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Investigating the Relevance of the Development and Implementation of Strategic Plans in Public Sector Education Institutions: A Case of Public Teacher Training Colleges in Malawi

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ABSTRACT

The hub of every academic institution of higher learning rests upon key areas of policies and how they are developed, managed and championed. This research study investigated the relevance of development and implementation of strategic plans in public sector education institutions in Malawi. In 2019 and 2020, GIZ championed the development of strategic plans in TTCs. This was done by facilitating the training of Principals in the quest to develop strategic plans. Field data was collected using both qualitative and quantitative approaches through document analysis, questionnaires, and focus group discussion guide. The findings of the study indicate that the strategic plans are relevant in public TTCs because of the following factors: government policy, strong committed leadership, organizational culture, structure and effective communication. The study findings support Bryant (2013) in his evaluation report in Malawi and the study by Nyakeriga (2015) who identified the same factors as influencing the development and implementation of strategic plans. The structure is identified by the setup of the public TTCs, with the principal being the top manager, followed by the Deputy Principal, Heads of Departments, Teaching Practice Coordinator, and Assessment Committee chairperson. through the organizational culture, Quality Assurance and Monitoring and Evaluation work to track the progress of the implementation process in the TTCs. The study also showed plans the activities in the strategic plan inform TTC budgets. However, the study has firmly established that completing the activities in the strategic plans is a challenge. The study attributes this to erratic and inadequate funding, lack of knowledge on the implementation process and lack of political will. The study proposes investment in continuous professional development with all education stakeholders to fully understand the concept of strategic planning and implementation in order to achieve set objectives.

INTRODUCTION

Long-term and medium-term planning in Government comes in form of National Development Plans and strategy papers and policy and investment framework. This section provides a brief historical perspective of development planning and what has led Government of Malawi to champion the development of strategic plans in the public sector.

National Development Plans

Government of Malawi and its public institutions have used long term planning and medium-term planning as instruments for implementations of development strategy since independence in 1964. The statement of development policies (1971-1980,1987-1996) was the basis of development planning in the first 30 years of independence in Malawi and vision 2020 (Government of Malawi 1997) from year 2000 to around 2022. The government has now adopted Agenda 2063 the Malawi we want is the basis for development planning to date. The vision 2020 is a list of sectorial vision and aspirations. It required an implementation strategy paper to translate the aspirations into strategies. Therefore, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper- MPRSP was developed. (Government of Malawi 2002). The MPRSP

focused on investment in social sectors of education and health. In 2007 the MPRSP was replaced by the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy- MGDS. The MGDS also heralded a change of focus as Government felt poverty reduction was best dealt with through sustainable economic growth.

Agenda 2063

The Malawi 2063 (MW2063) agenda expresses the Vision and aspirations of Malawians. It envisions a youth-centric inclusive wealth creating and self-reliant nation by 2063. The vision is the belief in the abilities to fully harness the resource endowments of the country. A belief in strong governance and efficient public sector systems and institutions provide a facilitatory environment for thriving industry that has backward and forward linkages to the other pillars and service sector. As a nation, having commitment to address the key challenges and barriers to youth development and to protect their health and well-being. There is a guarantee in the provision and accessibility of quality education, skills development and decent work opportunities.

Sectoral Strategic Plans

In Malawi, strategic development planning has always been

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buttressed by sectoral Development Planning. Key sectors of Agriculture, Health, Education, Energy and Transport have always developed sectoral policies and strategic implementation plans that addressed issues outlining the National Policy Agenda in greater depth. The Education Sector developed the policy and Investment Framework (PIF1995-2005 & 2005-2012) that responded to MPRSP. The National Education Sector Plan (NESP 2008-2017) was developed in response to MDGS I&II. The National Education Investment Plan that responds and addresses the agenda 2063 was to facilitate high quality delivery of programmes and improve sectoral performance and contribute to effective delivery of the National agenda. Despite the presence of these well-meaning policy and strategic sector plans, there was a growing outcry across all sectors about poor performance in public institutions and Government Departments.

