

**STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY BRIDGE SCHOOLS IN KENYA TO GAIN
SUSTAINABLE COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE**

BY

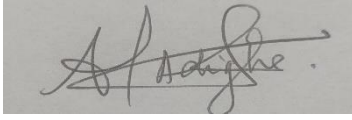
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**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF DEGREE OF THE MASTER OF
BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION, FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND
MANAGEMENT SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI**

2022

DECLARATION

I accept that this project is my work and it has not been accepted in any other university.

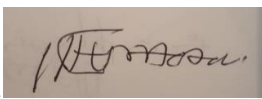
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This project has been submitted for examination with my approval as the supervisor.

Signature... .....

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my wife Jacqueline Mutile and my lovely children Michael Sami, Cherish Amanda, and Judah-Christian Jabali.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to appreciate the power of God in this inquiry. Deeply, my sincere appreciation goes to my supervisor Professor Evans Aosa. He was the best in this setting. His support is above measure and I can never forget his support.

I want to acknowledge the support that family members showed me and their love throughout this process. My wife Jacqueline thanks for the time, endless support and unfailing love. I also appreciate any friends who were part of this process.

Finally, I want to thank Bridge International Academies for the support they offered me.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

| | |
|------|---|
| CEO | Chief Executive Officer |
| CIO | Chief Information Officer |
| CTO | Chief Technology Officer |
| ECDE | Early Childhood Development & Education |
| IT | Information Technology |
| KCPE | Kenya Certificate of Primary Education |
| KMP | Knowledge Management Process |
| OEM | Original Equipment Manufacturer |
| SCA | Sustainable Competitive Advantage |
| SME | Small & Medium-sized Enterprises |
| SPSS | Statistical Package for Social Sciences |

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ABSTRACT

The business environment is challenging and firms require strategies to manage their operations. Strategies allow firms to achieve success, plan for their activities and develop power over others. It is the use and application of plans that allow firms to experience long value in their operating environment. Using the models of Porter's competition and sustainability as well as the models of instructional theoretical framework, this inquiry determine the various plans and strategies used by Bridge Schools in Kenya to gain Sustainable Competitive Advantage. As such, the model was case study and information was developed and created using interview. School managers within Bridge Schools in Kenya were interviewed using face to face ways. Content analysis method was used in developing various themes underlying the topic. Responses with common themes or patterns were grouped together into coherent categories to get themes that relate to the topic of the study. This study found out that Bridge International Academies had in place six key strategies that include high quality service provision, cost leadership, market segmentation, focus strategies, branding and capacity building, and outsourcing. It was noted that the schools were cost leaders in that their services were cheaper than their competitors, they were also offering quality services through enhanced technological innovations, and they had carved out a sizable market segment among families in informal settlements. This study suggests future studies should incorporate more than one cluster of schools to enhance variability of the responses thus increasing reliability. Importantly, the scholars should consider using both primary and secondary data such as real academic performance and co-curricular performance of the company, look into actual costs and delve into other performance indicators related to the strategies studied.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The current business world is full of challenges and firms require strategies to manage their operations. A corporation has a high level of success and power over rivals when it has unique resources and good talent management systems. Technology and brand management also plays a role in promoting high success in firms. According to Thompson & Strickland (1998), Competitive advantage may be gained through tactics. Strategies can result in sustainable competitive advantage, which is based on core skills that help the business in the long run. A core competency is an area of specialized expertise produced by integrating complicated job activity and streams of technology (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990). Porter (1980) argued that firms must offer products that are of high value and services that are above the rivals in different dimensions. Consistently comprehending and foreseeing client wants, customer service and shifting market conditions are the cornerstones of every competitive strategy. Practically in all sectors, including the setting of elementary schools, achieving a lasting competitive advantage is the main objective of corporate strategy. According to a research by Quaye and Mensah (2018), strategies are the foundation of business operations and provide companies a lasting competitive edge. This advantage arises when a company can offer the same advantages as rival products while charging less, or it can offer benefits that are superior to those offered by rival products.

This inquiry is guided by two major theoretical models. These include the theory of institutions that serve as institutional theory, and Michael Porter's theory that supports development of power and effective plans over rivals. Porter supports the view business will face competition and firms can achieve high performance and good competitive advantage when they pursue policies that create high quality services and enhance productivity levels. The theory indicates that firms must adopt differentiation, segmentation as well as brand innovation in promoting their success. The idea also suggests that companies use superior quality and affordable price in their main activities to gain a long-term competitive advantage. The institutional model supports the view that firms are managed based on norms and internal factors or values (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The underlying premise of the idea is that entities' structures serve as reflections of a socially created reality. According to Meyer & Höllerer (2014), a highly formal operating environment has a significant impact on the behavior of the environment the company operates in and homogenizes that behavior. According to this concept, organizations are institutions that are managed according to a set of rules.

In Kenya today, primary schools and other institutions are faced with different challenges. Top managers have realized the importance of adopting and using strategies to promote and achieve their sustainable competitive advantage. As such, many primary schools are adopting different strategies with the aim of promoting their success and sustainable competitive advantage. The well outlined strategies and plans that form part of unique ways of doing operations by firms in Kenya and to improve their competition include the use of cost leadership strategies, high quality service delivery and the use of differentiation

strategies. The purpose of this study is to identify the tactics used by Kenya's Bridge Schools to acquire competitive edge.

1.1.1 The Concept of Strategy

According to Valdez-Juárez, Castillo-Vergara and Ramos-Escobar (2022), strategy is the plan that firms use to manage environmental changes in their operations. With strategy, firms are able to deal with turbulent external business environment and this is done through the development of strategic plans and continuous analysis of the environmental factors and changes. By utilizing strategic plans, businesses are able to establish organizational policies, develop means to put the plans into action, and adopt monitoring and assessment strategies to guarantee the goals are met without fail (David, 2008). After carefully analyzing the circumstances using various strategic tools like the PESTEL and SWOT analysis models, strategic planning guarantees that managers are able to support the articulation of the company's vision and mission statements (Andrews, 1971). Additionally, it relates to the process that businesses employ to define their objectives, allocate their resources, and provide a comprehensive framework for achieving those objectives.

