# Factors Influencing Implementation of Strategic Plans in Public Secondary Schools in Lari District, Kiambu County

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**Abstract:** *Previous studies have indicated that good strategies have been written but very little has been achieved in their implementation. It has further been argued that only 10% of formulated strategies are successfully implemented. Studies done in Kenya give a good inside about strategy implementation but they do not explain what factors influence strategy implementation. In addition, these studies were not based in Kenya public secondary Schools. This study was carried out to investigate the factors influencing the implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools in Lari District Kiambu County. The study aimed at determining the influence of organizational structure, leadership style, resource allocation and communication on implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools in Lari district. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The study population comprised of the school managers both BOG and PTA members, heads of departments, teachers and other BOG employees serving in the selected schools. A sample of 64 respondents was selected from a target population of 640 stakeholders. Primary data was collected through questionnaires, that was administered through "drop and pick later" method while secondary data was collected through document review. Quantitative data was analyzed through descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis. The SPSS statistical computer package was used in the analysis. Quantitative data was presented using bar-graphs, pie charts and frequency distribution tables. Qualitative data was analyzed through content analysis. The study revealed that organizational leadership contributed the most to the implementation of strategic plans; followed by resource allocation, communication and organizational structure the least. Based on the findings, it is recommended that for public secondary schools to improve on the implementation of their strategic plans there is need to enhance teamwork, communication and transparency. The study also recommends that resources need to be adequately availed to capacity building, implementation activities and tasks based on the organizational structure. Decision making process should also be made open and participatory to enhance teachers and other BOG employees' ownership of the implementation process.*

**Keywords:** strategy, strategic planning, strategy implementation, organizational structure

## 1. Introduction

The goal of education for all is now being looked into afresh by the organizations concerned to ensure that not just education but quality education is received (UNESCO, 2004). The UNESCO report emphasizes that quality education is a tool to overcome most of the problems in Africa and a means to fulfil other rights. Indicators of quality education must be revised to ensure that standard is maintained worldwide. It is important to realize that poor quality education anywhere in the world is bad for humankind as a whole (UNESCO, 2004).

Quality education assures sustainable acquisition of knowledge, be it intellectual or practical, capable of developing the individual and contributes to national and global development. The process of providing quality education begins with proper planning for financial, human, physical resources and curriculum. This involves all the stakeholders and it is incorporated in the teaching/learning process.

The focus on education quality is normally at the heart of efforts aimed at improving the performance of education sectors. Quality is what attracts learners, satisfies their basic learning needs, and enriches their life and their overall experience of living. Governments and all other partners must work together to ensure quality of education for all, regardless of gender, wealth, location, language, ethnic, social or cultural origin. There has been much effort in expanding basic education in Kenya. The achievements made especially with regard to making basic education accessible to the population at all places are very significant. However, the issue of quality in education still remains a crucial concern of the ministry of education. Quality of education has now become the most important aspect of education worldwide.

Public secondary schools have many stakeholders who must be involved in the strategic management process. Apart from B.O.G and PTA members, HODs, teachers and other B.O.G employees, the schools also need to account for the interest of the students, parents, government agencies, alumni, the sponsor and the community. Each of these stakeholders make demands upon the school and the school management must bring these stakeholders into the strategic management process to maximize "client satisfaction".

The Kenya education sector has since year 2003 embarked on plans to institute reforms at all levels, they ask, where are we now? Where do we want to go? And how do we get there? In the face of changing circumstances, these are important questions to ask (Mutuku & Mutuku, 2004). These questions ought to force them to evaluate the conditions in their operating environments, examine competitive pressures, carry out SWOT analysis and identify strategic issues. This requires development and implementation of strategic plans that are capable of moving the schools to their desired future states. Strategic planning and thinking involves making choices and decisions about the long-term future of an organization (Pearce & Robison, 2002). A secondary school can use strategy as a tool to find

its competitive advantage and place within the ever turbulent operating environment.

