Innovations

Strategic Management in Ethiopian Public Higher Education Institutions: Assessing the practices and Challenges

¹Ali Hussien Edris & ²Professor B.Mohan Venkata Ram

1 Research Scholar, Department of Commerce and Management Studies, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam, 530003, India

2Co-author , Research Director, Department of Commerce and Management Studies, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam 530003, India

Corresponding Author: **Ali Hussien Edris,   balaale85@gmail.com & bmohanvra@gmail.com**

Abstract: Several studies have reported that the practice of strategic management benefits organizations in many ways. In recent years, almost all types of organizations have recognizedtheir importance. Ethiopian public higher education institutions were among institutions that recently embarked on strategic management practice. However, how strategic management practice is carried out determines success or failure. This study aimed to assess the practice and challenges of strategic management in the north-cluster public universities of Ethiopia. A mixed methods research design was utilized to better describe the status of strategic management practice and its challenges. Quantitative data were collected by applying a cross-sectional survey using a self-developed five-point Likert scale questionnaire. It was administered to 365 randomly selected respondents, including academic staff and leaders from the targeted universities. Data was collected using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics like the mean, standard deviation, and percentage were used for the analysis of quantitative data. Qualitative data were collected through a semi-structured interview guide from academic leaders. The results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis of this study demonstrated that both the leadership and academic staff of the selected universities had a favorable attitude toward the adoption and application of SM. The environmental scanning and strategy formulation phases of SM development attracted significantly more attention than the other two phases, strategy implementation, and strategy evaluation. Furthermore, the results indicated that the efforts made to institutionalize SM were inadequate and required attention from the institutions' leadership. Finally, the targeted universities' efforts to adopt and implement SM were hampered by a variety of challenges, including a lack of resources, a lack of leadership, a lack of management buy-in, an overemphasis on tools and techniques, frequent policy changes from the government side, staff turnover, a lack of ability to create and use change champions, and a lack of follow-through.

Keywords: FormulationImplementation EvaluationInstitutionalization Staff Leaders University

Introduction

Strategic management (SM) has gotten prominence in the last decades in almost all types of organizations, beit public, private, or not-for-profit. Numerous researchers and authors ascribed a strategic management approach for the success of many organizations. Research disclosed that institutions that practice SM, by and large, do outshine those institutions that do not (Miller &Cardinal, 1994; Wheelen & Hunger, 2012).

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are vital to any country's economic development. Ethiopia's higher education sector has been growing tremendously in the last three decades. There were only two public universities and zero private higher learning institutions in Ethiopia till the last decade of the 20th Century. Since the mid-1990s, following the ratification of education and training policy (ETP) 1994, public and private institutions have expanded dramatically. Today there are aboutfifty public universities, and there are also a significant number of TVET colleges, regional teacher education colleges, and more than 200 accredited privately owned higher education institutions in the country (Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency [HERQA], 2019; Ministry of Science and Higher Education [MoSHE], 2019). However, in today's complex environment, Ethiopia'spublic higher education institutions face a myriad of challenges. The challenges are so immense and so severe.

Context of the Study

Ethiopia, which is situated in the horn of the Africa region, is the second-most populous nation in the African continent, only after Nigeria. The higher education sector is an essential sub-sector in any country's education system.This sector offers a wide range of services that benefit society in various ways, including the development of capable human resources, the resolution of societal and institutional problems through research, knowledge production, innovation, and community services.Before the introduction of the western style higher education system, some researchers claim that a traditional higher education system existed in Ethiopia for many centuries having roots in Orthodox Church and Islam(Asgedom & Hagos, 2015;Wagaw, 1990).However, secular, and modern higher education dates back to 1950 when the University College of Addis Ababa was founded. (Wagaw, 1990;Wondimu, 2003;Asgedom & Hagos, 2015).

Ethiopia's higher education sector has been showing tremendous expansion in the last three decades. The government of Ethiopia massively invested a huge amount of resources for the expansion of existing universities and opening brand new universities across the country.As a result, the number of public universities rose from two to fifty. The substantial expansion of higher education in Ethiopia was induced by the governments' strong conviction to make higher education accessible, ensure its equity as well as provide qualified human resources to drive socio-economic development.The government of Ethiopia invested greater than 40% of its annual education budget inthe higher education sector (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization[UNESCO], 2015; Raynor & Ashcroft, 2011). The achievements registered in higher education expansion is commendable, yet there are a plethora of setbacks and challenges related to access, equity, relevance, and quality of the higher education sector in Ethiopia (MoSHE HEPS,2019)

Despite such a massive expansion drive, it is important not to forget that the country's higher education system is still considered elitist by global comparison. The current gross enrolment ratio stands at 13.8% (MoSHE, 2019), has not reached 18%.

Problem Statement

Worldwide, the higher education system is facing many challenges. Based on the World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21st Century (1998), it is indicated that the higher education sector is facing several significant challenges at the global, national, and institutional levels. Contemporary challenges for higher education institutions comprise changing demographics, diminished funding, and rising scrutiny from the public sector (Leslie & Fretwell, 1996).