Weor (2018) noted that strategy is important in managing the environment of operations. Each company has its unique environment. Business environment is not straight and this requires non-rigid plans. This means that the application of some plans or strategies may require restructuring an organization to meet new activities and respond appropriately to the external environment. It may also involve comprehensive strategy evaluation to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Effective strategy application requires formal and flexibility of operations among the top management. It is the strategy that provides growth

and direction towards the success of the company. This implies that effective decision making and problem solving are ingredients of strategy in many organizations.

1.1.2 Sustainable Competitive Advantage

The capacity of a company to outcompete other companies in its field is important. It is what makes firms to get customers where others are not. This requires firms to adopt new models and improve their operations plans in day to day capture (Porter, 1985). According to Peteraf and Barney (2003), a competitive advantage is cheaper costs or higher differentiation compared to the product market's marginal rival. If a company can generate more economic value than its marginal rival, then it has a competitive advantage.

A long-lasting competitive advantage is one that endures over time (Porter, 1985). Development that satisfies current needs without jeopardizing the potential success in near days to come is need by all firms. It is the long-term advantage of putting in place a special value creation strategy based on the special fusion of organizational resources and talents that cannot be imitated by rivals. This requires that organizations obtain the necessary resources and operate proactively within the framework of the sustainability standards and obligations. Because of this strength, the company can outlast its rivals for an extended length of time.

Every time a business has an advantage over its rivals in securing clients and fending off competitive forces, it typically has a sustained competitive advantage. Core competencies that serve the organization long term give rise to a sustainable competitive advantage. Lowering costs relative to competitors, first-rate customer service, and high-quality products are a few prominent sources of competitive advantage. A company must

work to offer what customers will see as higher value if it hopes to succeed in creating a long-lasting competitive edge. This means that the product must be either of higher quality or worth paying more for, or of higher quality and priced reasonably. Porter (2004) asserts that understanding an industry's evolution is essential for achieving sustainable competitive advantage in order to be able to foresee change and effectively respond to it. Porter (2004) lists several evolutionary drivers, including changes in governmental policy, structural shifts in related industries, product and process innovation, the accumulation of experience, the dispersal of proprietary knowledge, and shifts in the customer segments served. In addition, Johnson and Scholes (2006) list three essential strategies for maintaining competitive advantage, which include seeking to predict competitor changes, gradually realigning a firm's competitive strategy and working with rivals through lock-in strategies.

1.1.3 Primary Schools in Kenya

Primary schools in Kenya are categorized as either government funded or private. Government funded schools are referred to as public schools. Individuals, churches, or private businesses operate private schools. Through its policy documents, the Kenyan government has repeatedly emphasized the value of education as a means of eradicating ignorance, disease, and poverty. As a result, maximizing efficiency, improving quality, and ensuring fair access at all educational levels is a key component of the government of Kenya's overall development strategy.

To ensure that all children, regardless of their financial circumstances, may access primary education, the Kenyan government has been implementing the Free Primary Education program since 2003. However, a dramatic rise in the number of pupils over the years has

had a significant impact on the human resources and physical infrastructure already in place. In Kenyan elementary schools, teacher absenteeism remains a severe problem that makes it difficult to deliver high-quality instruction. While there are many reasonable reasons for teachers to miss out on classes and instruction, there are some absences that are obviously unjustified, such as when teachers work somewhere else while they should be in the classroom. It contributes to the fact that a large number of primary school pupils in the country still do not possess the fundamental social and emotional competencies, numeracy and literacy required for them to achieve their full potential.

1.1.4 Bridge Schools in Kenya

Bridge International Academies is a Kenyan company that was founded in 2008. As a social enterprise, Bridge is managed through a centralized system with the aim of providing high-quality affordable education to underserved families and children and lowering the administrative costs for operating individual schools. The Bridge model is run on low-cost community schools that provide affordable high-quality education to children from underserved families. Bridge supports leverage cutting edge innovation and technology, tailor lessons and teachers to provide children with high-quality education. Bridge entered the Kenyan market in 2008 and opened its first private school in Mukuru slum in 2009.

The mission of Bridge Kenya is to provide children with a life-changing education. Bridge Kenya has a long history of successfully improving learning outcomes in ECDE and primary schools across Kenya and this success has been recognized in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) results since 2015 where pupils have significantly outperformed the national average over consecutive years. It is adept at mobilizing capital and investments and is experienced in supporting the delivery of better

performing education systems through instructional design, teacher training, classroom management and assessment.

Bridge International Academies top management believes that every child has the right to high-quality education. The organization's goal is to give children an education that will change their lives and serve as a solid foundation and doorway to their future prosperity. Today, the management of the school runs community schools across 30 of 47 counties in Kenya and targets children from underserved communities to ensure that they receive a life-changing education. The management use a combination of specially selected technology, data, and experts to standardize and scale every aspect of how they deliver high-quality and affordable education. This includes everything from how teachers are selected and trained, how and where schools are built, and how lessons are delivered and monitored for improvement. Through innovative technology, learning is digitized based on the Kenyan national curriculum. Computer-aided applications help to monitor attendance, lesson delivery and performance. The technology helps all schools become transparent, giving near real time data on the performance of schools, no matter their location.

Since 2015, tens of thousands of pupils have achieved high marks on the national primary exit test (KCPE), earning admission to some of Kenya's best secondary schools as well as scholarships to elite US high schools. Universities in Kenya and colleges in the US now have alumni from these schools. This study tries to identify the tactics used by Kenya's Bridge Schools to gain Sustainable Competitive Advantage.

1.2 Research Problem

Firms work in different environments with the aim out-smarting their rivals. This is important for firm success and value as well as succeeds in the long run (Galliers & Leidner, 2006). To do this, they must identify appropriate strategies for producing and enhancing value for their clients. A key component of successful organizations is the employment of various strategies. A fundamental prerequisite for estimating the value of each member's contribution is the necessity to understand the business's general direction, goals, and mission. Even though it does not result from a formal planning process, every successful organization has this business self-awareness and appears to have clarity of vision (Gerstenfield and Wortzel, 2007). According to Masale (2018), the use of different strategies is associated with sustainable competitive advantage among firms. This is because strategies help to deliver road map, direction and wide problem solving and decision-making framework in organizations.