Development of Public Sector Strategic Plans

To improve the performance and service delivery to public institutions, government made a policy decision in the year 2000 that all public sector Institutions and Government Departments had to develop strategic plans. This process was to be spearheaded by the Department of Human Resources Management and Development (DHRMD) in the office of the president and cabinet. This policy decision was hailed by the development partners but it was quickly noted that DHRMD has no capacity to lead the process and there was no framework to guide Government Ministries and public sector Institutions in the development of strategic plans. Through Canadian Government and World Bank Assistance a guiding document called 'The Integrated Strategy Implementation Planning in Government of Malawi for Government Planners' was developed (DHRMD 2007). This document is referred to as ISP. Government then directed that all Government Departments and Public Institutions develop strategic plans based on the ISP guidelines. Kayuni (2016) argues that the process of developing strategic plans is an indicator of positive reform. He further notes that leadership be it political or professional plays a significant role in strategic planning and management and it can be the cause of failure to implement strategic plans. The Ministry of Education Science and Technology (2015) developed a strategic plan 2015-2020 which aligns to PSIP National Education Sector Plan, Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDSII). The strategic plan was developed with the intention to operationalize MGDS II. The process of developing the Ministry strategic plans received strong support from political and professional leadership. GIZ in 2019 /2020 facilitated the training of Principals in the principles of development of strategic plans in TTCs. The training covered the following key components: How to integrate national policies into the strategic plan; reflecting on vision 2024; finalizing analysis of SWOT data; deciding for priorities; development of objectives; development of action/implementation

plan and development of a monitoring tool. What is interesting is that researchers despite asking GIZ, DTED and The Teacher Training Principals Forums no one could produce document to give the rationale and background for providing that support. Despite this lack of documentation, the TTCs strategic plan's structure and layout shows strong support from the Directorate of Teacher Education and Development.

Statement of the Problem

The Government of Malawi (GoM) recognizes that strategic plans are central in enhancing quality service delivery of public and private sector institutions to achieve the development and planning objectives set out in the National and sectoral Development plans. As such GoM has issued directives three times, in 2000, in 2007 and 2014 (DRMD 2000) that all public and private institutions should develop strategic plans. These plans were intended to enhance the smooth running of public institutions and provide for more reforms and innovative approaches. Public Teacher Training Colleges fall under this category. After the public TTCs produced their strategic plans between 2019 / 2020, three years down the line is their evidence that these public TTCs have become more innovative or and freedom based. What are the factors that have impeded this progress? It has been three to four years since the launch of these strategic plans. The question that this research is trying to address is, have these strategic plans been relevant?

Objective of the Study

There are over 16 teacher training institutions in Malawi. This study focused on seven public TTCs. The purpose of the study was to carry out an investigation on the relevance of strategic plans as regards to college financing, management and institutional sustainability. The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To determine the knowledge of the development of strategic plans in public sector education institutions
2. To establish the organizational management and work culture in the development and implementation of strategic plans in public sector education institutions
3. To identify key factors that would make strategic plans relevant in public TTCs
4. To identify key factors that would affect the implementation of the strategic plan in public TTCs

Research Question

The research focused on four main questions:

1. What are the knowledge and indicators of the development of strategic plans in public sector education institutions?
2. What are the organizational management and work culture on the development and implementation of strategic plans in public sector education institutions?
3. What are the key factors that would make strategic plan relevant in public TTCs?
4. What are the key factors that would affect the

implementation of the strategic plan in public TTCs?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in that:

The study results will shed some light on the relevance of strategic plans in the public sector education institutions in Malawi due to absence of published study nor evaluation report on the same.

The research result that will be shared to Government through DTED is believed will provide an impetus to Government to commission for more in-depth research on how TTC's are managed and run.

The study will make small but significant contributions to the body of local and international knowledge on the factors that impinge on the strategic planning process in public sector in Malawi after findings have been published in an international journal.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Strategic plans emanate from strategy processes. Mintzberg and Quinn (1992) assert that there is no single universally accepted definition of strategy. This is evidenced by different definitions by different authors and experts in strategy process. Mintzberg and Quinn (1992) have adopted the definition that strategy is a pattern or plan that integrates an organization major goals, policies and action sequences into a cohesive whole. (Davis 2013) defines strategy as the means by which long term direction of an organization are realized. The private sector adopted and adapted this approach and have revolutionized the strategy development and management processes. The public sector has generally lagged behind in this field. Strategy is studied as subject on its right, and it also approached it from a strategic management or strategic planning. Theories and concepts follow the same pattern.

David (2013) asserts that strategic management is used more by academia and strategic planning used more by the business world but the two terms can be used synonymously. This study has taken the same approach. The literature review is from strategic management and strategic planning theoretical concepts and empirical studies. Whilst as there are many books and research written on strategic management theories and concepts in the private sector or business world, there is paucity of literature on strategic planning in the public sector *let alone* in the education sector. The focus of this research is on the development, implementation and relevance of strategic plans in public sector education institutions. These factors could be unearthly and understood from a historical perspective, from a management or organizational theory perspective, from a cultural and sociological theory and the conceptual framework strategy development and management process. There lies the challenge as this wide-ranging subject area. The theoretical and conceptual framework discussed in this paper will be deemed as key foundational theories and concepts that will assist in answering the research objectives.