There is no exception to Ethiopia's higher education systems. Ethiopia's higher education sector is facing more challenges than ever. Some of the challenges are shortage of resources, staff development, deteriorating quality, infrastructure, leadership. To transform the sector, from 1998-2020, five consecutive education sector development programs (ESDPs) have been prepared and implemented. The programswere aimed at increasing access, improving quality, achieving equity, increasing effectiveness at all levels of education within Ethiopia. After implementing the education and training policy (ETP) in 1994 and the subsequent education sector development programs, the higher education sector expanded tremendously.

Among the multitude of challenges, Ethiopia's public higher education institutions encountered are shortage of funds, the critical need of qualified staff, absence, obsolete infrastructure, lack of autonomy,poor staff incentive packages and retention schemes,gender imbalance, inefficiency in the administration and finance sections of the HEIs, poor research infrastructure, poor integration of teaching and research, poor university-industry linkage (Saint, 2004;Yizengaw, 2003; Asfaw, 2012).

The Ethiopian higher education landscape and its external environment keep changing, pushing the leadership to look for better management systems to lead complex institutions effectively and efficiently.For the entire public university system, almost all the funds come from the treasury of the state, and the government wants to see the results of its spending. Higher learning institutions are under criticism for not meeting stakeholder expectations. SM as modern management practice can help higher education institutions deal with current issues and challenges. Higher learning institutions with institutionalizedSMpractice can remain relevant in a complex and competitive environment (Bush&Coleman, 2000; Schraeder, 2002; Sawhney et al., 2017; Tavernier, 2005).

It is widely recognized that firms that need to survive in today's world need to think strategically and engage in strategic management. SM is an essential component for the success of all types of organizations, both public and private, worldwide, with no exception for public higher learning institutions. Institutions need a new approach to SM. Managers need to prioritize strategic management to keep their organizations competitive in an increasingly volatile environment (Bryson,2003; Shattock,2000;Wheelen & Hunger,2102).

It is worth studyingSM practices in the case of public higher education institutions in Ethiopia. Formal adoption and Implementation of strategic management practices can tackle the multifaceted challenges institutions are facing. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no specific study is done on this title in North Cluster Public Universities (NCPUs) of

Ethiopia.Hence, this study aimed at investigating the status of strategic management practice and its challenges in north cluster public universities of Ethiopia. This study intended to address the following research questions:

Research Questions

1. What is the attitude of sample respondents (academic staff and leaders) on strategic management adoption and practiceNCPUs of Ethiopia?
2. To what extent SM is practiced in NCPUs of Ethiopia?
3. What are the major challenges NCPUs of Ethiopia are facing in the effective execution of the SM process and its Implementation?

Research Objectives

1. To identify the attitude of academic staff and academic leaders in NCPUs of Ethiopia towards strategic management practice.
2. To assess the extent strategic management is adopted in NCPUs of Ethiopia.
3. To identify challenges in the effective execution of the SM process in NCPUs of Ethiopia.

Literature Review

Given its unique nature and potential,the Higher Educationsectorhasbeen attracting the interest of researchers and policymakers.Similarly, strategic management has gained momentum as its use has expanded to all types of organizations.In the following couple of paragraphs, Findings from empirical studies that have been conducted in different parts of the world will be reviewed.

Strategic Management

Strategic management is a set of activities, decisions, and actions that managers engage in to formulate and implement strategies to realizeorganizational objectives (Chandler, 1962; Wheel & Hunger, 2012; Pearce et al., 2000). According to David (2011), Strategic management is the art and science of developing, implementingand evaluating cross-functional decisions that allow an organization to achieve its goals. There is no single best definition of strategic management, yet most of the definitions complement one another. Hence, strategic management is all about analyzing the internal and external environment, envisioning the future, creating strategies, implementing strategies, and monitoring strategies to achieve organizational goals.

Several researchers and scholars put forwardnumerous reasons why institutions should engage in strategic management. David et al.(2011)SMenables aninstitution to be more proactive rather than being reactive in steering and shaping its future. Much of the research works reveal both pecuniary as well as non-pecuniary gains that institutions can get by the adoption of a strategic management approach in their course of actions. Not only Current but future benefits can be reaped by devising a well-articulated strategy. As David and David (2016) ascertain, organizations can reap both substantial financial as well as non-financial benefits if they engage in an effective strategic management process.

Strategic Management Process

Strategic management is not a one-shot activity; instead, it is the process of engaging in continuous and evolving activities of analyzing environmental situations, choosing strategies, putting selected strategies into action, tracking the progress, and taking corrective measures to achieve the desired goals.The strategic management process indicates the phase that an organization navigates through when it engages in its strategy development. In the literature, it has been found that some authors or researchers provided three phases, while others have forwarded four.