Bridge International Academies is among the main primary school education in Kenya. The success of the firm has been due to adoption of different strategies in their operations. The use and adoption of different strategies has led to scaling up of operations of Bridge International Academies. However, the success of the firm is not well documented and the management needs to know and understand some of the best strategies that can improve their success.

The investigation of the tactics used by firms to acquire Sustainable Competitive Advantage has been the subject of numerous studies. Bilgihan and Wang (2016) used the U.S lodging industry as a case study to assess the technology-induced competitive advantage in the states. The study, which employed a case study approach, found that while

some businesses successfully use IT to gain a competitive edge, others struggle to do so. In order to gain knowledge and insight into the alleged issue, different people were interviewed during the study. The committee, which included technology executives, held twice-yearly meetings to discuss how technology and e-business are evolving in the hospitality sector. CEOs of hospitality technology, suppliers, vice presidents, CTOs and CIOs of hotels, and scholars with expertise in the field participated in this study. The results show that hotels can get a competitive edge through IT if they decide to effectively incorporate all available technology into their business. Businesses must invest in cutting-edge and complex technologies in addition to successfully allocating resources like capital and labor to build IT-induced competitive advantage. This study was conducted in the USA, so it might not be applicable to Kenya.

Mahdi, Nassar, and Almsafir (2019) used an empirical investigation in private universities in Iraq to study sustainable competitive advantage and the knowledge management processes. According to the research, firms today have realized that their success depend on their plans. As a result, knowledge must be included among an organization's resources, which must constantly be preserved and expanded. Universities and Private colleges are really just making investments in the world's future entrepreneurs. The study discovered that the knowledge they ultimately process from these educational institutions through knowledge management processes (KMP) will help them choose how competitive they will be in the commercial sector as well as their future route. 525 academic leaders from 44 private Iraqi universities in a variety of positions made up the study's responses. The findings indicate a significant connection between SCA and KMP. This study was

conducted in Iraq, so it might not be applicable in Kenya. Additionally, the survey mainly paid attention to private universities.

The value of creativity and brand value was determined among manufacturing SMEs in Ghana by Quaye and Mensah (2018). The study used a cross-sectional research methodology. The article gathered information from 591 manufacturing SMEs in Ghana using simple random sampling and a multi-stage stratified approach. According to the report, SMEs in metal fabrication, the detergent, beverage, and water industries may gain a competitive edge through innovations. It was noted that success require effective plans. However, this study was done among manufacturing industry in Ghana and may not apply among schools in Kenya.

Masale (2018) examined in Kenya the impact of competitive tactics on organizational performance using Bridge International Academies as a case study. Quantitative research methods were utilized in the study's descriptive research design because they made it easier to gather data and produce numerical findings for the variables. 156 employees of the Nairobi-based Bridge International Academies served as the study's target group. The list of Bridge International Academies administration and faculty served as the sample frame. The study used a stratified random sampling approach to get the best sample, and it then used Yamane's formula to calculate the sample size, which came to 111 managers and teachers. Data from the chosen respondents were gathered using a semi-structured questionnaire, and the validity of the data collecting instrument was examined in a pilot research. The inquiry showed that most participants were in agreement that management uses cost leadership strategy tactics to expand market share, boost profit margins, and reduce expenses. Additionally, the findings showed that Bridge has a focus on innovation

and ongoing development, provides goods and services of greater quality than those of rivals, and advertises its brand, goods, and services. However, this study focused more on the concept of performance and used quantitative methods rather than qualitative methods.

In light of the study context, many firms employ various strategies to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Bridge International Academies works in a setting where it is required to deploy strategies to create sustainable competitive advantage. “What are the strategies adopted by Bridge Schools in Kenya to gain Sustainable Competitive Advantage?”

1.3 Research Objective

The objective of the study was to determine the strategies adopted by Bridge Schools in Kenya to attain Sustainable Competitive Advantage.

1.4 Value of the Study

This study would benefit different stakeholders in the country and beyond. The study would benefit practitioners, policy makers as well as future researchers. The study results would help the top management of schools in the country and beyond to determine the strategies they can deploy to gain Sustainable Competitive Advantage. This would help promote competitive advantage, success and performance among various primary schools owned by different stakeholders in the country.

The study findings would help to guide policy makers in the country, especially towards formulation and implementation of strategies and policies that can promote sustainable competitive advantage among primary schools in the country. It would help implement

policies and strategies that can promote sustainable competitive advantage of primary schools and other institutions in the country.

Future researchers would evaluate the tactics used by Kenyan schools to acquire a sustained competitive edge using the study as a benchmark. Along with a discussion of the relevant theories and empirical data, the research would also present some of its findings. The study would act as reference point in the analysis of theories associated with the topic.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The literature review for the study is covered in this chapter. It also reviews previous research on the subject of the study that has been done by other academics. The chapter also covers theoretical foundation. In addition, the section also covers empirical studies and research gaps associated with the topic of the study.

2.2 Theoretical Foundation

The idea of sustained competitive advantage has been the subject of several theories. As such Michael model and Institutional Theory serve as the foundation for this research.

2.2.1 Michael Porter Theory of Competitive Advantage

This theory was proposed by Michael Porter in late 1980. The theory indicates that business will face competition and firms can achieve high performance and good competitive advantage when they pursue policies that create high quality services and enhance productivity levels. The theory indicates that firms must adopt differentiation, segmentation as well as brand innovation in promoting their success. In addition, the theory supports that firms adopt high quality and cost-effective pricing in their major operations. A company gains a competitive edge when it assembles a group of qualities that enable it to outsmart its rivals. It entails gaining access to specialized labor, special resources and technical advancements (Thompson & Strickland, 2012).