The essence of strategic planning is to attempt to relate the organization to the changes in the environment (Ansoff, 1988). For any organization, strategy helps in integrating the long term plans and ensuring that there is harmony between the vision, mission, objectives, core values, activities and its environment. According to Thompson and Strickland (2007), strategy formulation and implementation are core management functions. The developed strategy may be good but if its implementation is poor, the intended strategic objectives may not be achieved. To ensure survival and success, an organization does not only need to formulate strategies that seek to constantly maintain a match between the organization and its environment but also must ensure appropriate implementation of strategy at all levels. The specific objectives of this study were;

1. To determine the effects of organizational structure on the implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools in Lari District.
2. To assess the effects of leadership style on the implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools in Lari District.
3. To determine the effects of resource allocation on the implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools in Lari District.
4. To establish the influence of communication on implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools in Lari District.

## 2. Historical Development of Strategic Management

### 2.1 SWOT Analysis (Kenneth Andrews)

During the 1950s, academics and practitioners paid little attention to the practical concepts of strategy developed during World War II in the military arena. In this post-war period, given the stability of the markets and increases in demand, most companies in U.S.A and Europe were thinking primarily about efficient production systems. Later, by the 1960s, large companies moved from an emphasis on operations, budgeting and control areas to an emphasis on planning aspects. The growing complexity and dynamism of the environment  and the need for solutions to this situation from the firm's top managers demanded future planning and a global view. As a result, most business schools by that time required "corporate policy" as the "capstone" course at the end of every business curriculum. Top executives were concerned with the general direction and long-term policy of their enterprises. Business policy professors encouraged thinking systematically about companies' strategies (Schendel & Cool, 1988).

The seminal work of Chandler (1962), *strategy and Structure*, positioned the concept of strategy as a separate business function from marketing, finance, etc. Strategy consisted of deciding on the basic long – term goals of an enterprise and the adoption of the course of action and allocation of resources necessary for carrying out those goals. In his work, he postulated that "structure follows strategy". Strategic decisions were seen to lead to a restructuring of the firm that should yield superior competitive performance.

During the 1960s, two other authors made significant contributions to this new field. One was Igor Ansoff, then general manager of Lockheed Electronics. In his book *Corporate Strategy*, he argued that strategy is described as a rule for making decisions determined by product / market scope, growth vectors, competitive advantage and synergy (Ansoff, 1965). These concepts and components of strategy, together with the seminal ideas proposed by Chandler (1962), are still explained in strategic management text books and applied, in some way, by most practitioners today.

Other important contributions came from Kenneth Andrews of Harvard Business School, working both alone and with others (Learned et al., 1965; Andrews, 1971). Andrews underlined the importance of business definitions as part of strategy, and the need to determine the company's mission. Andrews developed the SWOT analysis tool to understand how an uncertain environment presents opportunities and threats (OT) to which a firm had to adapt its strengths and weaknesses (SW). Working together with these scholars, Boston Consulting Group introduced the concept of the "experience curve", and also developed the first analytical tool of portfolio planning, the so called "Growth / Share Matrix".

### 2.2 Conceptualizing Strategic Management

The 1970s were a time of great turmoil and there was a growing need for strategic thought. World inflation made wages and floating exchange rates volatile, and price control a reality. The dislocations of the 1970s led to the rise of independent firms offering strategic guidance in times when strategic thought and tools for analysis were specially demanded (Oliver, 2002). The first major conference properly devoted to the subject of strategic management was held in 1977 at the University of Pittsburgh. As a direct result of this conference, the researchers changed the name of the field from strategic planning to strategic management. Contributions from authors such as Rumelt (1974), Ansoff (1979) and Mintzberg (1978) are essential to understanding this period, which may be described as the moment of conceptualization of strategic management.

The emerging field of strategic management began to feature implementation and evaluation as critical components of organizational success, rather than being preoccupied exclusively with the analysis of the firm and its environment and the formulation of strategies. Strategy researchers could be identified in this period as having *strategy content or strategy process* approaches. One of the most influential works in *content* research, in *what* is the right strategy, was Rumelt's categorization of diversification strategies (Rumelt, 1974). On the other hand, there were authors who were concerned with the understanding of the process of strategy creation, on *how* to develop a strategy. In this line, Mintzberg (1978) argued that strategy is emergent, rather than just the exercise of planning.