The strategic management process utilizes a systematic, coherent, and rational approach that helps management proactively guide and control their firm's destiny (David, 2013).Wheelen and Hunger (2012) spell out that the strategic management process comprises environmental scanning (both internal and external), formulation of strategy (strategic or long-range planning), strategy implementation, and evaluation and control.This four-phase model was used in this study.This study explored the extent to which the elements and activities under each phase were in existence in targeted universities.

Strategic Management in Higher Education Institutions

According to Kang (2005), SM in the public sector is a system of management that integrates the activities of planning, implementation, assessment, and allocation as a continuing process in public organizations. In public sector strategy, the analysis of the critical environment is more intricate than in the private sector (Whittington et al., 2005). According to Goldsmith (1995), people have come to believe that strategic management can be applied to all types of institutions, not just the private-sector businesses where it originated. The geneses of Strategic Management in public and Non-For-Profit Organizations, including HEIs, can be traced back to the 1970s, during the period when HEIs in the US was challenged to handle and deal with issues like reduced financial support from donors and others, demographic challenges, lower enrolments, resource mobilization, economic and technological developments (Holmes, 1985).Kettunen(2002), Strategic planning has also been regarded as an effective management tool for obtaining funds through the creation of smart funding strategies leading to the formation of eminent institutions.

Strategic Management in higher education provides the required framework for institutions to align vision and mission with institutional core values (Hinton, 2012). In addition, SM enables HEIs to deal with the ever-changing environment, assessing the awareness of the institution's vision, actual practice,assess strengths, weaknesses, aims, and future predictions (Dooris et al. 2004; Chang, 2008; Lerner, 1999; Pidcock,2001); and SM can act as a link between the perceived current state and the desired future state (Kettunen,2002).

There are limited studies that have investigated strategic planning, utilization of some modern management tools and techniques of Ethiopian HEIs.The changing landscape of the public higher education sector in Ethiopia needs further research. Since, the above-mentioned studies are conducted in other parts of the world where there is much difference in socio-economic, cultural differences with the Ethiopian context. There is a lack of empirical research addressing strategic management practice adoption and its status and challenges within the context of Ethiopian public higher learning institutions in general and in the North Cluster Public Universities in particular. The current study was carried out to fill this knowledge gap.

Research Methodology

This study was conducted by applying a mixed methods research (MMR) design. It is a research approach that combines collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study (Cresswell,2009).The MMR approach is advantageous for gaining a deeper understanding of complex phenomena by triangulating, correlating, or complementing one set of results with another, thereby increasing the validity of inferences. (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009; Greene et al., 2001).The mixed-method design is chosen for the very reason that it enables to address the research questions in a better way than solely utilizing either qualitative or quantitative approaches.

As a research strategy cross-sectional survey was employed to collect quantitative data from management members who include vice presidents, deans, and department heads, and academic staff) through self-administered questionnaires. The Likert scale questionnaire was developed by the researcher. Before administering the final study, its reliability and validity were assessed by conducting a pilot study on 35 respondents. The Cronbach alpha was computed was more than 0.7 for all constructs.

Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Technique

Population: Apopulation is the entire collection of individuals and elements from which a sample is drawn. (Saunders et al., 2009). The target population of the study is all academic staff and academic leaders (vice presidents, deans, directors, department heads) in public-owned Universities in the North Cluster of Ethiopia. These NCPUs are situated at two neighboring regional states namely, Tigray and Afar regional states. The five public universities that make the cluster are Adigrat, Aksum, Mekelle, Raya, and Samara. Except for Samara, the remaining member universities are found in Tigray regional state.

Sample size
The sample size is determined by the degree of confidence in the data collected, the acceptable margin of error, and the type of analysis (Lohr,2019)
The total population of the three sampled universities was around 4250. To obtain a sufficient sample size, Yamane's formula was utilized. Using Yamane's (1967) formula for sample size determination, the resultant total sample size for the study was 365.

Sampling Techniques

The five universities that make up the cluster differ in their size, age, (years of existence). Three universities were selected considering regional distribution and the generation university belongs. Usually, Ethiopian public universities are categorized by using their generation. For the quantitative survey, a multi-stage sampling technique was utilized. Accordingly, at the first stage, Mekelle from the first generation, Samara from the second generation, and Adigrat from the third generation were selected. Secondly, to get samples from each selected University, probability proportional to size (PPS) sampling was utilized. Accordingly,155 from Mekelle,81 from samara, and 129 from Adigrat were selected to be part of the study. Finally,a simple random sampling technique was employed to contact the respondents. Cooper and Schindler (2003) agree that personnel records available at a university and a population that is

geographically concentrated, a probability sampling method is possible.For personal interviews a total of21 individuals, seven from each University who were in leadership positions (vice presidents, Deans, Directors, and Heads of departments were selectedby employing purposive sampling. By virtue of their position, these individuals are believed to have a better understanding of strategic management process issues.