A strategic plan is therefore more comprehensive taking an overall view, of the organization direction rather than a substantial period. In this approach (Johnson *et al*) argued that for a successful development and implementation of strategic plans, it must be treated as a project. It is further argued that as such a Strategic Plan needs to have particular teams of people assigned to work on particular strategic issues over a period. The strategic plan requires a clear brief, top management commitment, milestones, reviews, and appropriate resources. The theory that strategic plan is developed from top-down approach to enable a business or firm to respond to competitive environment resonates very well with the private sector but does not wholly address factors that lead to the development of strategic plans in the public sector.

UNESCO (2010) advances a theory that the development of strategic plans in the public sector is driven by the need for public sector reform. Even though public sector is not expected to make profits and have little autonomy to make decisions they were expected to deliver specific services and quantifiable results. Mullins (2002) makes strong case that all organizations including service organizations and those in the public sector require some of corporate strategy. This assertion is supported by quoting Lynch (2000) who states that the strategy process in public and non-profit organization is governed by broader public policy issues such as politics and Monopoly supply, Bureaucracy and the battle for resources from government to fund the activities of the organization and by values held by the Institution.

Conceptual Framework on the Development of Strategy and Strategic Plans

Conceptual framework is explained in line with visual or written ideas that explain the focal points to be studied or those studied already. It includes key points of variables and any presumed connectivity to the research topic. There are many conceptual frameworks but one could argue that the foundational concept is that of Mintzberg conceptual framework or process of developing strategic plans (Mintzberg & Quinn 1992). This concept advances the view that a strategy can be developed as a plan, ploy, pattern, position and as perspective. Basically, a conceptual framework clarifies a research problem and also assists or aids in the refining of the research questions. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of this part of the research to guide the data collection and analysis process and also offer a systematic perspective for the researchers. In this case, researchers were helped to understand the process of implementation of strategic plans in public sector education institutions with a focus on teacher Training Colleges in Malawi.

Strategy as a plan is developed through SWOT or PESTEL analysis and results into some sort of consciously intended course of action with built in budgeting information and rewards. It requires management to have certain skills to implement the plan. This is the concept that was followed by all Teacher Training Education Institutions.

Strategy being such a wide subject area has a lot more models and concepts than outlined above. These models and concepts outlined in the section are more likely to assist the assessment of factors that impact on development of strategic plans in government, public sector in general and public sector education institutions of higher education.

Empirical Literature Review

There is plenty literature on factors of relevance, the development and implementation of strategic plans in the private sector, but there is not much on public sector institutions and it is quite a task to find published literature on strategic plans in the sector *let alone* studies to examine relevance of the development and implementation. Outlined below are published studies in various journals on studies done for public sector education institutions. The concentration of this literature covers studies done in Asia and Middle East, East Africa and also in Malawi though little has been published. Literature search for southern Africa has so far proved elusive.

Studies in Asia and Middle East

Yang Li, (2008) in his study of factors influencing strategy implementation states that there are myriads of factors that can potentially affect implementation of strategic plan. He however argues that these factors are influenced by geographical location and regions. He goes on to say these are best understood when classified as organizational levels, factors and organizational type factors. Shahin (2011) in his doctoral thesis on effectiveness of strategic planning in the Middle East argues that the factors that apply to the western countries may not necessarily apply in the Middle East and that factors that apply in private sector may not apply to the public sector. He cites factors that are critical in public sectors such as constitutional limitations, constraints in decision making process due to political, financial and legal factors that are not key factors in private sector. Gabriel (2010), puts forward a very interesting argument that the most difficult part of strategic plan is not technical but human. He further asserts that the development of a strategic plan requires an application of a number of specific techniques which can be taught. The most difficult challenge is to change the mindset of people and introduce a management culture that goes with techniques, he concludes.

Studies in the Public Sector Education in Africa Region

Most studies that are published focus on secondary schools. Ndengwa (2014) in his study of factors affecting implementation of strategic plan in secondary schools in Kenya states that the implementation of strategic plans is influenced by many factors such as (a) Managerial skills, (b) Institutional policies, (c) and resource allocation. Kibachi, Iravo, and Luvanda (2014) in their study of factors that affect strategic plan implementation in Parastatals in Kenya state that a common challenge faced by all organizations whether private or public is how to successfully manage

the planning process for the attainment of organizational objectives. They then identify these as risk factors (a) organizational structure, (b) leadership style and (c) funding process in the implementation of strategic plans in the public sector in Kenya. Chemwei, Leboo, and Koech (2014) carried out a study on factors that impede the implementation of strategic plans in secondary schools in Kenya and conclude that (a) human resources, (b) leadership style, (c) organizational structure and (d) culture of schools were key factors. Messah (2007) states that it is a Kenyan Ministry of Education requirement that public organizations including educational culture institutions develop strategic plans. He however notes that factors such as institutional culture and staff management have had a big impact on the failure or successful implementation of strategic plans.