In the U.S. in the 1970s there were social protests related with business and political scandal; meanwhile, Japan began to make huge gains in areas such as electronics and

automobiles. Contemporaneously, an important debate on corporate social responsibility (CSR) also took place. This concept was not entirely new. Both academics and practitioners had already considered it in different ways. Before 1950, some practitioners had already undertaken social initiatives in the business context. Howard Bowen, 1953, with his influential book *Social Responsibilities of the Businessman* marked the beginning of corporate social responsibility in academic literature.

Bowen explained that the social responsibility of businessmen (at this time the presence of women in management was scarce) "refers to the obligation of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make decision, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society". Soon many other scholars contributed to developing this idea (Davis, 1960, Cheit, 1964; Davis & Blomstrom, 1966; Steiner 1965, among others) and since then, concern for the social responsibility of business has been relatively frequent in management literature. In strategic management, as has been mentioned, Andrews had also suggested including social responsibility as a component of strategic decision-making. According to Andrews, leaders and social groups point out to management what the contents of social responsibilities are.

The importance given to social responsibilities during the 1970s linked CSR and strategy; a link based on long-term economic effects and beyond the personal values of managers. Davis (1975) among others, emphasized the risk a company would bear if its behavior was contrary to the expectations of those who constituted the company's social environment. The notion of corporate social responsibility, considered to be overly abstract and generic, began to be replaced, or complemented, by that of "corporate social responsiveness" during the second part of the 1970s (Ackerman, 1973; Ackerman & Bauer, 1976; Sethi, 1975: Bowman & Haire, 1975). The idea of social responsiveness is that business must not only respond to, but must also anticipate public concerns. The concrete demands of society have to be discovered and answered. The proponents of this concept sketched out a new, more pragmatic way of linking strategy with society's expectations and demands, in a manner that could contribute more explicitly to the benefit of the organization, or in Porter's terminology, to attaining competitive advantage.

Later, during the 1980s, several authors developed the ideas of "corporate social responsiveness" in strategic management, trying to quickly respond to any social demand or, even more, to be proactive (Ansoff, 1982; Arcelus & Schaefer, 1982; Mintzberg, 1983; Carroll & Hoy, 1984; Daneke & Lemak, 1985; Milles, 1987; Meznar, et al, 1991, among others).

## 2.3 Competitive Advantage Development

The decade of the 1980s was a period in which strategic management again offered an important contribution to the managerial world. It was a period of relative political tranquility in the U.S., but massive changes overseas. Some elements that may explain the dynamism and complexity of the environment in this decade are, among others, the political liberalization of Eastern Europe by the second half of the decade, the market liberalization in Asia and Latin America, or the formation of trading groups in Europe, together with the imitation of the Japanese business model by leading firms all around the world (Oliver, 2002).

At this historical moment, the ideas of Michael Porter's books *competitive strategy* (1980) *competitive Advantage* (1985) provided substantive guidance to analysts, consultants and managers. Some argued that his books were the legitimization of strategy as an academic discipline. In particular, his "five forces industry analysis" and the "generic strategies" described in the books are considered the most influential contributions of strategic thought at this time (Barney, 2002).

Porter's model, which imported ideas form industrial organizational economics, is based on structure – conduct – performance logic. According to this model, company performance is determined by industry structure attractiveness, which depends on five essential forces: threat of entry, intensity of rivalry among competitors, pressure from substitute products, bargaining power of buyers, and bargaining power of suppliers. Therefore, potential profit relates directly to the combined strength of these forces. The model will help firm conduct within the industry structure, and companies may use three main generic strategies (strategic choice) to earn superior returns: overall cost leadership, differentiation and focus.

This model was adopted in empirical research, included as part of strategy textbooks and implemented in the world of business. In fact, it started a new era of research. A large number of studies examined the efficacy of generic strategies during the 1980s, continuing the *strategy content* approach to the discipline. In the meantime, *strategy process* researchers, based on Porter's ideas, also expanded into more sophisticated conceptualizations and areas of research connecting with other influential approaches.

Strategic management thought, in this period, started a dialog with other influential theories in management, like institutional theories (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), political approaches (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), or the environmental approach of population ecology (Hannan & Freeman, 1977). At least ten schools of thought on strategy formation had been described by the 1980s, and, although some criticized Porter's positioning school as too narrow a perspective, most writers in this area would agree that his work must be counted as having made a major contribution to strategic thought in that decade (Mintzberg, 1990).