Data Source, Collection Instrument,and Procedures

Both primary and secondary data were utilized in this study. Primary data was collected by using a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Secondary data were gathered from books, journals, documents, websites, reports of relevant agencies. To collect first-hand quantitative data from the respondents, asurvey questionnaire was developed by the researcher from the literature for all constructs except one (SM tools and techniques),based on a five-point Likert type scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were tested. After that,a self-administered questionnaire was distributed at a point of time to sample staff and management of North Cluster Public Universities of Ethiopia by delivering personally at the campuses. For qualitative data collection, a semi-structured interview guide was developed. The personal interview was conducted with academic leaders (vice presidents, Deans, Directors, and Heads of Departments).

Data Analysis and Presentation

Data were analyzed by using the application of the statistical package for social sciences SPSS(Version 25) software. Tables, charts, and graphs were utilized to display a visual presentation of the data, for ease of understanding and analysis. The study employed descriptive statistics mean, the standard deviation, and percentage. This study utilized a mean score greater than 3 taken as agreement while a mean score lessthan 3 was judged as disagreement. Hence analysis was made by comparing the computed mean of the construct with 3. The data obtained by interviewwas analyzed thematically and presented concurrently with quantitative results for triangulation and elaboration.

Results and Discussions

To collect the quantitative data, 365 questionnaires were distributed to respondents (academic staff and leaders) in targeted universities. Out of which 330 (90%) usable questionnaires were returned. Hence, the analysis of the results is based on 330 properly filled and returned questionnaires.

Research question 1: The attitude of academic staff and academic leaders towards strategic management adoption (practice)
To assess the attitude of academic staff and academic leaders towards the adoption and practice of SM in their institutions

Table1			
Descriptive Statistics Attitude towards SM Practice			
Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
SM can transform higher education.	330	3.57	.921
SM can help public HEIs overcome current challenges.	330	3.52	.926
SM can be regarded as a tool to deal with future challenges	330	3.58	.946
adopting SM in public HEIshelps improve institutional operational efficiency	330	3.51	.952
Mean score attitude of academic staff and academic leaders towards SM adoption	330	3.54	.751

Table 1 showthat academic staff and academic leaders agreed with the statements. The mean score [μ=3.54]for the construct indicates respondents have a positive attitude towards strategic management adoption.

To test whether there was a significant difference inattitude between academic leaders and academic staff independent t-test was conducted. As shown in Table 2below, there was no significant difference t(df=.440,.976 in scores for staff (M=3.56,SD=.749) and for leaders (M=3.52,SD.759) the magnitude of the differences (Mean difference=.038 at 95% CI:-.131to.206) was very small.

Table 2

Construct	Group	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means						
		Mean	SD	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
											Lower	Upper
Attitude	staff	3.56	.749	.001	.976	.440	328	.661	.038	.086	-.131	.206
	Leaders	3.52	.759			.438	253.725	.662	.038	.086	-.132	.207

Research question 2

To what extent strategic management is practiced in North Cluster Public Universities (NCPUs) of Ethiopia?

To answer this question, seven constructs were developed, taking the elements of the four phases of the strategic management process and other two related constructs that can give a better picture of the status of strategic practice in targeted universities.

Construct 1: Environmental Scanning

Respondents were asked to state the level of agreement with the main activities identified in the literature in the Environmental scanning phase of the SM process. As shown in table 3, the mean score for the construct is 3.55, with a standard deviation of 0.678. this shows respondents agreed that the main activities under the environmental scanning phase of the SM process were performed in targeted universities.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Environmental Scanning			
Main activities	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Analysis of human resources (staff) issues	330	3.45	.935
Evaluation of internal operating processes	330	3.52	.978
AssessUniversity's weaknessesand strengths	330	3.41	.945
Examining community issues	330	3.45	.908
Conducting PESTEL analysis	330	3.46	.945
Assessing competitive issues	330	3.53	.933
Student needs assessment	330	3.56	.934
assessment of national educational issues and trends.	330	4.05	.758
Totalmean (Environmental Scanning)	330	3.55	.678

To complement the quantitative data qualitative interviews were conducted with the leadership of the targeted universities. Most interviewees indicated the existence of the activities. for instance, one of the interviewees described environmentally scanning activities:

> Initiatives like tracer study, customer satisfaction surveys, and discussion forums are used to assess the external environment of an institution. The assessment is also done to enhance staff development, infrastructure, and facilities at the University.Our environmental assessments help us make decisions about intake capacity, recruitment, program expansion, new program development, research priorities, and community service activities (EL12).

During the interview, several respondents were also made many indications that show the tools universities utilize in this phase. The most mentioned tools and techniques were SWOT analysis, PESTEL analysis, BSC, and benchmarking. Both the quantitative and qualitative findings show environmental scanning in targeted universities was carried out. Scanning the environment is critical and cannot be omitted from the strategic management process because it is a requisite. (Beal, 2000).