Njeru, Stephen and Wambui (2013), in the analysis of factors influencing formulation of strategic plans in secondary schools in Embu country in Kenya conclude that (a) availability of funds, (b) government policy and (c) employees know how, significantly influence formulation and implementation of strategic plans in public education institutions. Messah (2007) in his study of factors affecting implementation of strategic plans in public tertiary institutions, identifies four factors; (a) managerial behavior, (b) resources allocation, (c) management and (d) institutional policies as factors that impact on the development and implementation of strategic plans. The study concludes that out of the four, allocation of resources was the most critical factor. Nyakeriga (2015) in the study carried out to investigate factor influencing implementation of strategic plans concludes that apart from organizational culture, structure and administrative systems, effective communication and consensus have very big influence on strategic plan implementation.

Meiguru, Siamoo and Salema (2019) study in factors that affect strategic planning implementation Diploma Teacher Training Colleges in Tanzania reveal that they are external and internal factors, these include resource availability, fear of change, poor communication and lack of skills in tutors and managers. Schlebusch and Mokhatele (2016) state that Strategic planning is powerful instrument for school improvement and ensures coherent action planning for school renewal and change, however attainable targets should be set with the result that success will drive success. Oyadele and Chikwature (2016) in their studies on teachers perception of the role of strategic planning in Educational Development in Manicaland province Zimbabwe find that teachers did not fully understand the concept of strategic planning and its role in education planning, they recommend that since teachers are most valuable resource they should invest in continuous professional development, Whilst as Hill & Jones (2012) states that strategic planning process in private sector is both a formal process initiated by top management and a result of serendipity, it can be argued that in public institutions serendipity is stifled and the formal process through standardized manuals is the

norm. This is evidenced by existence of highly structured instructional manuals (Government of South Africa 2010, and Government of Malawi 2007).

Studies in Malawi

There is very little published literature on studies done on strategic plans in Malawi *let alone* factors that impact on the development and implementation of strategic plans in public education institutions. Bryant (2013) in an internal evaluation report on the Malawi Polytechnic Strategic Plan that was carried out on behalf of University of Regina and Canadian International Development Agency states that (a) the country economy, (b) organizational culture, (c) strong commitment by leadership, (d) partnership, (e) reward and incentive system were critical factors in strategic plan formulation and are still critical factors in the implementation of the strategic plan. The Department of Human Resource Management and Development (2013) carried out an organization performance review. This internal report came out with two notable issues (a) there was poor compliance by Ministries, Government Departments and public sector Institutions in adhering to directives from the Office of the President and Cabinet (b) over half the Ministries and Departments did not have strategic plans. It does not give any analysis to the reasons why this status quo. The DHRMD (2014) monitoring report shows again that out of 48 Government Ministries and Departments, only 22 in the last ten years developed strategic plans. The report does not analyze the factors that led to this lukewarm response to the Governments' directive. It only provides a list of institutions, and it does not provide any further data on when the strategic plan was developed or whether this is first, second strategic plan of the institution.

In spite of the above Kayuni (2016) in his paper Strategic planning in Malawi Public Sector argues that the process of developing strategic plans in the public sector is an indicator of positive reform and further argues that leadership be it political or professional play a significant role in failure or success in strategic planning and management.

Study of the Strategic Plans of Public TTCs

GIZ in 2019 and 2020 facilitated the training of Principals in the principles of development of strategic plans in TTCs. This was a follow up on GIZ supports to strengthening Primary Teachers Colleges internal management systems through a placement of management experts and the development of college charters. This support therefore anchored both in well trained management but also on Government directive that all public institutions should develop strategic plans. GIZ provided step by step process in the development of strategic plans and the training covered the following key components: How to integrate national policies into the strategic plan; reflecting on vision 2020; MGDS 3; How to conduct and summarize SWOT data; deciding for priorities; development of objectives; development

of action/implementation plan and development of a monitoring tool. Due to this process the Public TTCs strategic plans are similar heavily influenced by public primary TTCs culture as directed by DTED.

METHODOLOGY

This study used both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Quantitative research directs a considerable amount of activity towards measuring concepts with scales to provide numerical value whilst as qualitative research focuses more on describing, listening and interpreting. This research followed a multiple methods design (Saunders *et al* 2012) that use a combination of qualitative and quantitative research. Having chosen multiple methods that leans more towards qualitative research supported by a quantitative methodology, the research strategy used the survey method.