The theory assumes that organizations could explore the strategic actions of concentrated growth and market development. Firms must also adopt strategies that aim at product

development as well as innovation and vertical integration programs. The theory also confirms that a competitive business environment enables the organization to come up with unique innovations and strategies to help the business thrive. According to Porter (1985), a company's competitive advantage will grow as long as the value it offers customers outweighs the cost of its goods. In order to provide firms a competitive edge over rivals, he developed three general methods, which include focus technique, distinctiveness, and cost leadership. Production at a lower cost than rivals is a component of the cost leadership approach. Finding a low-cost basis in terms of the resources a company has access to is required for this concept (Thompson & Strickland, 2012).

The theory is relevant to this research since it indicates that firms can use generic strategies to promote their success and achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Long-running businesses have a wealth of industry knowledge and the capacity to develop strategies that will uphold their sustained competitive advantage. The primary objective of businesses is to develop competitive advantages through sustainable strategy.

2.2.2 Institutional Theory

The majority of organizational actions are driven by the need to adapt to the institutional environment; this is according to the institutional theory put forward by DiMaggio and Powell in 1983. The underlying premise of the concept is that entities' structures serve as reflections of a socially created reality. According to Meyer and Höllerer (2014), a highly formal operating environment has a significant impact on the behavior of the environment the company operates in and homogenizes that behavior.

According to this concept, organizations are institutions that are managed according to a set of rules. Firms must consider issues that touch their moral, social and legal market value. According to Scott (2008), institutions define the possible methods to function by supporting, forbidding or limiting specific behavioral patterns. These actions set the ground rules for the game.

This theory is suitable to this study because it asserts that if organizations such as schools have norms, practices and rules that guide operations, then they will enjoy high performance. The theory explains important aspects that organizations must conform to in the process of maintaining their success and performance. The institutional theory includes the organization structure, rules and social policies that govern success and growth in organizations.

2.3 Strategy and Sustainable Competitive Advantage

The current business world is full of challenges and firms require strategies to manage their operations. A corporation has a competitive advantage anytime it outperforms its competitors in gaining consumers and fending off competitive forces. Competitive advantage is achieved through tactics (Thompson & Strickland, 1998). Businesses may use a variety of techniques to create a sustained competitive edge. Competitive strategy, according to Shapiro (1989) should cover diverse methods of operations. A company's ability to produce value for the customer at a cost that is lower than the cost of doing so is what gives it a competitive advantage. Market success is important in promoting value over others.

To achieve their well set out plans, firms must work with different models (Kathura et al, 2007). Thus, since the competitors will almost certainly adapt to the most successful firm in a specific field, a strategy must be flexible to accommodate this adaptation (Marren, 2010). Some of strategies that create sustainable competitive advantage include the use of cost leadership, differentiation strategy, delivery of high quality and innovation as well as the use of focus strategies and market segmentations.

By providing distinctive products that are characterized by important attributes like customer service, innovation, and quality, differentiation strategy seeks to provide a sustained competitive advantage. A differentiation strategy involves creating a product or service that has distinctive qualities that consumers appreciate and that they view as being superior to or different from those of the competitors. To maintain this strategy, the company needs to possess the following qualities, according to Baum and Oliver (1992). Also, other qualities include the ability to attract highly skilled and qualified individuals, a focus on continuous improvement and innovation, and the ability to plan their plans.

With fundamental services provided to a higher priced market leader, a lower cost strategy gives some market sectors a sustained competitive edge. It produces goods that are comparable to considerably more expensive goods that can also find enough market acceptance. Firm must provide effective services and develop various plans in their major operations (Porter, 1996). This is possible through low cost plans.

A company needs a sizable market share that produces a long-lasting competitive advantage in order to implement a cost leadership strategy successfully (Hyatt, 2001). Cost leadership may be attained in a variety of ways, including through easy access to raw

materials, resource capacity utilization, technology, product design, wide distribution, economies of scale, input costs, and mass manufacturing, (Malburg, 2000). According to Porter (1985), there can only be one cost leader per sector, and if this is the sole distinction between a business and its rivals, taking on the low-cost leadership role is the optimal course of action from a tactical perspective (Malburg, 2000).

When firms operate at low cost, they plan to achieve their plans and success. This means working with various groups to plan their operations. This is possible in managing their long-term value. All firms must plan their value and ensure their goals match their plans. This is what Porter was talking in late 1980s (Porter, 1996). Malburg (2000) also noted that reengineering operations promote economies of scale, process innovations, and learning curve advantages all lead to lower costs and cost advantages.

(Kathura et al, 2007) assert that product innovation gives differential competitiveness in terms of function and quality, which creates incentives for customers to select. This enables businesses to outperform their rivals, take the lead on the market, and boost performance by luring in new clients. A brand also represents a promise of an experience and is closely related to trust in the company. It's what the customers say when the firm is not around and the brand cannot be duplicated, and that is a competitive advantage.

According to the study by Malagihal (2021), new product innovation has an impact on an organization's success. This can be done with the newer products and new models. Therefore, innovation is the primary driver of competitiveness, profitability, growth, and the development of enduring values. Competitive advantage is unstable and challenging to achieve in a highly competitive setting. Innovation can help firms anticipate market

changes more quickly and get ahead of opportunities and it can also help firms to differentiate their activities from the competition.

2.4 Empirical Studies and Research Gaps

Various studies have been done on the analysis of the strategies deployed by organizations to gain Sustainable Competitive Advantage. According to Miotto, Del-Castillo-Feito, and Blanco-González's (2020) research, the UK's higher education institutions' reputation and legitimacy are crucial to maintaining their competitive edge. The reduction in public money, rankings, and globalization according to the report, have made public colleges very competitive. Community engagement, employability, teaching, knowledge transfer and better outcomes in terms of research are increasingly demanded by internal and external stakeholders. In this new environment, intangible assets like credibility and reputation are essential for maintaining a competitive edge. Yet there is still a shortage of understanding regarding these factors and their connections. The inquiry used different colleges in the region. They take into account the types of cognitive values in their major activities and the firm reputation has a favorable and significant impact on its validity. This study was conducted in the U.K; thus, it might not be applicable to Kenya.

