

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INSTITUTIONAL PRESSURES AND STRATEGIC RESPONSES OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN NAKURU COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract

There are only a limited number of empirical studies into the dynamics between institutional pressures and organizational strategic responses to those pressures. This necessitated the present study which examined the relationship between institutional pressures (social and professional normative pressures) and strategic responses of public universities in Nakuru County, Kenya. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The study targeted the 123 management and administrative staff working with the public universities in Nakuru County. A stratified random sampling method was employed to draw respondents. A structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences software was used to aid in data analysis. Data Analysis was in form of both descriptive and inferential statistics. The study established that social normative and professional normative pressures significantly affected strategic responses adopted by public universities in Nakuru County. The study recommended that staff who are members of professional bodies should adhere to the policies, codes of conduct and rules of such bodies.

Keywords: Institutional pressures, professional normative pressures, public universities, social normative pressures, strategic responses

INTRODUCTION

Formal organizational structure reflects widespread understanding of the social reality. Powerful institutional rules function as rationalized myths that organizations incorporate in order to gain legitimacy, resources, stability and enhanced survival prospects. In this regard, organizations do conform to institutionalized rules referred to as isomorphism (Buhrman, 2011). It has been argued that the emphasis on conformity has occasioned underestimation of the role of interest and agency in adaptation to the institutional environment (Oliver, 1991; Hoffman, 1999). It is argued that institutional pressures lead to isomorphism.

A number of authors (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 1995) have examined the various institutional pressures that face organizations. In tandem, they developed an integrated set of institutional pressures. Majorly, they came up with four categories of institutional pressures which include regulative, social normative, professional normative and mimetic pressures. Regulative pressures are concerned with organizations being obliged to adhere to rules and regulations while social normative pressures are concerned with wider societal norms. More so, professional normative pressures focus on professional norms; and mimetic pressures pursue to match competitors' performance. In the same light, it is asserted that there are several benefits that accrue from complying with the aforementioned institutional pressures. The benefits include but not limited to enhanced prestige, stability, legitimacy, social support, internal and external commitment, access to resources, attraction to personnel, fit into administrative categories, acceptance in professions, and also invulnerability to questioning (Scott, 1983).

Isomorphism which is the inclination towards homogeneity, describes a scenario where organizations are persuaded to incorporate the practices and procedures defined by prevailing rationalized concepts of organizational work and institutionalized society. The theme of isomorphism holds that, organizations that abide with the foregoing enhance both their legitimacy and survival prospects. A study conducted in the United Kingdom examined institutional pressures on public organizations. The study focused on an empirical test of isomorphism. The study noted that organizations adapt their internal characteristics in order to conform to the expectations of key stakeholders in their environment. In tandem the study evaluated whether organizational change in the public sector is consistent with the foregoing institutional perspective (Ashworth, Boyne & Delbridge, 2005).

Moreover, there are other scholars (Davidsson, Hunter & Klofsten, 2006) who opine that institutions exert pressure on organizations in the shape of mimetic, normative and coercive pressures. In the same perspective, it is noted that institutional pressures form the elements of which institutions are built. These pressures introduce the mechanism by which the institutional pillars pursue their impact (Scott, 2001). Mimetic pressures stem from the perspective to reduce

uncertainty (Davidsson et al., 2006). The aforesaid pressures reflect the mechanism by which the cultural pillar influences its power. The pressures exerted on the organization lead to an isomorphic behaviour towards convergence with the institutional environment. This results in reduction of probable radical changes due to the pressures presented by the organizational practice (Mignerat & Rivard, 2005). Normative pressures, on the other hand, results from professionalization, which socializes personnel with the organization in order to view certain kinds of structure and process as legitimate. It is argued that, contrary to popular belief, the drivers of the behaviours occasioned by various types of institutional pressures are political power and legitimacy rather than competition (Samairat, 2008).

Organizational response to institutional pressures were analyzed by Samairat (2008). The focus was on Latin America and the Caribbean countries. The author observed that, search for legitimacy is the driving force behind organizations responding to institutional pressures. When citing Oliver (1991), Samairat noted that there are five different ways organizations can strategically respond to institutional pressures. The responses range from passivity to increasing active resistance and include acquiescence, compromise, avoidance, defiance and manipulation. Acquiescence includes such elements as habit, imitation and compromise. Compromise involves an organization's attempt to strike a balance between it and the external elements. By adopting this approach, an organization further seeks to pacify or bargain with the aforesaid external elements. Avoidance strategy involves concealment, buffering and escape. Regarding this strategy, an organization may, for instance, change its activities in order to avoid certain government regulations. Defiance strategy incorporates three types of resistance which include dismissal, challenge and attack. Lastly, manipulation strategy is when an organization decides to adopt co-opt, influence, and controlling tactics.

In addition, Handgraaf (2012) explored different institutional pressures exerted and the strategic responses employed by Shell in respect of Ogoni Struggle in the Niger Delta, Nigeria. It was established that the Shell Company employed all the five strategic responses postulated by Oliver (1991). These include acquiesce, compromise, avoid, defy, and manipulate. Notably, each of the aforesaid strategies implemented through use of various tactical approaches. In tandem, Oliver highlighted, each strategy could adopt one, two or all of the three tactical approaches unique to it.

