowledge by providing empirical data that can also be used as a reference for further studies.

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