Malagihal (2021) investigated Tata Motors as a case study for the strategic plans and values influence the success of firms in India. According to the research, new business models have an effect on how well vehicle companies' function, and the competitive environment for original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) is always evolving across the world. In order to examine the contrasts in platform strategies, and fundamental competencies the research compared Tata Motors' performance in the passenger car category with that of a relevant

overseas passenger vehicle manufacturer. The disparities show that there is fierce rivalry among the companies in India's vehicle business. The results show that Tata Motors may benefit from strategic choices such as strategic collaboration with partner companies, technology, and appropriate management of workers in senior leadership roles. In order to maintain a competitive edge, the new strategic alternatives may also offer opportunities for worldwide expansion in specialized vehicle product sectors. This study, however, was limited to the automotive sector and might not be applicable to the educational field.

According to Muhammad, Tasmin, and Aziati's (2020) review of big data analytics' sustainable competitive advantage in Nigeria's higher education sector, institutions of higher learning must adopt contemporary technology, such as big data, to survive in the country's increasingly complex and competitive environment. According to the authors' findings, several organizations are now able to connect their multiple databases into data warehouses thanks to significant improvements in data collection, processing power, data transfer, and storage. Higher education institutions, similar to healthcare organizations, governments, and businesses, have some of the same motivations for implementing analytics in the age of plentiful data, particularly in the areas of addressing new financing methods in a changing economic environment, extending local and worldwide influence and financial efficiency. Higher education institutions are experiencing an increase in data, yet the majority of this data is dispersed among departments and comes in different forms. This makes it challenging to integrate or access data. It is necessary to be able to analyze various information sets, regardless of where they come from, and to consolidate data kept in several locations inside institutions in order to use these data efficiently. One essential need for the deployment of Big Data in higher education is the regulation and

management of the data while protecting sensitive data across databases (Daniel & Butson, 2013). Additionally, the authors noted that integrated data from different sources within an organization offers a stronger basis for choices relating to important business and technological demands, avoiding redundancies and wasting valuable time gathering data from diverse sources. To put it in another way, data warehousing may be a useful strategy for maximizing the value of big data in higher education institutions. Nevertheless, this study was carried out in Nigeria; hence it might not entirely apply in Kenya.

Rajab et al. (2014) used a case study of Moi University in Kenya to examine the effects of customer relationship management as a strategy for competitive advantage in Kenyan public universities. According to the study, the World Wide Web in particular offers businesses the chance to forge stronger connections with clients than was previously feasible in the offline world; this is because of the information technology revolution. Companies now have a greater capacity than ever before to create, develop, and maintain long-term customer relationships since they have the ability to combine immediately and respond to consumer demands which offers a customer a highly tailored and interactive experience. The ultimate objective is to lower client acquisition expenses and increase repeat purchase rates in order to convert these connections into higher earnings.

To investigate the effect of customer relationship management on customer loyalty at Moi University, the investigators conducted a survey. The study used a case study research methodology and had a target population of 25,013 people, comprised of 12 heads of schools at Moi University, 1 vice chancellor and 25,000 students. The leaders of the schools, the vice chancellor, and the students were divided into strata of the targeted demographic. Using Fisher's method, the sample size for the students was determined to

be 100. 113 people made up the whole sample size. For the vice chancellor and heads of schools, a purposive sample method was utilized; for the students, a convenience sampling method was used. Interviews and questionnaires were used to gather the data. While the vice chancellor was being interviewed, the questionnaires were given to the students and the leaders of the schools. With the use of descriptive statistics, the data was analyzed. According to the study's findings, customer relationship management enhances competitive advantage among Kenyan universities. Nevertheless, this study was conducted in 2014, thus it might not be entirely applicable now.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This section presents the plan of the study. It covers the procedures that guided the study activities. The review of the procedures used was based on the topic of the study – determination of the strategies adopted by Bridge Schools in Kenya to gain Sustainable Competitive Advantage.

3.2 Research Design

Research design indicates how the research will be done. It gives the framework used by the researcher to get data, measure the findings and analyze the data obtained from the respondents (Creswell & Plano, 2011). The model is the framework under which the study is conducted. Denscombe (2014) argued that research design guide data collection and focus of the study.

In this study, the researcher adopted a case study method since it allowed the researcher to retain the meaningful and holistic features of the real-life experiences of the study topic and it was easier to establish the strategies deployed by Bridge Schools in Kenya to gain Sustainable Competitive Advantage. In addition, the use of case study design allowed the researcher to get in-depth data related to the topic of the study. The case study method enabled the researcher to collect data in a cheaper way and within a short time. The study case was Bridge Schools in Kenya.

3.3 Data Collection

Primary data was collected by the means of an interview guide. The researcher interviewed school managers within Bridge Schools in Kenya. This was done on the topic.

Typically, the researcher used face to face interviews. The method was cheap and easier. It was also possible to gain different views on the topic. It allowed the researcher to engage with others and get reliable data. This is imperative in developing good rapport during any inquiry.

3.4 Data Analysis

In this study, the author used qualitative data analysis. The main information was analyzed and reviewed using content analysis method, based on various themes underlying the topic. This helped to evaluate and establish the connection on the concepts. Responses with common themes or patterns were grouped together into coherent categories and this helped to get themes that relate to the topic of the study.

According to Saunders et al. (2015), qualitative research methods involve examination of variables of the study to provide more observations and knowledge. This is important in expanding new knowledge and creating new ways of doing things based on opinions. Since the study adopted and used content analysis, it was easier to analyze the data based on different thematic categories and this helped to achieve the objective of the study. This clearly established some of the strategies that have been adopted by Bridge Schools in Kenya to gain Sustainable Competitive Advantage.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the data collected with a view of achieving the research objective and the stated research aim. The chapter offers an in-depth analysis and discussion of the findings in line with the existing literature and findings from studies that had been conducted earlier. Since the study was based on interview, the chapter provides analysis of the themes associated with the topic and based on the opinions of the study participants. The analysis confirms some of the strategies adopted by Bridge Schools in Kenya to promote their success and competitive edge in the basic education sector in the country.