Kenya has a total of 23 accredited public universities as indicated in Appendix III. Nakuru County is home to Egerton University and several campuses of other public universities which include Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT), Kenyatta University (KU), University of Nairobi and Laikipia University. Public universities just like other organizations are prone to institutional pressures. The foregoing realization necessitated this

study with a view of linking institutional pressures to strategic responses amongst public universities.

Statement of the Problem

Public universities just like other organizations operate in an environment full of pressures that are presumably associated with the institution of education. It is argued that there indeed exist only a limited number of empirical studies into the dynamics between institutional pressures and organizational strategic responses to those pressures (Lounsbury, 2001). This is in spite of obvious pressures that have been facing these institutions of higher education in Kenya. It is exemplified that the local communities have been questioning the location of university campuses in their localities. There have also been complaints from adjacent societies that they are being left out of the human resource of universities. Such pressures are likely to impact negatively on the universities, local communities and the nation at large. Given that these institutions are expected to strategically respond to the aforesaid pressures and ultimately strike a balance between stakeholders' and institutional interests, it is thus necessary to conduct this study which purposes to examine the relationship between institutional pressures and strategic responses of public universities in Nakuru County, Kenya.

General Objective of the Study

To evaluate the relationship between institutional pressures and strategic responses of public universities in Nakuru County, Kenya

Specific Objectives

- i. To analyze the relationship between social normative pressures and strategic responses of public universities in Nakuru County
- ii. To assess the relationship between professional normative pressures and strategic responses of public universities in Nakuru County

Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: The relationship between social normative pressures and strategic responses of public universities in Nakuru County is not statistically significant.

H₀₂: The relationship between professional normative pressures and strategic responses of public universities in Nakuru County is not statistically significant.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study reviews a number of theories pertinent to institutional pressures and strategic responses. The theories are discussed in the context of academic institutions specifically public universities. The study reviews and discusses the institutional theory and resource dependency theory.

Institutional Theory

Institutional theory was developed from the works of Meyer and Rowan (1977) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983). The theory states that organizations are bound to conform to the institutions within which they operate. According to the institutional theory, institutions are described as regulatory structures, government agencies, laws, courts, professions interest groups and public opinion (Scott, 1987). The institutional theory stipulates that formal organizational structures reflect widespread understandings of social reality. In addition, it indicates that powerful institutional rules and practices function as rationalized myths, which organizations bring on board in order to gain legitimacy, resources, stability and enhanced survival prospects. Buhrman (2011) noted that, in respect of the foregoing, organizations conform to institutionalized rules (isomorphism) besides evaluations of their impact on work outcomes.

The institutional theory brings to focus various elements of institutional pressures. These include regulative pressures, social normative pressures, professional normative pressures, and mimetic pressures. Regulative pressures focus in organizations being obliged to abide with set rules and regulations; social normative pressures are concerned with wider societal norms; professional normative pressures are interested in professional norms; while mimetic pressures focus on least equal competitors' performance (Zucker, 1988). In the same light, DiMaggio (1988) underscores the importance of complying with aforesaid pressures exerted by institutions. Some of the accruing benefits from the said compliance include enhanced prestige, stability, legitimacy, social support, internal and external commitment, access to resources, attraction of personnel, fit into administrative categories, acceptance in professions, and also invulnerability to reproach. It is asserted that institutional theory argues that besides being financially successful, organizations are supposed to be legitimate in order to survive. While acknowledging the tension brought about by competitive and institutional pressures, organizations are expected to balance between the degree of conformity and the level of differentiation from competitors (Boon, Paauwe & Hartog, 2009).

In her literary works, Handgraaf (2012) cited Scott (2001) and noted that the institutional theory describes institutions as social structures which encompasses legal authorities, judicial authorities, administrative agencies, government agencies, regulators, and organizations that

enforce behaviour; competitors, professions, interest groups, educational systems and indeed public opinion and society at large. It is worth noting that strategic organizational behaviour which organizations adopt in response to the institutional pressures was lacking from institutional theory (Oliver, 1991). According to the theorist, organizations respond from conformity to resistance out of the organizational interest. In this breadth, Oliver proposed a number of organizational strategic responses to institutional pressures. These strategic responses range from organizational conformity to organizational resistance. The organizational strategic responses are acquiesce, compromise, avoid, defy, and manipulation (Oliver, 1991). The institutional theory is applicable in the context of public universities given that, just like other public entities, they are prone to institutional pressures. The theory also suggests some of the measures that the universities may take to strategically respond to institutional pressures.

Resource-Dependency Theory

The resource-dependency theory was advanced by Oliver (1991). The theory holds the viewpoint that organizational choice is controlled by a variety of external pressures. The theory states that the resources at the disposal of an entity are ordinarily scarce and as such a dependence on the outside environment exists. In tandem, it is imperative for the theory to put into perspective the organizational interdependence and networks (Pfeffer & Salanick, 2003). This would in turn result in environmental dynamics. It is further observed that the resource-dependency theory is significant in that it considers the relationship and power contributed with them instead of efficiency. In addition, the resource-dependence theorists are concerned with the necessity of an organization to adapt to environmental uncertainty, coping with issues interdependencies, and actively managing resource flows (Oliver, 1991).