Porter's theories also remained vital during the decade of the 1990s, especially the "value chain" concept, a tool for internal transaction value analysis. Consulting firms like Mckinsey extended this concept by developing value system analysis models. This new decade was characterized by the turbulence of an environment with higher levels of competitiveness, entrepreneurship and innovation. It was in the 1990s that internet started to change the role of customers in their relationship with business. Also present was an increasing emergence of sophisticated information technologies, with the creation of complex technical systems for internal and external strategic purposes. Since then, much strategy discussion has ranged around building

competences to support such systems internally and through alliances with key partners (Oliver, 2002).

## 2.4 Resources and Capabilities Development

Technological discontinuities and uncertainties, typical of the 1990s, explain the behavior of firms and the creation of different products or ways of making products, beyond the external analysis of the environment in which a company operates. While previous approaches to strategy neglected, to a great extent, the influence of organizational resources in strategic management, now the resources and capabilities of the companies seemed to be the key element for explaining their success. In this context a new perspective was introduced the resource-based view (R.B.V) of the firm (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991).

This approach affirms that the main sources of sustainable competitive advantage reside in the development and use of valuable firm's resources and capabilities. The argument is that if resources are valuable, rare and costly to emulate without any close substitutes, then they could become a source of sustained competitive advantage. This perspective complements the industry analysis framework. It is not possible to evaluate the attractiveness of an industry independently of the resources a firm brings to that industry (Barney, 1991). Resources become valuable because of social complexity, an element that was absent in more technical models like Porter's contribution (Grant, 1991).

Resources that resist imitations, such as culture and reputation, are intangibles, and the result of complex interactions. They become crucial to explaining present competitive advantage. Regardless of the limitations in measuring resources, some empirical studies have statistically tested the original postulates of RBV, confirming the importance of resource sharing among business, and especially the association of intangible resources with performance (Herrmann, 2005). During the 1990s as we have seen, the field of strategy focused its attention on those resources that are most likely to lead a competitive advantage. The organization should be set up to effectively deploy resources that are valuable, rare, and inimitable. This resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991; Wernerfelt, 1984), widely accepted today, maintains that the ability of a firm to perform better than its competitors depends on the unique interplay of human, organizational and physical resources overtime.

This strategic thought has been complemented with the dynamic aspect of resources ("dynamic capabilities approach"), focused on the drivers behind the creation, evolution and recombination of the resources into new sources of competitive advantage (Teece et al., 1997). Dynamic capabilities are described as the organizational and strategic routines by which managers acquire resources, modify them, integrate them, and recombine them to generate new value – creating strategies. When the analysis of the resources and capabilities is carried out at an institutional level, terms of the relationship of the organization with the rest of society, then the processes of perception, deliberation and responsiveness of the organization or its capacity for adaptation becomes another source of competitive advantage (Litz, 1996). This capacity

for adaptation is directly related to the concept of corporate social responsiveness already developed in the earlier literature.

## 3. Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework can be defined as a set of broad ideas and principles taken from relevant fields enquiring how to structure a subsequent presentation (Reichel & Ramey, 2007). As a research tool, it's intended to assist the researcher develop awareness and understanding of the situation under scrutiny and communicate it. The conceptual framework of this study included independent variables i.e. organizational structure, leadership style, resource allocation, communication and the dependent variable i.e. implementation of strategic plans.
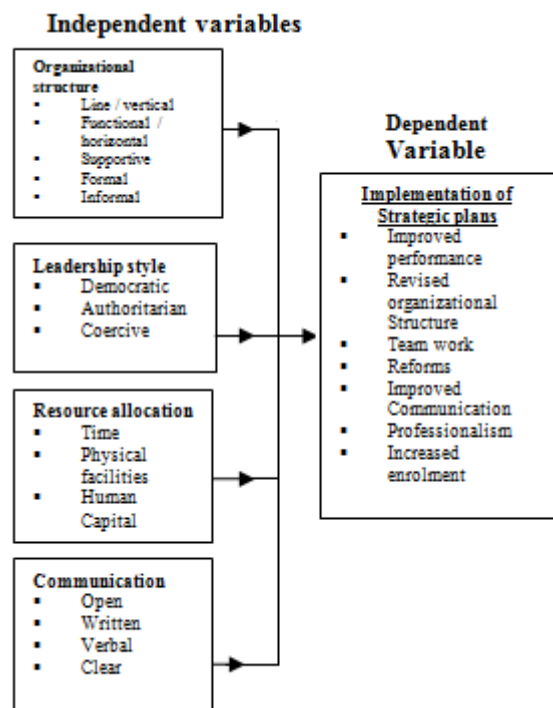