Construct 2: Strategy Formulation

In the literature, the main activities during strategy formulation are developing vision and mission statements, setting goals and objectives, preparation of a strategic plan. Respondents were asked to what extent they agree with the existence of these activities in their institution. The mean score for the construct was 3.17, with a standard deviation of 1.168. Respondents agreed with all activities under the construct. Hence, they are agreed with the existence of the strategy formulation process in their university.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics of Strategy Formulation			
Main activities	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
The University's vision identifies geographic domain where the University excel	330	3.00	1.249
The vision of the University is an effective leadership tool that induces staff to act toward a shared -common goal	330	3.03	1.273
The vision of the University is well communicated to stakeholders	330	3.12	1.358
The mission of the University identifies key customers and markets.	330	3.15	2.624
The University's mission incorporates the identification of the University's use of technology	330	3.28	1.318
The philosophy, beliefs, values, and priorities are articulated in the mission of the University	330	3.29	1.340
The University's goals and objectives are to direct programs and educational policies.	330	3.26	1.314
University has a strategic plan	330	3.18	1.474
The University has realistic SMART objectives	330	3.25	1.350
Mean score (Strategy Formulation)	330	3.17	1.168

Several excerpts from the interview have also substantiated this result. Some of the quotes from respondents for instance:

We have developed a vision that reveals where we want to be for the next ten to fifteen years. Our major decisions and investments are geared towards the materialization of our vision. Our mission is crystal clear; we are mandated to provide skilled manpower to the nation, so we offer undergraduate, graduate, and Ph.D. programs in diverse fields of studies; likewise engaging in problem-solving research and community is a list of our mandates (EL9).

Both the quantitative and qualitative results revealed that targeted universities were engaged in major activities within thestrategy formulation phaselike the vision and mission setting, goals objective, preparation of strategic plans. This is a phase where actual strategies are developed.Poor strategic planning leads to organizational failure (O'Regan &Ghobadian,2004).

Construct 3: Strategy Implementation

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics of Strategy Implementation			
Main activities	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Devising supportive plans, policies, and procedures	330	2.92	1.256
Allocating ample resources for project implementation	330	2.70	1.247
Developing faculty and staff	330	2.93	1.215
Designate people in charge of implementing the strategies.	330	2.98	1.225
Aware employees of the time and the way the strategies need to be implemented.	330	2.97	1.286

Reward employees for successfully implementing strategies	330	2.72	1.311
Top leadership exercises strategic leadership during Implementation	330	2.92	1.273
Restructuring the institution to proper Implementation of a strategy	330	2.82	1.298
Execute strategies and monitor progress	330	2.90	1.303
Mean score (Strategy Implementation)	330	2.87	.985

As it is presented in table5respondents disagreed with all aspects of strategy implementation in the targeted universities. The mean score for the construct was 2.87. However, during the qualitative interview, many leaders made indications that they were engaged in strategy implementation and registered some results in some areas. For instance, a quote from EL6,

Eventhough things didn't happen as it was planned, in the last couple of years, we designed many initiatives and projects in alignment with our vision, expansion of programs, staff development, fulfillment of required laboratory facilities recruitment; due to these, our enrollment capacity has been increased massively in all undergraduate and graduate but still, we are short of our targets for many reasons. The attention strategy implementation gets in our university is not commendable, unlike strategic planning (EL6).

Some interviewees indicated potential obstacles like an overemphasis on strategic preparation plan, frequent changes in the institution's top leadership, lack of resources, and lack of leadership. The quantitative and qualitative findings depicted that the major activities under the strategy implementation phase were below average. As was hinted by one of the respondents, the leadership of the institution gave less attention to strategy implementation, unlike the formulation stage.None of the strategies that have been prudently formulated by an organizationis of much use unless they are put into action (implemented) (Stacey, 1996). AstoDavid (2011), doing something (strategy implementation) is more difficult than saying you are going to do it (formulating strategy).Strategic management, according to Misankova and Kocisova (2014), is most effective when strategy implementation is at its core.

Construct 4 Strategy Evaluation and Control

Respondents were requested to express their agreement to what extent they agree with the major activities during the strategy evaluation phase. The mean score[μ=2.86] was below the average which indicates the inadequacy of activities in the strategy evaluation phase

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for Strategy Evaluation and Control			
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Examining the underlying bases of a university's strategy	330	2.92	1.212
Preparation of indicators and special criteria for performance evaluation	330	2.94	1.200
Participating stakeholders in strategy evaluation	330	2.85	1.420
Conducting periodic performance evaluation of units and the entire University	330	2.87	1.216
Adopting corrective actions to ensure performance is in line with the plan	330	2.95	1.284
Holding meetings and discussions for feedback	330	2.65	1.322
Mean score (Strategy evaluation and control)	330	2.86	1.032

This result was also reflected during the interviews as one of the interviewees described the situation as