There are 11 public Teachers Training College in Malawi and out of these three opened in 2023. The study selected 7 colleges using randomized sampling and one is a Girls College managed through the board of Governors. The senior Management of the selected Institutions that were the visionary of the strategic plan process had a questionnaire each. The middle level management teams that were tasked to implement the strategic plan were 8 per college also had a questionnaire each. The other randomly selected staff members representing their departments had to be interviewed during focus group discussion (FGD). This study used purposive sampling (Saunders, *et al* 2012). The reason for this choice is that purposeful sampling provides an opportunity for an in-depth study of information and that purposeful sampling strategy requires relative medium resource package. (Emmel 2013).

Primary data was collected through questionnaires and focus group discussions especially for the Head of Education Institutions (Principal). Secondary data was collected through document review of institutions' strategic plans. The questionnaire was framed in such a way that it could capture information on the process of developing the strategic plan and factors that cache group of respondents taken as critical to successful development and implementation of the strategic plan including factors that affect the implementation. Ethical issues were considered and researchers implored confidentiality.

LIMITATIONS

The study limitation is lack of published research on the impact of strategic plans in public education institutions in Malawi. The second was that TTCs could not provide data to support responses on successful implementation of the strategic plans. The last one is failure to reach the targeted groups in some cases.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this research was analyzed using thematic and content analysis. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns or themes

within the data collected (Bryman, 2004). This method of thematic analysis was chosen by this study because it is flexible and a good method to unravel or loosen the surface of reality (Braun and Clarke, 2006). After data from all the sources was reviewed, then content analysis was done which led to the categorization basing on the responses from respondents. It is from this categorization that themes emerged. Themes that came out very clear are as follows:

1. Desk review of Public Teacher Training Colleges
2. Knowledge and evidence of the existence of the strategic plan
3. Management and work culture in the development and implementation of the strategic plan
4. Key factors that would make strategic plan relevant
5. Factors that would affect the implementation of the strategic plan
6. The themes in this study are presented using brief descriptions as reported by participants with clear labelled tables and figures where possible.

Discussion of Findings in Themes and Content

Desk Review of Strategic Plans

A desk review was undertaken on all Strategic plans collected. The strategic plans had basic elements and these are: vision as basic aspirations of the college, mission as why the college exists and envisioned, SWOT analysis that was undertaken to identify internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats, core values, a belief that the college views as being of central importance, goals, what is considered to be achieved, objectives i.e. actions intended to attain or accomplish and action plans being a detailed plan outlining actions needed to reach the goal. The researchers focused on each strategic plan key result area and noted that there are common KRA in all strategic plans and these are:

1. Quality ICT and Library services for teaching and learning.
2. Promotion of outreach services in the surrounding community.
3. Provision of conducive learning environment and habitable housing for students and staff.
4. Maintenance of a committed and motivated staff and students.
5. Procurement & disposal of resources and effective record keeping by departments and sections.
6. Leadership, management and communication,
7. Maintenance and infrastructure.

What was noted by researchers was that well-meaning as the common themes key results areas are, being Government institutions, required input from other departments such as the Department of Human Resources, Ministry of Finance and DTED therefore lending the Strategic plans targets to externalities (threats) not under the control of senior management of TTCs.

Knowledge and Evidence of the Existence of the Strategic Plan

The research wanted to find out in the first place if all

the participants who were given the questionnaire and during focus group discussions have the knowledge and are aware of the existence of the strategic plans in their respective colleges. This was to confirm not only the availability of the strategic plans but also the participants' knowledge and use of the strategic plans and therefore relevance in the day-to-day management of the college. In addition, the research also wanted to understand the development of the strategic plan originated from.

The results of the study show that responses from both the questionnaires and focus group discussions indicate that participants had knowledge of the existence and acknowledged of the availability of strategic plans in their institutions.

50% of the respondents indicated that the idea of the development of strategic plan came from college management. While 8.3% respondents said that the idea of development of the strategic plan originated from DTED and 42% attributed to GIZ. Though there seems a balance, the fact that 50% of the respondents think it was externally driven calls into question the relevance but most importantly practical use of strategic plans to achieve key result areas in the day-to-day teaching and operations of Teacher Training Colleges. Mintzberg argues that a strategic plan to be relevant and successful must be treated both as ploy-reform driven but also as pattern organizational behaviour and position which is internally driven. Kayuni (2016) argues that public sector plans must be reform driven, it can be safely concluded that strategic plans were externally driven but still were relevant as they responded to government call.