In tandem with resource-dependency theory, it is argued that legitimate organizations are likely to create and experiment with new technical rationales that vary from current standards particularly due to the fact that they have the high status and requisite resources to be different (Shere & Lee, 2002). More so, according to Oliver (1991), this theory assumes that firms exercise some degree of influence over the resource environment of the organization's exchange partners with the view of achieving stability. The foregoing explains the difference between resource-based and institutional theories. The former theory focuses largely on formal relationships between organizations constituting a given network and pays little attention to cognitive and cultural perspectives which are the primary elements of institutional theory (Pfeffer & Salanick, 2003). Oliver (1991) adds that by controlling scarce resources, an organization is able to exert power over others. Fundamentally, public universities faces a scarcity of resources; financial, human resource, infrastructure, land amongst others. The situation obliges

these institutions to seek external sources of resources. For instance, inadequacy of land, has forced some universities to higher space in private apartments, and lack of enough lecturers has led to outsourcing of part-time tutors.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

This section outlines empirical studies hitherto carried out in respect of institutional pressures and strategic responses. In particular, the studies touching on the various types of institutional pressures, that is, social normative pressures and professional normative pressures are reviewed in the context of strategic responses.

Social Normative Pressures

Moreover, another study by Wilde (2012) looked into the strategy making in five public MBA programs in selected universities in the United States. The study sought to establish whether coercive, normative and mimetic pressures contributed to the strategies that the public MBA programs develop and implement in their quest to differentiate themselves. The study employed in-depth interviews of five current directors of MBA programs in these public institutions of higher learning. The study found that the programs experienced influences while formulating their strategies. Coercive, normative and mimetic pressures coupled with stakeholders, institutional characteristics and leadership were found to be in play and influenced the MBA programs in these institutions. It was however noted that stakeholder interests and power greatly influenced the extent to which these isomorphic mechanisms influenced the programs.

A study conducted in Europe explored the kind of universities that embraced external evaluation in Greece (Papadimitriou & Westerheijden, 2011). The study employed data on documented projects and used content analysis to understand the relationships between neo-institutional pressures and university characteristics that influenced the choice of European University Association's Institutional Evaluation Programme (EUA-IEP). Eight universities in Greece had voluntarily invited European University Association's (EUA) evaluation and were seeking on their overall performance. EUA's self assessment projects cited normative pressure from the universities by their management commitment and by the fact that these institutions had voluntarily participated in the professional association, EUA. Documented projects, as cited by the authors suggest that other 17 universities had participated in EUA and nearly half had voluntarily invited EUA-IEP. This, according to the authors had significant benefits and services that EUA would provide. Further, it was noted that normative pressure by EUA-IEP was as a result of the cooperation between the university and the external stakeholders. This was meant to improve capacity for planning education programmes, continuing education and research.

External stakeholders were seen to exert normal pressure to a university through participating in informal departmental committees before any changes in the study programmes were affected by the university. It is also noted that stakeholders would influence the adoption of quality management through the alumni network. In the project, it was recommended that organized involvement of students would provide a link between the university and the outside world, reinforce university importance and indeed allow the university to track careers of students as stakeholders at large. In this regard, the EUA would exert more pressure on the university to include alumni networks in the quality management agenda.

Another study by Munene (2006) countered criticism against sustainability and foreignness of African Virtual University (AVU) and the paradox of the World Bank in Kenya. Munene argues that the new virtual educational system mirrors that of the state universities in Kenya. The author concludes that the forces of isomorphism explain best the locations of AVU within the traditional university set up. The author cites normative pressures of professionalization as the forces spearheading isomorphism. He argues that where rules and ethics of professional conduct exist in an organization, incentives for new organizations to ally and pattern as the older organization exist too. Since the rules that govern academic standards, conduct and faculty qualification among others have already been formalized in traditional institutions, the author asserts that it would be more cost efficient to establish virtual universities within the traditional universities where professional rules are already in place.

Social normative pressures exerted on universities have been examined from a global perspective. Wide (2012) investigated the aforesaid pressures in selected public universities in the U.S. Narrowing to the Greek context, Papadimitriou and Westerheijden (2011) examined the EUA-IEP. In Kenya, Munene (2006) delved into forces of isomorphism which he concluded that they explain best the locations of AVU within the traditional university set up. The author cited normative pressures of professionalization as the forces spearheading isomorphism. However, Munene's study never touched on strategic responses taken by public universities in Kenya.

Professional Normative Pressures

A study conducted in the United States examined institutional isomorphism (Tuttle & Dillard, 2006). The study noted that characteristics or actions associated with mimetic isomorphism might over time become accepted as part of the organizational field's professional standards for behaviour or actions imposed a powerful constituency such as governmental regulations, might become recognized as part of the expected standards for responsible action, thus obviating the necessity for coercive force for implementation.