There is a huge gap between what was planned and what was reported by the University. We evaluate the performance of our university quarterly and report to the concerned government agencies. Believe me, the evaluation report is stashed activities performed on an ad-hocbasis. Reports are deficient in showing performance against plan. There are problems in monitoring initiatives and taking corrective actions. Critically evaluating performances by participating key stakeholders (IL3).
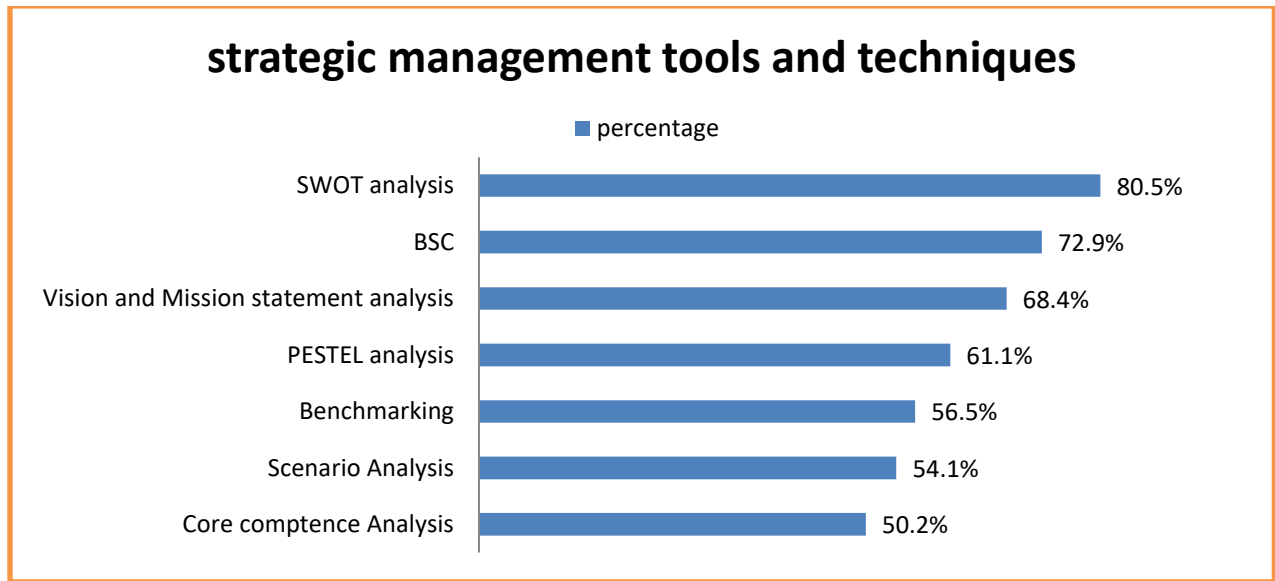
Both results showcased less emphasis was given to strategy evaluation and control activities in targeted universities. Because of changes in long-term goals, current objectives, and changing circumstances in the environment, a strategy may need to be modified.

Strategic Management Tools and Techniques

The tools and techniques enable leaders and strategists to be aware of relevant issues for strategy formulation and Implementation.To identify tools and techniques utilized in SM development, respondents were asked to select as many from the list of most used SM tools and techniques in public sector organizations, particularly HEIs. The study revealed that most respondents, 80.5% selected SWOT analysis, 72.9% BSC, and 68.4% vision and mission statement analysis. The least selected tools were core competence and scenario analysis. Simplicity to use may have made SWOT the preferable tool in the targeted universities.

Figure 1

Strategic Management Tools and Techniques

During the interview, some participants indicated their institution utilized other tools like gap analysis. Over decades SWOT has been a widely used technique in the scanning and analysis of internal as well as external environments to support strategic decisions (Gurl, 2017).The tools and techniques enable leaders and strategists to be aware of relevant issues for strategy formulation and Implementation.

Institutionalization of SM

To judge whether the targeted Universities institutionalized the SM process, a scale was developed. Respondents were requested to express their agreement with activities of institutionalization. Accordingly, the mean score [μ=3.50] for the construct show respondents agreed with the institutionalization of SM in targeted universities. However, when we look at individual activities required to institutionalize the SM process, they disagreed with most of the activities, as presented in Table 7below.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics for Institutionalization of SM			
Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Top leaders take formal responsibility for the University's SM process	330	2.98	1.302
The top leadership of the University is focused on strategic issues	330	2.81	1.497
Management time, money, and staff support for strategic planning are provided by the University.	330	2.88	1.413

The planning and reporting system at the University is well-defined.	330	2.97	1.324
A dedicated office is structured to deal with strategic planning	330	3.45	1.054
Mean score (Institutionalization of SM)	330	3.05	.912

fora further enhancement of the SMinstitutionalization, a suggestion was made by some participants include among others, including capacity building, empowerment of leaders at the bottom of the hierarchy, and building supportive institutional culture.