4.2 Participant Demographics

The researcher established the participants' demographics that include sex, age, job experience, and the highest level of education. The researcher was not keen on other demographic characteristics that include ethnicity, race and religious beliefs due to the cosmopolitan nature of the schools and also the predominance of a common religious belief. It was necessary to underscore the demographics of the respondents since some, such as job experience determine the quality of responses given.

Likewise, age is in most instances proportional to the level of job experience. Finally, an understanding of the gender composition can explain any biases that may affect the reliability of the study findings. The analysis also indicates that Bridge International

Academies in Kenya has different departments and there are school managers who manage various strategic operations.

4.2.1 Age and Sex of the Respondents

The age of the respondents was captured in the interviews because it would offer information regarding the composition of the management of Bridge International Schools in Kenya. The findings indicate that out of the 18 managers interviewed, more than 70% were aged above 35 years and only less than 30% were aged between 26 and 34. 12 respondents were aged between 36 and 50 years while 5 respondents were aged between 26 and 34 years. Out of the 18 respondents, only one was aged below 26 years. From the findings, it is noteworthy that the largest percentage of managers were aged 36 and above. This is explainable by the requirement for more experienced personnel in the management positions in running schools and such experience increase with age. The findings also show that it was difficult to find younger people in the higher positions of employment in Bridge Schools.

Out of the 18 participants, it was noted that 11 were male and 7 were female; thus, the male represented 61.1% of the population while the female represented 38.9% of the sample population. This indicates that a majority of the managers in the schools are male; the proportions however, meet the third gender rule as per the constitution of Kenya stipulates. Despite meeting the gender rule requirements, the finding herein may be biased; being a social study hence may not reflect the real position of all the managers, especially the female managers.

4.2.2 Position and Department

The researcher sought the job positions of the respondents and it was established that out of the 18 respondents, 10 were School Managers, 4 Area School Supervisors, 3 were Regional School Supervisors and 1 was Schools Director. The study was mainly focused on top-level management and staff because they understood the strategies used by the schools better than the employees. However, the school system is organized in different departments to promote strategic management of operations. There are some managers who head academic portfolio and some are in charge of the school games and other co-curricular activities.

4.2.3 Participant Work Experience

In terms of the level of job experience of the participants the researcher sought to underscore the experience, in terms of years in which the participant had worked in management positions in Bridge Schools or elsewhere. It was established that 12 of the respondents had an experience of more than 10 years while 5 had worked between 5 and 10 years, the remaining 1 had experience of 5 or less years in management positions. The finding indicated that management in Bridge International Schools required some level of experience in that more than 66% of the managers had more than 10 years' experience.

Table 4.3.1 Level of experience of participants

| Level of Experience (Years) | Frequency | Percentage (%) | Cumulative Frequency |
|------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|
| 0 – 5 | 1 | 5.6 | 5.6 |
| 5 – 10 | 5 | 27.8 | 33.4 |
| 11 and above | 12 | 66.6 | 100 |
| Total | 18 | 100 | 100 |

4.3 Strategies adopted by Bridge Schools to gain Sustainable Competitive Advantage in Kenya

The unique competitive strategies used by Bridge Schools in Kenya were sought from the respondents when they were asked to explain how Bridge Schools operated that made them different from other schools in the community. Most of the respondents mentioned that the schools emphasized on delivering world class lessons using the Kenyan curriculum, continuous training of its teachers, instilling discipline among its pupils and enhanced use of technology. Some of the responses are sampled below.

‘The school is one of the community schools that charge the lowest school fees for quality services, compared with other similar schools in Kenya.’

‘Our school is unique in that we use international standards to teach local pupils using the Kenyan curriculum.’

'We have incorporated technology in all aspects of teaching and our classes are equipped with the necessary technologies to enhance efficient teaching and learning. Our classrooms and libraries are also equipped with modern learning aids.'

'The school only recruits highly motivated and well-trained teachers, we also offer periodical trainings to our teachers to enhance their capacities.'

'Importantly, we have for a long time built a culture of good performance and excellence not only in academics but also in co-curricular activities, which has heightened our brand image among primary schools in the country.'

'Bridge schools charge low school fees and this makes them affordable compared to other schools in the community. They use technology in teaching and provide home-work books and revision books for all pupils. They also involve the community in the day-to-day running of their schools through monthly Parents-Teachers conference and Board of Management meetings. Teachers are supported through continuous training and development to enable them succeeds in the classroom.'

In addition, one of the respondents noted; *"Bridge schools charge low school fees and this makes them very affordable and attractive to families from low-income communities. Learning in Bridge schools is supported by innovation and technology, and the schools provide homework books and revision books for all pupils. Teachers are supported through continuous training and development, and this makes our work very easy and simple, hence the reason many learners from low income families prefer joining our schools.'*

From the responses, it can be extracted that Bridge Schools have three main unique competitive strategies. The school is charging low school fees and support cost-leadership

management strategies. In addition, the school support technology use in curriculum implementation and its success is pegged on adoption of modern technologies. With low costs in its operations, the school has attracted different stakeholders. The school also supports a culture of good performance and provision of quality services. The school top management also promote stakeholder engagement and the community members including parents and government officials are part of major engagement in the school.

Six strategies came out clear from the analysis; they include quality service delivery, cost leadership, focus strategies, market segmentation, outsourcing, and branding as well as employee capacity building.

4.3.1 Delivery of Quality Services

The respondents were asked to give the extent to which their schools had adopted quality service delivery as a strategy in its operations to achieve competitive advantage. It was evident from the respondents that the school is maintaining high quality and this has been achieved through the use of modern technologies. Some of the responses are sampled below.

'Quality is our main priority and we employ both international and local teaching strategies in ensuring that we provide quality services to our pupils. This is evident in the good performances and excellence that we get every year, both in co-curricular activities as well as in national examinations. Through innovation and technology, Bridge has ensured the delivery of high-quality services to all of its clients.'