**Figure 3.1:** Conceptual framework

## 3.2 Research Gaps

Strategy implementation has been the subject of increased study and search for solution; especially since the process from strategy formulation to implementation is not efficient and is inadequate (Karami, 2007). In his study David (2001) noted that without understanding and commitment, strategy implementation efforts face major problems. Managers are prone to overlook implementation realities. Past local studies (Obare, 2006) Koske 2003), lumiti, 2007. Ateng, 2007) concurred that good strategies have been written but very little has been achieved in their implementation. However, these studies do not explain the factors that influence strategy implementation.

## 3.3 Data Analysis and Presentation

Data analysis refers to examining what has been collected in the survey and making deductions and inferences. Since data for this study were both qualitative and quantitative, both descriptive and content analysis techniques were employed. Before the quantitative data was analyzed, it was checked for

completeness and consistency. The collected data was sorted for order, edited to remove errors in order to identify any problems that may have resulted from the use of the questionnaire.

### 3.4 Data Presentation

Quantitative data was presented through statistical tools such as frequency distribution tables, pie-charts, bar-graphs etc for easy understanding. The researcher then interpreted the research findings from the evidence presented by the data collected. Conclusions are based on the findings. Finally guided by the objectives of the study, the researcher made recommendations Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) explains that recommendations must be consistent with the purpose of the study & its objectives.

## 4. Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The target population was made of 160 BOG and PTA members, 80 heads of department, 160 teachers and 240 junior employees who report to the functional level managers. The researcher took 10% of the target population which translated to a sample size of 64 respondents. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a sample size representing 10% of the target population is adequate as long as it will have a minimum of 30 elements

## 5. Results and Discussion

The data collection instrument was a questionnaire which was sent to a sample of 64 respondents. However, only 52 questionnaires were returned adequately filled in.



Percentage of respondent 81.25

Percentage of non respondents 18.75
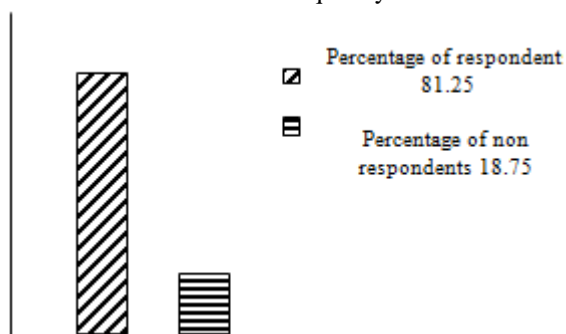
### 5.1 Response rate

This response rate was considered adequate for reporting as it exceeded the generally accepted threshold of 50% (Mugenda & Mugenda 2003). From the research findings, 15.6% of the respondents were aged below 30 years, 59.4% were aged between 30 to 40 years and those aged above 40 years constituted 25% of the respondents who participated in the study. This illustrates that majority of the respondents were adults aged between 30 – 40 years.

## 6. Organizational Structure

It was noted that organization structure in public secondary schools was not statistically significant in regards to the implementation of strategic plans. However any organizational strategy should quite often than not determine the choice of organizational structure hence the assertions that "structure follows strategy". It was noted that schools with inconsistent organizational structure were not able to achieve their goals as efficiently as those with well aligned, practical and acceptable structure. The researcher noted very clearly that organizational structure can help or hinder, support or block strategic change and that a good fit – for – purpose structure will enable changes, continuous or discontinuous, small or large, to be made effectively and efficiently. Kroon (1995) suggested that the organizational structure that is developed must be practical and acceptable and must follow the business strategy.