Research question 3
Challenges toSM Adoption and Implementation

To identify the challenges that obstruct the proper adoption and Implementation of SM in targeted universities, a construct was developed based on the literature. Respondents were asked to what extent they agree with challenges as to their institution. The results revealed that they agreed [μ=3.44]with the list of challenges as presented in table 8 below.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics Challenges to SM adoption and Implementation			
Challenges	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Planning and Implementation are time-consuming and complex.	330	3.55	.995
Lack of resources	330	3.64	1.022
Difficult to track the effectiveness of strategies and measure success	330	3.07	1.288
Insufficient staff development /lack of training	330	3.52	.936
Lack of proper communication between departments and along hierarchies	330	3.58	.946
lack management Buy-in	330	3.51	.952
Deficiency in Developing and using change champions	330	3.12	1.274
Lack of follow-through	330	3.52	.936
Mean score (challenges of SM adoption and practice)	330	3.44	.633

Respondents agreed with all aspects of challenges (μ=3.44) which indicates SM adoption and Implementation faced numerous challenges. Comparably, during the interview, participants stated several challenges to the adoption and Implementation of SM. Hence, we have categorized those into two categories. Challenges during formulation and challenges during Implementation even though some challenges are difficult to strictly categorize under one phase. The summary is presented in the following table 9

Table 9

Qualitative Findings Challenges of Strategic Management Adoption and Implementation	

Challenges during Formulation	Challenges during Implementation
	Lack of resources
Top leaderships lack experience in envisioning. Lack of support from the administrative board,	Matching organizational structure with strategies
The negative attitude of some leaders and staff towards SM.	Difficult to track the effectiveness of strategies and measure success
Lack of management buy-in and support to strategic planning	Lack of participation from staff
Absence of capable leaders with adequate exposure to leadership in higher education	Lack of proper communication between departments and along hierarchies
	Lack of follow-through
The complexity, longevity of the strategic planning process	Driving cultural change in the institution to galvanize employee engagement
Lack of enthusiasm and leadership from key leaders	a shorter cycle of leadership
	Overemphasis on tools and techniques
	Frequent policy changes from the government side,
	Staff turn over

Conclusion

This study aimed to assess the status of strategic management practice and its challenges in North Cluster Public Universities of Ethiopia. Conclusions were made based on the findings quantitative and qualitative findings of the study. The results of this study revealed that the leadership as well the academic staffs of the targeted universities were of positive attitude towards SM adoption and practice. Environmental scanning and strategy formulation phases of the SM development were received much more attention than the other two phases namely strategy implementation and strategy evaluation. The results also showed that SWOT analysis, BSC, PESTEL analysis, and vision and mission statement are the top SM tools and techniques targeted universities utilized in the strategy-making process. Furthermore, the results revealed the efforts exerted to institutionalize SM were minimal and needs attention from the leadership of the institutions. This and less attention that was given to strategy implementation may have resulted in dissatisfaction of respondents. Finally, the SM adoption and implementation effort of the targeted universities were challenged by several issues that include, among others, lack of resources, lack of management buy-in, overemphasis on tools and techniques, frequent policy changes from the government side, Staff turnover, deficiency in creating and using change champions, lack of follow-through.

Recommendations

The following are main recommendations drawn based on the study's findings:

- To reap the full benefits SM offers to an institution proper attention should be given to all phases. Having a compelling strategic plan will do anything to the institution and its stakeholders unless it is implemented properly. The attention given to the assessment and preparation phases should be given to the latter phases that incorporate strategy implementation and strategy evaluation.
- Institutionalizing the SM practice is essential. Hence, institutional leaders should work on institutionalization by building a capable organizational structure and culture and the development of staff.
- There is a need to make strategy implementation a routine part of the major decision-making of the targeted universities.
- To properly adopt and practice SM, leaders of targeted universities are expected to create change agents and champions by participating stakeholders in strategy development and implementation and evaluation stages. Proper performance evaluation, follow-up incentive mechanismsare needed to tackle the roadblocks of SM practice in universities.

References

1. Amare, G. (1988). Current Trends in higher education in Ethiopia. Northeast African Studies,10(1), 47-68.
2. Asfaw, A. (2012). Gender Inequalities in Tertiary Education in Ethiopia. Mediating the Transition to University through the Development of Adaptive Competencies.
3. Asgedom, A., & Hagos, T. (2015). Governance Reforms in Higher Education of Ethiopia: The Case of Autonomy and Accountability in Addis Ababa University. Ethiopian Journal of Development Research, 37(1), 1-40.
4. Ashcroft, K., & Rayner, P. (2011). Higher education in development: lessons fromsub-Saharan Africa. IAP.
5. Beal, R. M. (2000). Competing effectively: environmental scanning, competitive strategy, and organizational performance in small manufacturing firms. Journal of small business management, 38(1), 27-47.
6. Bryson, J. (2003). Strategic planning and management. In B. G. Peters, & J. Pierre Handbook of public administration (pp. 38-47). SAGE Publications Ltd
7. Chandler, A. D. (1962). Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of American Enterprise. MIT Press: Cambridge, MA.
8. Chang, G. C. (2008). Strategic planning in education: Some concepts and methods. In Directions in educational planning: a symposium to honour the work of Françoise Caillods.
9. Cooper, D. R., & Schindler, P. S. (2003). Business research methods McGraw-Hill: New york.
10. Creswell, J. W. (2009). Research design: Qualitative and mixed methods approach. London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