Management and Work Culture in the Development and Implementation of the Strategic Plan

The research wanted to find out the management of the development and implementation of the strategic plan. The study has revealed from document analysis, questionnaires and focus group discussions that all the Teacher Training colleges developed their strategic plans through a process that was directed by DTED and GIZ. It followed the process of SWOT analysis and resulted into developing action plans. These structures that were established such as Teaching Practice Committees to collect data from TP Schools, Quality Assurance Teams and Monitoring and Evaluation Teams were a mirror of Teachers Training College work and management culture firmly established through GZ support which is entrenched in each college. The role of structures was confirmed during focused group discussions

The focus group discussion generated the following responses on involvement in the development and implementation of strategic plans as one teacher said:

“Yes, Development of strategic plans lecturers were involved. Did SWOT Analysis – copy available”. (FGD COL Z)

Another teacher had this to say:

“Most members were involved as we developed questionnaires and collected data in primary schools and did SWOT analysis” (FGD – COL Y)

From the same college another teacher said:
 “There is delegation of duties where others were collecting data, monitoring and evaluation, and budgeting and procurement”. (FGD – COL Y)

“College management team, teaching staff, support staff and students”. (P.COL X)

Another had this to say:

“All staff- the strategic plans tackled a number of areas”. (P- COL Y)

The study revealed that the management team at the college established different committees such as Quality Assurance, Teaching Practice, Budget and Finance and Monitoring and Evaluation to make sure that members of staff get involved in the development of the strategic plans. 80% of respondents as shown in the table indicate involvement. This shows that public TTCs strategic plans have high levels of ownership and at the point of development very relevant. The research has revealed that most of the participants were involved in different ways in the development of the strategic plans.

Key Factors that Would Make Strategic Plans Relevant

The research wanted to find out about the relevance of the strategic plans to education institutions in this case Public Teacher Training Colleges. Nyakeriga (2015) in the study carried out to investigate factor influencing implementation of strategic plans concludes that organizational culture, structure and administrative systems plays crucial role in making strategic plans relevant in TTCs. The study established through document analysis that the availability of key result areas in the strategic plans made them relevant. As stated above there are common key result areas in the strategic plans which TTCs identified as key to the implementation of the plans.

One of key result area is quality ICT and library services for teaching and learning and this has been achieved through procurement of resources like laptops as indicated here:

“There is fully furnished ICT laboratory, construction of additional classroom blocks done, refresher courses of both management and support staff done, ramps constructed”. (P X)

Another comment on the same key result area is this:

“Procurement of ICT gadgets as laptops and desk tops for use in departments”. (HOD – COL Y)

Another had this to say:

“We have increased the number of beamers to three”. (HOD COL – T)

The SWOT analysis of the strategic plans revealed the opportunities that are there in the TTCs that could be utilized in order to bring improvement of quality teaching. “Passing rate for students has been maintained to almost 100%”. (HOD COL – T)

Another teacher said:

“Improved student teacher performance”. (HOD COL Y)

Welfare of students and staff is among the key result areas (KRA) of strategic plans of some TTCs which

is promoting the creation of good working culture among all stakeholders that may bring about improved performance for example:

A teacher said:

“The relationship with TP schools is good”. (HOD COL Z)

Another teacher said that:

“There is good relationship among the teaching staff and non-teaching staff”. (HOD COL Y)

The study also identified another key result area, improved infrastructure, this help in the creation of a conducive working and learning environment for students and staff. It improved accessibility to the college by everyone. This has been supported by a teacher who said:

“Construction of infrastructure which is user friendly to all students”. (HOD – COL T)

The key result areas made strategic plans relevant since they guided the TTCs not to lose focus as they implement. Impact of organizational culture on implementation of strategic plans in TTCs

Through GIZ support, Public TTCs have development of culture of working committees and efficient Departments and Sections. These structures were directly involved in the development of strategic plans and therefore it was not difficult for them to be involved in implementation as they did set the targets. The success of every plan is as a result of a well constituted monitoring and evaluation team that is mandated to oversee the implementation of the strategic plan activities.

The research findings of the study reveal critical factors in the implementation of strategic plans. The principals played leading role and continue leading the process of implementing the strategic plans by being committed as one principal said:

“Provide guidance and focus of the strategic plan, reviewing the strategic plans, evaluation of plans and budgeting and allocation of resources.” (COL T P)

The findings also noted that the implementation of strategic plans in TTCs is well coordinated through the establishment of a structure which is headed by the Principal, the Deputy Principal, Head of Department, Teaching Practice Coordinator, Quality Assurance and Assessment Chair person. Though there were a lot of positive attributes there are four factors that if not looked into may affect all the positive gain of strategic plan. These are inadequate funding affects implementation of strategic plans in public institutions since access to finances enable organizations to develop as effective and viable strategies. This is according to the study by Muchemi (2005). Lack of political will means lack of committed support among key decision makers for a particular policy solution to a particular problem. Lack of knowledge means is a general condition of lack of awareness of a particular thing. These key factors have been summarized in the table below.