A study by StevenOlof, Tagesson, Anderson, Cato and Hansson (2004) sought to explain the choice of accounting standards in Swedish municipal corporations. The empirical analysis of the study revealed that the coercive, mimetic and normative forces pressures presented by the environment should always be considered. The study specifically underscored the adherence to the professional normative pressures. The sample of municipal corporations indicated that the choice of standards was significantly explained by institutional factors. In this respect, it was deduced that the aforesaid organizations tend to be subject to institutional influence by accepting the practice of their auditing firm and employing specific standards in order to legitimize themselves when they have attained a certain size. StevenOlof et al.'s (2004) findings concurred with a study by Dimaggio and Powell (1991) that had posited that it can be expected that a professional group will struggle for the right and opportunity to define the conditions and methods of their work. For instance, it is noted that auditors influence their conditions through their professional bodies and by being part of the regulatory regime of a given country.

In yet another study, Gustavson (2012) examined the professional norms in African contexts. This was against the backdrop of the argument that Western practices are not appropriate in African contexts. The explanation given is that there exists a lack of legitimacy for practices among public officials in these countries, as well as a lack of empirical studies of the practices outside the West. Gustavson's study focused on governmental audit as part of public administration reform with a specific interest in Namibia and Botswana. The field work conducted was in form of interviews, observations, and document studies. The study findings revealed how professional norms and imitation, which have had been found to significantly influence professional public officials in Western countries, also play a substantive role amongst African public auditors. These professionals were established to strive to conform to their professional identity and continuously reform their organizations in order to achieve higher compliance with international requirements also in disapproval of domestic politics. The study findings contradicted with the contemporary literature that describe African public officials and, instead, provide insights on how to understand public sector reform in Africa as a whole.

The reviewed studies have underscored the adherence to the professional normative pressures (StevenOlof et al., 2004). Gustavson (2012) examined the professional norms in African contexts. The former author focused on Swedish municipalities while the latter's study was conducted in both Namibia. The reviewed studies neither addressed the Kenyan scenario in general nor did they focus on public universities. More so, the studies did not address the professional normative pressures in the context of strategic responses.

Strategic Responses

In the context of strategic responses, Rabovsky (2013) did a study on using performance data to manage public universities. The study employed a survey of public university presidents in order to broaden the understanding about the use of data and performance management strategies within public organizations. In response to strategic planning in the universities, evaluating employees, organizational learning and interacting with the external stakeholders of the university, the study found that public universities often use the performance data to aid manage but that the resort to the use of performance management data was due to several factors across the management functions in these universities.

Furthermore, Manyenze (2013) embarked on the procurement performance in the public universities in Kenya. The study sought to establish the mechanisms to reduce the effects procurement challenges and determine the effectiveness of those mechanisms at the University of Nairobi. The study found that there was indeed an oversight and enforcement challenge and it affected the procurement management a great deal. Further, the study established that there were non-transparent procurement practices that posed a challenge to the procurement management at the university. Corruption was rampant and blocked the implementation of the 2005 procurement act. In response to the challenges aforementioned, it was noted that the university had instituted a combination of assets to deal with financial issues at the university. The efficiency levels for the various functions were also found to be in place but were too weak to deal with the enormous challenge the affected procurement. The study recommended that the university should encourage centralized procurement to enhance effectiveness of these mechanisms in order to promote standardization. Further the university should enhance coordination of activities, control of inventory and budgetary control through centralization of planning and carrying out frequent procurement planning.

On the other hand, Ombuki, Arasa, Ngugi and Muhwezi (2014) looked into the environmental factors influencing procurement regulatory compliance by Kenya's public universities. The study analyzed the responses of 168 procurement staff from 21 public universities. It was found that a variety of environmental factors such location of the university; completion with other institutions and environmental audit requirements influenced the procurement compliance at the universities. Further it was noted that universities integrate the community interests in response to the challenges on procurement compliance. University physical accessibility was also noted to be a contributing factor to procurement compliance. However, despite integrating community interests and strategic location of the university, there were still challenges in the procurement compliance. The study therefore recommended that the

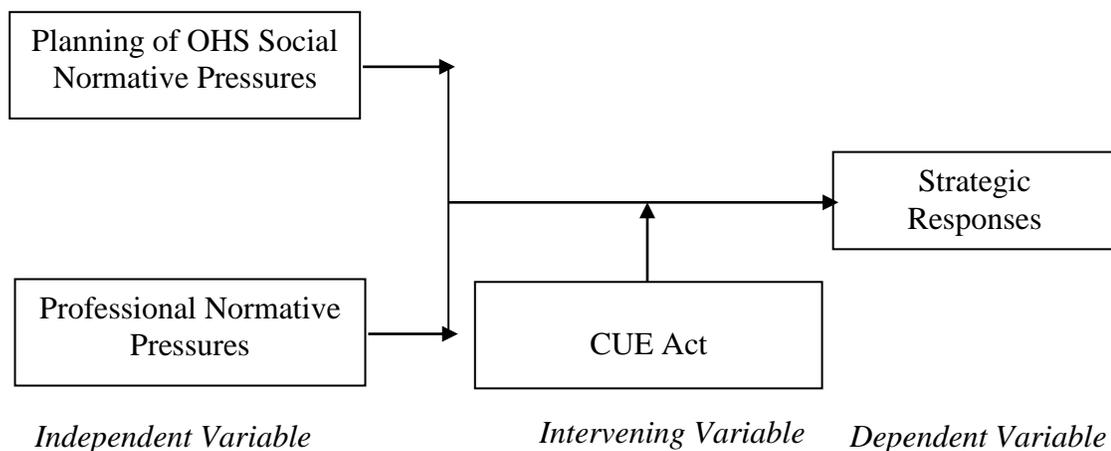
universities should encourage deeper and further engagement partnerships with the local communities taking into consideration community interests.