Moreover, it was evident that technology is at the center of Bridge teaching and daily management of schools. Every teacher is equipped with a tablet on which they can

download teacher guides for over eight hours of engaging lessons a day-up to two weeks in advance. This frees teachers from the demands of lesson planning and allows them to focus on teaching. Technology also powers the Bridge remote learning program that allows pupils to learn from home, thereby supplementing classroom learning. This increases the provision of quality services to the pupils based on the responses gathered.

4.3.2 Cost Leadership Strategies

The respondents were asked to give the extent to which their schools had adopted cost leadership strategy in its operations to achieve competitive advantage. From the respondents it was evident that cost leadership is one of the strategies adopted by the school to promote the success of their operations. The participants noted that innovation has allowed Bridge to cut on costs and hence deliver services at lower costs than competitors. One of the respondents noted; *'Bridge Schools are among the best performing low cost schools in the Kenyan Private Schools. Our school fees are as low as only an eighth of an average private school fees in the country.'*

Another respondent said; *'Innovation has allowed Bridge to cut on costs and hence deliver services at lower costs than competitors.'* This confirms that the school fully supports cost leadership practices in its major operations.

4.3.3 Focus Strategies

The respondents were asked to give the extent to which their schools had adopted focus strategies in its operations to achieve competitive advantage. It was evident that the school has adopted focus strategies to attract more customers and to deliver quality services. The management of the school noted that the school is focused on empowering children from

vulnerable backgrounds through life-changing education and the management always make follow-ups on our pupils and even seek scholarships for those who excel to both local and international institutions of higher learning. One of the respondents also noted that the first Bridge School was opened in Mukuru Kwa Njenga, a slum within Nairobi City. This was to offer education mainly to the poor children within such socially degraded areas, the main focus of Bridge. *'Bridge has focused on delivering high-quality primary education to low earning families through world-class instructional design'*. This confirms that the school mainly focuses on low income families and provides educational activities mostly in underserved communities.

4.3.4 Market segmentation strategies

The respondents were asked to give the extent to which their schools had adopted market segmentation strategies in its operations to achieve competitive advantage. Some of the responses noted include the view that Bridge targets the low earning market segment; hence most Bridge schools are located within the informal settlements and areas where families are underserved'. One of the respondents noted that *'The first Bridge School was opened in Mukuru Kwa Njenga, a slum within Nairobi City...this was to offer education mainly to the poor children within such socially degraded areas...that is our main focus.'*

4.3.5 Outsourcing Non-Core Services

The respondents were asked to give the extent their schools had adopted outsourcing strategy in its operations to achieve competitive advantage. It was evident that Bridge concentrates on its core service of teaching while non-core services are outsourced to external firms. Such services include Finance, Recruitment and Construction. One of the respondents said that; *'We sometimes outsource services such as finance reporting and*

construction from other companies and individuals to allow us to concentrate on our core competencies and activities’.

4.3.6 Branding and Continuous Training of Teachers

When asked to state the extent to which their schools had adopted brand image management and capacity building strategies in its operations to achieve competitive advantage, all the respondents responded and noted that branding and training of teachers is common in the organization. The respondents noted that Bridge ensures that its brand reflects in all its materials, from school uniforms, school structures, posters and sign posts. Bridge teachers receive continuous training to ensure that they succeed in teaching pupils in the classroom’. One respondent said; *‘We strengthen our brand through ensuring existence of strong parent groups that support the school, continuous communion between teachers and parents and occasional community social services within the areas we operate’.* Another respondent said; *‘Our school organizes annual events and activities within the slums and incorporate the community around while sensitizing them on the importance of education and enlightening them on other social matters...this has created a good rapport between the school and the people around.’*

Generally, the respondents alluded that Bridge International Schools employed all the six strategies to a large extent. It is only outsourcing that was not a common practice in the organization but was occasionally done. This has led to effective service delivery and high performance among pupils and teachers in Bridge Schools.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

The objective of this study was to determine the strategies adopted by Bridge Schools in Kenya to attain sustainable competitive advantage. First the study sought to underscore the unique strategic plans and programs that the schools used to remain competitive. Most of the respondents mentioned that the schools emphasized on delivering world class lessons using the Kenyan curriculum, continuous training of its teachers, instilling discipline among its pupils and enhanced use of technology. The schools had in place extensive use of technology in curriculum implementation; it offered low costs services and had a culture of good performance and provision of quality services.

The findings of this study agree with Malagihal (2021) who noted that innovation has immense impact on an organization's sustainable competitive advantage. Bridge schools have in place modern technology use, not only in management but also in the classrooms and in all areas of curriculum implementation. Likewise, on innovation and technology, this study's findings are in tandem with Kathura et al, (2007) findings which established that innovation gives differential competitiveness in terms of function and quality, which creates incentives for customers to select from. The innovation at Bridge gives parents an opportunity to choose from the traditional normal schools and Bridge Schools.

Bridge Schools do not only use technology in classrooms but also in management, this has been found to enhance efficiency in management. For instance, Tasmin, and Aziati's (2020) review of big data analytics' sustainable competitive advantage in Nigeria's higher education sector, institutions of higher learning noted that adoption of contemporary technology, such as big data, enabled organizations to survive in increasingly complex and competitive business environments. In addition, Augusto et al. (2012) noted that

technology does not only increase efficiency in operations of companies during crises but also enables companies to meet globalization and evolution of the consumer market through increasing their scope and reach of final customers. It is through technology that Bridge International Schools have broadened their customer base because it has enabled them to reach all corners of their target markets.

The findings indicate that Bridge International Academies is among the schools with cost-leadership strategies; implying that the cost of education in their schools is relatively lower than in other similar schools. This has played well to the competitive advantage of the schools bearing in mind their locations among the slum-poor families. This finding agrees with that of Porter (1996) and Malburg (2000) who noted that with the lowest costs in the sector, an organization easily gains a competitive edge.