Inadequate Funding

Proper funding is the bedrock of project implementation; therefore, funds need to be disbursed timely and

adequately to enable the institutions carry out its programmes. The study established that funding has been erratic and inadequate for public TTCs to implement their plans. Almost all (100%) respondents during focus group discussions and responses from questionnaires confirm inadequate funding as a major factor affecting implementation of strategic plans.

Commitment/Political will

This is the extent of committed support among key decision makers for particular policy solution to a particular problem. This commitment has been identified from the study through questionnaires and focus group discussions where it has been noted that principals and senior members devote themselves in support of implementing the strategic plans. About 25% of respondents confirmed this support from decision makers especially the principals, deputy principals and committee chairpersons

Knowledge and Skills

Knowledge provides a strong foundation of understanding and skills bring practical application of the knowledge. It allows individuals to make informed decisions, understand complex concepts and solve problems. It is only a member of staff who has knowledge and skills that can contribute effectively in the implementation of strategic plans. The study has revealed that about 12.5% of respondents acknowledged lack of knowledge and skills affecting the implementation of strategic plans.

Key Factors that Would Affect the Implementation of the Strategic Plan

The effective implementation of the strategic plan is dependent on some factors to facilitate this. The research study established these factors as organizational leadership, organizational culture, organizational structure, availability of funds and government policy. Through questionnaires and FGDs it was noted that leaders and the leading process are key factors for formulating and implementing strategy because they represent the core of strategic management and this was shown through the principals of the TTCs. Leaders influence decision-making processes because effective decision-making impacts the implementation of the strategy.

A strong culture creates a sense of shared purpose, aligns employees with the organization's goals, and encourages behaviors that support strategic objectives. All the TTCs developed the charter in which culture is clearly outlined. According to researchers it has been argued that the fit between the strategy and structure of an organization leads to better performance because the structure provides the necessary systems and processes essential for successful strategy implementation. TTCs have good structures which makes it possible to have the strategic plans being implemented though at different levels as revealed by the study.

Research has revealed that funding is a major determinant

of implementing strategic plans in cooperative societies because of the inadequacy of financial resources of their own. Public TTCs fall in this category as funds comes from government so it is affected to a greater extend. Without government policy TTCs would not have developed their strategic plans. Therefore, policies facilitate recurring problems and guide the implementation of strategy. This study established the role of the factors explained in the implementation of TTCs strategic plans.

Challenges in the Implementation of the Strategic Plans

One of the key components of strategic plans is to facilitate reforms to make an organization more competitive. For public institutions Government policy had direct influence in formulation of strategic plans through policy reforms, formation of national plans as MGDS 2&3 sectoral plans as Education Sector Improvement Plans and direct directives (GoM2000). This reflects high levels of political will but that funding was not adequate to support all the activities. As indicated in earlier chapters there is overwhelming evidence that DTED with support from GIZ played a key facilitator's role in implementing this public sector reform. Bryant (2013) in an internal evaluation report on the Malawi Polytechnic Strategic Plan noted these: the country's economy, organizational culture, strong commitment by leadership, partnership and reward and incentive system as critical factors in strategic plan formulation and are still critical factors in the implementation of the strategic plan.

Achievement of Key Results Areas

The researchers looked again on the common themes of key results areas such as construction, staff Training etc. and noted that most of the key result areas were outside the mandate of the Teacher Training Colleges, it was not surprising that most TTCs are not above 50% in the implementation of strategic plans as indicated by the Principals Questionnaires. One of the factors could be that with strong guidance from DTED and GIZ there was legitimate expectations that these key result areas could be funded through a project.

Too Many Indicators or Over Ambitious Indicators

During the focus group discussions, it was conceded that the indicators were over ambitious and could not have been able to be implemented in the five-year plan. The focus group discussions that obvert a period of 15 years or so that GIZ funded teacher training, it facilitated the provision of funds to meet specific indicators agreed in the 5year slots. This therefore could have had an impact in SWOT analysis done in each college risks and threats were underplayed due to prioritized culture in implementing TTCs reform programmes

Budgets Ceilings and Erratic Funding

The research has revealed three key factors as shown in the table. Out of the three, the issue of funding

kept on appearing from respondents both through the questionnaire as well as focus group discussions. One of the key factors that could render the Public TTCs Strategic Plans irrelevant is inadequate financial support. This is not unique to Teachers Training Colleges only. All public institutions have experienced this. However, one would have expected the SWOT or PESTEL to take this into account. Looking at the intensity of training TTCs went through on SWOT analysis this came as a surprise to researchers that it was not fully interrogated. Inadequate funding is the critical key factor that would make the strategic plans a mere academic exercise therefore not relevant in TTCs

This was supported by other responses from participants who said that:

“...funding from the government seems to be an issue when it comes to implementation of the strategic plan.” (FGD COL V)

One of the teacher said that:

“...late funding affects implementation of plans. It compromises the quality of delivery.” (FGD COL Z)

One of the principal had this to say:

“...our strategic plans were based on the expected government funding. However, due to the situation on the ground, government is not funding us as anticipated.”