Locally, Sifuna (2014) carried out a study on the effect of competitive strategies on performance of public universities in Kenya. The study sought to establish the effect of competitive strategies on the performance of public universities. The study employed primary data obtained from 54 respondents. The highly competitive market condition as the study noted necessitated competitive responses to ensure survival and sustainability in the highly turbulent and competitive market. It was noted that the universities differences in the economies of scale, reducing operations time and costs, efficiency and cost control, mass production and mass distribution as aspects of cost leadership strategies adopted, affected performance of these universities. The study recommended that universities should embrace and invest in cost leadership strategies by providing engagements with the service providers, suppliers and other supplementary institutions in order to achieve competitive advantage.

Conceptual Framework

According to Camp (2001), a conceptual framework is a diagrammatic representation of how the study variables are presumed to interact. Figure 1 outlines the conceptual framework that guided this study.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



As illustrated in Figure 1, the conceptual framework presents two major sets of study variables, that is, independent and dependent variables. Social normative pressures and professional normative pressures constitute the independent variables. It is important to note that the

aforested variables describe the various types of institutional pressures which could ordinarily affect the public universities. Strategic responses comprise the dependent variable. Each of the aforesaid variables (independent and dependent) is operationalized by a number of key measurable indicators. It is also important to note that the institutional pressures and strategic responses are confounded by the Commission of University Education (CUE) Act.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A research design which is a blueprint of undertaking a research study indicates the various approaches used in solving the research problem, sources and information related to the problem, and also the time frame. The present study adopted descriptive survey research design.

This design was employed in order to describe the views of the respondents regarding the variables of the study. In tandem with Kothari's (2008) assertions, descriptive study is quantitative in nature. The aspect of survey is supported by the fact that the study was conducted over a specific period of time, that is, August to October, 2015. More so, the study involved respondents who cut across the five public universities with campuses in Nakuru County. Survey studies as argued by Mugenda and Mugenda (2009) are frequently evaluated against strengths and weaknesses of statistical, quantitative research methods and analysis which tallied with the present study.

Target Population

According to Kitchenham and Pflieger (2002), the target population refers to the group or the individuals to whom the survey applies. In other words, the members of the target population must be in a position to answer the questions regarding the study at hand. This study targeted the 123 management and administrative staff working with the public universities with campuses in Nakuru County, Kenya. By the time the study was conducted, there were a total of five universities in Nakuru County, namely Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT), Egerton University, Kenyatta University, University of Nairobi and Laikipia University. The categories of the staff targeted include the campus directors and their deputies, coordinators, administrators, public relations officers, and other staff falling under management/administrative dockets. These employees were believed to be the savviest with issues touching on the institution pressures and the strategic responses adopted by the universities to address those pressures.

Sample Design

Sampling Frame

A sampling frame is an exhaustive list of the members of the target population. Therefore, the frame constituted all the 123 management and administrative staff working with public universities in Nakuru County.

Sample Size Determination

A sample refers to a proportion of the target population from which the data is collected. The sample was calculated scientifically using Nassiuma's (2008) formula which is outlined as follows.

$$n = \frac{NC^2}{C^2 + (N-1)e^2} \quad \text{Where}$$

n = sample size

N = population size

C = coefficient of variation (0.5)

e = error margin (0.05)

Substituting these values in the equation, estimated sample size (n) was:

$$n = \frac{123 (0.5)^2}{0.5^2 + (123-1)0.05^2}$$

$$n = 55.41$$

$$n = 56 \text{ respondents}$$

Sampling Procedure

Stratified random sampling was employed to obtain the 56 respondents from the target population. This method was necessitated by the fact that the target population constituted different universities where distribution of administrative and management staff varied. Stratified random sampling, therefore, ensured fair and equitable representation of respondents across all targeted strata (universities).

Research Instrument

A structured questionnaire was employed to collect data from the sampled respondents. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2009), a questionnaire is the most appropriate tool to employ in data collection in survey studies. The questionnaire was structured in such a way that it primarily enabled collection of data relevant to the study objectives. Simple language was also

used to draft questions therein. The instrument was aimed to facilitate collection of data on a five-point Likert scale. It further ensured that the questionnaire factored in ethical issues. In other words, it desisted from directly sensitive questions that would have likely deterred respondents from divulging the required information.