## 7. Leadership Style

The study revealed that BOG in many public secondary schools in Lari supported the implementation activities and tasks. This makes leadership to contribute most to the success of the school strategic plans. It was noted that in schools where there is good and visionary leadership, subordinates are urged to a level that they themselves never thought possible. BOG leadership and actual involvement is critical in the strategy development and implementation process and also determines the level of support and backing that the teachers and other BOG employees give to the new strategy.

## 8. Resource Allocation

It was noted that implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools is adversely affected by scarcity of resources, presence of idle capacity due to poor flow of resources and inadequate funding of capacity building. In this study, resources included time, human capital and budgetary allocations. Alexander (1991) points out that "strategy implementation addresses the issue of how to put a formulated strategy into effect – within the defined time constraint, within budget and human resource and its capabilities". Budgeting was found to be a fundamental part of any action planning especially where the school had capital intensive strategy. However some schools were noted to incorporate financial considerations within their draft strategic plan which makes a lot of sense.

## 9. Communication

Communication was found to contribute substantially to the implementation of strategic plans. Communication was found to serve as the link between the three levels of management and it is the one that helps to ensure that responsibilities and duties are clearly explained. In schools where communication was excellent, implementation of strategic plans was efficient. This is because strategy is designed at the top but implemented from the bottom. Communication was found to be the link that makes this happen. However, in some schools where implementation was not efficient, it was noted that very little had been communicated after the fanfare of strategy formulation. Where this is the case, teachers and other BOG employees do not adopt the strategy. Kumar et al (2006) pointed out that excellent communication and transparency between involved parties as well as clearly defined performance factors play a vital role in creating trust in the

implementation phase. To become a successful strategy implementer, schools top management personnel should clearly communicate "what the new strategic decision is all about" with the involved stakeholders' Alexander (1985).

## 10. Conclusion

The conclusions of the study are drawn from the most significant sections. Four independent variables, organization structure, leadership style, resource allocation and communication were considered. Whereas organizational structure was found not significant, leadership style, resource allocation and communication contributed significantly to the implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools in Lari district Kiambu County.

The study concludes that leadership style contributed the most to the implementation of strategic plans in public secondary school. The importance of leadership style to the implementation of strategic plans is underscored by the fact that this process entails formulation and institutionalizing the whole process (Essenbach et al, 1999). According to Coleman (2000), there are five styles of leadership which include coercive, afflictive, democratic, pacesetting and coaching. However, Coleman (2000) emphasizes that an effective leader should be skilled at several of these styles and should be flexible enough to switch between these styles as circumstances dictate. Top school management team should strive to adopt this style. The implementation process is further facilitated by communication. Excellent communication and transparency between stakeholders was found to play a vital role in the implementation phase. Effective and open communication is the foundation for trust building among the stakeholders.

This supports Kumar et al (2006) who asserted that "excellent communication between the involved parties is the foundation of trust-building between the involved parties throughout the implementation process".

## 11. Recommendations

The main objective of this study was to investigate the factors that influence the implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools in Lari district, Kiambu County. Recommendations that follow are aimed at improving the implementation process so that public secondary schools can realize their full potential and attain competitive advantage. The study makes the following recommendations guided by the objectives of the study.

### 11.1 Recommendations for the School Managers

The study recommends that BOG gives adequate direction and also participate actively in the implementation phase. They should also create a higher level of involvement of teachers and other BOG employees to avoid hands off approach and lack of ownership on their part.

### 11.2 Recommendations for Other Stakeholders

Secondary schools stakeholders should be encouraged to learn new knowledge on the role and place of strategic management in steering the schools to strategic advantageous positions.

### 11.3 Recommendations for Government Agencies

The government agencies charged with the management of public secondary schools should ensure that adequate resources are availed to the schools for the purposes of strategy implementation as this is an expensive exercise that must be deliberately budgeted for. The agency must also ensure a high level of sensitization among all school stakeholders and where possible organize for practical programs for capacity building to give skills and willingness to enable all stakeholders participate in the strategic management process.

### 11.4 Recommendations for Further Research

This study has exposed a number of challenges faced in the implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools. The study recommends that similar studies be undertaken in other organizations and other factors that influence the implementation of strategic plans in public secondary school be investigated. More research should also be carried out to investigate other factors and the influence of external environment on the implementation of strategic plans in public secondary schools and other organizations.

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