11. *David, F. R. (2011). Strategic Management: Concepts and Cases, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.*
12. *David, F. R. (2013). Strategic management: Concepts and cases. (13th ed.). Essex, England: Pearson Education Limited*
13. *David, F. R., & David, F. R. (2017). Strategic Management concepts and cases A Competitive Approach.*
14. *Dooris, M. J., Kelley, J. M., & Trainer, J. F. (2004). Strategic planning in higher education. New Directions for Institutional Research, 2004(123), 5-11.*
15. *Goldsmith, A. A. (1995). Making managers more effective: Applications of strategic management. USAID.*
16. *Greene, J. C., Benjamin, L., & Goodyear, L. (2001). The merits of mixing methods in evaluation. Evaluation, 7(1), 25-44.*
17. *HERQA (Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency). (2019). List of Accredited and Re-accredited Private Higher Education Institutions for 2019/2020 Academic Year (Amharic version). Addis Ababa: unpublished.*
18. *Hinton, K. E. (2012). A practical guide to strategic planning in higher education (Vol. 7). USA: Society for College and University Planning.*
19. *Holmes, J. (1985). 20/20 Planning... Well Almost. A Short History of the First Twenty Years of The Society for College and University Planning, Written with 20/20 Hindsight... Well Almost.*
20. *Kang, Y. C. (2005). Strategic Management in the Public Sector: Major Publications. Public Performance & Management Review, 29(1), 85-92.*
21. *Kettunen, J. (2002). Competitive strategies in higher education. Journal of Institutional Research, 11(2), 38-47.*
22. *Leslie, D. W., & Fretwell Jr, E. K. (1996). Wise Moves in Hard Times: Creating & Managing Resilient Colleges & Universities. The Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series. Jossey-Bass, Inc., 350 Sansome St., San Francisco, CA 94104.*
23. *Miller, C. C., & Cardinal, L. B. (1994). Strategic planning and firm performance: A synthesis of more than two decades of research. Academy of management journal, 37(6), 1649-1665.*
24. *Mintzberg, H. (1994). Rethinking strategic planning part I: Pitfalls and fallacies. Long-range planning, 27(3), 12-21.*
25. *Mišanková, M., & Kočišová, K. (2014). Strategic Implementation as a part of strategic management. Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 110, 861-870.*
26. *MoSHE (Ministry of Science and Higher Education, FDRE). (2019) Guideline for Academic Publishing and Promotion (under discussion). Addis Ababa: unpublished.*
27. *O'Regan, N., & Ghobadian, A. (2004). The importance of capabilities for strategic direction and performance. Management decision.*
28. *Pidcock, S. (2001). Strategic planning in a new university. Journal of Further and Higher Education, 25(1), 67-83.*
29. *Saint, W. (2004). Higher Education in Ethiopia: The Vision and Its Challenges. Journal of Higher Education in Africa / Revue De L'enseignementSupérieurEn Afrique,2(3), 83-113.*
30. *Saunders, M., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2009). Research methods for business students. Pearson education.*

31. Sawhney, S., Gupta, A., & Kumar, K. (2017). A case for strategic management in higher education in India. *Leadership, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship as Driving Forces of the Global Economy*, 403-410.

32. Schmidtlein, F. A., & Milton, T. H. (1990). *Adapting strategic planning to campus realities*. Jossey-Bass.

33. Schraeder, M. (2002). A simplified approach to strategic planning: Practical considerations and an illustrated example. *Business process management journal*.

34. Shattock, M. (2000). Strategic management in European universities in an age of increasing institutional self-reliance. *Tertiary Education & Management*, 6(2), 93-104.

35. Stacey, R. D. (1996). *Complexity and creativity in organizations*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

36. Tashakkori, A., & Teddlie, C. (2009). Integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to research. *The SAGE handbook of applied social research methods*, 2, 283-317.

37. Tsiakkiros, A., & Pashiardis, P. (2002). Strategic planning and education: the case of Cyprus. *International Journal of Educational Management*.

38. Wagaw, T. G. (1990). *The Development of Higher Education and Social Change: An Ethiopian Experience. African Series 2*. Michigan State University Press, 1405 South Harrison Road, Suite 25, Manly Miles Building, East Lansing, MI 48823-5202.

39. Wheelen, T. L., & Hunger, J. D. (2012). *Strategic management and business policy: entering 21st-century global society*.

40. Whittington, R., Regnér, P., Angwin, D., Johnson, G., & Scholes, K. (2020). *Exploring Strategy Text and Cases*. Pearson UK.