Pilot Testing

The research instrument was pilot tested before it was used to collect data for the main study. The pilot study was carried out amongst administrative and management staff of public universities and university campuses in Uasin Gishu County, Kenya. The participants in this study who were randomly selected were approximately 10 per cent of the ones participating in the final study. Needless to say, these respondents did not take part in the final study. The primary objective of conducting the pilot test was to determine both the reliability and validity of the research instrument.

Validity Testing of the Research Instrument

Having determined the reliability of the instrument, the validity of the same was assessed. This was informed by the argument that an instrument may be reliable but not valid, but in order for it to be valid it must be reliable. A valid instrument is that which measures what it purports to measure (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008). The study tested both the content and construct validity of the research instrument. Content validity which is statistically not measurable was determined through consultation with the assigned university supervisor. Determination of construct validity was carried out using the Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) method. All the factors under each of the three study constructs as shown in Table 1 returned Eigen values greater than 1 (social normative pressures = 3.106, professional normative pressures = 1.929, and strategic responses = 2.713). Therefore, they were considered to be valid.

Reliability Testing of the Research Instrument

According to Kimberlin and Winterstein (2008), a reliable instrument facilitates collection of consistent data whenever it is administered. There are various methods of determining an instrument's reliability. However, in this study, the Cronbach alpha (α) will be employed to test the internal consistency of the questionnaire. This method is the most widely used and recommended particularly in social research. The reliability threshold was alpha equal to or greater than 0.7 ($\alpha \geq 0.7$). Table 1 outlines the results of reliability test.

Table 1: Reliability Test Results

Constructs	No. of Items Tested	Alpha Value (α)
i. Social normative pressures	7	0.81
ii. Professional normative pressures	6	0.78
iii. Strategic responses	6	0.87

The results shown in Table 1 indicate that the three study constructs (variables) returned alpha values greater than 0.7 each (social normative pressures = 0.81, professional normative pressures = 0.78, and strategic responses = 0.87). Therefore, all the three variables were found to be reliable.

Data Collection Procedure

The assessment of the instrument's reliability and validity were followed by data collection. Before the actual data collection, the requisite permits and consents were sought from all the participating public universities. The administration of the questionnaires was done by the researcher in person. The respondents were allowed 5 working days, a period of time that had mutually been agreed upon by both parties (researcher and respondents). The filled questionnaires were then collected at the expiry of that time period.

Data Analysis and Presentation

The collected data were first cleaned in order to ensure only the questionnaires that were appropriately filled were used in the data analysis. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 21 software was used to aid in data analysis. Data was analyzed for both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics took the form of measures of distribution (frequencies and percentages), measures of central tendencies (means), and measures of variation (standard deviation). Moreover, inferential statistics were in form of Pearson's correlation and multiple regression. Correlation analysis facilitated relating each of the independent variables (regulative pressures, social normative pressures, professional normative pressures, and mimetic pressures) to the dependent variable (strategic responses). Multiple regression analysis enabled testing of the extent to which the institutional pressures generally affected the strategic responses adopted by public universities. The findings of the study were presented in tables. The following regression model function was adopted.

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \epsilon$$

Where:

$$Y = \text{Strategic Responses}$$

β_0	=	constant
X_1	=	Social normative pressures
X_2	=	Professional normative pressures
ε	=	Error term
β_1, β_2	=	Régression coefficients

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Response Rate

Out of 58 questionnaires distributed, it was found out that 51 were filled according to the expected threshold. This amounted to 91.07% response rate. The high response rate was justified by the fact that administration of the questionnaires was done by the researcher in person whereby participation of the respondents in the study was emphasized.

Descriptive Analysis

The study examined the opinions of the sampled management and administrative staff regarding the various institutional pressures studied and strategic responses adopted by the public universities in Nakuru County. Institutional pressures studied include regulatory, social normative, professional normative and mimetic pressures. Findings are presented in form descriptive statistics, that is, means and standard deviations.

Descriptive Analysis for Social Normative Pressures

The study also sought to find out the perceptions held by management and administrative staff of public universities in Nakuru County regarding social normative pressures they possibly faced. The results of the pertinent descriptive analysis are as shown in Table 2.

Tale 2: Descriptive Statistics for Social Normative Pressures

	n	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
i. Public universities are faced by social pressures	51	4	5	4.67	.476
ii. Social pressures are exerted by the local communities	51	3	5	3.88	.553
iii. Social pressures are exerted by civil societies	51	1	4	2.59	1.512
iv. Our institution has never been faced by social pressures	51	2	4	2.18	.994
v. Social pressures are influenced by the location of the institution.	51	2	4	2.94	1.008
vi. Our institution is proactive when responding to social pressures	51	2	4	2.47	.952
vii. Our institution adopts a reactive strategy when addressing social pressures	51	2	5	4.02	.927

The descriptive findings indicated that respondents strongly believed (mean = 4.67; std dev = 0.476) that public universities are faced by social pressures. It was admitted (mean \approx 4.00; std dev < 1.000) that local communities exert social pressures; and that public universities in Nakuru County adopts a reactive strategy when addressing social pressures. It was disputed (mean \approx 2.00; std dev < 1.000) that public universities in this County have never been faced by social pressures; and that such institutions are proactive when responding to social pressures. It was, however, unclear (mean \approx 3.00; std \approx 1.000) regarding the propositions that civil societies exert social pressures on public universities; and that social pressures are influenced by the location of the institution.