Finally, an important factor in the competitive edge of the Bridge Schools is the fact that the schools constantly engage stakeholders and the communities around them in their activities. This is critical in building brand as noted by Miotto, Del-Castillo-Feito and Blanco-González's (2020) who established that community engagement enhanced brand image of a product. Likewise, they noted that continuous capacity building and knowledge transfer led to better outcomes in terms of performance in a company.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the study as derived from the findings herein. The chapter also gives conclusions based on the research study process and findings. In addition, the section presents the policy implications of these findings on practice and also in academia. The study limitations are captured here and subsequent recommendations for further studies. Finally, the chapter presents the researcher's recommendation for policy and practice.

5.2 Summary of Findings

This study aimed at establishing the strategies adopted by Bridge Schools in Kenya to attain Sustainable Competitive Advantage. 18 respondents were sampled from top management and interviewed with regard to the research question. Most of the respondents positively responded to the interview questions and it was noted that the network of schools had a higher percentage of males than female in management leadership positions (61.1% for male and 38.9% female). It was also established that the management of the schools had a higher number (more than 60%) of managers with more than 10 years' experience.

With regard to the sustainable competitive advantage strategies, the study established that Bridge International Academies had in place six key strategies that include high quality service provision, cost leadership, market segmentation, focus strategies, branding and capacity building and, outsourcing in their order of importance. It was noted that the

schools were cost leaders in that their services were cheaper than their peers, they were also offering quality services through enhanced technological innovations and technology acquisitions, and importantly, they had carved out a sizable market segment (poor, slum children).

The School enhanced its competitive advantage through focus strategies as well as through customer engagement and involvement. The services offered by the schools are tailor made for the local poor (who are their main focus) but are offered to international standards. It has also built its brand by constantly engaging with parents, the community through corporate social responsibilities and the schools' alumni. Also, by seeking scholarship for its pupils and keeping contact with the schools' alumni, the schools have built its brand image as among the best schools in the country.

5.3 Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that competitive strategies are critical in enhancing customer loyalty and satisfaction among institutions. Additionally, it can be concluded that technology plays an important role in promoting competitive advantage of a firm. It is through technology use that Bridge International Academies have stood the test of competition among a flooded market. Therefore, organizations seeking to remain at the top of their industries should have in place robust technological acquisition strategies and use.

Additionally, the study has indicated that low cost leadership is critical in maintaining competitive advantage in organizations. Therefore, it is concluded that organizations which are low cost leaders would always remain on top of the businesses in their specific

industries. However, the study has shown that low cost leadership required an amalgamation of cost reducing strategies which do not compromise quality of products or services. Therefore, companies with strategies that heighten quality at lower costs tend to remain competitive in the dynamic markets.

The findings of this study reinforce the critical importance of strategy in the organizational activities. The results imply that companies with an amalgamation of weighted strategies that maintain cost leadership, high quality service provision, technology use and continuous employee capacity building commonly have a higher competitive advantage compared with their peers. Thus, companies should employ managers who are apt and can scan the market environments to audit the available competitive advantage strategies and select the most appropriate strategies for their companies.

5.4 Recommendations

The research has established that a number of strategies that include provision of quality services, cost leadership, focus strategies, market segmentation, branding, outsourcing and employee capacity building play an important role in enhancing sustainable competitive advantage in schools and learning institutions. Therefore, schools and other leaning institutions' management should strive to put in place the mentioned strategies depending on the need and organization culture of each.

The findings have also emphasized the need for the use of technology in organization management as well as in service delivery as key contributors to competitive advantage. This call for the management of organizations to invest in technology and low-cost production to enhance governance and subsequent firm performance. Therefore, the

organizations should emphasize on promoting professionalism and integrity among the employees. It is also recommended that organizations should have outsourcing plans to reduce costs and increase efficiency.

5.5 Limitations of the Study

This study is limited in terms of scope and context in that it was a case study of a single organization. Therefore, the findings may not be readily generalized to all schools and educational institutions. Additionally, the research was restricted to only six competitive advantage strategies which were appropriate for the education sector and schools. This left out a number of other critical strategic practices that affect competitive advantage of firms. Therefore, an analysis of more expanded competitive advantage strategies may have given more reliable results which would be used fairly for generalization.

The study, being of a case study design, as a characteristic of cases studies, lacked scientific rigor and thus not appropriate for generalization because of the difficulty in replication. Also, it should be noted that qualitative case studies are prone to biases, hence the study herein may have some possibility of biases, some of which may result from Hawthorne effect where respondents give responses as a matter of convenience to protect or safeguard organization secrets and core success factors. Nonetheless, despite the mentioned limitations to the research, the finding provides an important source of information as well as reference material for future researchers, managers and policy makers.

5.6 Suggestions for Future Research

This research study focused only on six strategies of competitive advantage; thus, future studies should evaluate other strategies of sustainable competitive advantage. Also, future studies should incorporate more than one cluster of schools to enhance variability of the responses thus increasing reliability and validity of the findings. While this study considered the roles of different strategies on competitive advantage of the schools, future studies should evaluate the quantitative effect of each strategy separately to enhance more reliable recommendations; this is critical because it may be difficult for an organization to put in place all the studied strategies at once or concurrently.

Finally, since the present study only used primary data, future studies should consider using both primary and secondary data such as real academic performance and co-curricular performance of the company, look into actual costs and delve into other performance indicators related to the strategies studied. Also, a larger number of respondents should be used in future studies to enhance the response base, increase variability and thus enhance reliability of the findings.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Interview Guide

1. What is your work status and position in the School?
2. Which department do you head in the School?
3. The level of time you have worked in the School?
4. Could you please explain to me how Bridge Schools operate that make them different from other schools in the community?
5. What role does technology play in the day-to-day running of Bridge schools?
6. To what extent has your school adopted the following strategies to achieve competitive advantage in major operations?
 - i. Delivery of quality services
 - ii. Cost leadership strategies
 - iii. Focus Strategies
 - iv. Market segmentation strategies
 - v. Outsourcing non-core services
 - vi. Branding and continuous training of teachers
7. Could you please indicate some of the competitive strategies that you can suggest for your school to adopt and achieve sustainable competitive advantage? Explain how.

THANK YOU