Another response was this:

“...delayed and unreliable funding system.” COL X (P)

Lack of Innovative Approaches to Funding Strategic Plans

In the private Sector, the development of strategic plans is buttressed by innovative funding to implement that strategic plan and make the private sector competitive. It was noted through responses to questionnaires and focus group discussions that there was innovative approaches to funding the strategic plans, there was an expectation that either GIZ or Government would provide extra funds. This was a common response during focus group discussion:

“Some of the issues in the strategic plan need government or donor support.”

This did not come as surprise to researchers as organizational culture of public institutions do facilitate innovative ways of funding and all funds that public institutions are channeled into account NO 1

The research findings revealed that public TTCs solely depend on government funding in order to implement all their development activities. This is a clear indication that there is lack of innovation among public TTC management putting sustainability of planned activities at risk of failing to be completed.

Responsiveness to Agenda 2063

Reforms in both private and public institutions are driven from the top. (Mayuni2016). As noted, the development of strategic plans for them to be relevant need to be responsive to Government policy direction. All TTC Strategic plans were developed before Government

adopted the agenda 2063 and National Implementation Plan 1. During group discussions it was surprising that senior members of TCCs could not elaborate what Agenda 2063 was all about. However, the questionnaires responded by Principals were all up to speed on Agenda 2063. Desk review of Public TTCs Strategic plans does capture a system of midterm review critical factors that negatively affect the relevance of the strategic plans. The Monitoring and Evaluation focus on internal matters such as implementation plan.

CONCLUSION

The study established that there is a strategic plan at each institution that was part of the study. This was supported by document analysis where the strategic plan from each institution that took part was studied. The Developments of these plans were highly participative and hugely influenced by the Management Culture of delegation and specialized Committees of the public TTCs and strengthened through GIZ support. Public TTCs have a management culture of each level having tasks Deputy Principals, Heads of Department, Teaching Practice Coordinators, Quality Assurance Teams and Monitoring and Evaluation Teams. This enabled a very participative situational analysis through SWOT process and Development of an all-inclusive Strategic Plan. However, it was also noted that the strategic plan in trying to be all-inclusive had over ambitious targets or had Key Result Areas that were outside the mandate of the TTCs. This aspect would render the strategic plan as an academic exercise and not relevant to the day to day running of the TTCs.

Questionnaires responded to by Principals revealed that most of the plans in third year of implementations had only managed to accomplish 30-50% of the goals and targets set. This could be attributed to the fact that most targets set assumed an increased budget and regular disbursement of funds. However, during the planning period, funding was erratic at making colleges cut down on activities.

It was also noted that there was legitimate expectation that GIZ the traditional donor for TTCs would fund some of the activities, but during this planned period GIZ, reduced their funding and left the sector. In the minds of the participants, they had no doubts that the strategic plans are relevant in public TTCs because the strategic plans key results areas had focused on procurement of resources, improved teaching and learning, improved welfare for staff and students, improved infrastructure and environmental development, use of Information and communication technology (ICT) and practicing inclusivity (IE).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings from the study and literature review, the study recommends the following:

Both in private and public sector, a strategic plan is highly influenced by the existing policy agenda. To ensure that

the Strategic plan remains relevant there should be a set mechanism for bi annual review. This bi annual review would serve three purposes

(a) It will ensure that the strategic plans are still responsive to government set agenda, there is change, it will provide for an opportunity to realign the strategic plan second half of implementation to new policy agendas

(b) It will allow for Monitoring and Evaluation results feedback into the goals and targets and where there are too ambitious adjust where they were too casual adjust

(c) There is usually high turnover of staff the bi annual review provides an opportunity to bring new staff on board.

For the Ministry of Education specifically DTED the researchers would like to make two major recommendations. The first is that 'Teacher Training Philosophy should be driven by Policy agenda of the Government.' There was significant shift from MGDS II & III to Agenda 2063. Whilst the Strategic plans were hugely responsive to MGDS II & III the change Agenda 2063 made the strategic plans endangered species and not a priority for government to fund the activities therein. There was need and still a need for DTED to find funds to have Teacher Training Colleges review the Strategic Plans. DTED currently is through USAID funded programme reviewing teacher training strategies. This is a window of opportunity to review the strategic plans so that they remain relevant

Second major recommendation is that, 'within the constraints of Public financed institutions DTED should negotiate that TTCS can have programmes that will assist in generating funds.

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