Descriptive Analysis for Professional Normative Pressures

The study further sought the opinions of administrative and management staff of surveyed universities on professional normative pressures in respect of their institutions. Table 3 outlines a summary of descriptive analysis regarding the aforesaid pressures.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics for Professional Normative Pressures

		n	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
i.	The staffs of public universities are members of various professional bodies	51	5	5	5.00	.000
ii.	I am a member of at least one professional body.	51	5	5	5.00	.000
iii.	Employees of our institution are required to adhere to the code of conduct of professional bodies	51	3	5	4.33	.952
iv.	Professional bodies exert pressure on our employees through potential deregistration	51	5	5	5.00	.000
v.	It is a requirement for the university staff to be members of professional bodies.	51	2	5	4.00	.428
vi.	The pressures exerted by professional norms enhance our institution's performance.	51	4	5	4.67	.476

It absolutely agreed (mean = 5.00; std dev = 0.000) that staffs of public universities including management and administrative employees are members of various professional bodies; and that professional bodies exert pressure on public universities' employees through potential deregistration. It was also strongly concurred that (mean = 4.67; std dev = 0.476) that pressures

exerted by professional norms enhance public universities' performance. It was also admitted (mean \approx 4.00; std dev $<$ 1.000) that employees of public universities are required to adhere to the code of conduct of professional bodies; and that it is a requirement for the university staff to be members of professional bodies.

Descriptive Analysis for Strategic Responses

More so, the study put into perspective the opinions of the surveyed respondents on strategic responses adopted by public universities in Nakuru County. Table 4 summarizes the pertinent descriptive findings.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Strategic Responses

		n	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
i.	Our institution has adopted various strategic responses to institutional pressures.	51	4	5	4.67	.476
ii.	Our university has adopted compromise responses to institutional pressures.	51	4	5	4.67	.476
iii.	Our university has adopted avoidance responses to institutional pressures	51	3	5	4.33	.952
iv.	Our university has adopted defiance responses to institutional pressures.	51	1	5	3.98	.961
v.	Our university has adopted manipulative responses to institutional pressures	51	1	4	3.00	1.428
vi.	Our university has adopted acquiescence responses to institutional pressures.	51	3	5	3.84	.784

The study established that the surveyed administrative and management staff strongly believed (mean \approx 5.00; std dev $<$ 1.000) that their institutions had adopted various strategic responses; and that they have adopted compromise responses to institutional pressures. It was also agreed (mean \approx 4.00; std dev $<$ 1.000) that public universities in Nakuru County have adopted avoid responses, defy responses, and acquiesce responses to institutional pressures. However, it was not, on average, clear (mean = 3.00; std dev = 1.428) whether or not these universities had adopted manipulate responses to institutional pressures.

Inferential Analysis

The study put into focus how institutional pressures influenced the strategic responses adopted by various public universities in Nakuru County. The institutional pressures analyzed included social normative and professional normative pressures. Correlating each of the aforesaid pressures against strategic responses enabled determination of their relationships. In order to assess the extent to which institutional pressures related to strategic responses, multiple regression analysis was conducted.

Relationship between Social Normative Pressures and Strategic Responses

In tandem with the second specific objective and null hypothesis, the study examined the relationship between social normative pressures and strategic responses where the results of the relevant correlation analysis are as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Correlation between Social Normative Pressures and Strategic Responses

Social Normative Pressures	Strategic Responses	
	Pearson Correlation	.789**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	n	51

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

It was revealed that there existed a positive, strong and statistically significant relationship between social normative pressures and strategic responses ($r = 0.960$; $p < 0.01$). The results indicated as social normative pressures exerted by, say local communities, increased, the more the public universities in Nakuru County adopted strategic responses to address those pressures and the reverse is true. The findings underlined the fundamental importance of social pressures in defining the kind of strategic responses adopted by the aforesaid institutions of higher learning. The findings of the study concurred with Papadimitriou and Westerheijden's (2011) argument that stakeholders would influence the adoption of quality management through the alumni network.

Relationship between Professional Normative Pressures and Strategic Responses

The study also analyzed how professional normative pressures exerted mainly by professional bodies influenced the strategic responses adopted by public universities in Nakuru County. Table 6 illustrates the relevant correlation findings.

Table 6: Correlation between Professional Pressures and Strategic Responses

Professional Normative Pressures	Strategic Responses	
	Pearson Correlation	.960**
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
n	51	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

It was established that the relationship between professional normative pressures and strategic responses was positive, strong and statistically significant ($r = 0.960$; $p < 0.01$). The findings meant that when professional bodies exert more pressure on public universities, the more these institutions are obliged to have in place requisite strategic responses to address the same. The results implied the importance of public universities adhering to professional requirements as stipulated by professional bodies such as Engineering Regulatory Board (ERB) and Institute of Certified Public Accountants-Kenya (ICPAK) amongst others. The study agreed with Munene's (2006) assertion that where rules and ethics of professional conduct exist in an organization, incentives for new organizations to ally and pattern as the older organization exist too.

Relationship between Institutional Pressures and Strategic Responses

Moreover, the study examined how institutional pressures influenced strategic responses adopted by public universities in Nakuru County. It also sought to establish the extent to which these pressures affected the strategic responses. Table 7 shows the results of multiple regression analysis.

Table 7: Results of Regression Analysis

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	24.469	1.311		18.668	.000
	Social Normative Pressures	.100	.119	.063	.841	.005
	Professional Normative Pressures	2.655	.110	.960	14.122	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Strategic Responses

The results of regression analysis (Table 7) were interpreted using the following regression function: $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \varepsilon$

Where Y , X_1 , X_2 , X_3 , and X_4 represented strategic responses, social normative pressures and professional normative pressures respectively.

The results were interpreted as follows:

$$Y = 24.469 + 0.100 X_1 + 2.655 X_2$$

The findings led to rejection of the first null hypothesis ($t = 0.841$; $p < 0.05$). The third null hypothesis was also rejected ($t = 14.122$; $p < 0.05$). The findings also indicated that strategic responses were influenced by 0.100 social normative pressures and 2.655 professional normative pressures. Moreover, the results implied that institutional pressures jointly influenced the strategic responses adopted by public universities significantly (18.668 ; $p < 0.05$).

Summary

It was indicated that public universities are faced by social pressures. It was admitted local communities exert social pressures; and that public universities in Nakuru County adopts a reactive strategy when addressing social pressures. It was disputed that public universities in this County have never been faced by social pressures; and that such institutions are proactive when responding to social pressures. It was, however, unclear regarding the propositions that civil societies exert social pressures on public universities; and that social pressures are influenced by the location of the institution. It was revealed that there existed a positive, strong and statistically significant relationship between social normative pressures and strategic responses ($r = 0.960$; $p < 0.01$). The findings led to rejection of the second null hypothesis.

It absolutely agreed that staffs of public universities including management and administrative employees are members of various professional bodies; and that professional bodies exert pressure on public universities' employees through potential deregistration. It was also strongly concurred that pressures exerted by professional norms enhance public universities' performance. It was also that employees of public universities are required to adhere to the code of conduct of professional bodies; and that it is a requirement for the university staff to be members of professional bodies. It was established that the relationship between professional normative pressures and strategic responses was positive, strong and statistically significant ($r = 0.960$; $p < 0.01$). Therefore, the third null hypothesis was also rejected.

The study established that the surveyed administrative and management staff strongly believed that their institutions had adopted various strategic responses; and that they have adopted compromise responses to institutional pressures. It was also agreed that public

universities in Nakuru County have adopted avoid responses, defy responses, and acquiesce responses to institutional pressures. However, it was not, on average, clear whether or not these universities had adopted manipulate responses to institutional pressures. The findings indicated that strategic responses adopted by public universities in Nakuru County could be explained by a factor of 24.469 of institutional pressures.

CONCLUSIONS

It was inferred that public universities were faced by social pressures and it emanated from local communities. Additionally, the study concluded that public universities in Nakuru County adopted a reactive strategy when addressing social pressures and that such institutions were proactive when responding to such pressures. It was, however, inconclusive that civil societies exerted social pressures on public universities and that social pressures were influenced by the location of the institution.

The study further concluded that staffs of public universities including management and administrative employees were members of various professional bodies and that such bodies exerted pressure on public universities' employees through potential deregistration. In addition, it was inferred that pressures exerted by professional norms enhanced public universities' performance and that it was a requirement for the university staff to be members of professional bodies. The staffs were required to adhere to the code of conduct of professional bodies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The policy recommendation is that University staff who are members of professional bodies should adhere to the policies, codes of conduct and rules of such bodies in order to enhance the university's legitimacy and avoid portraying the university in bad light if such professional were deregistered due to malpractices such as fraud and gross corruption. Universities should have clear mechanisms to handle pressure from the immediate society. The study therefore recommends that such institutions should engage in activities that give back to the society such as the corporate social responsibilities.

LIMITATIONS

The study experienced a number of crucial strategies which threatened to compromise the findings. It was quite a challenge to access some members of the target populations particularly the senior management staff of universities. This was due to their hectic and tight schedules. The limitation was overcome through prior appointment with them. Another challenge bordered on skepticism of some respondents. Regarding this challenge, the researcher promised to

uphold ethical considerations when conducting the study by ensuring that the identity of the respondents remained anonymous.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

The study suggested areas that should be further researched in Kenya with respect to institutional pressures and strategic responses. These areas are; the influence of mimetic pressures on strategic responses of private universities; the effect of institutional pressures on performance of public universities; assessment of institutional pressures affecting implementation of projects in selected institutions of higher learning.

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